For adults, digital media act as a door to the world. They appear essential for everyday life. It is different for children. The younger the child, the bigger the potential harm. The more time spent in front of the screen the bigger the negative influence on the child's development. Why is that so?

A newborn simply lacks real life experience. An adult can rely on years of living that are the basis for understanding and putting experiences into context.

The brain needs many different sensual experiences to grow and develop: Sight, sense of gravity, hearing, taste, sense of own movements, sense of balance, smell, sense of rotation.
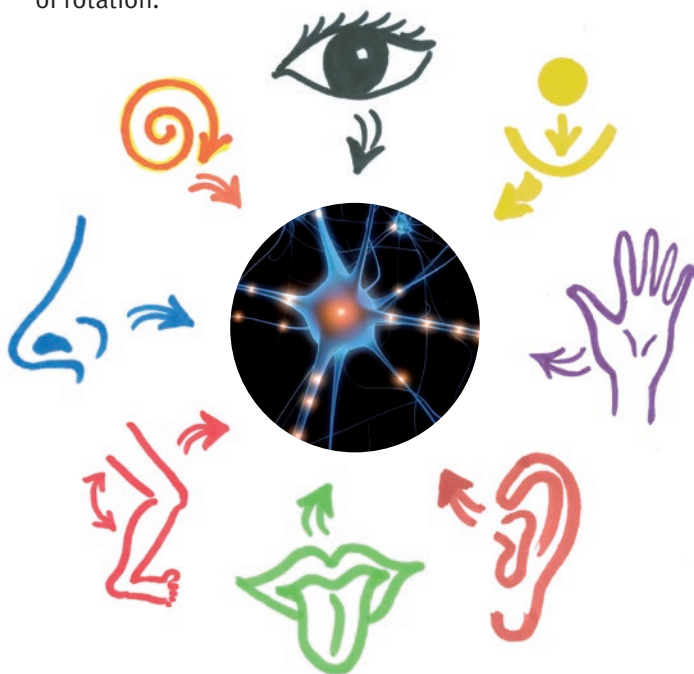
Computers, TVs and other screens both large and small involve the sense of sight and hearing only. For sensorimotor integration – the connection of movement and perception – all 8 senses must be addressed. This is needed for a healthy brain development as a basis for all later success in learning. The direct contact to the world and other people is indispensable. It fosters child development more than any electronic medium ever could.

Eye Contact and Language are Reduced

Child psychologists'warning: "The extensive use of TV, computer and smartphone damages the contact between parent and child."

For a secure attachment (bonding) between parent and child the first few months are especially important. A positive parent-child relationship is the basis for your child's healthy and happy life – and a big win for you too.

Why does use of media harm this relationship? A mother who is on the telephone (talking or chatting) is physically present but emotionally absent for the child. Loud noise and flashy pictures on TV drown out small signals from your child.

**Speech development researchers point to new studies:**

With a TV set turned on there is less verbal communication and eye contact. The same is true for parents using their mobile phone, smartphone or computer.

Young children learn to communicate better if they spend a lot of time in a media free environment – alone and with their parents.

Bought for Learning, Used for Gaming!

The more screen media devices ten-year olds have in their rooms, the more time they spend with them. The same study shows: Age-inappropriate content (films rated 16 and even 18 plus) are used much more often.

TV usage (minutes per school day) — no device ■ full equipment

Boys / Girls
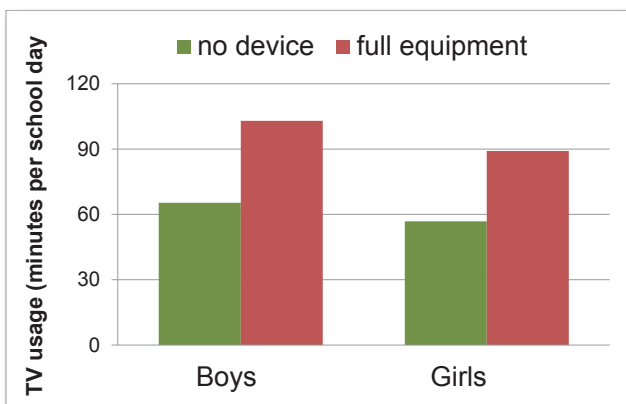
Therefore: No screen media in children's bedrooms!

