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THE INFLUENCE OF MOBILE PHONE ADDICTION IN PRESCHOOL CHILDREN ON THE CHILD'S MENTAL HEALTH

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, mobile phone usage has increased across all age groups, including preschool children. While these devices can be educational and entertaining, excessive use can lead to mobile phone addiction, which poses significant risks to young children's mental health. This article examines the factors contributing to mobile phone addiction in preschoolers, including the lure of digital devices, limited self-regulation skills, and parents' role in digital interaction. It further explores the negative impacts on cognitive, emotional, and social development, such as attention span reduction, emotional instability, social isolation, and sleep disturbances. To mitigate these risks, the article suggests strategies for parents, educators, and caregivers, such as setting boundaries, encouraging alternative activities, modeling responsible use, and fostering a balanced approach to technology. Increased awareness and proactive interventions are essential to promote healthier digital habits and protect young children's mental health during critical developmental stages.

KEYWORDS

Mobile phone addiction, preschool children, mental health, cognitive development, social skills, emotional stability, screen time, early childhood, digital devices, parental guidance.

INTRODUCTION

As mobile devices have become more affordable and accessible, young children, including preschoolers, are increasingly exposed to screens. Mobile phones offer educational content and entertainment, but overuse

among young children can lead to dependency and, in extreme cases, addiction. Unlike older age groups, preschool children have not yet developed the self-regulation skills needed to manage screen time

independently.[1] This article discusses the phenomenon of mobile phone addiction in preschoolers and its potential consequences for mental health, emphasizing the importance of establishing healthy habits early on. In today's digital age, mobile devices have become increasingly accessible, and even preschool-aged children are no strangers to smartphones and tablets. While these devices can provide educational content and entertainment, the overuse of mobile phones among young children has raised concerns, particularly regarding the potential impact on mental health.[2] This article explores the phenomenon of mobile phone addiction in preschool children, its effects on their mental health, and the steps parents and educators can take to foster healthier interactions with technology.

Understanding Mobile Phone Addiction in Preschoolers

Mobile phone addiction is a term generally associated with an excessive and uncontrollable urge to use mobile devices, resulting in negative impacts on daily functioning. While adults and teenagers are often the primary focus in discussions of screen addiction, preschool children can also display signs of dependency on mobile devices. These signs may include tantrums when the device is taken away, a preference for digital play over physical or social play, and difficulty concentrating on other activities without access to a device. Young children are particularly susceptible to mobile phone addiction because of their still-developing self-regulation skills and the immediate gratification that mobile devices offer. Unlike traditional toys, mobile phones and tablets are designed to capture attention through bright colors, movement, and sounds, creating a compelling

experience that can quickly lead to habitual use. With limited impulse control and an eagerness for stimuli, preschoolers are at a high risk of developing a dependence on these devices. Mobile phone addiction in children is characterized by excessive and uncontrollable use, often accompanied by frustration or emotional distress when device access is limited. Preschool children are particularly vulnerable due to their developing brains and high sensitivity to external stimuli. The bright visuals, sounds, and interactive features of mobile devices are designed to capture and retain attention, making it challenging for children to disengage once they are accustomed to digital content.[3] Mobile phone addiction in preschoolers can manifest through behaviors such as tantrums when the device is removed, a preference for digital play over other activities, and difficulties concentrating on non-digital tasks.

Effects of Mobile Phone Addiction on Mental Health

Cognitive development in preschoolers is heavily reliant on interaction with their surroundings, exploration, and sensory experiences. Excessive screen time can detract from activities like reading, drawing, and physical play, all of which are essential for developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Studies indicate that prolonged exposure to screens can delay language acquisition and reduce cognitive flexibility, both of which are vital during early childhood.[4] The constant stimulation provided by mobile devices can reduce a child's ability to focus on less stimulating tasks. When children spend extended periods on mobile devices, they become accustomed to rapid and continuous gratification, which can make focusing on non-digital tasks difficult. This reduction in attention span can lead to challenges in school readiness, as preschoolers may struggle with following

instructions and engaging in activities that require sustained concentration. Mobile phone addiction is associated with emotional outbursts and mood swings in young children. Excessive use can lead to difficulties in managing emotions, as children become increasingly dependent on the device for comfort or distraction. Studies have shown that children who are exposed to high levels of screen time are more likely to exhibit symptoms of anxiety and depression. In some cases, children may become irritable, withdrawn, or experience frequent emotional breakdowns when access to their devices is restricted. Preschool is a time when children learn to communicate, share, and build relationships with their peers and family members. Mobile phone addiction, however, can interfere with these fundamental social interactions. Children who spend too much time on their devices may miss out on face-to-face interactions, which are critical for developing social skills. This lack of interaction can lead to feelings of isolation, as children may find it challenging to connect with others without the mediation of a screen. Sleep is essential for healthy growth and development in preschool children, but mobile device usage can interfere with both the quality and quantity of sleep. The blue light emitted by screens suppresses melatonin production, making it difficult for children to fall asleep.[5] Moreover, overstimulation from digital content can lead to difficulty in calming down before bedtime. Poor sleep can exacerbate issues such as irritability, cognitive impairment, and a weakened immune system.

