Low-tech toys are better for young kids

Too much early exposure to gadgets could harm, hamper development: Experts

Amelia Teng

June 16, 2013

Low-tech toys are better for young kids, a local study has found.

Experts use of touchscreen devices like tablets and smartphones can hamper a child’s development, lead to poor sight or even addiction, a local study has found.

In fact, Professor Marjory Ebbeck reckons a child is better off playing with “low-tech” toys such as building blocks.

These basic play tools help children develop motor skills that may be compromised as they become more adept with technology at a younger age, said the director of the National Institute’s Centre of Research and Professional Diploma in Early Childhood Education Theresa Lu.

“Children develop most cognitively through imaginative play, like playing doctors and nurses or engineers and doctors, instead of being inhibited by gadgets because ‘everything is set, controlled for them’,” she said.

“Children who use gadgets like tablets and smartphones should be encouraged to develop an interest in playing doctors, engineers and doctors,” she said. “But parents need to learn about nature and what’s around them.”

“Early childhood consultants say ‘gadgets substituted for conventional and language skills cannot be learnt from a gadget but some games and drawing apps, though, can benefit children’s learning as long as they are closely supervised,” Professor Ebbeck said.

Mr Tan Siang Meng, however, feels smartphones are “a baby-sitting tool, but it’s easy to misuse”. Parents have to be responsible for the time children spend on touchscreen devices, he said.

Eight-year-old Raphael Lee has been using his parents’ iPhones and iPads since he was two. His parents allow him to play games, watch videos and read stories on them every day.

Four-year-old Raphael has been using his parents’ iPhones and iPads since he was two. His parents allow him to play games, watch videos and read stories on them every day.

The institute, which is under the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC), runs early childhood education and care programmes.

“Children must interact with the real world in their early years,” Professor Ebbeck said. “They need to learn about nature and what’s around them.”

But smartphones are “adults’ devices, run by an operating system and controlled by the users”, she said.

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