

## SPEECH AT RISK

by:

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*Children now grow up with phones, tablets, and televisions all around them. Almost every home has these gadgets, and young kids spend many hours watching or playing on screens each day. Changes in daily activities have prompted expert concern, as findings reveal a link between prolonged screen use and delayed speech development among children (Madigan et al., 2020). Schools and families should make places where kids talk face to face with grown-ups, play with other children, read paper books, and do activities with their hands to help their words grow strong.*

*Scholars have raised concerns regarding the effects of digital media exposure during infancy on language development. Data from longitudinal investigations reveal that early and frequent screen use may disrupt speech and communication growth. Specifically, a nationwide study in Japan demonstrated that children with greater screen exposure at one year of age were more likely to exhibit speech or communication delays at ages two and four (Takahashi et al., 2023). Evidence from international research indicates a consistent pattern in which elevated screen exposure is associated with speech difficulties among children in regions including the United Arab Emirates and the Philippines (Al Hosani et al., 2023; Alsaadi et al., 2024; Sobremisana et al., 2023).*

*Excessive exposure to screens can be detrimental to early language development because it replaces opportunities for meaningful verbal interaction. When infants and toddlers engage with screens independently, they miss chances to listen to caregiver speech, participate in back-and-forth communication, and practice producing sounds. Such interactive exchanges are critical during the early years, a period marked by rapid brain development related to language acquisition. Empirical evidence indicates that increased screen use is associated with poorer word comprehension and reduced ability to form sentences among young children (Rayce et al., 2024). The American Academy of*

*Pediatrics (2023) advises that young children should have minimal exposure to screens. For those younger than 18 months, screen use should be avoided except for video calls with family. Children aged two to five should spend no more than one hour per day on screens, and any screen time should occur with a parent actively involved.*

*Some people say certain educational videos can help if parents watch and talk about them. When adults ask questions and explain what is happening on screen, children can pick up new words (Madigan et al., 2020). In most households, though, kids watch alone, and the amount of time they spend in front of a screen is much too much.*

*The answer is to focus on genuine plays and communications. Reading stories together, singing nursery rhymes, playing simple games, and chatting over everyday routines encourage verbal development more than any app. Much as the tender sapling needs the right kind of nurturing to grow tall, spoken language in a child needs nurturing to flourish. Parents and teachers can impose rigid restrictions on screen time and discover a host of other activities that do not use any screen.*

*When we choose real human connections over glowing screens, we give every child the gift of clear speech and bright confidence for life ahead.*

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