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Shared Spaces

Growing Up in the Digital Age

Technology is an ever-present part of today's society, which raises growing concerns about its effects on childhood development. While technology presents opportunities for learning, socialisation, and connectivity, it also carries the potential for negative effects on cognitive, social, and emotional development. By encouraging safe and responsible technology use, parents and educators play a crucial role in ensuring that children navigate the digital world in a manner that promotes holistic development and well-being.

The Impact of Technology on Child Development

Technology use can have both positive and negative effects on cognitive, social, and emotional development.

Cognitive Development

- Utilising technology can benefit cognitive development, especially in domains like language and literacy, spatial thinking, and problem-solving. For example, educational apps enhance young children's language and literacy abilities.
- Reduced cognitive development has been associated with excessive screen usage, especially in domains like attention and memory.

Social Development

- Technology can foster connections and socialisation, but it can also result in cyberbullying and social isolation.
- Children who spend an unhealthy amount of time on screens are more likely to experience social and emotional difficulties such as depression and anxiety.

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Emotional Development

- Children who spend too much time on screens are more likely to struggle with emotional and behavioural difficulties like impulsivity and hyperactivity.
- Social media use has been linked to lower self-esteem and feelings of inadequacy, particularly among teenagers.

The Pros of Technology in Childhood Development

Increased Access to Information

- Children have the opportunity to learn about a variety of subjects in an interactive and captivating way through educational apps and programmes.
- With access to online libraries and resources, children can learn about any topic they are interested in at any time of day.

Development of Technological Literacy and Skills

- By exposing children to technology from an early age, parents and educators can encourage the development of technological literacy and skills that will be beneficial for their future careers.

Improved Communication and Socialisation

- Through video chat and social networking platforms, children can maintain connections with family and friends who live far away.
- Social networking platforms tailored for children offer a secure and monitored setting for them to interact and form new friendships.

The Cons of Technology in Childhood Development

Risk of Addiction and Overuse

- Extended periods of screen exposure can disrupt children's sleep patterns and reduce their physical activity levels, ultimately contributing to a sedentary lifestyle and adverse health consequences.
- Withdrawal and anxiety associated with excessive screen time can have negative impacts on mental health.

Risk of Exposure to Harmful Content

- Children may encounter violent or inappropriate content online, potentially harming their mental and emotional well-being.
- Cyberbullying and online harassment can profoundly affect children's self-esteem and confidence, often resulting in severe consequences.

Impact on Mental and Emotional Health

- Elevated screen time has been associated with a higher likelihood of experiencing anxiety and depression, along with detrimental effects on attention span and concentration.
- Social media platforms can detrimentally influence self-esteem and body image, fostering feelings of inadequacy and diminished self-worth.

Tips for Parents in the Digital Age

Build a family media plan that balances time with and without devices

- Collaborate to establish guidelines for media usage, ensuring mutual agreement between you and your children on how devices integrate into your daily routines.
- Discuss and prioritise tech-free activities you aim to incorporate regularly into your schedules.

Create screen-free times and places in your home

- Set do-not-disturb on phones when you want undistracted time.
- For younger children, maintaining consistent and predictable media routines with set time limits is beneficial.
- Utilise built-in timers to facilitate smoother transitions when their allotted screen time ends.
- Research shows that children should engage with screens for a maximum of 2 hours per day.
- Studies show that two or more hours of screen time in the evening can seriously disrupt the melatonin surge needed to fall asleep. Consider turning off all electronic devices at least one hour before bed, at a minimum.

Make sure your kids know they can come to you about their experiences online

- Let them know you're there to support them through challenges since we're all learning as we go.

Talk about how media and emotions connect

- We sometimes crave social media when we're stressed or want to share our joy. At the same time, what we see online shapes how we feel.

Set a good example

- Incorporate your own social media habits into conversations about usage within the family.
- Be mindful of your device usage and the example you set for your children.
- If you find yourself using your device around your family, communicate openly about what you're doing. This transparency helps your children understand responsible digital behaviour and fosters a healthy relationship with technology.

Check settings

- When your child or teenager creates a new social media or video game account, prioritise setting parental controls and privacy settings to the highest level of security available. This proactive approach helps safeguard their online experiences and protects them from potential risks or inappropriate content.
- Establish clear safety rules regarding online interactions, including guidelines on who they can talk to, how to report concerning posts, and whether they have permission to make purchases.
- Take the time to understand how the platform operates by reading about it yourself or having your child guide you. This ensures that both you and your child are equipped to navigate the platform safely and responsibly.

Watch for signs of problematic media use

- In adolescents, signs of problematic media usage may manifest as withdrawal from friendships and hobbies.
- Younger children might exhibit behaviours like constant arguments about media and a decline in interest in other activities.
- Across all ages, a concerning sign is when time spent on social media, devices, or video games starts to interfere with physical activity, healthy eating habits, or regular bedtime routines.

Examples of Beneficial Technology for Childhood Development

Although childhood technology use carries risks, there are numerous instances where technology can positively contribute to children's growth. Here are several examples:

Educational Apps

- Educational apps can help reinforce learning concepts in a fun and engaging way and provide children with access to information they may not have otherwise.

Virtual Reality Experiences

- Virtual reality experiences offer children immersive and interactive learning encounters unparalleled by traditional classrooms. For example, virtual reality enables

exploration of historical sites or scientific concepts, enhancing engagement and retention of information by bringing these subjects to life in ways not possible through conventional methods.

Online Learning Platforms

- Platforms like Khan Academy, Udemy, CoolMath, and Funbrain offer children access to high quality educational content online.

Assistive Technology

- Assistive technologies like text-to-speech software and communication devices offer children with learning barriers access to information and communication they might not otherwise have.
- These tools can enhance socialisation, communication, and independence, significantly benefiting children with disabilities.

While these technologies can bring significant benefits, it's crucial to ensure that children use them safely and responsibly. Balancing their use with activities like outdoor play and creative pursuits is essential for their overall well-being.

CHILDREN
are great imitators,

SO GIVE THEM
something
great to imitate.

SISTER JOYCE D. JONES