Limiting kids' screen time is key to their personal development; Too much online surfing is affecting children's emotional development. A psychologist gives tips on how to improve it. By Lisa Salmon

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Children's obsession with screen time is a major bugbear for many parents although it's not just kids who are letting tech get in the way of the rest of their lives.

New research by the reading charity Booktrust has found mums and dads themselves are spending four times as long on screens as they are reading to their young children.

As a result, children are losing out on the bond created between a parent and child during storytime and that's yet another blow to their emotional intelligence development. Further studies have found children as young as three are hindering the development of their emotional intelligence which helps manage feelings and moods, aids effective communication and protects against mental health problems by spending too long staring at screens.

Hours spent alone playing high-tech games means children are spending less time with other kids and not learning to share, communicate effectively with their peers and develop emotions.

Psychologist Dr Amanda Gummer, founder of Fundamentally Children, which helps children develop skills through play, says: "There's a growing concern that the increase in remote communication hinders children's emotional development and children today can find it more difficult to understand and manage their emotions.

"Interpersonal relationships play a huge role in the development of emotional skills and there's a worrying trend for children to spend less time socialising with others and more time in solitary situations, so they may be getting fewer opportunities to practice those important skills."

Gummer says the main area of concern is with very young children if they develop a screen-based play pattern before they start school they're likely to be less able to share and make the most of the learning available in a social classroom setting.

She says the 'Me, Now' generation is used to having instant gratification because their needs are often met almost instantaneously through tech play.
As a result, they may feel that by not getting what they want when they want it is worse than they might ordinarily have felt, and this can have a negative impact on coping mechanisms. In addition, children who are told to stop crying or behave are less likely to develop emotional intelligence than those encouraged to explore their own emotions, she says.

Gummer suggests the following ways to help improve children's emotional development: 1. Talk to your children about a healthy balanced diet of play/entertainment and agree what's fair then ensure everyone sticks to the rules, including the adults (using apps like OurPact can help).

2. Make it a family rule that everyone checks in their phones before bedtime, and agree a list of things that need to be completed in the morning before they get them back.

3. Try and keep up with the apps your children use so you can have informed conversations with them and they don't think you're a tech dinosaur. 4. Practice what you preach make sure you give your children your undivided attention, look them in the eye etc.

5. Be authentic don't try and hide your feelings.

6. Validate their emotions "I can see you're cross ... but you can't have another cake. What can we do to help you feel better?" 7. Encourage imaginative role play especially with characters that have different expressions.

**CAPTION(S):**

Tough love: it's hard to limit your child's time on their tablet

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