

Is Your Smartphone Affecting Your Toddler's Speech?

by Cynthia Wilson James

If you frequently use your mobile phone or tablet to occupy your toddler's time, you're not going to like the latest research finding.

At the annual Pediatric Academic Societies Meeting in San Francisco on May 6, the group presented research that the more time toddlers spend playing with smartphones, tablets and other handheld screens, the more likely they are to begin talking later or "are at a higher risk for speech delay."

According to Science News, the research team used information from nearly 900 children's 18-month checkups. Parents answered a questionnaire about their child's mobile media use and then filled out a checklist designed to identify heightened risk of speech problems.

Catherine Birken, who is co-author of the study and a pediatrician at The Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto, pointed out the checklist is a screening tool that picks up potential signs of trouble and doesn't offer a diagnosis of a language delay.

Birken see the need for further study since the current study only looked at time spent with handheld screens. She said future studies could investigate whether parents watching along with a child and the type of

content or even time of day might change the calculation.

Meanwhile, Carrie Clark of Speech and Language Kids, a resource for speech-language therapists, suggest turning off the smartphone and doing one of the following activities with your toddler:

- Talk with your child. If your child is only giving you one-word responses, try asking more specific questions (like "who did you eat lunch with") instead of open-ended questions (like "how was your day?").
- Sing songs
- Read a book
- Play with your child's favorite toy
- Color a picture
- Make a craft project
- Play in the yard

Most experts agree the consequences of toddlers playing with smartphones, tablets and other handheld screens will not be known for years to come. However, I do know that even toddlers appreciate and recognize the difference between a loving and caring adult and a lifeless device! 🙏

Cynthia Wilson James is the founder of InSeason Mom Blog.