

Screen Addiction in Children: Awareness, Risks, and Prevention

This presentation has been prepared within the framework of the Erasmus+ KA210-SCH Project “Get Away From the Screens, Be With Nature: Play and Discovery in Children’s Lives»

Empowering educators to foster healthy digital habits in primary education



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What is Screen Addiction?

Screen addiction refers to compulsive, excessive use of digital devices that interferes with daily life, relationships, and well-being. It shares characteristics with behavioral addictions, including loss of control, withdrawal symptoms, and continued use despite negative consequences.

Key Characteristics

- Inability to reduce screen time despite attempts
- Preoccupation with devices when not using them
- Using screens to escape negative emotions
- Neglecting responsibilities and activities
- Irritability or distress when access is limited



The Modern Screen Environment

Children today interact with screens through multiple devices and platforms, each presenting unique engagement patterns and addiction risks.



Smartphones

Social media, messaging, mobile games, and constant connectivity



Tablets

Educational apps, entertainment, drawing programs, and interactive content



Computers

Homework, research, online learning platforms, and web browsing



Television

Streaming services, cartoons, shows, and passive viewing habits



Gaming Consoles

Video games, online multiplayer experiences, and immersive virtual worlds

Why Children Are at Greater Risk

Developing Brain Architecture

The prefrontal cortex, responsible for impulse control and decision-making, is not fully developed until the mid-20s. Children lack the neurological maturity to self-regulate screen use effectively.

Reward System Sensitivity

Young brains have heightened dopamine responses to rewards. Games, notifications, and likes trigger intense pleasure reactions, creating powerful reinforcement cycles that are difficult to resist.

Limited Consequence Awareness

Children struggle to connect present actions with future outcomes. The immediate gratification of screen time outweighs abstract concerns about health, relationships, or academic performance.

Social and Emotional Needs

Screens offer escape from boredom, anxiety, or social challenges. Without developed coping strategies, children turn to devices for emotional regulation and social connection.

Effects on Mental Health and Cognition

Attention and Focus

- Reduced attention span and concentration ability
- Difficulty sustaining focus on non-digital tasks
- Increased distractibility in classroom settings
- Challenges with deep reading and complex thinking

Emotional Regulation

- Heightened irritability and mood swings
- Increased anxiety and depression symptoms
- Difficulty managing frustration without screens
- Reduced emotional resilience and coping skills

Motivation and Reward

- Decreased interest in non-screen activities
- Need for constant stimulation and novelty
- Reduced intrinsic motivation for learning
- Difficulty finding satisfaction in slow-paced activities



Physical and Social Effects



Sleep Disruption

Blue light exposure suppresses melatonin production, delaying sleep onset. Late-night screen use reduces sleep quality and duration, impacting growth and learning.



Physical Health

Prolonged device use causes posture problems, eye strain, headaches, and reduced physical activity, contributing to childhood obesity and musculoskeletal issues.



Social Development

Excessive screen time replaces face-to-face interactions, limiting development of communication skills, empathy, and the ability to read social cues and build relationships.









Academic Performance

Screen addiction correlates with lower grades, reduced homework completion, decreased reading comprehension, and impaired critical thinking abilities essential for learning.

EARLY DETECTION

Warning Signs and Risk Indicators

Recognizing these behavioral patterns early enables timely intervention and support for children developing problematic screen use habits.

-  **Behavioral Changes**
Secretive device use, defensive reactions when questioned about screen time, lying about usage, or sneaking devices against rules
-  **Emotional Responses**
Extreme irritability, anger, or emotional distress when unable to access screens or when screen time is limited or ends
-  **Social Withdrawal**
Declining interest in friendships, avoiding family activities, preferring virtual interactions over real-world social opportunities
-  **Physical Symptoms**
Persistent fatigue, complaints of headaches or eye strain, declining hygiene, irregular eating patterns, or disrupted sleep schedules
-  **Academic Decline**
Falling grades, incomplete assignments, reduced class participation, difficulty concentrating during lessons, or homework avoidance
-  **Loss of Interests**
Abandoning previously enjoyed hobbies, sports, creative activities, or outdoor play in favor of screen-based entertainment

The Screen-Activity Connection



Physical Inactivity Crisis

Screen addiction directly contributes to sedentary lifestyles, with children spending critical developmental hours motionless. This lack of movement has cascading effects on physical health, cognitive development, and emotional well-being.

Partnership for Prevention

Both families and schools play essential roles in breaking the screen-sedentary cycle. Coordinated efforts create consistent expectations, provide alternatives, and model healthy technology relationships across all environments where children learn and grow.

- Establish device-free zones and times at home and school
- Prioritize daily physical activity and outdoor play
- Create engaging, movement-based learning opportunities
- Model balanced technology use as adults



PRACTICAL GUIDELINES

Creating Healthy Digital Habits

01

Recommended Screen Time: Ages 7–12

Maximum 1–2 hours daily of recreational screen time, excluding educational use. Prioritize quality content and interactive rather than passive consumption.

02

Establish Clear Boundaries

No screens during meals, one hour before bedtime, or in bedrooms overnight. Create consistent rules applied across all devices and settings.

03

Alternative Activities

Offer rich alternatives including outdoor exploration, creative arts, sports, reading, board games, music, building projects, and unstructured play.

04

Co-viewing and Discussion

When screens are used, engage with content together. Discuss what children watch and play, teaching critical media literacy and digital citizenship.

Our Project's Contribution and Key Takeaways

Teacher Training Resources

Developed comprehensive materials for identifying, addressing, and preventing screen addiction in educational settings across partner countries.

Evidence-Based Strategies


Created practical, classroom-tested interventions that reduce screen dependency while promoting physical activity and social-emotional learning.

Family Engagement Tools

Produced parent education materials fostering school-home partnerships in establishing healthy technology boundaries and alternative activities.

Essential Messages for Educators

- Screen addiction is preventable through early awareness and consistent boundaries
- Physical activity and real-world experiences are irreplaceable for healthy development
- Teachers and families must work together to model and enforce balanced technology use
- Quality of screen content matters as much as quantity of time
- Alternative activities must be engaging, accessible, and regularly offered
- Creating screen-free spaces and times protects children's well-being

 **Moving Forward:** Armed with knowledge and practical strategies, educators can create environments where technology serves learning without dominating childhood. Together, we can raise a generation that uses screens as tools while prioritizing movement, creativity, and human connection.