

Which parental strategies for managing screen time contribute to healthy screen time habits in preschoolers?

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Context

- Children aged 2 and 5 years should be exposed to screen ≥ 1 h/day.¹
- Preschool habits tend to persist later in life.²
- Exceeding the recommendation is linked to poor sleep and global development.^{3,4}
- Parental strategies to monitor children screen media are likely to support healthy media habits by children.⁵
- Research has yet to identify which parent strategies contribute to meeting screen time recommendations in the early years.^{6,7}

Objective

To examine how parental strategies for managing child screen time at 3.5 prospectively contribute to child screen time at age 4.5.

Methods

Sample

- N=315 Nova Scotia children studied at ages 3.5 and 4.5 during the pandemic.

Measures

- Predictors*

Parental mediation practices:⁵

Restrictive mediation: Setting limits on child screen time

Instructive mediation: Explaining screen content and

Social co-viewing: Watching and enjoying screen media together.

- Outcome*

Screen time: Dichotomized to distinguish children who spent respected the recommendation (≥ 1 hour/day) from those who did not (< 1 hour/day).⁸

- Control variables*

Baseline child screen time, gender, parental stress and parental education.

Data analytic strategy

Multivariate logistic regressions to estimate how parental strategies contribute to the odds of adhering to screen time recommendations at age 4.5 controlling for child baseline screen time, sex, parenting stress, and parental education.

Results

Table 1. Descriptive characteristics for continuous study variables

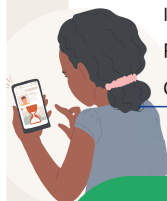
	Mean (SD)	N
Restrictive mediation	3.18 (.65)	311
Coviewing	3.07 (.63)	311
Instructive mediation	3.13 (.65)	308
Parenting stress	18.19 (5.6)	315

Table 2. Frequencies for categorical study variables

	%	N
Child sex		
Girls	46	145
Boys	54	170
Screen time		
Age 3.5		
≤ 1 h/day	14	44
Age 4.5		
≤ 1 h/day	20	53

Table 3. Adjusted logistic regression estimating the probability of children meeting screen time recommendations at age 4.5

	Child screen time at 4.5y		
	OR	95% CI	P value
Screen time at 3.5y			
≥ 1 h/day	0.02	0.01, 0.07	$p < .0001$
≤ 1 h/day (ref)	-	-	
Parental mediation			
Instructive	1.82	0.82, 4.02	.139
Restrictive	4.07	1.70, 13.03	.003
Coviewing	0.20	0.09, 0.48	$p < .0001$



Discussion

Restrictive mediation was associated with a 4 times greater odds of adherence to the recommendation at age 4.

Limitations of our study include the use of a correlational design and a moderately sized sample.

Findings underline the importance of developing family-based interventions to help parents foster healthy media habits in their children.⁹

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