Are digital gadgets good for our kids?

LET'S TALK #SOCIAL

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MOST parents face this dilemma: should they be giving their kids gadgets as toys? Or should they deprive them of these gadgets? It doesn't help that the World Health Organization (WHO) recently released the latest update of its International Classification of Diseases and identified gaming disorder as an addictive behavior disorder. The new classification is warranted because of a movement in the medical field to recognize addictive behaviors extend beyond drug addiction, according to John Roache, who heads UT Health San Antonio's Division of Alcohol and Drug Addiction.

Having raised my three children in the early age of the internet in 1995, I followed two parenting concepts that applies online and offline. These are clear limits and lead by example.

Clear limits mean providing boundaries on our child's activities and walking the talk on rules.

We need to understand the technologies better to know how they should and should not be used. We have to recognize where the real world begins and ends so we can help our children develop boundaries in both worlds. Parents also need to venture into the online world of our children to help them navigate the tricky waters, learn the rules, learn from our adult experience and still be safe.

In our digital lifestyle, a mobile phone or tablet is usually within easy reach. Raising tech-savvy kids at such a young age has its advantage but can also be a little worrisome. Both feelings are valid, but the motivation behind our children's interaction with gadgets need to be examined as this can help determine whether the use of the gadget is beneficial or harmful to the kid. Children exposed to gadgets for more than two hours a day have higher risk of becoming overweight, which could lead to other serious illnesses such as diabetes and heart diseases according to Dr. Parolita Mission, head of the National Nutrition Council (NNC) in Region 7.

A paper "The Impact of using Gadgets on Children", written by Sundus of the Department of Computer Science, Lahore Garrison University and which appeared in the "Journal of Depression and Anxiety" published on January 10, 2018 discussed both the positive and negative impact of gadget use. The positive impact of gadget use are 1) Children have better motor skills; 2) Gadgets are fun for kids while they use them; 3) Educational games help children to perform well in their studies; 4) Playing video games enhances their skills of competition and enables them to manage themselves in competing environment.

On the other hand, the negative impact of gadget use is Speech or language delay, Attention deficits, Learning problems, anxiety, childhood depression, and negative impact on character.

Mundus recommend some tips parents can follow when their child is using gadgets.

Set time for using screens: The amount of time children spend on gadgets need to be restricted and be consistent by not allowing them to use after their time is finished. It is recommended that small children use gadget an hour a day and two hours a day for school children. Set your own rules and follow them consistently. Some parents get their children's gadgets at 9:00 PM before bedtime while others programmed their modem to shut off at a certain time. Another parent I know allows her highschool children to monitor their own time as long as their grades are fine. The limits I set for my children below 16 years old: only one hour gadget use/internet a day. No TV during school days. Once the girls were in college, I set them free and allowed them to set their own rules.

Make them play outside: Children need to be encouraged to play outside with their friends and siblings. They will learn to interact and communicate with other children. Playing with pets like cats, dogs, and other kids are so much better, rather than watching any animated movie. Playing outside also helps in exercising long distance vision and lessens the chances of myopia. Allow them to develop other hobbies like singing, sports or the arts. You can also make a deal in the house that for every hour of media, they must also spend an hour reading or being outside. This makes sure kids keep a balance between technology and other activities.

Gadgets as babysitters is discouraged: It is best to keep the children occupied with other creative toys, story books, puzzles, coloring books while you are busy. Kids should be experiencing all the senses in their activities not just eye-hand coordination.

Ensure adequate sleep of your child: 10 hours a day is what our young children need every day. Good sleep helps recover from eyestrain and for efficient working of brain.

If you need to use digital devices to your young children, cuddle them in your arms or sit them on your lap. The best way to make technology a healthy and positive part of family life is actually to embrace it as a family activity. Play games along with them to encourage building social skills while monitoring how they are learning. Teach them how to use technology responsibly. Talk to them about apps that have added value, versus apps that are merely repetitive. For as long as the kids are guided well and follow a balanced set of online and offline activities, gadget use can be beneficial to their learning and growth. As with everything, moderation is key.