That's easier said than done. Don't we all know how children can nag!… "Mommy, Daddy, everyone else has it so I want it too!" Do you want to stick with a calm and well-grounded "no"? Always keep in mind that you are doing your child a big favour – in the long run: You protect them from dangers like pornography, violence, cyber mobbing and addiction.

Plus your child has more time for the things he or she genuinely wants: Surveys show that children in elementary school state "playing outside" and "meeting with friends" as their most favourite activities!

Your child needs a PC and/or internet for their homework? No need to buy a computer. Sit with your child while they use mom or dad's PC. And turn it off after the work is done.

Aiming for Responsible Media Use vs. Media Addiction

16-year-old Max's parents have come to see a counsellor:

Diana (35) :

„We were always so proud of Max and we always wanted the best for him. As a reward for good grades we used to give him new computer games. We woke up last week though when he destroyed our door because we had turned off the internet!

Max has been living in his online gaming world for months now. He has got problems at school. His friends Jason and Luke never visit anymore. He has stopped playing football. Max does not think he has a problem, but we are desperate and don't know how to go on."

For many other worried parents the counsellor could give an all-clear signal or assist with a few well-placed suggestions. Not for Max, who was addicted and diagnosed with **Internet gaming disorder**

But Max's is not a rare isolated case either. Studies show: 1 in 50 young people have similar problems. Young men are more often addicted to online role-playing games, while young women are more addicted to social networks like facebook. Is "the earlier the better" good advice for teaching chidren to become mature media users? No. They might become more technically skilled earlier on. But early technical know-how is a risk factor, not a way of protecting them from addiction.

For effective protection, provide a secure grounding in real life. The final aim is that your children use media sparingly, creatively, autonomously. To become media masters, not media slaves. There are 3 important steps towards this goal:

1. **Do not expose small children to screen media**

2. **Accompany and assist older children using screens.**

3. **Step by step, let the reigns loosen as youths learn to act responsibly**

Do computers, TV etc. make you dumb or smart?

On the one hand:

Research shows: Older children and adults can use digital media to learn. An example: An online language course to learn Spanish; a training programme for dyslexics; a movie about deep sea animals. But paper dictionaries are still the better choice for children, for example when preparing a presentation on Thailand for geography class. Why? Just google the word and find yourself on the homepage of a sex-hotel.

On the other hand:

The more time children spend with screen media, the worse they do at school. Researchers' main explanation for this negative effect: Children need real-life experience to learn how to solve problems successfully and learn self-directedly.

TV, PC, smartphone and other screens take away the time for learning with all senses.

In addition, motivation suffers: If you are too used to colorful and exciting video clips, a school book will seem rather boring and tedious.

To sum up: For successful learning children need the following: Support without pressure; a positive atmosphere in the classroom; teachers that are socially and academically compelling; and additionally, protection from harmful screen usage. **Screens are more harmful to learning and academic success: the younger the child, the longer the usage time and the more violent the content.**

The more age-adequate young people's media use is, the more google and co. can help with reflecting, researching and learning.

Overweight

The more time people spend in front of a screen, the higher the risk of being overweight.

This can have severe consequences: For example diabetes or heart attacks. The question is: "What comes first? Too much TV causes overweight – or the other way round?" Researchers in New-Zealand recorded data from 1,000 children from birth to 30 years and found that in fact watching a lot of TV causes overweight, diabetes, and also worse grades at school.
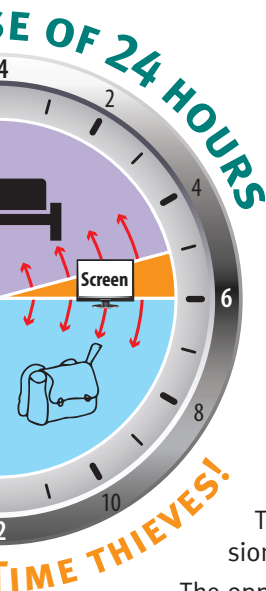
Lack of Exercise

Children who spend a lot of time in front of the screen show a slower development of motoric skills. Too little movement and exercise lead to poor blood flow – and less oxygen for the brain.

