

iPads delay babies speaking

By Sarah Knapton

PUTTING babies in front of iPads before the age of two stunts speech development, a new study suggests.

In Britain children under the age of three spend an average of 44 minutes a day using smartphones and tablets but it is the first time researchers have shown it can impact language skills. Researchers from the University of Toronto and the Hospital For Sick Children in Toronto found that every 30 minutes of screen time increased the risk of delayed speech by 49 per cent.

By the age of two to three, infants should be able to communicate in sentences of between three and four words. But those who spent the most time on handheld devices were found

to struggle with communication skills. Many parents do not realise that guidelines for screen time also apply to handheld devices, the authors warn.

"While new pediatric guidelines suggest limiting screen time for babies and toddlers, we believe that the use of smartphones and tablets with young children has become quite common," said Dr Catherine Birken, staff paediatrician at the Hospital for Sick Children. "This is the first study to report an association between handheld screen time and increased risk of expressive language delay."

She said all children younger than 18 months should avoid screen media.

The study was presented to the Paediatric Academic Societies Meeting taking place in San Francisco.

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