

Family life

Become the best version of you

Book in time for reading



SCHOOL OF THOUGHT

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CHILD development research recommends parents start reading to their children as soon as possible after birth.

It is widely accepted that reading aloud to our children is the single most important activity for supporting language development and early literacy skills.

Are we still reading to our children? In a single generation, screen-based media has changed how children are experiencing childhood. Screens are changing our interactions with our children.

Despite recommendations from various authorities about how much screen time young children should experience, it is not uncommon to see parents handing their young children digital devices to keep them quiet/distracted/occupied. Out to dinner the other night, I observed a young family. The two young children wore headphones and spent

the whole evening staring at the screens in front of them. Yes, the parents got to eat in peace but was it worth it?

A new preliminary study led by Dr John Hutton raises questions about the influence of media on early brain development and reminds us of the importance of the emotional bonding and physical closeness that comes with reading exchanges and interactions.

Reading a picture book on a caring adult's lap is one of the best conditions for learning, bonding and development.

Dr Hutton is a researcher and pediatrician at Cincinnati

Children's Hospital and is interested in how children learn to read. He has found that when children engage with picture books they are developing their ability to bring the story to life in their minds.

The concern is that with screen-based stories and animations, children are missing the opportunity to imagine, form mental pictures and reflect on the content of a story.

With animation, all the information is dumped on children at once and their brains – while active in receiving or perceiving the information – are not working to understand or

comprehend the story.

Dr Hutton's research suggests that kids who are exposed to too much animation are going to be at risk in terms of their ability to imagine, understand and reflect.

In an ideal world, parents will always read to their children. Let's not turn to electronic devices to entertain them. Reading together supports bonding, relationships and communication skills. Reading stories and enjoying pictures fosters imagination.

So next time you have the chance, gravitate towards a picture book.