Sleep Disturbance

Many people fall asleep while watching TV in the evening. Does that mean television is good for sleeping soundly?

The opposite is true: The more exciting a movie or PC game, the more problems children have falling asleep – and sleeping through the night. The effect is stronger if the TV is turned on directly before going to bed.

More screen time means less sleeping time, and that is bad for childrens' learning: All things experienced during daytime have to be processed at night.

The average 15-year-old has already spent 12,000 hours in front of a screen, TV or other. While watching, they have witnessed 10,000 murders and 100,000 acts of violence. Nevertheless most teenagers do not act violently.

It is not that simple!

Violence in your mind?

Are headlines which say "School Shooting caused by Violent Video Game" just lies? There are many factors protecting children from becoming gunmen: Loving parents, good friends and a calm personality. And there are factors causing violence: A problematic circle of friends, violence in the family or problems at school. Violence in the media is additional factor.
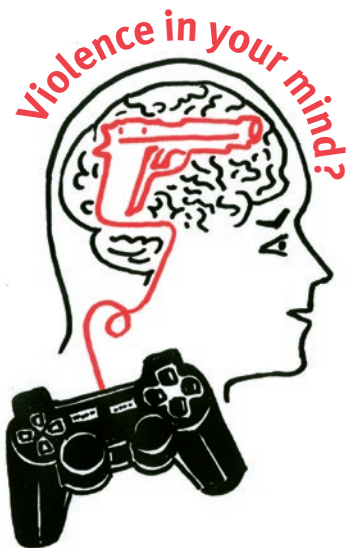
Loss of empathy – Brakes out of order!

Repeatedly watching violence on TV weakens our ability to sense the emotions of others. This loss of empathy is even stronger if you do something violent yourself, for example in a computer game. Humans do not kill other humans by instinct yet watching violence does reduce inhibitions to kill.

If violent behaviour were a car you could say: media violence doesn't act as premium gas in the fuel tank, rather, it stops the brakes from working!

Note: Not every movie/game rated „age 6 plus" is suitable for six-year-olds. Experts'advice: USK/FSK rating + 3 years.

Further Reading

Printed/books:

Citro, A. (2014). 150+ Screen-Free Activities for Kids: The Very Best and Easiest Playtime Activities from FunAtHomeWithKids.com!. Adams Media.

Levin, D. (2013). Beyond Remote-Controlled Childhood—Teaching Young Children in the Media Age. National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Levin, D. (2013). So Sexy So Soon: The New Sexualized Childhood and What Parents Can Do to Protect Their Kids. Ballantine Books.

Links:

Unplug and Play brochure for Kindergarten age:
www.commercialfreechildhood.org/unplug

For infants and toddlers: www.commercialfreechildhood.org/resource/helping-babies-entertain-themselves-screen-free

Cell phones and health: http://www.parenting.com/blogs/screen-play/jeana-lee-tahnk/are-cell-phones-hazardous-our-kids-health

Media addiction: http://www.webroot.com/gb/en/home/resources/tips/ethics-and-legal/family-internet-addiction-what-can-parents-do
http://netaddiction.com/childrenonline/

Child protection software:
http://parental-software-review.toptenreviews.com/

http://www.digitaltrends.com/computing/best-free-parental-control-software/

http://www.waldorfschule.de/fileadmin/downloads/blickpunkte_reader/Struwwelpeter_engl_August_2015.pdf

Resource for kindergarten teachers: http://www.commercialfreechildhood.org/sites/default/files/facingthescreendilemma.pdf

Read this guide for parents online – and more: www.medienratgeber-fuer-eltern.de

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Children and the Media
A Guide for Parents...

MEDIA PROTECT

0 – 3	YEARS
4 – 6	YEARS
7 – 9	YEARS
10 – 13	YEARS

Not an Issue in YOUR family?

