

# Collaboration for Early Childhood

## Strong Start, Bright Future

October 2013

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#### HEALTHY YOUNG CHILDREN IN THE MULTI-SCREEN WORLD

By Rebecca Barbato

It is impossible to ignore the impact that "screens" have on our lives. How many times do we all look at our phone, TV or computer monitor during the day? It is even more important to think about the impact that screens and media have on children. Recent studies show that most children and adolescents use screens for more than seven hours a day. While there can be beneficial or educational uses of TV and computers, there are also some frightening consequences. One study of eight-year old boys found that if boys watched violent TV programs growing up, they were more likely to have aggressive, violent behavior at age 18 and more likely to have criminal behavior by 30. When young children see violent acts in movies, TV programs or video games, they often do not know what is real and what is make believe. Increased TV time is also associated with obesity, bullying and other forms of nonphysical aggression with peers. Children who see violence on TV are more likely to have fear, anger, PTSD, nightmares and sleep problems. Children are also often exposed to very adult messages about sex, tobacco and alcohol, and often believe that these things are associated with being more attractive, having more friends and being happier.

As physicians, how do we advise our families about these issues? The Collaboration's Physicians Network hopes to provide you with some helpful information at our next breakfast meeting at Maya del Sol, on October 22nd at 7:15 am. Chip Donohue, Erikson Institute dean and director of Erikson's Technology in Early Childhood (TEC) Center, will present "Healthy Young Children in the Multi-Screen, Multi-Touch Digital World: Guidance for Physicians, Families, Parents and Educators." RSVP to Karen Baldwin at 708-613-6122 or kbaldwin@collab4kids.

### A PARENT'S PERSPECTIVE ON SCREEN TIME LIMITS

By Julie LuLu

During my sons' annual well visits, I anticipate their pediatrician's yearly warning about limiting screen time. As a mother of two non-neurotypical boys, I am aware of, and feel guilty about, the amount of time a screen that is being viewed in my house on a daily basis. When our trusted pediatrician repeats herself year after year, I am tempted to ask questions. However, I always end up nodding and smiling as if I completely abide by firm boundaries, masking my fear that I overindulge in the use of screens. As a result of my lax rules, my worry is that I am only encouraging a wider social gap between my children and their peers. But, I also know it's not so black and white. If I could muster up the courage to ask questions during one of these visits, I would want to know how much screen time is too much? What is the harm in "too much" screen time? Are all "screens" created equal? And, if not, what can I do to optimize my sons' screen time by making it as healthy as possible.

Neither of my boys are interested in sports but my oldest, in particular, wraps himself up in a blanket and lies down on the couch to stare at the ceiling. I encourage him to go out to join other children I see laughing and playing games like I did as a kid. He complains that it is too hot, that he hates being outdoors or that he is not feeling social. He struggles socially and physically to keep up with his peers despite significant intervention. Balancing my encouragement for him to be relational and giving him some freedom to pursue his interests is sometimes challenging. His preferred activities include: writing his blog, fiddling around on Google Earth, checking out YouTube videos, watching The Brady Bunch and playing Minion Rush on my iPad. He also goes through phases of enjoying certain games on the Wii. I am working with my son to change activities after 30 minutes or so of sofa time, but often resort to something from his preferred list of activiites. I just wish I could look into the crystal ball and someone would tell me what long-term damage I am doing because I certainly know the short-term consequences of trying to make him do something that causes him a great deal of discomfort.

Both boys receive many hours of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) therapy on a weekly basis. I often notice the therapist using iPads or iPhones as part of their therapeutic goals and strategies. This question of screen time becomes even more confusing to me as screens become more and more ubiquitous. I have observed screen time utilized as a teacher, a resource, a reward, a redirector and even as a way to encourage physical activity (Wii). As a result, I have learned even more new ways to entertain my kids involving a screen. I recently read an article about a family who picks one day a week as their "family day," which means no screen time for that 24-hour period. Applying this to my reality does not sync up with the promise held on paper. Quite often, the key to peace, tranquility and happiness during given moments in my house is a fully charged iPad. It would be an invaluable resource for me to have more concrete information about my choices and alternatives in regards to screen time.

#### RISKS OF MEDIA EXPOSURE TO CHILDREN

By Pam Rumoro

"Blood and gore," "intense violence" and "strong sexual content" are just a few phrases used to describe the substance of many of today's most popular video games, movies and music lyrics. Mass media is more prevalent in young children's lives than ever before, increasing their experience with violent content on a daily basis. In its most recent policy statement on media violence, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) states that exposure to violence in media, including television, movies and video games, represents a significant risk to the health of children and adolescents ("AAP Policy Statement: Media Violence" 124).

Children in all age groups are at risk for increased screen time simply by the variety of ways available to access mass media. Children between zero and six years of age spend an average of two hours per day using screen media. According to the AAP, prolonged exposure to such mass media representations results in an increased acceptance of violence as an appropriate means of solving problems or achieving goals. Research also associates exposure to media violence with a number of issues for children and adolescents such as aggressive behavior, desensitization to

violence, bullying, fear, depression, nightmares and sleep disturbances ("AAP Policy Statement: Media Education" 126).

Additionally, the AAP Media Violence statement reminds us that we should consider that children learn primarily through observation followed by copying of behaviors. The aftereffects or results of the copied behavior strongly influence whether the behavior should be repeated. Unfortunately, many video and computer game violence is rewarded through winning or game advancement.

The AAP suggests that pediatricians encourage parents to follow the AAP media recommendations.

- Remove televisions, internet connections and video games from children's bedrooms.
- Make thoughtful media choices and co-view them with children.
- Limit screen time (including television, videos, computer and video games) to one to two hours per day.
- Avoid screen media for infants or toddlers younger than two years of age.

#### Cited Research

American Academy of Pediatrics. "Policy Statement - Media Violence," (Nov. 2009): Vol. 124, No. 5, pp. 1495-1503.

American Academy of Pediatrics. "Policy Statement - Media Education," (Nov. 2010): Vol. 126, No. 5, pp. 1012-1017.

• 2013 edition of the Developmental Referral and Services Directory available. Attend the Physicians Network Breakfast or contact Karen Baldwin at kbaldwin@collab4kids.org for more information.

Announcements

• Developmental Screening Network Coordinator full-time position available. Go to www.collab4kids.org.

Our mission is to make sure that all children (birth to age 5) in our local community arrive at kindergarten safe, healthy, ready to succeed, and eager to learn.

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