

Are Children Too “Wired”?

By Anthony Ripo

Fifty years ago, most children learned, did homework and entertained themselves without any technological devices. Half a century later, children are practically plugged into the technoverse, charging their brains with a cacophony of data. Gadgets provide today’s techno-savvy tots with everything they need: information, communication, and entertainment. Libraries and telephones have been replaced by web surfing and texting. Hanging out with friends can happen in person, in a chat room online, or during a video game contest on X-Box Live. As beneficial and “cool” as these gadgets may be, they do have their detriments as well, making it important for parents to decide if too much of a good thing can actually be bad.

One of the eldest of all gadgets found in every home today is the television. What was once a box containing a handful of channels and programs is now a universe of its own. Today, hundreds of channels containing thousands of programs are at every person’s disposal, catering to almost every interest. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, children should watch no more than 1-2 hours of quality programming per day. In actuality, the average child views double that amount, and what they watch may contain questionable material. Some programs cater to children educationally, such as public television, which help child learn useful tools like the alphabet, numbers and behaving properly. However, children who watch too much television run the risk of becoming couch spuds, as sitting in front of the television for many hours promotes laziness. Studies have shown that children who watch TV for prolonged amounts of time are more prone to being overweight. Parental control comes heavily into play here, as a child will rely on their parents to dictate their limits.

Video games have become a multi-billion dollar industry since home consoles became available for purchase nearly thirty years ago, and they show no signs of slowing down. A study performed by the NPD group in 2006 showed that one third of all avid gamers are between the ages of six to seventeen. As this number continues to grow, it is important to determine if gaming is helpful or hurtful to a child's development.

In terms of helpful, video games do help children develop their coordination, show them how to apply problem solving skills, and assist them in using logic. Educational games in the market can also help a child by becoming an extension of their learning process. Some video games also contain a multiplayer option, which can help a child develop his social skills by interacting with friends while having fun.

The detriments to video games are equally arguable, as sitting in front of a television with a controller in one's hand can also promote social isolation. The more a child plays a video game inside his home, the less time he spends outside interacting with others. Violent games available for purchase can be dangerous to a child's development, as these games can possibly lead to aggressive behavior in their young players. Gaming tots also run the risk of confusing fantasy with reality, since actions that occur within a game are more than unlikely to happen in reality, or are strictly forbidden to happen for fear of consequences.

The Internet is the newer of the techno-habits sweeping the globe. Having only been around the consumer market for less than twenty years, the Internet has grown into an unstoppable juggernaut. Most schools, offices and homes today have Internet access, utilized for information access, email, shopping, and many other facets. According to the International Data Corporation, ninety-nine percent of public schools have access to the

Internet, meaning children have a constant avenue of access to it, even if they do not have it at home.

The Internet offers a number of useful accessories for children to exploit. For one, it can be highly educational. Websites structured towards learning can further enhance a child's knowledge by continuing their education at home. It can also be a useful reference source when doing studies and reports. The Internet also helps children develop motor skills by utilizing their hand-eye coordination on the computer. Children also use the Internet as methods of communication, through e-mail, chat rooms, and instant messaging. Although this list may seem heavily beneficial, within each one is a drawback. Since anyone can post information on the internet, children might find it difficult to discern between correct and incorrect information, which can affect their learning experience. The Internet is also open to adult content, which children could be exposed to. Sitting in front of the computer for long hours could be a detriment as well by giving the child the option to sit in a room with just a screen to stare at. On top of that, communicating in places such as chat room poses a danger, as a child never knows who he/she may be speaking with.

Cell phones are a form of instant portable communication that originally was an expensive, bulky convenience garnered towards those in a higher tax bracket. Today, they are sleek, small and affordable, so much so that traditional telephones have started to fade into the shadows of its mini-successor. Cell phones were initially geared towards adults, but now are being marketed toward younger users. Parents can be more at ease by giving their child a cell phone, as they can always get in touch with their child, and vice versa, at any time. Cell phones also are invaluable in emergency situations, which is

another strong argument towards why children should carry one. However, giving a child a cell phone today leaves them prone to distracting themselves from the world around them. Aside from phone calls, a child can access the Internet, play games, and text on these tiny marvels. Also, health studies are underway to determine if cell phones are the cause of neurological health issues, so placing them in the hands of a growing child may not be wise at this time.

With technological advancements showing no signs of slowing down, it is important to remind children of the world outside the keyboard and controller. Being media and techno-savvy may be beneficial, but there are many things to enjoy in this world that do not require batteries, a plug or internet connection. The challenge today is creating a balance between the two, where everyone, parent and child alike, can combine both worlds and build on them together.

