

Guide for Spanish Parents: Childhood Technology Addiction



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What Does Technology Addiction Mean in Childhood?

Talking about technology addiction in children and adolescents does not mean demonizing screen use. Technology can be highly positive for learning, communication, and entertainment. The problem appears when its use becomes excessive, compulsive, and difficult to control, negatively affecting the child's physical, emotional, and social well-being.

In child psychology, addiction is considered when a child shows dependency on digital devices (mobile phone, tablet, video games, social media) and their use significantly interferes with daily life. It is not only about spending "a lot of time" in front of a screen, but about replacing essential activities such as sleeping well, studying, playing outdoors, or interacting with family and friends.



Frequent Use vs. Addiction

Frequent use: a child may spend hours on a tablet or mobile phone while maintaining balance. They complete school responsibilities, sleep well, and engage in social or sports activities.

Technology addiction: the child increasingly needs more screen time to feel satisfied, becomes irritated when access is limited, neglects other areas of life, and loses interest in activities outside the digital environment.

Recent Figures and Data in Spain

The problem is widespread. Studies reveal:

- Over 15% of adolescents in Europe show problematic mobile phone use, and other technology like games.
- Between ages 14 and 18, 21% use new technologies compulsively.
- According to Fundación ANAR, 54.9% of minors with problems from excessive technology use do not receive psychological support.

Many parents seek guidance about whether their child simply enjoys technology or is developing an addiction. Our team helps differentiate healthy use from digital dependency.



Main Risks and Effects on Children's Health

Excessive technology use in early childhood does more than increase screen time. Without proper control, it can lead to emotional, cognitive, and social issues.

Emotional and Behavioral Problems (Anxiety, Irritability)

- Common effects include anxiety, irritability, and sudden mood changes. Children may feel nervous without access to devices or respond with disproportionate anger when limits are set. These behaviors are warning signs of possible digital dependency.

Sleep Disorders and Low Academic Performance

Screens, especially at night, disrupt sleep cycles. Blue light from mobile phones and tablets makes falling asleep difficult and causes insomnia. Poor sleep directly affects academic performance, concentration, and memory.



Social Isolation and Loss of Healthy Habits

Prioritizing video games or social media over interactions leads to progressive isolation. This reduces social skills and replaces essential developmental activities like outdoor play, reading, sports, or creative expression. Sedentary behavior also increases long-term health risks.

Warning Signs: How to Identify Problematic Use

Some behaviors can help identify unhealthy technology use:

Mood Changes and Screen Dependency

Irritability or frustration when access is limited. Anxiety when devices are not nearby. Difficulty enjoying other activities formerly appealing.

Difficulty Reducing Device Use

If a child spends long hours using devices and cannot stop independently, this suggests loss of control typical of addiction.

Impact on Family and School Life

Technology dominating daily routines can affect:

- Academic concentration and performance.
- Family harmony, causing constant conflicts about screen use.
- Shared family time and daily routines such as mealtimes.

Factors That Foster Digital Addiction

Age and Developmental Stage

Children and adolescents are especially sensitive to the instant gratification offered by digital technology. Their developing brains are more vulnerable to compulsive patterns.

Influence of School and Social Environment

If peers commonly use devices, children find it harder to accept limits. Screens are also used for educational purposes, increasing total exposure time.

Unlimited Access to Screens and Video Games

Lack of clear boundaries and unrestricted access to screens significantly increases risk.



How to Prevent Technology Addiction at Home

Family Rules for Screen Use

- Define specific usage times.
- Avoid screens during meals and before bedtime.
- Supervise content and ensure age-appropriate material.

Setting Healthy Times by Age

- Under 2 years: avoid screens.
- Ages 2–5: maximum 1 hour/day with adult supervision.
- Ages 6–12: 1–2 hours/day without interfering with sleep, schoolwork, or physical activity.

Encouraging Alternative Activities

- Outdoor play and sports.
- Creative activities (music, arts, reading).
- Family tasks and board games.



Strategies to Support Your Child's Technology Use

Open and Empathetic Communication

- Listen to how they feel when using devices.
- Ask what they enjoy about games or social media.
- Explain risks simply and clearly.

Parental Control Tools

- Apps allow supervision of screen time, blocking certain apps, or receiving usage reports. They support, but do not replace, teaching self-regulation.

Negotiating Limits

Establish screen rules together.

- Agree on rewards for following rules.
- Ensure adults model healthy screen habits.



When to Seek a Professional

Seek help if:

- Persistent behavioral changes appear (extreme irritability, isolation).
- Emotional problems (anxiety, low self-esteem) arise.
- Screen use disrupts sleep, school performance, or family relationships.
- Speech or communication issues appear in young children.

How a Specialist Can Help

A child psychologist can:

- Identify whether addiction exists.
- Design a personalized intervention plan.
- Provide communication strategies for families.
- Coordinate with speech therapists or nutritionists when needed.

Resources for Families and Educators

- Digital education workshops.
- Websites and blogs with practical tools.

Recommendations from Spanish Institutions

Identifying early signs of problematic technology use is key to protecting children's well-being.

Parents and educators can apply preventive measures, but professional support may be necessary in some cases.



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