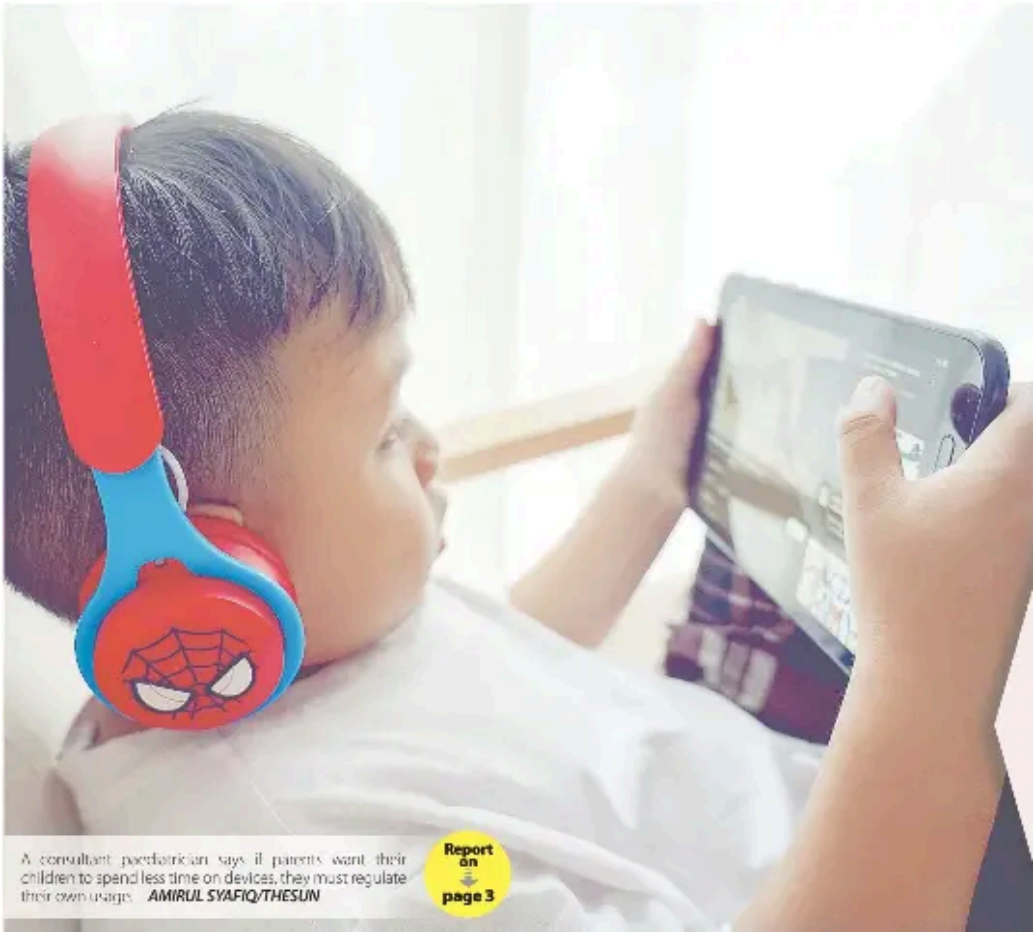
- Screen time / Child development

Concern over digital addiction among kids

Signs of overuse include decline in academic performance, impaired social skills and mood instability: Consultant paediatrician

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Excessive screen time affects concentration in class, academic performance as well as development of language and social skills: Expert



PETALING JAYA: As digital devices become an integral part of daily life, the growing dependency of children on them has raised significant concerns.

Consultant paediatrician and child disability activist Datuk Dr Amar-Singh H.S.S. warned that digital addiction affects children's development, mental health and overall well-being.

"Some signs of digital addiction in children include a decline in academic performance, reduced concentration in class and decreased involvement with family members.

"Children suffering from digital addiction may also display mood instability, depression and low self-esteem. Many children even hide their excessive digital use from their parents."

He said excessive screen time is linked to delays in language development, impaired social skills and physical health issues.

"A major concern is language delay in young children as many parents and caregivers use devices as a convenient but inappropriate babysitter," he said, adding that it also limits outdoor activities and disrupts sleep.

“While digital devices offer learning opportunities, excessive use could be harmful. There is a clear dose-response relationship between screen time and issues such as loneliness, depression and hopelessness.

“Many children are not only addicted to (videos) but also to social media and electronic games, leading to prolonged use and social disengagement.”

He recommended parents follow and enforce screen time guidelines with their children.

“For those below two years old, devices should be avoided entirely. For those aged two to five, screen time should be limited to one hour daily, ensuring content is high quality and interactive.”

He emphasised the need for parental involvement, setting consistent limits for older children and fostering responsible digital habits.

“If parents want their children to spend less time on devices, they must regulate their own usage. The most important gift we can give our children is to listen to them.”

Amar-Singh said with the rise of e-learning, it is a challenge to balance education and screen time.

“Parents and educators need to create structured schedules and encourage offline activities to maintain a healthy balance.”

He said ultimately, the fight against digital addiction starts at home.

“Regulating electronic devices use is not enough. Parents must be actively involved in their children’s play and daily activities.”

A private kindergarten teacher who asked to be known only as S. Komathi said increased exposure to digital devices among young children may contribute to developmental delays, poor motor skills and even rising health concerns.

With over 20 years’ experience, she has observed a sharp rise in speech and developmental issues among children.

“Previously, we would see only one child in two years with developmental delays. Now, it is around 10 out of every 100 children in my kindergarten.”

She also noted an increase in cases of “lazy eye”, a condition affecting vision.

“In the past, maybe one child in three years would have this problem. Now, I see around three cases in just one year.”

Komathi said children’s social skills have also deteriorated, with many becoming more withdrawn and struggling to show respect to teachers and parents.

She added that children today are quieter and less confident in social interactions.

“Many do not know how to hold a pencil properly or even how to chew and swallow their food correctly,” she said.

She cited excessive screen time as a major factor.

“Parents are busy on their phones, so they give phones to their children. Kids start believing ‘the phone is my world’. I urge parents to set limits and reintroduce outdoor play.

“Parents need to change first. If they make an effort, their children will follow.”