

# Too much screen time delays school readiness

4 March 2021



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Too much screen time and a penchant for computers is playing havoc with children's school readiness, as new research from the University of South Australia shows that modern lifestyles are influencing our young generation's prevalence of developmental delay.

Conducted by UniSA researchers, Dr. Kobie Boshoff, Alessia Pivato and Sarah Seekamp, the study explores the concerns of more than 100 South Australian preschool directors, finding that an overuse of screen [time](#), in lieu of quality play, is substantially impacting [children's](#) development, putting them behind their peers as they start [school](#).

In South Australia, nearly [22% of children](#) are considered to be [developmentally vulnerable](#), where they display a much lower than average

ability in competencies such as [physical health](#), behaviors, emotional maturity, language or communication.

Pediatric expert and Director of UniSA's International Centre for Allied Health Evidence, Dr. Kobie Boshoff, says reducing children's screen time and replacing it with more developmentally appropriate playtime will help improve poor rates of school readiness.

"School readiness is all about the ability of a child to make a successful transition from preschool into formal school. But as research shows, nearly one in four South Australian children are not meeting the mark," Dr. Boshoff says.

"In our research, preschool directors indicate that families are overusing screens as 'babysitters' and that this could be contributing to lower levels of social skill development, concentration, problem solving abilities and self-regulation—all key skills that improve school readiness.

"This is acutely important for all Adelaide families and children, but especially so for families living in rural and low socioeconomic areas, where the risk of developmental delay is known to be statistically higher."

In Australia, health guidelines for preschool-aged children (2-5 years) recommend no more than one hour of screens per day, which includes television, computers and smart devices.

"While screen time has certainly become a normal part of everyday life, there has to be a balance, and we must educate parents about the adverse effect of too much [screen-time](#) on children's development," Dr. Boshoff says.

"Young children need to be spending more time riding scooters, being outside, or playing with traditional toys such as blocks, cars, or puzzles.

"A balanced, healthy lifestyle incorporating weekly time for physical activity, positive play time with parents and peers and giving children time to develop independence in their daily routines, are some examples of healthy activities for families.

"The result is that many more preschools have children with greater needs, leaving them in desperate need for early childhood interventions such as occupational therapy, speech pathology and physiotherapy.

"Providing this support is vital to ensure that children have a positive experience of the early years of school and that strong foundations for learning occur from day one.

"We do need to support our children to make most use of their learning opportunities and if we can get the message out that we all, as a society, need to look out for how our modern lifestyles are influencing our children's development, then perhaps we will start seeing some positive change."

Provided by University of South Australia

APA citation: Too much screen time delays school readiness (2021, March 4) retrieved 1 May 2021 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-03-screen-school-readiness.html>

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