➡ Three out of four parents worry about what happens when their children sit in front of a screen.

... Actually, I do worry too. Only sometimes it's hard to be consistent in my actions.

TIPS AND TRICKS

FOR EVERYDAY STRESS REDUCTION

Developmental Steps

0 – 1 years

In the first year your baby gets to know its own body step by step. It learns to grab and hold, to sit and crawl. It explores its surroundings. During the first year the bond between you and your child is formed.

1 – 2 years

All your child's senses develop in direct interaction with the world. Learning to walk and talk are key developmental steps. Your child becomes aware of his or her own emotions – and those of other people.

2 – 3 years

Your child moves around more independently – on foot or tricycle.

They like to talk and play with other children – and form friendships. They begin to understand that their wishes are not necessarily the same as yours!

How screens impact children

Screens take away time from direct contact with the world and other people.

Babies cannot make sense of the content. The more loud and flashy, the more it leads to anxiety and sleep disturbance

Pediatric advice: Do not expose your small child to screens. No background exposition either.

Sue (30) and Matthew (32):

❝ *When the little one (6 months) is awake, we call it screen-free time. No computers, no smartphones, and we use a bedsheet to cover the TV. The positive side-effect: The elder siblings (5 and 8 years) watch less TV than they used to. Out of sight, out of mind! They have learnt to keep themselves busy and they are not used to their digital babysitter providing permanent entertainment.* ❞

Tips and Tricks for low-stress media education in the family

- ■ Treat yourself and your child to times of togetherness – body contact and closeness.

- ■ "Media" recommended for this age group: language (verbal exchange), books (to read aloud or look at) and music (listening or perfoming)

- ■ Your TV, computers or Smartphone should not be in sight or hearing range of your child.

- ■ Times of silence are important for your baby. They allow the baby to observe explore his or her own body and surroundings.

- ■ It is important to "practice" taking periods of rest as a parent. Small children **can** occupy themselves. At first for 3, then 5, and later for 10 or 15 minutes. This may require some effort in the beginning, put pays off for both parent and child in the long run.

Developmental steps

Your child masters more complex movements: running, balancing, climbing, tying shoelaces, moving a pencil on paper while drawing. Speech development is rapid. The range of emotions expands: jealousy, pride and empathy are added to simple joy and sadness.

Your child's self-confidence grows when you talk and pay attention. Rhythmic patterns and repetition in speech and music foster a sense of security.

Your child's awareness starts to expand beyond the present. It can report on past events and wait for things to come. Time and space for creative role-play with other children are important. This is the age where **playing is learning!**

How screens impact your child

They take time away from reading and exploring the world with all senses.

They can tranquilize restless children … but careful: They get more restless later on.

Minimize the time your child is exposed to screens!

This applies to TV, DVDs, computers, mobile and smart phones.

Key advice: No screens in children's bedrooms!

Katie (35), single mother, Chris (10) and Zoe (5):

" With Chris, I used the TV to apply pressure: "No TV today if you don't tidy up your room!" Only after a time, he didn't move a finger unless I used the "No-TV-Threat". The strategy backfired completely! It was very difficult to break free from this habit, but we've done it. That's why with my daughter I avoided this pattern right from the start." "

Tips and Tricks for low-stress media education in the family

- ■ Physical activity, especially outdoors, is important for your child's healthy development. And it puts them in a good mood!

- ■ Clear agreements help: Mum, Dad, Grandma and Granddad should try and pull together. Rules will be much easier to maintain.

- ■ Beware of commercials: Rather than watching TV, chose short childrens' DVDs. Do not let the child watch them alone. Avoiding commercials prevents nagging ("Mommy, buy me this, buy me that!")

- ■ Media literacy is an important goal. To reach it, these are the essential basic steps for Kindergartners: Use language, books and audio media. Read your child bedtime stories to make them feel safe and secure – and to foster their reading skills in years to come.

