

When A Child Is TOO WIRED

How much screen time is too much for a toddler, and what can you do if yours is glued to the screen of a tablet or smart phone?



IT'S A SHOCKING STATISTIC. According to a study by a team of medical undergraduates at the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine (YLLSoM), half of the young children in Singapore — below the age of two — spend part of their day on a screen device such as a television, computer, video game console and/or smart phone or tablet. And 33 per cent of those spend more than two hours a day on these devices.

Worldwide research in this area is on-going, but numerous studies have already linked excessive screen time with obesity, irregular sleep patterns, behavioural problems and more. Media exposure at the age of six months has been associated with poorer cognitive developmental outcomes eight months later. Excessive screen time hampers language

acquisition and can also result in speech delays. In fact, screen time delivers so few benefits that the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) discourages media use by children younger than the age of two.

While some screen time seems unavoidable — the YLLSoM researchers found that 80 per cent of the households surveyed owned three or more personal portable devices — of greater concern is that a large proportion of parents are not supervising their child when he or she is using these devices.

The data should be a wakeup call for concerned parents. "It is clear that parents need to be actively involved in reducing the negative effects of media exposure on their children," said Dr Falk Mueller-Riemenschneider from

the NUS Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health.

The best way to reduce excessive screen time is to make sure your children have plenty of fun options that don't involve electronic media. "Actively engage your children in alternative activities [such as] reading, talking, singing, writing, and playing," said Dr Mueller-Riemenschneider. ♥

HOW A CHILD CAN G.R.O.W.

♥ Guidance: Review the content that your child is watching, and watch it with your child.

🕒 Restrictions: Have clear limits on screen time and enforce them. Children younger than two years should be discouraged from having screen time. The AAP recommends a daily limit of two hours for older children.

☀️ Other activities: Plan for interactive activities with your child. Read a book together, draw or even paint. Go outside for some fresh air — outdoor play is linked with lower rates of obesity and may prevent short-sightedness.

📺 Watch: If you must have a television, put it in your living room. Remove TV sets from children's rooms.



Singapore's Little Treasures

ECDA teams up with the National Heritage Board to cultivate in pre-schoolers an interest in Singapore's history and heritage.

HISTORY CAN BE AN endlessly-fascinating subject; indeed, knowledge of one's own past is a crucial element of one's identity. To foster an appreciation of Singapore's multicultural heritage in young children, the Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA) and the National Heritage Board (NHB) have jointly embarked on an innovation guidance project titled 'Singapore's Little Treasures'.

A pilot group of 10 child care centres and kindergartens are taking part in the project which started in May and will last until October this year. In this project, a 'Discovery Box' resembling an antique trunk will be loaned to each pre-school. The Discovery Box contains eight specially-curated heritage objects and teachers will implement heritage lessons based on these.

To kick things off, two teachers from each participating pre-school attended a two-day workshop on 16 and 23 May. In collaboration with museum educators, they created lesson plans around the heritage objects with emphasis on experiential and inquiry-based learning such as close-observation via a view-finder.

The teachers' workshop also included a guided exploration of the National Museum's

permanent galleries, practising museum etiquette and a hands-on session with traditional Chinese glove puppetry. Said Ms Valerie Gan, a participating teacher from Kiddiwinkie Schoolhouse @ Grandstand, "I am Chinese and yet I didn't know much about Chinese glove puppetry before today, let alone my students! The project is a great way to expose young children to their culture and heritage."

Together with their teachers, the pre-schoolers involved will develop a heritage learning corner in their classroom where for example, their artwork inspired by the heritage objects may be displayed. Another highlight of the project is a visit to PLAY@ National Museum of Singapore, a new wing dedicated to children aged three to seven years, where pre-schoolers can appreciate and learn about Singapore's rich history in a fun and interactive manner.

Ms Siti Raudhah Binte Haji Halimi, a Mother Tongue Language teacher from MOE Kindergarten @ Tampines hailed the project's ability to engage young children in a multi-sensorial way. "There is so much that pre-schoolers can learn at museums. This project will allow them to undertake a hands-on exploration of what life used to be like," she said.

Pre-school centres keen to discover Singapore's Little Treasures can get more details at the upcoming ECDA Conference on 19 and 20 September 2014. ♥

Teachers practising close-observations using a self-made view-finder.

WHAT'S IN THE DISCOVERY BOX?

It contains the following items: a rotary telephone, a *kompang* (Malay drum), a Chinese glove puppet, a tiffin carrier, a *kuih kapit* ('love letter' cookie) mould, a wooden pillow, and reproductions of paintings of flora and fauna in 19th-century Singapore from the museum's William Farquhar Collection.

Also in the Box are resource and educational cards for teachers to use during their lessons. The educational cards feature photographs of life in old Singapore that are related to the eight heritage objects, and with bite-sized information to aid sustained conversations with pre-schoolers.

