- Child rearing

Parenting in a digital world

Where attention is currency and guidance can be tricky

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Time with developmental and behavioral pediatrician, Francis Dimalanta usually means a journey down memory lane. Back when we had to eat whatever was on the table, when reasoning with our parents was unthinkable, and when TV time was limited to an hour after homework and on weekends.



We reminisced about our generation and how it was shaped by family, school and the community.

Kids, screens, and well-being

Today, we exist in a world where screens and constant online interaction surround us 24/7. Parents today must keep a watchful eye on how the digital world is shaping their children's well-being, in ways that never existed before.

Dr. Dimalanta addressed the pressing issues parents face today.

1. Digital and screen exposure

Generations ago, television and radio were carefully regulated; today, it's commonplace to have multiple gadgets running simultaneously. The 24-hour exposure is a concern due to its impact on sleep, attention span, physical activity, as well as social and emotional development.

2. Cyberbullying and online safety

Home was and should always be a safe space, but with social media, messaging apps, and gaming platforms—this is no longer the case. Bullying happens anytime and anywhere, increasing the risk of anxiety, depression, isolation, and even the possibility of succumbing to despair.

3. Mental health pressures

Mental health problems are on the rise. Excessive screen time fuels constant comparison, heightens academic pressure, and deepens feelings of unworthiness.

To develop a healthy self-image is a challenge in the digital world where "perfection" is the norm.

4. Anxiety and worry
Encountering scenes related to climate change, natural disasters, and the global crisis at a tender age... all this triggers anxiety and a sense of helplessness.
Dr. Dimalanta observed that this has given rise to a new generation, unwilling to bear children. Luckily, he says that those born after COVID-19 have had a change of heart.
5. Early exposure to content
While surfing the internet, it is inevitable that children encounter developmentally inappropriate content that negatively shapes body image, relationships, and values. This can affect their perception in the long run about how they see themselves and others.
6. Childhood obesity, early onset of diabetes, picky eating, and micronutrient deficiency
The lack of home-cooked meals, seasonal fruits and vegetables, and thoughtless snacking during screen time have all contributed to the problem. This is why there is an alarming increase in micronutrient deficiency in children despite the excessive intake of food.
And it does not help that highly processed and sugary foods are advertised aggressively to target children. To add to that, fast food appears at your doorstep at the click of a finger, and junk is marketed as “fun food.”
All these mixed signals leave children confused about proper food choices.
Parental guidance
What are parents to do in a world where self worth is tied to digital validation—like follows, likes, and top scores? Here are Dr. Dimalanta’s tips to guide parents in a tech-driven world:
Device regulation and curfew
• A flip phone for children below 13.
• Smartphones should be withheld until they’re 13 years old. The phone must also be earned and not freely given.
• No gadgets for children under three.
• No gadgets one hour before sleeping. Exposure to blue light hinders sleep.
• No gadgets in the bedroom, where children can stay hidden and potential problems can arise.
• Radiation penetrates the thin skull of babies. No phones in their presence.
Healthier food choices
• Hidden hunger is on the rise. There is a lack of essential vitamins and minerals, even if calories are consumed in excess. Offer fruits and vegetables sticks, nuts, or lightly salted popcorn as snacks.
• Serve fruit-infused water, coconut water, or smoothies as healthy alternatives to highly sugary drinks like softdrinks.
• Consume junk food “sometimes,” on cheat days or as a treat.
• Eat dessert at lunchtime, not at night. Do not eat sweets when hungry, as this causes sugar spikes.
• Dr. Dimalanta encourages parents to involve their children in meal preparations. By doing so, they learn about ingredients, math, and develop fine motor skills and independence.
No manual needed

• Know your children and create a bond early with them by learning about their interests, likes, and dislikes.
• Eat one meal a day together. Make time! Even if it's breakfast. Use meal times as opportunities to bond.
• No gadgets during meals at all.
• Spark a conversation. Tell your child about your day, then ask them about theirs. Opening up creates a safe environment for sharing.
• Each child needs 15 minutes of your undivided time per day, with no gadgets. Just one on one time—to cuddle, talk, or play.
• Give children age-appropriate household chores, like throwing their own diaper or getting their own shoes. Making their bed is a must. This is not a chore but a duty, Dr. Dimalanta insists. "Even if they just pull their covers," he says, it gives a semblance of order.
• Parents should present a united front when imposing rules.
• There is no manual for parenting, but begin by "being present in the moment," Dr. Dimalanta stresses.

"The role of a parent is not just to protect our children but to prepare them for a noisier, faster world. The world may have changed, but what kids need have not, and they still need us," were Doctor Dimalanta's final words of advice.