Developmental Steps

When starting school your child faces new tasks and challenges. But it's not only about the three R's (reading, writing, arithmetic). In addition to the family, relationships with friends become more important. This is not always simple and that is why an adult role model is so important. This teaches them to deal with anger, aggression and frustration without hurting anyone. Don't forget: Playful fights and arguments here and there are completely normal. Of course we need to protect kids from real harm, but overprotection hurts their self-confidence. Small mistakes are a normal part of living and learning! Overcoming them makes your child more confident and helps them to assess their own actions better.

How screens impact children

Studies show: The use of screen media is harmful if certain rules are ignored. Those rules are:

- being with the child while watching and talking about the content
- avoiding age-inappropriate content (age ratings FSK/USK, PG)
- limiting screen time (children who have more than 5 hours of screen time a week have reduced reading and language skills)

Children's bedrooms should be kept free from any kind of screen media devices.

Michael (38) und Ashley (32):

❝ When Toby was having a hard time learning to read many people recommended: Spend more time reading to him, and less time with TV, DVD and game consoles. Now Toby is only allowed to use screens on the weekends. We expected huge protests. But apart from boredom and nagging in the first few weeks he adapted to the new rule quite well. Plus his reading abilities have gotten better already! ❞

Tips and Tricks for low-stress media education in the family

- ■ Encourage your child to form friendships, do sports and to learn an instrument! Surprising but true: This is the best way of preventing gaming-addiction, cyber-mobbing, violence, pornography and rip-offs on the internet! A solid grounding in real life, real success and recognition offer protection from the search for "cheap" virtual rewards.

- ■ No mobile or smart phones for children (at most, a simple phone-only model for occasional use).

- ■ Homework that requires a computer should be the rare exception. No computer or Internet use without adult supervision. Why not ask for a supervised media room at your school?

Developmental steps

With the start of puberty your child's body changes. Mood swings can become a part of everyday life.

Friendships with others of any gender become more important. It's not an easy balance: Still being responsible as a parent, yet granting enough freedom.

Most children appear older than they really are. Early sexualisation is enhanced by the digital world and by advertising. Give your child time: to play, to wrestle, to be silly, simply... to be a child.

How screens impact impact children

Tweens and teens are often fascinated with digital worlds. They lack the overview needed to see the long-term pros and cons. So, just keep communicating with your child.

Carefully chosen educational software can be a support when it comes to learning. But providing your child with their own technical devices causes problems: The usage time doubles and the age rating (FSK/USK) is more often ignored. Beware of violent and pornographic content.

For this developmental stage experts recommend the following:

- no accounts on social networks (e.g. facebook)
- no personal smartphones
- no personal screen media in the child's room

Aylin (12) and Mehmet (10):

99 When our grandparents asked what we wanted for Christmas our answer was sooooo obvious: „An iPhone!" After unwrapping the presents on Christmas Eve, Mum and Dad immediately took away the smartphones. Shane screamed and I didn't talk to my parents for about a week! We have now found a compromise I can live with: We exchanged the iPhone for a dumb basic phone-only model. At least I can call and text now. When I turn 15, I'll get an iPhone — I've got that in writing! With the rest of the money my brother and I are flying out to visit my grandparents in Turkey. YOLO! 99

Tips and Tricks for low-stress media education in the family

- ■ Agree upon a maximum sceen time and make a written contract. Expect conflicts. It pays off to calmly work through them: Better an argument at 10 than an addict at 17!

- ■ No driving without a driving license, no computer use without a 10-finger-touch-typing course. Sounds radical, but this has been proven to work. And saves your child hundreds of hours of slow typing in years to come...

- ■ A good idea for families with teenagers: A shared computer with internet access in the kitchen. There may be more arguments, but it helps parents to have a much better overview of usage times and content.

- ■ Does your child use the internet (PC or smartphone) without you being present? Install time-limitation-software and/or filter software.

Children and the Media
A Guide for Parents...

MEDIA PROTECT

In online and offline press releases, it's mostly either black or white.

Confusing headlines:

TV makes You Fat, Dumb and Sad! ?

? **Train your Brain on the PC**

More and More Computer Junkies ?

? **Facebook Users Have more Friends**

School Shooting caused by Violent Video Game ?

Looking for Explanations

beyond the HEADLINES?