687 Highland Ave/Fl 2

Needham, MA 02494

Phone 781-559-8444

Fax 781-559-8117

<http://www.bostonneuropsych.com>

**The Screen Time Dilemma: How Much is Too Much for School-Aged Children?**

In today’s digital age, screen time is a constant in children’s lives, from virtual classrooms to online games and social media. For school-aged children, understanding how this screen time affects their developing brains has become a priority for neuropsychologists. Here’s what recent research reveals about the impact of screen time on cognitive, emotional, and social development—and some tips for a balanced approach.

**The Brain Under Construction**

Between the ages of 6 and 12, a child’s brain is particularly malleable. During these critical years, neurodevelopmental processes—such as the strengthening of neural connections and pruning of unused ones—are in full swing. These processes are essential for forming cognitive functions like attention, impulse control, memory, and emotional regulation.

**Cognitive Impact: The Trade-Off Between Screen Time and Attention**

Research has shown that excessive screen time can impair attention spans in school-aged children, potentially impacting their academic performance. Studies suggest that fast-paced or constantly interactive content can overstimulate the brain, making it challenging for children to concentrate on tasks without digital support. Neuroimaging studies also show that high screen time correlates with changes in the brain’s white matter, which is crucial for language and literacy skills.

**Emotional Development: Social Media and Mood Dysregulation**

A notable concern in neuropsychology is the association between social media use and emotional health in children. Frequent social media use is linked to heightened anxiety, lower self-esteem, and depression. School-aged children may be particularly vulnerable to the emotional impact of comparing themselves with peers and seeking validation online. Additionally, the constant influx of digital interactions can overwhelm the brain’s emotional regulation centers, leading to mood swings and impulsivity.

**Social Skills: The Challenge of Real-World Interaction**

The increase in screen time often comes at the expense of face-to-face interactions, which are essential for developing empathy, social cues, and conflict resolution skills. When children are mostly communicating online, they may struggle with interpreting body language and tone in real-life settings. Neuropsychologists note that this can impact social brain networks, influencing their ability to form healthy relationships.

**Striking a Balance: Recommendations for Parents and Educators**

Given these findings, here are some neuropsychology-based recommendations to help manage screen time:

1. **Set Limits on Recreational Screen Time**: The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends a maximum of one to two hours of recreational screen time for school-aged children, encouraging parents to prioritize interactive and educational content.
2. **Encourage Screen-Free Zones**: Designating areas like the dinner table or bedrooms as screen-free zones can promote family interaction and healthy sleep habits.
3. **Model Balanced Screen Use**: Children learn from watching adults, so it’s important for parents to demonstrate mindful screen use.
4. **Promote Physical and Social Activities**: Engaging children in sports, hobbies, and social events can stimulate brain development in ways that digital devices cannot.

**A Balanced Perspective**

The key to navigating screen time with school-aged children is balance. While digital tools have their benefits, the impact of excessive screen time on attention, emotional health, and social skills is a growing concern. As neuropsychologists and educators continue studying these effects, a thoughtful approach to screen time can help safeguard children’s development.

Balancing screen time is a shared responsibility, and by fostering awareness, parents and educators can support children’s cognitive and emotional growth in the digital age.

Kevin A. Domingos, Ph.D.
Clinical Neuropsychologist
Clinical Director - Boston Neuropsychological Services, LLC
687 Highland Ave., 2nd Floor
Needham, MA 02494

[http://www.BostonNeuropsych.com](http://www.bostonneuropsych.com/)