

Positive Parenting in the Digital Age - a RAISING GIRLS event

Screens are having an enormous influence on our children at the time of their life when they are determining “who am I”, “where do I stand”, and “how do I fit in?” As parents, it is vital to get educated on the implications of screen use for your children. Be there and show you care: get involved, stay involved, see what they see and find the fun.

Technology companies are working hard to keep your children engaged or even addicted to their screens, using intermediate variable reward systems (addictive slot machine technology) and no stopping limits (automatic feeds that don't give you brain a chance to opt out). We are too soon in the evolution of smartphones to know the effects. It is impossible to say what the cause and effect reasons are for rising rates in depression and anxiety. The National Institutes for Health has the most comprehensive studies going on at the moment. Their findings show that children who are exposed to 7+ hours of screen time daily develop thinning in their cerebral cortex and reduced attention span. We don't know yet what the thinning means and how it affects humans.

Boys are drawn to the motion, action, and velocity shown on their screen use, while girls are more interested in the aspect of weaving relationships through their screen time. A 2017 statistic shows that 45% of teens are constantly and compulsively checking their phones vs. 19% in 2012. An increasing trend is that apps like Snapchat and Instagram are increasing their functionality within their app so that people don't need to leave it in order to facetime, for example. You can get all social media needs in one spot. Some current WY online issues include fight clubs, assault dares, underage substance abuse, bullying and sexting. Interestingly, teens using online avenues to engage in risky behaviour are rising, while alcohol use seems to be declining. Teens might be fulfilling their drive for risky behaviors mostly in the virtual world. Parents should be aware that Wyoming does not have any sexting laws. What this means is that it is a felony if your kid has any naked underage photos on their phone. Check out cyberbully.org for more information on this.

Wren Kominos-Marvell, the Library tech guru, shared some valuable tips for parents to share media time with their kids to promote positive behaviour. Research shows that spending time with your child digitally has a positive impact for parents and children alike. He recommended finding out what your child gains from the use of a particular application, promote behaviours and thinking that you want in your child and mitigate the negative aspects of screen time. Here are some sites and ways to share media time in a positive and constructive manner:
Youtube - neverending content due to autoplay - source of popular culture memes - watch together or ask your kid to take a break and inform you about what they see. They can continue watching if they come and talk with you about what they are seeing, what they think about it, etc.

Pewdiepie - Swedish blogger and gamer with some notoriety - ask their opinion about it. This is the most watched Youtube station since 2013.

Fortnite - ask your kids what is driving their decision making process/strategy - why did you drop in a particular zone, why did your character die/

Minecraft - large scale project building - help them choose and build a project, encourage them to stick with it

Snapchat - social photo/experience sharing - offer to take pictures with them to post

Instagram - picture and story based sharing - take pics, help create storyboards

Rachel Wigglesworth from Growing Great Families shared that today's devices are coded to keep us attached and engaged and that kids brains are not developed enough for the restraint/impulse control required to use them safely. She suggested co-creating a technology pact with your children so that both have accountability and buy-in. Some things to consider in crafting a pact might be:

Defining use of screens for communication, homework and entertainment

Finding balance with other activities, chores, family time

Safety of what they are posting and reading

Rules for personal interaction like putting device down and having eye contact for meals, conversation

Self - monitoring aspect, if possible

Creating exceptions for certain situations

Financial responsibility for phone, insurance, breakage

Rules for phone use like no sleeping with phone, no phone in bedroom/ meals, use in common area

Some of the hidden benefits of a technology pact utilize collaborative problem solving skills, helping kids self monitor/regulate aids in executive function skills and emotional regulation, preserves the relationship between parents and kids, prioritizes the relationship, and also encourages parents to self-monitor and set a positive example for screen use.

In closing, this presentation provided parents with information and tools to help them navigate screen usage with their children in a supportive and positive way.