



# Becoming MediaWise

*Don't let technology replace the human connection*

American children spend more time watching TV than any other waking activity. In the course of one year, they'll watch more than 1,000 hours of television, while spending about 900 hours in school. What will kids learn in those 1,000 hours?

*They'll learn that violence solves problems.* By age 18, the average American has seen 200,000 acts of violence on TV, including 16,000 murders.

*They'll also learn to stay inside and watch, rather than going outside and exercising*—a trend that is leading this generation of young people to be the most overweight and sedentary in our nation's history.

*They'll miss some of life's most important lessons:* how to interact with people, and how to compromise and share in a world of real people.

*And there's another crucial skill that children are not developing when they are watching TV: reading.*

By limiting or eliminating TV time, you can give your child a real reading boost. Make it easy for your kids to read by making books available, and visit the public library often. Suggest to relatives that books make great gift ideas. Set aside time each day or a few times a week to read to your children—and/or have them read to you. Talk about what they are reading. Help them with new vocabulary words. Encourage them to try new genres.

*In order to become skilled readers, children need encouragement and support... and time away from the TV. The support you give them now can help create their academic success and a lifelong love of learning.*

www.turnofftv.org (Adapted)



**Fact:** The average US home has more TVs than people

**Act:** Turn off TV, be with your family!



## New Brain Science

It is widely accepted that young children's brains are extremely malleable. One look at a two year old shows us that early childhood is a time of incredible developmental change. However, new

brain science is shedding light onto our understanding of how children's brains grow and develop over time. Contrary to long-standing belief, the adolescent brain is not a finished product. In fact, it is in the midst of a period of dynamic growth. And during this important developmental stage, an adolescent's brain can be very powerfully affected by the experiences he or she has.

Neuroscientists agree: when the brain is in the midst of major rewiring, it is extremely susceptible to outside influences. In other words, *the experiences our kids have when their brains are developing have a profound impact on the mental map they will use as adults.* This research reminds us that media are powerful forces in the lives of kids of all ages. If we believe that *Sesame Street* is teaching four year olds something, then we have to believe that *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* is teaching our fourteen year olds something, too.

www.mediawise.org



## Vocabulary Corner

Do your children's instant messages look like Greek to you? Do you wonder and worry about what they mean? Here are some common phrases to help you be aware of what's being communicated:

- WYSIWYG** what you see is what you get
- 2HOT4U** too hot for you
- a/s/l or asl** age/sex/location (used to ask a chatter their personal information)
- F2F** face to face
- P911 or PIR** my parents are in the room (P= parents; 911= emergency—in other words, drop the subject or watch the language)
- TTYL** talk to you later
- :- }** embarrassed
- > :- (** angry
- AFK** away from the keyboard
- BTW** by the way
- DTRT** do the right thing
- CU or CYA** see you

From f@stcht/A Quick Guide to the Abbreviated Language of Instant Messaging available at www.mediafamily.org

## Connect & Stay Healthy

We now know that interactions between human beings are required in order to accomplish several of life's vital functions. Being connected to another human being in a positive way regulates the nervous system: it slows heart rate, deepens breath, lowers blood pressure, and stimulates the release of certain healthy chemicals into the brain and bloodstream. Without human interaction, not only are these positive health effects lost: the socially isolated tend toward physical ailments, loss of productivity, and mental and emotional problems, as well.

Nina Atwood, *Soul Talk*

# Music and Children

Music has long been a staple of kids' media diet, being the media of choice for many adolescents, frequently edging out television. Many teens use music to shape their cultural identity and to help define their social group.

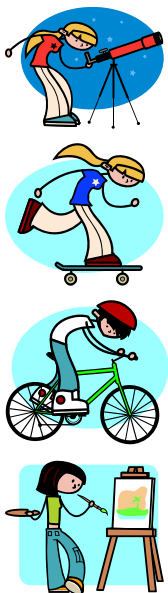
## Did you know?

- Pre-adolescents and adolescents listen to music (i.e. radio, CDs, iPods, and music videos) between 3 and 4 hours a day
- 45% of US teens listen to FM radio
- Teens consider musicians their heroes more frequently than athletes, and rate the influence of music higher than religion or books
- More than 20-30 music styles are identified by teens. From this list, rap and heavy metal stir the most controversy over song lyrics. Music affects emotions, and teens use music to enhance, intensify, or change their mood.
- "Parent Advisory" stickers (the black and white warning label adopted in 1990 by major record companies to satisfy Congressional demands for a system to help parents evaluate their children's music choices) is totally voluntary. Much objectionable music has no sticker—and when present, it's placed on the outside of packaging, being easily removed by kids.

## What to do?

- Expose children to a broad range of music from an early age. Listening to music from around the world can lead to an adventure of discovery about other countries and cultures.
- Be knowledgeable about the lyrics of your children's music.
- For younger children, be explicit about your family's values and what you will and will not allow your child to listen to.
- For older children, keep lines of communication open: ask what they like about a particular song or musician. Set limits on if/when/where they may play it.

[www.mediafamily.org/facts/facts\\_music.shtml](http://www.mediafamily.org/facts/facts_music.shtml)



Today's 8-12 year olds are seeking a teen lifestyle and independence from their parents. Even in elementary school children are wanting their own cell phones, downloading mature music, setting up their own MySpace pages, wearing suggestive clothing and going on dates. Though they may try to act like teens, they're still children... mentally and emotionally. So be sure to set firm limits on media and peer influence. Give them time to still be kids.

[www.familyfirst.net](http://www.familyfirst.net) (adapted)

## Be cyber-smart

- ✓ Keep computers in a common space. It's harder for kids to avoid homework or surf out-of-bounds when you keep an eye on them.
- ✓ Make sure your kids understand the difference between work and play time on the computer.
- ✓ Familiarize yourself with parental controls. Let your kids know that you will verify their website visits.

What makes cell phones so challenging is that they are no longer *just* cell phones.



Most are cameras, computers, and video cameras all in one hard-to-keep-track-of package. In addition to being able to talk with friends, online features are increasingly favorites among kids—giving them access to e-mail, Web pages, games, and more. Most carriers have a set of Parental Controls that enable you to filter content in text messages and downloads, block the purchase of ring tones, graphics, and games, and disable Internet connectivity. A few carriers have developed cell phones just for kids, allowing you to control with whom they talk and for how long. Research before you buy or contact your service provider for features you want.

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## POWERFUL Parenting

Be a MediaWise parent! Here are some video game tips:

- ☺ **TALK ABOUT** game content.
- ☺ **REQUIRE** that homework and chores be done before game playing.
- ☺ **USE RATINGS.** Make sure the games your kids play are age-appropriate.
- ☺ **LEARN** about parental controls—and use them.
- ☺ **CHECK** KidScore for parent-generated reviews at [www.mediawise.org](http://www.mediawise.org)
- ☺ **RENT** a game to preview it before buying.
- ☺ **PLAY WHAT YOUR KIDS PLAY!**
- ☹ **LIMIT** video game playing time. Recommendation: no more than 1 hr/day.
- ☹ **AVOID** violent first person shooters.
- ☹ **DO NOT PUT CONSOLES** in bedrooms.

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