

Description

Alternatives to Screen Time for Children

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Introduction

Screen technology using smart phones, tablets and computers is firmly embedded into everyday life. It is commonplace to see both children and adults engrossed with a device in all public areas and somewhat understandable that parents of young children use screen technology to keep youngsters amused. However, there is a growing body of evidence linking excessive screen use in children to an increase in physical, behavioural and psychosocial problems.[1,2]

Many leading authorities recommend restricting screen time for young children including The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) who recommend that babies under 18 months do not use screen media at all and that toddlers only have screen time with parental involvement and the German government who recommend screen time restriction for the first three years of life and a maximum daily screen time of 30 minutes per day for three to six-year-olds. In the UK there are no national guidelines, however some NHS units have produced guidance for parents, although the recommendations vary across the UK. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) suggested that children should have limited screen time, and children under five should not watch more than two hours of television per day, but this advice is quite vague.

This research by Schwarz, et al., adds to the debate.[3] The researchers conducted a large, prospective three-year randomised study across the whole of Germany with nearly 4,000 participants. The study findings indicated a direct correlation with parental screen use and that increased screen use has a negative effect on children's development.

Increasing green time

So how can midwives suggest alternatives to screen time for women and their children? A systematic scoping review in 2020 found that an increase in screen time led to a reduction in green time, that is the time spent in nature, a combination which may have a negative effect on children's physical and mental development.[4] So encouraging families to play in the park or garden or plant flowers and plants may be considered a public health initiative. Increasing green time will also help to improve physical activity and reduced sedentary behaviour.

Benefits of infant massage

Another alternative is utilising touch for babies and infants. A recent systemic review reinforced the benefits of infant massage for both women and their children citing a reduction in postnatal depression symptoms, improved bonding and

better sleep patterns for children.[5]

Reading together, playing games and goal setting are also strategies that may help lead to improvements in screen time and give the added benefit of communication and enhanced bonding. **TPM**

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