Understanding Virtual Autism in Children: A Contemporary Perspective

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Children learn language through stimulation and exposure to the environment during their critical period of development. In earlier times children were more socially engaged, however these days they spend more time with electronic screen media. This increased screen time in young children has been associated with detrimental health effects, including reduced cognitive function, delayed language development, and behaviors like short attention spans, irritability, which led to the development of new term known as Virtual Autism. Virtual Autism is also known as Digital Autism or Screen time Autism, refers to a condition where individuals exhibit autistic like symptoms such as social withdrawal and communication difficulties, primarily triggered by excessive screen time and digital interactions. Virtual Autism can affect individual of various ages but research suggests that excessive screen time and digital exposure can impact as early as infancy (6-12 months) and toddlerhood (1-3 years). This concept is not recognized as a distinct medical diagnosis but rather as a subset of symptoms associated with prolonged exposure to digital media. Research suggests that it can exacerbate existing Autism spectrum disorders(ASD), and Virtual Autism can also be reversed with reduced screen exposure and balanced digital habits. As technology continues to dominate, understanding virtual autism's implications is crucial for promoting healthy digital habits. Preventing virtual autism requires a holistic approach involving parents, educators, and policymakers. Key steps include setting a screen time limit, selecting age-appropriate content, promoting physical activity and outdoor play, nurturing in-person relationships, teaching digital literacy, parental supervision, professional guidance, and parental and educational roles.