

First national research on preschool children in front of small screens (results)

The Child and Youth Protection Center of Zagreb and Brave Phone conducted the first national research on preschool children in front of small screens. The survey was conducted in kindergartens throughout Croatia during 2016 and 2017, and the results are based on a sample of 655 parents of preschool children. The survey included a sample of participants from rural and urban areas in different parts of the Republic of Croatia.

Below we list the first results of the research.

Research Participants

- 80% of mothers, 19% fathers, 1% children of another close person (grandmother, grandfather, aunt ...)
- age of parents – from 22 to 59 years; most of them in their mid-30s
- age of children – from 18 months to 7 years (average age 5 years); 53% of boys, 47% of girls
- more than 90% of children live with both parents
- approximately one third of children are the only child (others have 1-4 brothers and/or sisters)
- almost 40% of children share a room with a brother and/or a sister

Table 1. Age of children in the sample

Age of the child	Percentage (%)
18-24 months	1.5%
2-3 years	5%
3-4 years	17%
4-5 years	20%
5-6 years	31%
6-7 years	25.5%

Shared time between parents and children

- 87% of parents spend upwards of 4 hours on a work day with their child
- every other parent is satisfied with the amount of time he or she spends with the child
- every third parent feels that the quality of time spent with a child is disrupted by bringing his or her job home
- 40% of parents believe that the quality of time together is negatively affected by work-related stress

Screen saturation

- almost all families with preschool children in their household own a television, cell phone and computer

- 85% of households with preschool children have a tablet
- 65% of households with preschool children have game consoles
- on average there are 6 electronic devices per household
- 80% of children live in households with 5 or more electronic devices
- in their bedrooms, 27% of children have a television, 8% a computer, and 5% a game console

Table 2. Screen saturation

Device	Percentage of households that have it
Television	99.9%
Computer	98.2%
Cell phone	99.9%
Tablet	85%
Game console	65%

Screen Time

Of the nearly 700 preschoolers reported by their parents, there is not one who does not use at least one electronic device - modern technology is used by everyone.

- 97.2% of children watch television
- more than two-thirds of children use cell phones and tablets
- 60% of children use computers
- every fourth child uses a game console
- preschoolers are on average in front of a screen 2.4 hours on work days and 3 hours on weekends
- 60% of preschoolers spend two or more hours with screens during the week
- 72% of preschoolers spend two or more hours with screens on the weekend
- every other preschooler aged two to four years spend a total of two or more hours daily with different screens
- after the end of the sixth year, 71% of preschool children spend two or more hours a day with screens, and on weekends 82% of them do
- children spend most of their time in front of the television, slightly more on weekends (97.2% of children) than on work days (95.5% of children)
- almost every fifth child watches TV for more than two hours on a work day, and on weekends every third child does
- about 15% of children play games on game consoles, most of them up to one hour per day

Average time spent in front of screens

	2-3 years	4-5 years	6-7 years
WORK DAY – AVERAGE	2 hours	2.5 hours	2.9 hours
WEEKEND – AVERAGE	2.3 hours	3.1 hours	3.6 hours
MORE THAN 2 hours/work day	50%	60%	71%
MORE THAN 2	52%	76%	82%

hours/weekend			
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The picture shows the average time in front of screens for children by age and the percentage of children of a certain age who have more than two hours of Screen Time per day. In red are marked those numbers that are larger than the recommended maximum allowed time in front of small screens.

Table 3. The proportion of children who spend two or more hours a day on screen

Age of children	Work day	Weekend
Two and three years	50%	52%
Four and five years	60%	76%
Six years and older	71%	82%

Table 4. Children in front of TV screens

Number of hours daily	Work day	Weekend
Do not watch TV.	4-5%	2.8%
0-1	40.2%	27.5%
1-2	37.7%	35.5%
2-3	14.6%	23.8%
3-4	2.3%	7.4%
4 and older	0.8%	3.0%

Table 5. Children watching video content on mobile phones, tablets or computers

Number of hours daily	Work day	Weekend
Do not watch video	22.2%	21.9%
0-1	53.8%	48.7%
1-2	18%	20.3%
2-3	4.5%	7.1%
3-4	0.9%	0.9%
4 and older	0.6%	1.1%

Table 6. Playing games on cell phones or computers

Number of hours daily	Work day	Weekend
Do not play games	43.8%	43%
0-1	47.2%	43.8%
1-2	7.3%	9.2%
2-3	1.4%	2.8%
3-4	0.3%	0.6%
4 and older	0%	0.5%

What does the World Health Organization say?	What do our results say?
Children up to 2 years old should not use small screens.	79% of children up to 2 years have started to use small screens.
Children leaving for school should use small screens a maximum of 2 hours a day.	Children of preschool age use small screens from 2 to 3.6 hours daily.

