



Balancing game play minus the brain drain

Lucy Battersby

Too much time in front of the screen playing the wrong kind of computer games can delay a child's development or lead to serious damage in adults, according to new research on the impact of media and technology on the brain.

Lecturer at the Institute of Early Childhood at Macquarie University, Kate Highfield, said the right apps, games or shows could help a child's development or keep them engaged in activities for longer.

But her research found 85 per cent of the apps purchased for their children were just "drill and

practice" games that asked children to repeat an action or remember simple facts. Such apps lead to lower-level neural development and often include excessive rewarding that can create unrealistic expectations in children.

She recommends apps such as

ARTmaker, My Story, Explain Everything and Creatorverse, which require input from the child.

Current health regulations suggest children under two years get no screen time at all, including television, and children under five years less than one hour a day. Surprisingly, even adults should have no more than two hours of screen-based entertainment every day.

Mother of three children under six years, Melissa Marshall, finds her children become passive or inactive when they spend too much time on a tablet or smartphone and she regulates their screen time.

"Sometimes they can sit there and be absorbed with [the iPhone] and play for ages, not doing anything constructive," she says.

"It's the same with TV. It is about saying 'you have had enough of that, go outside or read a book'."

Mrs Marshall said she wonders

if too much TV or computer games could damage her children's brains, or her own, and feels there is a lack of information for parents.

"These sorts of reports that are coming out [are useful], because they do help to remind you and give you some guidelines. Even though generally we know where the limits should be [and] you feel bad if you use [technology] too much."

The research will be presented at the Australian Council on Children and the Media conference in Sydney on Friday. It includes a presentation on internet gaming disorders and research on the effects of violent media and gaming on the human brain.

Mrs Marshall says she uses a common sense approach to technology because she knows her children are going to grow up in a technology-rich world.

