



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on September 22, 2026

Daycare Teacher Babysits Low-tech, “No Screens” Kids; Learns a Scary Lesson

If a child “vegs” in front of a TV five hours a day, we’ll consider it problematic. But what about when that child is on other screens — i.e., electronic devices — five hours daily? Is that any less troubling? And what’s the ultimate result?

Are smartphones yielding stupid kids?

A childcare professional gleaned some insight into this recently after babysitting a couple of “no-screens” toddlers. These tykes have never watched a movie, used an iPad, or viewed pictures on a phone. Their parents don’t even own a TV. And, well, the babysitter’s experience wasn’t just eye-opening. It also aligns with the findings of a growing body of research. To wit:



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Excessive screen time impairs children’s cognitive development and can cause emotional and behavioral difficulties.

In fact, some experts [have called the high-tech devices “digital heroin.”](#)

The current story involves Zoe Young, who’s based in Austin, Texas, and has been both a daycare teacher and nanny. Young says she has devoted much time to learning about “early childhood education, [and] infant and toddler brain development.” She states the obvious, too, as *Newsweek* [reported](#) September 13:

“A lot of parents use screens like a pacifier to distract their kids when they need a break or, quite frankly, are too lazy to engage with their children,” Young said. “Parents don’t like being told they’re bad at parenting or doing something wrong, even if it’s true.”

This “digital pacifier” phenomenon is even more common, a [study](#) found, when the parents have greater anxiety and lower education.

Speaking of education, Young apparently got one when babysitting the aforementioned no-screens toddlers, two and four years old. Mentioning that all their parents have is a projector in their bedroom, *Newsweek* also tells us:

According to Young, the children spend their time reading and playing, and she considers them among “the most intellectually advanced children” she has encountered in her six years working in childcare.

She said the 2-year-old already speaks in full sentences, while the 4-year-old builds his own biomes and has organized his animal toys by “time period and climate.” Young believes part



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of the reason for their advanced vocabulary is that, without screens, the children are expected to engage in conversation.

She said it's a "very stark" contrast to her experience with young children who regularly have screen time.

"Toddlers who have screen time often are uncomfortable when screens aren't an option," she said.

"They have a harder time entertaining themselves with toys, crafts, nature, and their own imagination. When they lack the instant gratification that comes with YouTube, games, and streaming platforms, they tend to become incredibly frustrated and angry."

Young's concern is that this reliance on instant gratification may eventually affect children in the classroom.

"Hearing the words 'no' or 'not yet' triggers their nervous systems because they're not used to not getting what they want instantly," she said. "If they don't understand something right away, they shut down mentally and emotionally, leading them to react negatively to learning."

Of course, another likely factor in the "no"-triggering phenomenon is failure to instill discipline and enforce obedience. After all, using digital pacifiers is surely more common among today's "typical" parent — that is, permissive. In contrast, anyone who'd completely reject electronics is likely also something else traditional: a disciplinarian.

Accords With Science

This said, we could learn something from certain, most likely "modern" parents: Silicon Valley tech executives. Note that many, including those from Apple and Google, have [sometimes sent](#) their own children to explicitly low-tech schools. Some also have raised their kids tech-free or with strictly limited screen time. Now, question:

What do these tech titans know that most of their customers don't?

What they know is what studies have shown. As [I reported in 2016](#), for example:

The analogy is apt, too, says [Dr. Nicholas] Kardaras, former clinical professor at Stony Brook Medicine and executive director of top rehabilitation center The Dunes East Hampton. While many parents instinctively sense that too much screen time is problematic, he says, "it's even worse than we think." Dr. Kardaras continues, "We now know that those iPads, smartphones and Xboxes are a form of digital drug. Recent brain imaging research is showing that they affect the brain's frontal cortex — which controls executive functioning, including impulse control — in exactly the same way that cocaine does. Technology is so hyper-arousing that it raises dopamine levels — the feel-good neurotransmitter most involved in the addiction dynamic — as much as sex."

This is why different researchers have all drawn the same conclusion, using slightly different language: Screens are "electronic cocaine," "digital heroin," "digital pharmakeia" ("drug" in Greek).



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Ten years later, the data are in, too. As I reported in February, [we spent \\$30 billion ensuring that every schoolchild could trade a textbook for a laptop](#). The consequence?

We bought a *less* cognitively capable generation.

Among other things, heavy technology use doesn't facilitate a contemplative mind, one conducive to deep learning. Just consider the aforementioned "hyper"-arousal factor. Reflecting Young's observations, Dr. Kardaras wrote that today's children often "become bored, apathetic, uninteresting and uninterested when not plugged in." Their attention spans are perilously short when not on their digital drug. This isn't hard to understand, either.

Seventeenth-century French philosopher Blaise Pascal once wrote, "All of humanity's problems stem from man's inability to sit quietly in a room alone." Modern research attests to this inability, too. *Science* reported in 2014 on a study showing that many people "would rather be electrically shocked than left alone with their thoughts." That may be a shocking thought. But the truth is that ability to tolerate quiet time — and ultimately enjoy and benefit from it — can be nurtured. It can also be undermined.

Reclaim the Empty Room

Today we raise children in the antithesis of an empty room, an environment more akin to a "sensory inundation chamber." They receive an astoundingly high level of stimulation. Consequently, returning to a more normal level can almost be like entering a sensory deprivation chamber. The result? Well, we can paraphrase and update a line from the late Paul Harvey's most famous radio commentary here.

If "I Were the Devil," I'd make entertainment so exciting so that anything else would appear dull and uninteresting.

What could then compete? School? Family conversation? Deep thought? How about that most quiet and serene place people are supposed to go but that young people are abandoning: church? Boring, huh?

It's not just that screen activities generally range from negative to morally neutral, either. It's also this: What are children *not* doing when they're whiling away those hours?

They're not reading.

They're not developing a skill.

They're (usually) not learning something valuable.

In general, they're not being productive.

While not strictly true that "nature abhors a vacuum," the human mind certainly does. Raise children without screens — *period* — and make classic books readily available, and where do you think they'll go for stimulation?

Understanding this doesn't take a genius. Acting upon it now, though, does take something perhaps even rarer: a bold and self-assured nonconformist.



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