

Trending screen addiction: Emerging risk of increased virtual autism among toddlers

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Dear Madam, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopment disease marked by enduring difficulties with social interaction and communication.¹ ASD was initially thought to be a rare disorder in the 1970s, with prevalence estimates of 2 of 10,000 kids² but then prevalence started to shift toward the end of the 20th century, rising to 116.1 per 10,000 kids in the United Kingdom in 2006.³ Excessive screen time is the strongest possible environmental component in people with ASD, along with socioeconomic, dietary, metal and air pollution. A child with ASD and developing ones suffering negative impacts from screen, use like subpar academic performance, sleep issues, mood disturbances, and autistic-like signs.¹ Compared to older generation who were more socially active, children worldwide now become screen addicts. Parents actively encourage their children to utilise electronic media as a companion to engage them so that they can work independently. Surprisingly, all parents expressed pride that their children under two years could use and enjoy electronic media.⁴

Besides this, Parents are noticing signs like children's delayed speech and social communication difficulties. These are the signs of "VIRTUAL AUTISM", a novel phenomenon that has been the subject of extensive medical research in the USA and Europe, according to city-based psychiatrists. They claim these signs are of a mental illness known as "VIRTUAL AUTISM". Psychiatry experts link extended screen exposure of youngsters under four years old to virtual autism.² Early screen exposures can lead to neurochemical changes, like reduced levels of hormone melatonin, as well as neurotransmitter deficiencies, including dopamine, acetylcholine, gamma amino butyric acid (GABA), and 5-hydroxytryptamine (5-HT). These deficiencies may contribute to aberrant behavior phenotypes in urban children who are internet addicts.⁴ There haven't been a poll conducted yet because the Western medical community is only now becoming aware of the new condition in the state.² It can be challenging to diagnose virtual autism, as it is critical to understand whether child has autism spectrum disorder or virtual

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autism. Understanding virtual autism will help find its solution. This occurs when youngsters under three use excessive screen thus results in symptoms similar to autism.⁵

To prevent this illness from spreading among toddlers, parents should encourage their kids to participate in more physically active pursuits, such as spending quality time by planning family vacations or quick day trips that include nearby parks. Avoid using phones or other devices in front of them or piquing their curiosity. Instead, parents should lock up their devices or set them to bedtime mode, a new parental control feature available on some smartphones. Typically, children of this age are drawn more to colours and music, and these features are abundant. Parents could substitute digital audiobooks, imaginative games, and toys in their place. By doing this, the parent-child bond will be strengthened. Encouraging kids to participate in extracurricular activities as well so they can develop their communication and social skills. By making these small and consistent efforts, it can decrease the symptoms of emerging virtual autism and aid children in developing their brains more effectively, particularly their cognitive and motor skills, which are the primary drivers of IQ growth.

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