

The Digital Distraction and Its Impact on Children's Social-Emotional Development

As a community we continue to live our days with a heightened mission of protecting our children from the Covid-19 virus. It has been a very difficult eighteen months packed with monitoring handwashing, reinforcing good sleep habits, curating virtual school, supervising use of masks, forming safety pods of friends and family to support interaction, monitoring safe play dates, etc. This has really taken quite a toll on the children, parents, mental health professionals, educators, and service providers across the state of Virginia.

While creating protocols to maintain safety for the children there is one tool that is emerging more and more as a concern, your mobile devices. Recently, there has been a new term associated with technology intrusion, *Technoference*. *Technoference refers to,* **the interruptions in interpersonal communication caused by attention paid to personal technological devices.** (Merriam-Webster Online) As mental health providers, and service providers we must be cognizant of the overuse, or intrusion of technology that could potentially cause relationship intrusion, and negatively impacts children's social-emotional development and wellness.

What is the potential loss for Infants and children?

- Appropriate attachment with parent or caregiver
- Lack of serve and return opportunities
- Misinterpretation or missed cues from Infant/child from the distracted parent/caregiver
- Physical safety or safe environmental boundaries for the Infant and child

These are just a few of the very important structures that support a well-developed infant or child that are now potentially compromising relationship and growth. Please be aware if this is happening in your personal life, and assess the possibility that this could be happening with the infants/children in your professional role as well. The following are a few tips to promote positive social-emotional development that you can use or share with parents/caregivers:

- Provide your child with responsive care
- Be affectionate and nurturing
- Make eye contact with your infant/child

- Get on your child's level to read, sing and play
- Give your child your full attention whenever possible

The attached video demonstrates “Technoference”, and its daily impact on the developing child.

<https://vimeo.com/264805028>