



Electronics: It's a Revolution!

In the Fall of 2003, the Kaiser Family Foundation released Zero to Six: Electronic Media in the Lives of Infants, Toddlers and Preschoolers, reporting on the "explosion in electronic media marketed directly at the very youngest children in our society." Including videotapes, DVDs, television shows, and electronic games, the products produced by this booming, multi-million dollar industry are targeted at children as young as nine months. Documenting the access that children had to media, the report's results **were** staggering and **are** staggering five years later.

Today's children are growing up surrounded by media. The report found that 99% of children ages six months to six years have access to television, 50% have three or more televisions and 36% have a television in their bedroom. Although the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children under two watch NO television, the study found that 74% of all children under two watch television daily. The report also stated that children between four and six who are "heavy TV users" spend significantly less time reading and less time playing outside." In fact, in "heavy TV households," children are less likely to be able to read at all.

The Center for Screen Time Awareness (www.screentime.org) reports that studies indicate "a child's risk of being overweight increased by six percent for every hour of television watched per day. If that child had a TV in his or her bedroom, the odds jumped an additional thirty-one percent." Screen Time also sites studies indicating "that for every hour of television children watch each day, their risk of developing attention-related problems later increases by ten percent."

With attention-related issues, obesity, reading difficulties and more now linked with the use of electronics, therapists and parenting experts are advocating that families unplug and revive unstructured social play.

Debbie Milam – founder of the Best You Can Be Foundation (www.bestyoucanbe.org), a charitable organization devoted to helping children, parents and teachers reach their highest potential – observed, "Watch any play date and you will see children sitting side by side watching TV while not paying any attention to the child who is in the room with them. Many children would opt to play with virtual friends that they do not even know before engaging in imaginative play." This observation was the motivation behind Milam's "Unplug and Reconnect" a national initiative that encourages families to unplug from all screens and reconnect with family and friends each day for an hour.

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Child advocacy expert Richard Louv, author of [Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder](#), views a disconnection with the natural world as a contributing factor in creating the exact issues associated with electronics use. He cites a 2002 British study that reported that eight-year-olds could identify Pokémon characters far more easily than they could name "otter, beetle, and oak tree." His solution is to re-establish the lost connection with nature.

In this electronics-centric world, what steps are parents to take? Here are the recommendations from Whole Hearted Parenting:

- Place electronics only in common areas of the home, not in a child's bedroom.
- Monitor electronic game use and content.
- Set a clear structure around use of electronics that includes homework and household responsibilities first being completed before plugging in. Include limits on the length of time children are permitted to have "screen time".
- Do not permit use of electronics before breakfast or right before bedtime.
- Unplug! Turn off the television, computer and game devices. If you are drawing a blank on what comes next or how to handle a bored child, here is a great resource. Awarded the Good Parenting Seal by Parental Wisdom (www.parentalwisdom.com), [Unplugged Play: No Batteries, No Plugs, Pure Fun](#), is a parent's guide to over 700 ways to inspire valuable, creative play.
- Establish a family game night to play board and card games together
- Create and tell stories as a family.
- Encourage kids to move more. Screen time is sedentary time. The best exercise for the brain is exercise according to Dr. Becky Bailey (www.consciousdiscipline.com).
- Permit unstructured outdoor play.
- Reconnect with nature – plant a garden, walk in the woods, talk about trees and insects and watch the sky!

Let's all unplug so our children will reconnect with the life that is both around them and in them!

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