



# Becoming MediaWise

*Don't let technology replace the human connection*

**Language is the basis of cognitive thought.** Children who acquire a rich basis in language are able to think more complexly and creatively. Research suggests that children in a language-rich environment will have listened to 45 million words by age four, giving these children a full and rich vocabulary to draw on for their own speaking, thinking, and learning. Some media stories entertain, inspire, educate, and amaze. Too many, however, don't. Too many specialize in tales of violence, sex, and disrespect. Reclaiming the role of storyteller in your child's life can be an ideal means of helping children build language skills. It not only helps lay the foundation for success in school and life, but it's a fun way to connect with your kids! For ideas and tips to help you start telling stories in your home, on the way to the grocery store, in the car, and anywhere else, check out the "MediaWise Network Parent Guide to Storytelling" at [www.MediaFamily.org](http://www.MediaFamily.org)



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**Does your baby watch TV?** Over the past few years, studies have been warning parents about the dangers of young children watching television. Much of this research has shown that too much TV can lead to learning and attention span problems. But in a recent survey, 90% of children under 2, and 40% of infants under 3 months regularly watch television. Even though the American Academy of Pediatrics strongly advises against any television before the age of 2, nearly one-third of parents still believe that baby-oriented programs are beneficial. *The bottom line is this: no matter how educational these programs may be, there's no substitute for one-on-one time with you.*



[www.FamilyFirst.net](http://www.FamilyFirst.net)

## 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:

- CTN** can't talk now
- FYI** for your information
- IDC** I don't care
- IDK** I don't know
- JIT** just in time
- JM2C** just my 2 cents
- LYL** love you lots
- LYLAS** love you like a sister
- SN** screen name
- SRY** sorry
- TTYL** talk to you later
- YTB** you're the best

See [f@stcht1A](http://f@stcht1A) Quick Guide to the Abbreviated Language of Instant Messaging for more chat abbreviations.

## Technology Tips for Parents



**DO** see for yourself what it's all about. Get on IM. Download an MP3 music file. Play a video game. Let your kids be your guide, but talk to them about how to use these technologies safely and wisely.

**DON'T** be a disapproving elder. Your kids need your curiosity and involvement—not pious, uninformed pronouncements.

**DO** set limits, monitor content and teach "techno-manners" for everyone: no cell phones at the dinner table, no playing video games while someone is trying to talk to you, no ignoring Mom and Dad when they come home because you are glued to a screen.



**DO** monitor your own online behavior and television viewing. A major reason for the disappearance of the human moment in families is the parents'—not just the kids'—addiction to screens.



**DO** look for the good. Search for what's positive and innovative in the ways in which your children are using and adapting to the new technology. Try to imagine how it could be used to enhance relationships and learning.

**DON'T** let technology steal your kids from you. Cherish the face-to-face conversations, the shared laughter, the dinner with all the family, the bedtime story, the car ride (without the iPod, video game, or fold-down DVD player).



**DO** take time to hang out with your kids. Do mundane, non-technological things: wash the car together, play Ping-Pong, debate politics, take them out for ice cream (no cell phones or iPods allowed!). Spend time together with ears and eyes available for them.



Dr. Edward Hallowell, author of *CrazyBusy: Overstretched, Overbooked and About to Snap—Strategies for Coping in a World Gone ADD*

## Avoiding Video Game Mistakes

**Mistake #1: Easy Access**—the vast majority of children over eight years old own their own video game system—more than one when you include handheld systems such as Gameboy. The risk of video game addiction increases dramatically when your child owns a system because it is much harder to control the amount of time spent due to availability. As with any other behavioral addiction, easy and frequent access to the object of obsession makes it more difficult to avoid potential pitfalls. Therefore, if you fear your child might become addicted, seriously consider NOT purchasing a system. They can still play once in awhile at a friend's home. If you do own a system, consider purchasing only group games and treating the system like a board game that is kept in a box and brought out periodically for an hour or so then boxed up and returned to the closet. Such approaches can drastically reduce the risk of obsession without totally eliminating games from a child's experience.



**Mistake #2: Starting Young**—the earlier a child begins playing electronic games, the sooner he or she is exposed to the patterns that lead to addiction. Similar to eating habits, children who become accustomed to junk food lose their appetite for healthy eating. Kids also “acquire a taste” for how they want to spend their recreational time. Those who develop patterns of “natural” play rather than “virtual” play are more likely to become well-rounded, happy adolescents. Those who are introduced to the dopamine-inducing “high” of prolonged video game play often become bored with any other form of recreation.

**Mistake #3: Using It As a Reward System**—many parents admit that the promise of video game play time is the only thing they have found that can successfully motivate their child to do homework, chores, and other productive activities. And while the benefit of completed school assignments and other tasks may seem like a positive aspect to video game obsession, the long term negative consequences far outweigh any short term gain. Depending upon video games as a child's sole motivation for responsible activities subconsciously reinforces the notion that completing a job, reading, learning, etc. are necessary evils to endure rather than rewards in and of themselves. Other motivational rewards, such as allowances, an ice cream date with dad, a movie



outing, etc. are far more effective and avoid feeding a propensity toward video game obsession.

**Mistake #4: “One More Level?”**—when asked to shut off the video game system, it is a rare child who quickly complies and ceases play. Invariably they respond instead with a plea for “just one more level” or time to defeat the current villain before they can “save my game.” as a result, many parents end up allowing their child to spend much more time playing video games than they intended or often realize. As one recovering video game addict said, “If you say you intend to restrict the amount of time a child spends, you better ask yourself whether you can really do it. Kids are very good at pushing and pushing for more time.” time flies when kids play video games, in part because we parents fall into the “one more level” trap.



**Mistake #5: Ignoring Your Gut**—many parents have a bad feeling about the amount of time their child spends playing, talking and thinking about video games. There is a nagging sense that allowing so much video game time may have long term negative consequences. But they second guess the feeling, writing it off as being old fashioned or too strict. “It's just the way kids are nowadays!” Besides, they don't want the inevitable conflict that would come from restricting or removing the game system. But video game addiction affects a growing number of kids, especially boys. Parents know their child better than anyone else, and are urged to trust their gut and intervene if needed to help their child live a better life.



[www.VideoGameTrouble.org](http://www.VideoGameTrouble.org)

### What the Research is Saying

- ✓ **THE GAMBLE:** Most parents are unaware of the risks associated with video game play. **Studies indicate that over twenty percent of adolescent children are addicted** - with boys much more likely to become hooked than girls. (April, 2003 - National Institute on Media and the Family)
- ✓ **MADE FOR ADDICTION:** **Most video games trigger physiological reactions in the brain similar to those associated with substance abuse.**
- ✓ **GAME SYSTEM OWNERSHIP:** **More than eight in ten kids own at least one game system.** (Kaiser Family Foundation, 3/05)
- ✓ **FAVORITE GAMES:** According to a November 2004 report from the National Institute on Media and the Family, **78% of adolescent boys admit that “M” (“Mature”) rated games are among their favorites.** ([www.mediafamily.org](http://www.mediafamily.org))