

DOES YOUR CHILD HAVE ELECTRONIC SCREEN SYNDROME?

Please remember to **ALWAYS** wear your mask.

To help curb the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19), we have taken extra precautionary measures to protect ourselves and our loved ones from harm's way. We have resorted to spending most of our days indoors, resulting in more relaxed schedules and even more screen time.

With almost 90% of the student population cut off from school, it is with no surprise that students, and parents alike, are now exploring alternative ways to stay connected to the "outside world" and even make use of communication methods that were previously reserved for minimum consumption.

With more than 130 countries restricting movement to contain the spread of COVID-19, it is time to recognise the internet's role as a critical tool for children's access to learning, play, entertainment and social interaction. For parents, however, this extra time spent in front of a screen can be worrisome, especially when considering your child's physical and cognitive wellbeing.



“As far-fetched as it may seem, a child's nervous system can become **overstimulated** by regular screen exposure that comes from cell phones, computers, iPads and other digital devices. These devices can cause chronic stress on the brain, which may result in various learning and behavioural disorders.”



Electronic screen syndrome (ESS) is considered an unrecognised modern-day disorder. The interaction with screens can shift the nervous system into a fight-or-flight mode, which causes dysregulation and disorganisation of different biological systems. Once in this state; your child's mood, behaviour, and focus can be affected. ESS is not limited to teenagers obsessed with digital devices; toddlers can also be affected.

Recent research suggests that around 90% of children can use an electronic tablet by the age of two. What is worrying about this statistic is that each time a child picks up a device, changes that can lead to overstimulation and hyper arousal take place in the brain.

According to Dr Victoria L. Dunkley, author of *Reset Your Child's Brain* (2015), ESS symptoms typically include lack of focus, irritability and disorganised or disobedient behaviour. Children with ESS are easily frustrated, tearful and angry. They tend to have meltdowns over minor incidents. They often struggle in school because they cannot get their work done and may display immature behaviour that is off-putting to their peers.

Technology is known to have a hyper-arousing effect, as it can raise dopamine levels – the feel-good neurotransmitter that also plays a role in forming addictions. Children with ESS tend to lose interest in anything that is not electronically based and may show little imaginative play or creative expression.

ESS RISK FACTORS

Children with ESS are drawn to their screens – so much so that it becomes hard to pull them away.

The following factors may increase the risk of ESS:

- Age (more prominent in young children)
- Males
- Behavioural disorders (like ADHD, hyperactivity or autism)
- Psychosocial stressors
- Addiction tendencies
- Sensory dysfunction



HELP YOUR CHILD



As a parent, the first step to help address this syndrome is to recognise the signs. If the following questions apply to your child, he may have or be at risk of developing ESS:

1. Has your child progressively become defiant or disorganised?
2. Does your child have full-blown rages?
3. Does your child have meltdowns over minor frustrations?
4. Do they become irritable when told to stop playing video games or to get off the tablet/computer?
5. Do you ever notice your child's pupils are dilated after using electronic devices?
6. Does your child have a hard time making eye contact after screen time or in general?
7. Do you ever feel your child is not as happy as they should be, or is not enjoying activities as much as they used to?
8. Does your child have trouble making or keeping friends because of immature behaviour?

Try to remove screen stimulation from your child's routine. This will allow for your little one's brain to get deep rest and will assist in rebalancing their brain chemistry and hormone levels, while at the same time restoring their mental energy. This can help to improve his mood, focus and behaviour in a matter of weeks.

▶ Education department toll free: **0800 111 011**

▶ Send a USSD to: ***134*664*38#**

▶ Email: **wcged@mhg.co.za**

Let us stay mindful of caring for one another and ourselves