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Resources for Families

Navigating the online world with kids

Based on stereotypes and cellphone ownership, it is easy to assume that children, tweens and teens devote a large amount of each day to media use. And they do.

Estimates are that school-age children spend approximately nine hours per day using digital devices for activities ranging from gaming to social media to watching videos or listening to music.

<http://globalnews.ca/news/2314977/teens-spend-an-average-of-9-hours-a-day-with-media/>

Why do students spend so many hours online? They are learning from their parents.

A new survey by Common Sense Media on media use by parents revealed that parents of school-aged children spend more than nine hours a day using digital devices, including TV, social media sites, and computer-based educational programs.

<http://bit.ly/2hPFJz8>

Leading by example

The digital lives of parents are somewhat contradictory. They are, as it turns out, modeling how to use technology, and they are not fully supportive of these technical tools.

Although most parents believe that children should learn to use technology and digital tools, they also worry about possible negative effects of too much electronic time.

“The vast majority of parents say they believe computers and digital devices in classrooms are good for their children. But they also worry that their children spend too much time on devices, to the detriment of physical activity and personal relationships.

“Common Sense Media, a nonprofit organization that advocates for the informed use of quality

media, surveyed more than 1,700 parents of children eight to 18 years old to learn about their media and technology use; it also conducted focus groups. That’s what makes this survey different – it sought to measure parents’ influence and opinions on media and technology use. And it measured how much time parents are spending on it, too.

“As it turns out, parents are watching TV and playing games on their phones the same amount of time as their children.” *The Hechinger Report*, <http://bit.ly/2ib7rkW>

Setting limits

Parents who worry about excessive media use by their children may want to consider the messages they are sending with their own use. And they may want to reflect on why they want to limit technology time. Digital tools are social tools, and social skills are essential skills.

The rules don’t have to be the same for children and adults, but it may be helpful for parents to assess their personal use of technology and clarify their concerns when they set boundaries for their children.

How much is appropriate?

Canadian standards are currently being updated, but will be very similar to new American standards, according to Dr. Michelle Ponti, of the Canadian Paediatric Society. “They are very similar to what our guidelines are shaping up to look like,” she says. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/health/child-media-use-canadian-paediatric-society-1.3824305>

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), a good place to start is with the quality of the media, especially for the youngest children. High-quality educational games and programs are a better choice than mindless games. Exposing children to technology as learning tools can have long-term benefits.



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New guidelines by the AAP are for no screen media for children under 18 months, high-quality, shared media for children 18-24 months, and one hour per day for children who are age two to five years old.

Guidelines for older children are more challenging because teens use their cellphones continually. The key, according to Common Sense Media, is to have a balance of media time with enriching activities and to watch how media use affects each child.

Solutions may include creating a schedule with screen time limits and/or balancing the kind of screen time. Cutting down passive consumption, such as watching TV, but allowing interactive consumption, content creation or communication may add enriching activities that balance how those nine hours of electronic time are used.

Making good media choices

Choosing high-quality media options that appeal to kids and have learning value is easier than you think.

Consumption

Common Sense Media reviews and rates movies, books, apps, TV shows, video games, websites and music for age-appropriateness. They have a library of more than 25,000 reviews by age, entertainment type and learning ratings. And they include a Common Sense seal showing media that is great for families.

This database is a good place to start for media consumption. Choose your child's age and entertainment type or pick a topic of interest, character strength, or recommendation by parents or other kids. There are numerous ways to filter your search and find options your child will enjoy and you can approve. www.commonsensemedia.org/reviews

Interaction and communication

Many tweens and teens regularly use social media to communicate with their friends. Although legal requirements state that users must be 13 or older, younger children may falsify their age to get a social media account.

Younger children don't have to lie to begin interacting socially online. There are a number of safe chat rooms and social sites that they can use for little kids, big kid and tween age groups.

<http://bit.ly/2jxCSLF>

Children who are over age 13 are old enough for these sites, but they should still have guidance from adults about how to safely interact online. Read the latest research and learn social media basics to help your child navigate Facebook, Instagram and the many other social sites that attract the teen and tween crowd. www.commonsensemedia.org/social-media