



Becoming MediaWise

Don't let technology replace the human connection

For parents who are concerned that their children spend too much time with



electronic media, there is good news: there appear to be concrete steps parents can take that will impact the amount of time their children spend with media. **Turning off the TV** in their home when no one is watching, **getting TVs out of children's bedrooms**, and **setting rules** about how much time their children can spend with media all appear to make a significant difference in the amount of time children spend in front of the screen.

*Zero to Six: Electronic Media in the Lives of Infants, Toddlers and Preschoolers," a Kaiser Family Foundation Report, Fall 2003

Babies Learn Words From People, Not TV

When you're a new parent your home fills up (almost instantly it seems), with stuff for the baby. These days, many parents include media on the list of must-haves for their babies and toddlers. DVDs just for baby are a fixture in many homes. The thinking behind a lot of these programs and products is noble: the images on the screen are supposed to help babies and toddlers learn.

A growing body of evidence tells us that TV isn't that great for tots under two. Language acquisition is an absolutely vital skill for babies while their brains are in a critical state. And it's still not clear exactly how kids pick up words and learn to use them. But here's what we do know: **talking to your baby one-on-one works better than anything else.** That's one of the reasons the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends parents keep kids away from TV for their first two years. If we help them learn the language ourselves, we give something more important than almost all the material items we provide.

David Walsh, Ph.D. is the founder of the MediaWise Movement, a program of the National Institute on Media and the Family (www.mediafamily.org)

What Makes Your Teen Happy?

A recent survey by the Associated Press and MTV found that teens and young adults who describe themselves as very spiritual or religious are generally happier than those who aren't. And 75% of those surveyed said God has an impact on their happiness. So, where do your teens search for happiness? Are they caught up in trying to fit in with the crowd or buying the latest MP3 player? Or do they find true joy in what really matters—their relationships with God, family and friends? **Talk with your teen about their priorities in life and what matters most.**

www.FamilyFirst.net

Music to Their Ears but Not to Yours



Parents want to know if they should be concerned about the references to violence, sex, and drugs in song lyrics, fearing that the crude messages will rub off on their kids. Music has been a battleground between parents and kids for generations. New styles of music often involve musical and lyrical innovations that push past the boundaries of what was previously acceptable. Sometimes new types of music are appealing specifically because they shock the tastes of their parents. Especially for adolescents, music seems to be a way to define tastes distinct from their parents' while finding common ground with peers.

Try these suggestions to keep music from being a divisive issue in your family:

- ✓ **Avoid making music a battleground.**
- ✓ **Be realistic.** You might want to forbid your kids from listening to music you find offensive, but you can't realistically stop them from hearing songs on the radio or listening to CDs with friends. At the same time, be clear about what you will and will not tolerate in your home.
- ✓ **Stick to value-based reasons for your objections** rather than sweeping labels. Instead of calling music "trash," say you don't care to hear certain music because "it objectifies women" or "glorifies violence." Let him know that you realize that you can't stop him from listening to it, but the rest of the family doesn't want to hear it.

The whole family doesn't have to sing the same tune all the time, but if you take a sensible approach you'll be more likely to have family harmony—and kids who grow up to have discriminating taste.

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Vocabulary Corner



Do your kids' electronic 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:

- BRB** be right back
- CUL8ER** see you later
- EM?** excuse me?
- FAQ** frequently asked question(s)
- HTH** hope this helps
- IMO** in my opinion
- LOL** laughing out loud
- MSG** message
- OT** off topic
- RBTL** read between the lines
- THX** thanks
- TMI** too much information
- WDYS?** what did you say?
- WYCM?** will you call me?

See [f@stcht/A Quick Guide to the Abbreviated Language of Instant Messaging](#) for more chat abbreviations.



Computer and Video Game Addiction

Computers, video games, and the Internet have become entrenched features of our daily lives. Computer use has reached beyond work and is now a major source of fun and entertainment for many people. For most people,

computer use and video game play is integrated into their lives in a balanced healthy manner. For others, time spent on the computer or video game is out of balance, and has displaced work, school, friends, and even family.

What is computer and video game addiction?

When time spent on the computer, playing video games or cruising the Internet reaches a point that it harms a child's or adult's family and social relationships, or disrupts school or work life, that person may be caught in a cycle of addiction. Like other addictions, the computer or video game has replaced friends and family as the source of a person's emotional life. Increasingly, to feel good, the addicted person spends more time playing video games or searching the Internet. Time away from the computer or game causes moodiness or withdrawal.

When a person spends up to ten hours a day or more rearranging or sending files, playing games, surfing the net, visiting chat rooms, instant messaging, and reading emails, that easily can reach up to seventy to eighty hours a week on-line with the computer. Major social, school or work disruptions will result.

Symptoms of computer or video game addiction for children:

- Most of non-school hours are spent on the computer or playing video games.
- Falling asleep in school.
- Not keeping up with assignments.
- Worsening grades.
- Lying about computer or video game use.
- Choosing to use the computer or play video games, rather than see friends.
- Dropping out of social groups, clubs, or sports.
- Irritable when not playing a video game or on the computer.

Symptoms of computer or video game addiction for adults:

- Computer or video game use is characterized by intense feelings of pleasure and guilt.
- Obsessing and pre-occupied about being on the computer, even when not connected.

- Hours playing video games or on the computer increasing, seriously disrupting family, social or even work life.
- Lying about computer or video game use.
- Experience feelings of withdrawal, anger, or depression when not on the computer or involved with their video game.
- May incur large phone or credit bills for on-line services.
- Can't control computer or video game use.
- Fantasy life on-line replaces emotional life with partner.

Physical symptoms that may signal addiction:

- Carpal tunnel syndrome
- Sleep disturbances
- Back, neck aches
- Headaches
- Dry eyes
- Failure to eat regularly or neglect of personal hygiene

For the computer or video game addicted person, a fantasy world on-line or in a game has replaced his or her real world. The virtual reality of the computer or game is more inviting than the every day world of family, school or work. With the increased access to pornography on the Internet and in games, this fantasy world may be highly sexual.

The first step to healing is recognizing the symptoms. Help from a professional is often needed.

For more information visit www.mediafamily.org

6 to 8 Year-Olds Become More Serious about Gaming



We've always had symbolic ways to mark the phases of childhood—from training wheels to a "big kid" bike to a 10-speed. Now we've got another way: the "gaming life cycle." Kids start gaming with kid-specific games then move from PC games to "Plug and Play" games and on to cell phone games, then finally to the "next generation" consoles like Xbox and PlayStation.

The surprise is not that kids play more sophisticated games as they grow older, but how quickly they advance through these stages. A new study found that kids turn into "more serious gamers" between the ages of 6 and 8. The study also showed that more than one-third of U.S. youth playing video games are spending more time gaming this year than last, most significantly for online gaming.

Make sure your kids use media wisely.

Sources: The National Institute on Media and the Family and "Kids and Gaming" (NPD Group, Inc.)