

Children and Video Games

In our ever-changing technological age, parents need to determine their limits and boundaries with video games and computers. There is no simple answer to how much time is appropriate to spend playing video games or on the computer.

If we consider that we are the main influence in our children's lives, it is interesting to think about how much time we spend apart from them. In a typical week, children spend time at school or daycare, watching TV, with friends and this is all time we spend away from them. Add on top of that the time that many parents spend away from the home, and this amount increases again.

So perhaps it is a matter of finding balance between time spent away from and with parents. If your child is spending a considerable amount of time away from you for any of these or other reasons, maybe we need to reduce extra time away from us spent playing video games.

As parents, we must also consider what is being taught to our children in our absence. We typically don't worry that our children are spending time with peers, family members, at school and evening activities such as sports, as these things are all healthy developmental experiences. With this in mind, what are video games and computers teaching our children?

Some age appropriate games can be great at helping children meet developmental milestones related to literacy and problem solving. On the other hand, there are games meant for youth and young adults which are finding their way down into the hands of young children. Some of these games contain profanity, objectify women, and model theft and morals that most parents would not want to create in their children. Even interactive learning games may need to be regulated so our children are experiencing learning opportunities from a variety of sources.

Another technological area that is concerning parents more and more is use of the internet for various ages. Some programs such as facebook ensure that their users must be 13 years old to make an account. Although this age limit can be easily out-smarted, we see that some online companies are trying to be responsible to their users and ensure that their products are used appropriately.

There have been concerns regarding webcams and chat sites which leave parents feeling that their children are not even safe in their rooms if there is a computer in there. One of the simplest ways to protect children, is to have a family computer in a living area of the house, such

as the kitchen or family room. Parents can learn more about internet programs, issues regarding various websites and appropriate user ages at http://www.safecanada.ca/link_e.asp?category=3&topic=94

It can be difficult to define our boundaries and where our limits are as parents. If you are technologically or internet-savvy, you may be more comfortable with your children going online than other parents may be. You are the parent, and you set the limits. If you want to create more interactive family time, you can do so by limiting time your children are allowed to be on the computer, playing video games or watching TV. By taking time to talk to your kids about the risks of the internet or the messages that some video games are sending, you increase their knowledge and foster open communication in your relationship. You can tell your kids that if they are ever uncertain of something they see online or on a game, they can come ask you about it.

By increasing your knowledge of the games and websites your children are visiting, you can help protect their safety as well as increase their understanding of the undesirable messages that these mediums may contain such as condoning violence or unrealistic body images).

Admit your fears and concerns to your children, and they will respond to your honesty. If they are aware of why you are laying out these rules and you explain that part of the reason is so that you can spend more time together, follow through and ensure that you are getting this family time in. You will all enjoy it and benefit from it!

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