

# SCREEN TIME FOR children

Meet Naima Nahid, a seven year-old. A first grader, she already takes selfies everyday, uploads them on Facebook (she has a Facebook account), gives about a dozen of check-ins in a month and enjoys playing video games on



PHOTO: STAR ARCHIVE/SAZZAD

Many parents, like those of Naima's, don't find anything wrong with it, oblivious of the harmful effects of too much screen time, often being hooked on screens themselves.

So for example, if your child is crying and seeking your attention, you are simply handing him your iPad. Steve Jobs, former CEO and figurehead of the company that developed iPad once said when he was asked



information about how the lives of everyone around you are going so happily and perfectly. This is because everybody uploads and talks only about their successes and achievements. People are selective about what they upload, and don't usually share their failures, insecurities and embarrassing moments."

Dr Helal raises an interesting point. "So, when you browse through, their lives seem to be a bed of roses. Meanwhile, you know all those failures, embarrassments and problems you have in your own life. This creates a false impression, which consequently creates a sense of emptiness in you."

It applies for all of us, including children, and especially for children. Dr Helal also worries how screens are replacing notebooks. "Handwriting improves hand eye coordination and sharpens fine motor skills which enable us to do tasks like tying knots and threading a needle," he said.

But these days, laptops and tablets have entered the classrooms of school premises.

Meanwhile, Pixieland, a playschool, is screen-free! "Children have a great time in the playschool, even without screens," informs Maliha Kuddus, head teacher and proprietor. "However, when they go home, they are bombarded with screens everywhere, and spend many hours on smart phones and tablets and so on."

So what is the solution? And how much screen time (if any) should children be allowed?

Maliha complains that our lives have indeed become too mechanised and complex. "Those little things we remember as children, like going for a walk with our parents or going fishing with our dad, have gone out of practice. Parents need to spend quality time with their children," she suggests.

"When both the parents are working, they come home tired, with little energy for a family outing on the weekend or conservations in the evenings. In such a scenario, it's no surprise children will be turning to the screen. Switch off the TV, plan a play date and shower your child with quality time."

together. Smart phones and Internet have their benefits. And if I do not allow even a minimal use, my children may fall behind. They need to be technologically competent," she expresses her concerns. "But at the same time, there must be boundaries and the supervision of parents."

For example, she believes that laptops are worse than desktops. "You can keep the desktop in an open space in the house, where you can supervise what your child is doing with the computer," she says. "But if it's a laptop, she can take it in her room or anywhere and use it without any adult supervision."

Shahana believes in dividing children in age groups and then allowing screen time for limited hours and in varying extents of supervision according to the age.

There are of course clinical problems associated with excessive screen time, such as risks of obesity and back problems. And the psychological aspect, too, is overwhelming.

Dr Helal Uddin Ahmed, Assistant Professor, Child Adolescent & Family Psychiatry, National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) says how social media like Facebook can negatively affect users.

"Your Facebook homepage is filled with infor-



whether his own children loved Apple's iPad - "They haven't used it. We limit how much technology our kids use at home."

Steve Jobs was of course not the only parent who had to deal with such issues. Shahana Huda, who works in the field of media and communication, has a granddaughter, Nayantara, who is around 3 years old. She also struggles with the issue of limiting screen time.

Nayantara, for example, often plays games on her iPad.

"We do not want to avoid technology all



By M H Haider  
Photo: Sazzad Ibne Sayed  
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Play Group  
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