Polls

How many times a day does your child brush their teeth?

- Once in the morning
- Twice – once in the morning and before bed
- After every meal
- I have to force him to do it

What type of formula do/did you use for your baby?

- powdered
- concentrated liquid
- ready-to-feed
- breast milk

How much do you spend on clothing per month for your child?

- \$0-50
- \$50-100
- \$100-150
- \$150+

Does your child attend summer camp?

- Yes
- No

Who watches your child while you are working?

- Private daycare
- family member/friend
- After-school program
- In-office daycare

At what age was your child potty trained?

- 2 years
- 2 ½ years
- 3 years
- 3+ years

How often do you change your child's bed sheets?

- daily
- weekly
- monthly
- whenever they make a mess

Which TV Mom Are You?

1950s – June Cleaver
1960s – Samantha Stevens
1970s – Carol Brady
1980s – Claire Huxtable
1990s – Marge Simpson
2000s – Sharon Osbourne

June Cleaver

You're an apron-wearing, cookie-baking, old fashioned mom who prefers everything to be neat and in its place. Dinner is always on the table every night and the children are tucked away in bed by nine. Life is so much simpler in black-and-white, isn't it?

Samantha Stevens

You run a warm and loving home full of life and laughter. You're bold and witty, and when things get out of hand, your problem solving skills are sheer magic. A twitch of the nose works every time. Just be careful who sees you on your broom.

Carol Brady

You are the mom of moms: leader, role model, and best friend. You guide your children with encouragement and always teach them that there's a lesson to be learned in everything you do. You also can't help but call every blonde teenager you see Marsha.

Claire Huxtable

You're a mom on the move, juggling life both inside and outside your home. Being witty and bold are your character strengths, and you instill them in your children daily in a positive way. But where do you find time to sleep?

Marge Simpson

You are a very understanding mom. Your patience and kindness give your children a change to grow and learn in a healthy, open environment. When there are times to put your foot down, you do so in a stern yet insightful way. You're also three feet taller than all the other moms thanks to your hair.

Sharon Osbourne

You are today's mom, the foundation of your family. Your abilities to wear many hats, being direct and supportive are keys traits that make you an inspiration to those around you. But you can't stand it when everyone screams out your name. "Sharon!"

Quiz Questions

A typical dinner at your home is:

- 1 – A splendid three-course meal containing all the major food groups
- 2 – Something quick you can whip up to save time
- 3 – Whatever take-out menu is sitting on the counter
- 4 – Whatever your maid/housekeeper makes for you

When your child gets in trouble, you:

- 1 – Punish him with a time-out
- 2 – Sit down with her and explain why what she did was wrong
- 3 – Let it go. They'll learn their lesson on their own
- 4 – Raise your voice to let them know this kind of behavior is unacceptable

Your child wants to do something fun, but it's raining outside, so you...

- 1 – Put a movie on for her to watch
- 2 – Ask him to find something fun to do on his own. You need some down time as well, after all
- 3 – Use your imaginations to create something new and fun to play together
- 4 – Sit down and read a book together

Your child is acting out in the middle of the grocery store, creating a scene, so you...

- 1 – Leave the store and reprimand her when you get home
- 2 – Reprimand him immediately
- 3 – Ignore her tantrum and continue shopping
- 4 – Offer him a treat to quiet him so you can continue shopping

A typical outdoor activity you do with your child is:

- 1 – Going to the movies
- 2 – Going to the park
- 3 – Going out and finding something new and exciting to do together
- 4 – Watching him while he plays outside the house with others

You are a:

- 1 – Stay-at-home mom
- 2 – Full-time working mom
- 3 – Part-time working mom
- 4 – Single mom

Of the four, which best describes you as a mom?

- 1 – Caring and understanding
- 2 – Strict yet supportive
- 3 – Fun and creative
- 4 – Hectic and all over the place

What sounds like the perfect family vacation for you?

- 1 – Spending quality time together with nature on a camping trip
- 2 – Disney World, of course!
- 3 – Sending the kids to camp and having a vacation from them for a change
- 4 – Vacation? There's no time for that.

Your child just made a complete mess in your home. How do you your child to clean it up?

- 1 – Refuse to give them dinner until he cleans up
- 2 – Create a clean-up game that's fun and exciting
- 3 – Yell at them so she knows how wrong she is for making the mess
- 4 – Leave it alone for now. You'll clean up the mess after he goes to sleep

Your child asks you a very grown-up question. How do you answer it?

- 1 – Treat him as an equal and give them a grown-up answer.
- 2 – Refuse to answer his question
- 3 – Explain the answer to her in a way she would understand
- 4 – Take her mind off the question by changing the subject