

# Videogames and Child Development

The development of new technology has had a positive impact in society. However, based on the evidence found in numerous research articles, for a child's developing brain, especially the smaller ones, the frequent use of technology may be detrimental.

First of all, it may negatively impact a child's capacity to have self-control. The use of new technology like videogames, or watching things continuously on the internet, causes the child to be constantly stimulated, with less opportunity to exercise self-control, mainly because the control is applied by the device. Another effect is that if the child is continuously exposed to intense stimuli, like videogames, the child may lose interest for other things that are slower and less intense, like the teacher, a book or playing with friends. The child gets accustomed to being intensely stimulated and when the activity is at a slower pace they get bored.



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According to the American Pediatric Society and the Mayo Clinic, a child should have no contact with electronic devices until he is three. However, some recommend that this should be extended till the child is at least six years old, since at this stage is when the child develops his imagination. The longer a child spends playing, in what we call free play which is not limited by an electronic device, the more likely will the child develop his imagination. Boredom is the mother of imagination and if the child is constantly entertained, he has no time to be bored nor imagine or create his own play world.

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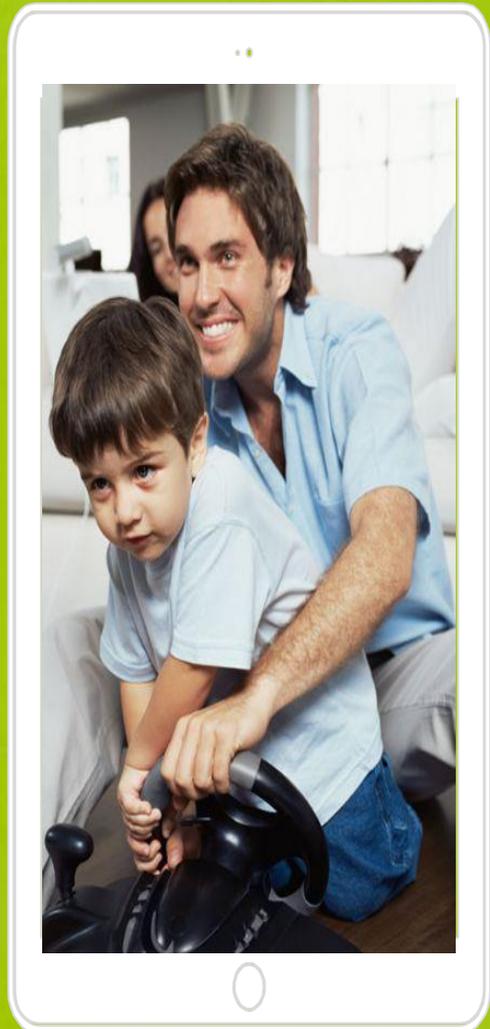


## Is it possible to prevent children from using electronics?

Some specialists believe that the consideration that children are innately digital is a myth. When a child plays with an electronic device he is not activating the zones of the brain that are involved in the language or speech, but with the movement of the hand and vision. There are numerous parents who have learned how to balance and limit the use of electronics in their homes. Of course, it will be inevitable that children will be eventually exposed to technology in their everyday life. Like for example, a family vacation where the pictures are taken with smart phones, or children speaking with their grandmother via video call using a tablet.

Nevertheless, parents should limit as much as possible those moments of technology use where the child is lying on a couch uninterrupted engaged scrolling through a screen. This can be easily achieved by just saying “no”, once in a while.

Having a dependency of electronics is heavily influenced by the context the child is in. Children have developed a series of brain cells, called mirror neurons, which enables the child to imitate what they see their parents do. The longer the parents last using an iPad, the easier it'll be for the child to want to use electronic devices. Children also demand using them because they see their friends do it, coupled with the fact that it is stimulating and interesting for them. It's like Coca-Cola: if you give it to a three year old child, he will want more soda the next day. It is desirable for children because it contains lots of sugar and caffeine, which stimulates them. Nevertheless, even though it stimulates them, we refrain from allowing them to drink it every day because it is harmful.



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Some studies suggest that using videogames may increase a person's processing speed, help them have a faster attention, but very few support this claim. In fact, most studies indicate otherwise. Furthermore, being accustomed to more intense stimuli, therefore being quicker to pay attention is not necessarily good, unless you are a pilot or a soldier in combat, where you have to be constantly in a state of alert. In fact, it is more common that your everyday environment requires you to be calmer, have a more controlled attention which will allow you to concentrate for longer periods of time. Being accustomed to intense stimuli and having a quicker attention and heightened state of alertness may cause the child to have difficulties in waiting longer periods of time without being exposed to it.

In the area of education, technology is used as a tool. Nevertheless, it's different to use new technologies as an educational tool than a child playing non-stop and freely at home. Studies have suggested that a child will learn mathematical concepts faster using hands on materials than through an online game designed for this purpose. This is due to the fact that the brain connects the kinesthetic and cognitive aspect while it functions.



This is to say that reasoning is tightly related to hand coordination. Therefore if the child doesn't have to use his hands to count, touch, it will be harder for him to grasp on certain concepts. There are some educational approaches that believe in learning through hands on experiences, especially in a child's earlier years, in contrast to using an electronic device to study. Electronic devices are then implemented in the classroom as one of the many tools for teachers to expand on a child's learning experience, but not purely rely on it.

It is recommended to introduce the use of electronics gradually, by taking your time, allowing your child's brain to develop in its own rhythm. Furthermore, regardless of when you allow your child to use electronics, teach them self-control. Allow the use of electronics, but with limits. Let your child learn and experience delayed gratification. This will make it easier for when he is older to stop when you ask him to stop playing a game in the computer or tablet without having a temper tantrum. If used this way, electronics may be useful. In fact, some authors believe that it may be better if children are exposed to electronics when they are three years old with clear rules, training your child self-control, rather than beginning when the child is 8 years old and having to teach him then.

If we introduce electronics too soon, the child will connect with them at a quick pace, but will disconnect with other things that are more important for his development.



Just because we introduce the use of electronic devices at a later age, it doesn't indicate we are wasting a child's potential. First, we must allow their brains to think, be attentive, to imagine. Then, we can teach them to use the technological tools that are available to them. If we introduce electronics too soon, the child will connect with them at a quick pace, but will disconnect with other things that are more important for his development.

Source: <http://www.diariodeibiza.es>