

TECHNOLOGY has become integral to our daily lives, transforming how we communicate, learn, and entertain ourselves. While there are valid concerns about the overuse of technology, including disrupted sleep patterns and heightened stress levels, it also holds significant benefits for neurodiverse children.

Neurodiverse children, including those with ADHD or autism, can leverage technology in ways that support their unique needs and enhance their development. This article explores the potential benefits of technology for neurodiverse children, strategies for maximizing its positive impact, and offers recommendations for healthy screen time use.

The benefits of technology for neurodivergent kids

Technology offers neurodiverse children a range of opportunities for learning, communication, and self-expression. Digital platforms provide a controlled and predictable environment that can calm autistic children, offering visual and auditory stimuli not found in traditional face-to-face interactions. Moreover, technology is a valuable learning tool, helping neurodiverse children bridge educational gaps and improve social interactions in a safe and supportive setting.

Many professionals leverage technology to support skill development in neurodivergent children. Regarding video games, Randy Kulman, PhD, a clinical child psychologist who is a proponent of neurotechnology for youth with ADHD, notes that healthy gaming can improve processing speed and working memory. However, he distinguishes between social media and gaming, highlighting that the former can be more problematic due to its variable feedback and constant availability.

Technology can be a powerful educational and therapeutic tool for neurodivergent children. Apps and games can act as learning aids, providing visual and auditory stimuli that help neurodivergent kids learn more effectively.

Additionally, they can help children develop social, communication, and cognitive skills by allowing customized learning experiences that can cater to each child's specific needs and preferences.

Technology can offer emotional and social benefits for children with ASD and ADHD. Predictable video games and online videos can soothe neurodivergent kids. Controlled digital environments can also help children practice and improve social interactions in a safe setting. They can also provide an outlet for self-expression and independence, boosting self-esteem and confidence.

Positive aspects of technology use

In his book *Unlocked: The Real Science of Screen Time (and How to Spend It Better)*, Pete Etchells suggests a reflective approach to managing screen time rather than an aggressive or abstinence-based approach. He highlights anecdotal evidence of video games serving as coping tools, such as his own use of gaming to cope with his father's death.

What's



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Good About Technology for Neurodiverse Kids

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Similarly, in *SuperBetter: The Power of Living Gamefully*, Jane McGonigal explores how gaming can increase dopamine levels, enhancing motivation and self-efficacy. She emphasizes the importance of purposeful gaming, where players have clear goals and use gaming to achieve specific outcomes.

Purposeful gaming with specific objectives, rather than gaming to avoid or escape, can have positive outcomes. It can help children reflect on their gaming experiences and relate them to real-world skills and knowledge. Additionally, co-playing or multi-player sessions can enhance social bonds and provide opportunities for teaching and guidance.

Educational apps and games can help neurodivergent children develop social skills, organizational skills, processing speed, and working memory. Choose interactive games that provide practice for social scenarios or that challenge cognitive function to improve memory.

Moreover, apps designed for task management can assist children in developing better organizational and time-management skills.

Risks and concerns

Ultimately, there is no one-size-fits-all solution for managing technology for neurodivergent children. Parents must strike a delicate balance between leveraging the benefits of technology and mitigating its potential risks. By adopting a flexible and individualized approach, parents can empower their neurodivergent children to navigate the digital world safely and responsibly.

Excessive or inappropriate screen time can have negative effects, especially for neurodivergent kids:

- Sensory overload: Too much screen time can lead to sensory overload and heightened stress.
- Sleep disruption: Screen use before bed can interfere with sleep patterns.

- Social and language development: Overreliance on screens can hinder face-to-face social interactions and language development.
- Worsen other issues: Excessive screen time can worsen social anxiety, personality disorders, and sensory sensitivity.
- Decrease physical activity: When kids spend too much time watching screens, they spend less time engaging in physical activity, potentially leading to health concerns, including obesity.

