



SCREENS CENTRAL TO SOCIAL LIVES

YOUNG CHILDREN and adolescents in WA are using digital screens, including smart phones and gaming consoles, to manage their mood and feel less lonely.

A study by University of WA researchers of students aged eight to 18 found it was mainly boys who turned to screens – often to play games – to manage their mood.

Lead researcher Stephen Houghton said two factors influenced the use of screens by children and adolescents.

The first was mood management and the second was salience (being most noticeable or important), where students reported behaviour such as spending too much time on screens or going to bed late because of screen use.

Salience was a more important factor in the use of screens by girls, who tended to use them for social networking, Professor Houghton said.

But fears that children and teens

were “addicted” to screen use might be unfounded.

“Screen use is just everyday use now,” Professor Houghton said.

“Kids are connected to screen media and screen use is the centrepiece of young people’s social lives.

“How many times do you check your phone for a message?”

Professor Houghton said the researchers had developed a problematic screen-use scale. It included a component that dealt with friendships made online.

In a preliminary survey of students about problematic screen use, some students said they received more understanding from online friends than those in real life, he said.

Many students said they went to bed late every night because of screen use.

Many also said they had tried to stop using screens but had been unable to.