6% of preschool children have their own cell phone, and even 4.2% of children have their own cell phone before their fourth year.

How did the children begin to spend time on screens, and what did they learn?

Children are beginning to use electronic devices at an early age. By their first birthday, 40% of children spend 40% of their time on small screens, by two years old, this number is 79%, and at four years, electronic devices are used by almost all (97%). For most of the children, the first device was a TV, followed by a cell phone and a tablet.

In their usage, children are more than passive information recipients - they actively seek content that is interesting and appealing to them.

- up to 97% of preschool children independently know how to turn on some electronic devices
- 90% of preschool children are individually searching and launching the content they want
- 77% of preschool children take pictures and record with a cell phone
- 45% of preschool children use the internet independently

Sleeping and eating with screens

- every third child at least sometimes uses an electronic device during meals
- 90% of children use electronic devices before bedtime
- in one of ten children, electronic devices are often or always used during meals
- even 41% of children with an electronic device use it frequently or just immediately before bedtime

Why do parents give children time in front of small screens?

- Almost 50% of parents give small screens to children so children can have fun
- more than one third of parents believe that electronic devices are useful to children for learning
- 56% of parents are trying to keep children's attention on electronic devices
- Approximately 7% of parents believe that children will better fit into society if they use modern technology
- About 50% of parents cannot assess whether electronic devices are harmful or useful to their children
- A third of parents assess electronic devices as harmful, but all children use them
- 17% of parents of electronic devices assess as useful

Social networks

65% of adults published a picture of a preschool child on social networks.

35% of parents published a picture of a child on social networks in the first month of a child's life.

Involvement of children in organized content

- organized sports facilities are available at the place of residence of 85.5% of children, half of whom attend
- playgrounds are available at the place of residence of 83.2% of children, and more than half of the children attend
- foreign language schools are available to attend for almost every third child
- almost 70% of children have available to them musical activities such as singing, playing or choral classes, but 8.3% attend

Table 7. Availability of organized content

Content	Availability
Sport activities	85.5%
Playgrounds	83.2%
Foreign language schools	78.8%
Musical activities	69.9%

Table 8. Percentage of children attending the content available to them

Content	Availability
Sport activities	51.1%
Playgrounds	56.3%
Foreign language schools	30.3%
Musical activities	8.3%

Almost half of preschool children attend two or more organized activities!

Rules, Supervision, Relationship: How Parents Control Screen Time

- Even a quarter of parents do not set rules for their preschoolers to use electronic devices
- Every tenth parent never or rarely tells the child what to watch
- Some parents set rules for TV only, and some just for other screens

Table 9. Usage rules for electronic devices

Usage rules	Percentage
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Do not have	25%
Only for TV	5%
Only for other devices	12%
Have for all	58%

THE RULES WHICH THE PARENTS HAVE SUPPLIED most often relate to the total allowable time of use. Some parents reward the child with extra minutes in front of the screen, and some punish the child by stopping minutes in front of small screens. Smaller rules are set for content that the child views/uses on small screens, which is often much more important than total time.

Regardless of the limited time, children use modern technology without supervision.

AT LEAST SOMETIMES...

70% of children use TV without supervision.

2/3 of children use a cell phone and computer without supervision.

75% of children use a tablet without supervision.

- 40% of parents are always present with the child while using electronic devices
- only 30% of parents monitor the content the child is watching all the time
- 11% of parents always watch the contents together with the child
- almost every fifth parent declares that he never or rarely looks at contents together with his or her child
- after the child sees some content on TV, one-fifth of parents never or only sometimes talk to the child about what they watched
- 20% of parents do not regularly determine which games the child can play
- almost every fourth parent never or rarely teaches their child about the use of electronic devices

39% of parents never play with a child on an electronic device.

Safety

- every fourth parent provides programs that monitor child activity and block inappropriate content
- almost 20% of parents do not know what programs to track activities nor do they have them
- 12% of parents do not know about programs that block inappropriate content

21% of parents never browse the Internet Search History