It is crucial to recognize that neurodiverse youth are more prone to gaming addiction because the real world often presents challenges that make it difficult

for them to grow socially, emotionally, and academically. Psychiatrist Alok Kanojia, MD, MPH, notes that seventy percent of people with ADHD develop depression, and three percent of people with depression develop ADHD, highlighting the interconnectedness of these conditions and the difficulties people with neurodivergence face.

Parents should strive to balance the risks and benefits of screen time. They should limit screen time to certain times or encourage screen-free time, ensuring children engage in a variety of activities, including physical, social, and creative play. Parents should stay involved in their children's digital lives to monitor and guide their technology use.

Recommendations for healthy tech use

Parents play a crucial role in modeling healthy technology habits and facilitating productive screen time for their children. By establishing clear guidelines and boundaries, parents can empower neurodiverse children to navigate the digital world responsibly and effectively. Encouraging positive interactions with technology, such as co-playing and goal-oriented gaming sessions, can foster a sense of agency and empowerment in neurodiverse youth.

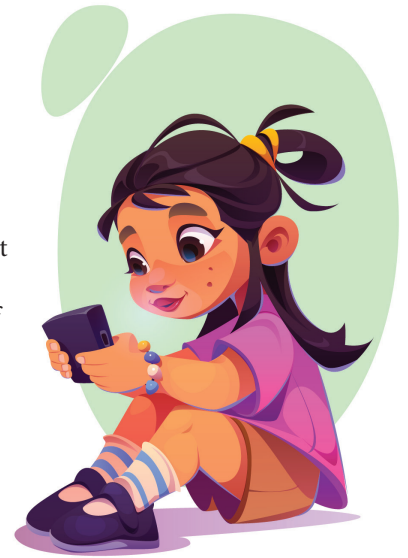
Dr. Kulman suggests that one hour of screen time daily is healthy, and two to three hours daily may be acceptable if the child meets other essential needs (school, friends, physical activity, sleep, and family time). More than three hours daily is risky and potentially unhealthy. Additional recommendations:

- Model healthy screen habits.
- Establish consistent rules and screen-free periods, encouraging other activities before screen time.
- Assess your child's unique risks and adapt your guidelines.
- Remember, not all screens are equal. Certain activities or types of engagement are more productive than others.
- Parents can increase the productivity of screen time by considering how the skills developed by screens can impact their children.
- Stay informed and adjust your rules when needed.

Managing conflict around screens

Screens represent a big dilemma for parents. It's difficult to know how strict to be regarding your kids' screen usage. Technology disagreements create immense conflict between parents and kids, and for neurodiverse kids, this can often result in meltdowns.

Prioritizing your relationship with your child is more important than sticking to specific limits or rules. Try not to participate





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in any conflict regarding screens. When parents feel compelled to participate in the conflict with their kids, it's best to stop, wait, or pull back from the argument. Parents have to learn not to argue with their kids about screens even though their kids constantly argue with them about it.

Work on your parent-child relationship in other ways outside of screen time to ensure you are “engaged enough” with your kids. The hardest part is to figure out how not to let screens dominate and damage your relationship with your kids, which is nuanced according to your child's own developmental needs. Absolutism around screen time usage is not that helpful for parents with kids with neurodivergence.

When you can be clear and pragmatic about your goals for technology usage with your kids and yourself and remove the conflict, you are most successful. That means learning to leverage your needs with your child's when limiting and granting use. For instance, some kids with autism use screens as a distraction to prevent or recover from a meltdown. Other kids might be able to recover with other distracting activities. Some neurodivergent kids with social or emotional delays rely on their phones to connect in a more distanced, comfortable manner with friends. In comparison, other kids may get too heavily involved in social relationships online.

Of course, all parents can aspire to the national recommendations for low screen use for their kids. Yet, it's important to let go of judgment and shame if you aren't meeting these standards so you can be flexible and use compassion when working with

your unique neurodiverse family situation to progress toward your goals. 🎮



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