

Does First Five Education Now Mean Using a Smart Device As Well?

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Tech types and computer media love the idea of toddlers playing with computers, tablets and smart phones. Not only does the concept seem to reinforce the idea that early adoption of technology makes it far easier to function with the tools, there is a belief that young minds plugged in can produce greater breakthroughs and productivity faster in adulthood. And this idea is consistent with the concept of First 5, which emphasizes exposure of reading, graphics and concepts to children under age 5, since their brains are developing the fastest during this period. However, critics argue that too much computerization too young is resulting in generations of couch potatoes who may not be able to function well outside of the digital world later on. So who is right?

The Medical View

Before any debate gets started, it has to be stated that the medical community is generally against any kind of computer screen exposure to a child age two or younger. This position is reinforced and confirmed by the American Academy of Pediatrics. Even the most liberal among the medical community argue screen time should be very, very limited and only used for direct educational purposes, not entertainment.

The Pro-Tech View

Technology tools represent natural focuses of attention for children because we as adults communicate that value to them. We are always holding phones, tablets, or punching our fingers at plastic things connected to computer screens. So at some point, just the same way kids learn language and good and bad, they also learn that computers and smart devices are something of value. Rather than make it something forbidden or withheld, technology proponents argue early adoption teaches children how to use such tools for thinking, problem-solving, and communicating better. They teach symbol recognition and teaching, conceptual learning, and mental skill training as well. So the earlier those occur, the faster and better a child will likely be in school.

The above said, even proponents believe adoption should start after preschool and with active parental monitoring and guidance. Further, screen time should be constrained so that children are also spending their time interacting, socializing and building physical skills as well. With moderation, computer exposure can fit into this formula for enhanced learning.

The Critics View

Critics posit that too much screen time interferes directly with a child's ability to exercise as well as to socialize with family and people. Kids don't know when to turn off or recognize their own fatigue. As a result, they can lose themselves into the technology without being monitored or regulated. Continued year after year, critics argue we are creating generations of kids who are physically unfit, plugged in way too much, desensitized to morals, and too aligned to look at violence as entertainment versus a negative social behavior.

The Reality

Regardless of what proponents or critics would like to argue, the reality is that kids are getting into smart devices and computers at an increasing rate. By 2013, according to a recent study, 38% of toddlers have had some kind of prolonged exposure to a tablet, computer or smart device. This rate of exposure is up almost four times over since 2011. Further, by age eight more than two-thirds of kids have already used a technology tool regularly. So utilization at a young age is becoming more and more common as smart devices becomes as common as drinking cups to young children.

In Summary

Technology isn't going to go away anytime soon. In many ways, the ease of computer tools will continue to embed their way into our daily life much the same way as the near future was envisioned in the movie, I, Robot. Moderation and regulated use will likely continue to be the best path parents can follow with their children's adaption of technology, but this may become more and more challenging. For now, however, children under five are probably not missing much that can't be replaced by books and artwork. After all, the alphabet is still the alphabet, whether it's painted on paper or displayed on an LCD screen.