Parental Role in Managing Mobile Phone Usage

Parents play a crucial role in managing and moderating their children's mobile phone use. Given the young age of preschoolers, parents need to set healthy boundaries and model appropriate behaviors when it

comes to screen time. Parents and caregivers are central to establishing healthy screen habits for preschool children.[6] They can set boundaries, model responsible device use, and provide alternative activities that encourage learning and play. Below are some strategies parents can employ:

Set Clear Boundaries. Establishing rules around screen time helps preschoolers understand that mobile phones are not a replacement for other activities. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no more than one hour of screen time per day for children aged two to five years, emphasizing high-quality content. Parents should encourage breaks and limit screen exposure, particularly before bedtime. Experts recommend limiting screen time for preschool children to no more than one hour per day of high-quality content. Parents can help children understand the value of screen-free activities by implementing device-free times, such as during meals and before bed. Clear rules can make it easier for children to balance screen time with other essential activities.

Encourage Alternative Activities. Providing a variety of stimulating activities helps reduce the child's reliance on mobile devices. Reading books, engaging in outdoor play, and participating in creative activities like drawing or building blocks allow children to develop crucial cognitive, physical, and emotional skills. Providing a variety of engaging, non-digital activities reduces children's reliance on screens. Options like reading, drawing, playing outdoors, and engaging in interactive games can stimulate cognitive, emotional, and physical development. These activities offer valuable learning opportunities that support a well-rounded development for young children.

Be a Role Model. Children learn by observing their parents' behaviors. If they see parents constantly on their phones, they may perceive it as acceptable behavior. Parents should try to model balanced technology use, particularly during family time, meals, and other shared moments.[7] Children often imitate their parents' behaviors, including their approach to technology use. Parents who model healthy screen habits, such as limiting their own device use during family time, can positively influence their children's behaviors. By prioritizing device-free interactions, parents encourage children to value face-to-face engagement and other non-digital.

Incorporate Educational Content. When screen time is permitted, parents can ensure that the content is educational and age-appropriate. Interactive apps that promote learning and creativity, like alphabet games or storytelling apps, can be beneficial when used in moderation. When screen time is allowed, parents can ensure that the content is educational and appropriate for their child's age. Many apps and digital programs offer interactive learning experiences that stimulate curiosity and encourage creativity. By selecting content that supports cognitive and emotional development, parents can make screen time a more enriching experience for their children.

Create Device-Free Zones. Designating areas of the house, such as bedrooms or dining areas, as device-free zones can help establish boundaries and reinforce healthy habits. These spaces allow children to engage in other activities without the temptation of a mobile phone, promoting family bonding and focused play. Designating certain areas of the home, such as the dining room and bedrooms, as device-free zones can establish a routine that separates digital time from other activities. These boundaries help children

recognize that screens are not always necessary and can encourage healthier relationships with technology.

Educators and caregivers also play an important role in addressing mobile phone addiction in preschool children. While preschools are often device-free, caregivers can reinforce screen time boundaries and offer activities that encourage interaction, creativity, and physical movement. Educators can also provide parents with resources and guidance on managing mobile device usage at home. Educators in early childhood programs can support families by providing resources and guidance on managing screen time. Preschool teachers can encourage structured play, group activities, and physical exercises that foster interpersonal and motor skills. By working with parents, educators can reinforce balanced screen habits and help children build the foundation for healthy relationships with technology. For instance, early childhood education programs can incorporate structured play, sensory activities, and interactive learning techniques to develop children's cognitive and social skills. Educators can also create awareness among parents about the potential effects of excessive screen time and offer alternatives that support the child's developmental milestones.[8] The effects of mobile phone addiction in preschool children can have long-term implications if left unchecked. Early childhood is a period of rapid development, and excessive screen time during this period can result in long-lasting changes in attention, cognition, and social-emotional skills. Increased awareness among parents, educators, and healthcare professionals is essential to prevent these negative outcomes.

While mobile phones and digital devices are an integral part of modern life, it is crucial to acknowledge their potential impact on children's mental health and

development. Research shows that children who are excessively exposed to screens are more likely to face challenges in school and have a greater risk of mental health issues as they grow older. Awareness and proactive measures can ensure that mobile devices serve as a beneficial tool rather than a detriment to a child's growth.

CONCLUSION

The influence of mobile phone addiction on preschool children's mental health is a complex issue that requires careful attention and intervention from parents, educators, and caregivers. Understanding the signs of addiction, setting healthy boundaries, and fostering a balanced approach to technology use are essential steps in protecting young children from potential mental health risks. By taking an active role in managing children's screen time, adults can help ensure that preschool children develop the social, emotional, and cognitive skills they need for a healthy and balanced future. The rise in mobile phone addiction among preschool children presents significant risks to their mental health and overall development. Unchecked screen time can lead to cognitive delays, emotional instability, attention issues, social difficulties, and poor sleep quality. Parents, educators, and caregivers play a vital role in managing young children's interactions with mobile devices. By setting clear boundaries, encouraging diverse activities, modeling responsible use, and fostering a balanced approach to technology, adults can mitigate the risks associated with mobile phone addiction. Increased awareness and proactive intervention are essential to support the mental health of young children in a digitally driven world, ensuring that they grow up with the skills needed for healthy social, emotional, and cognitive development.

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