



Growing Up With Gadgets

Recently, when I conducted a meeting , a parent had brought along her 4 year old. As we tried to talk, the child kept trying to get his mother's attention by asking her questions, giving her kisses, playing with her hands and so on. Out of frustration, the mother decided to find something to keep him busy as that would make it easier to focus on the meeting. She reached into her bag, pulled out her smartphone and opened a game called 'Candy Crush'. She handed the phone to her child. For the next 10 minutes, the child's eyes were glued to the screen and we could have our meeting in peace. Sounds convenient, but it got me thinking.

How many such 10 minutes are there in that child's day? And in a week ? How much screen time do children really get with gadgets?

In this article I am trying to weigh both pros & cons of Growing up with Gadgets .

Pros

It's a smart strategy to allow kids to explore gadgets in an effort to train them for a future in the electronic age. In fact, we can see it happen everywhere already. Kids are so efficient with tabs, phones and laptops at such a young age. My close friend's 3 year old daughter recently showed me some Mickey Mouse and Dora videos on YouTube, while operating the i-pad all on her own familiar with all the operations.



Similarly, one of my grade 8 students had a Facebook profile and wanted to add me on his Facebook. He typed my name in the search tab and clicked on the magnifying glass by the side ever so confidently. Somehow Facebook had cured him of his Learning Disability, but only until he returns back to studying the next History chapter!

Gadgets can be Fun & aid learning too !

That brings me to another huge advantage of introducing kids to gadgets. It's fun! Learning can also be fun when it takes place on apps in the phone. In fact, this is an area where we can get creative. When I worked with grade 10 NIOS students, I asked them to type out 5 of the 10 questions and answers of the chapter we had just discussed and then e-mail that to me. Of course, they all had an e-mail ID by then. All of a sudden, homework was their favourite activity of the day!

There are also several websites that provide ready worksheets, activities and games for teaching, learning and strengthening concepts. Here are some links:

- ▽ www.education.com
- ▽ www.starfall.com
- ▽ www.khanacademy.org
- ▽ www.brainpop.com
- ▽ www.jumpstart.com
- ▽ www.mathplayground.com
- ▽ www.ot-mom-learning-activities.com
- ▽ www.funbrain.com

Some of these and other websites have even developed apps for the tab or mobile phone. These apps are available in the different mobile phone operating systems and can make practicing math, reading, vocabulary and spellings fun.

In an attempt to aid this mission of getting kids acquainted with gadgets, some schools have introduced them into the classroom. A lot of them already have PowerPoint presentations and videos to make teaching learning sessions more interesting. Some have even been attempting to bring tabs into learning experiences. Students are given a login id on their school website. They can access this through their tab to get resources and information on the curriculum, the progress of current chapters, homework, assignments and even get in touch with teachers on a one-to-one platform online. They also play educational games or activities on the tab in order to enhance learning.

Video games in particular, have been associated with the development of cognitive skills like strategizing and problem solving. Use of gadgets also evidently improves speed of working.

It is all so exciting to see how many doors technology helps open up for kids today.



Cons

All that glitters is not gold and all that time on electronic devices is not a habit to hold.

We all know about the different health hazards that can result from overuse of electronic gadgets. Too much screen viewing can cause problems in vision. Too much laptop and computer can lead to pain in the back, shoulder and neck. Too much time on gadgets takes away from the time that kids should be using to engage in play and physical activity. In other words, overuse of electronic gadgets can result in all kinds of health concerns.

Developmentally speaking, they can rob children of various learning experiences. Playtime is essential for the development of physical motor skills, cognitive skills as well as social skills. For instance, a simple game of 'hide and seek' involves thinking of innovative places to hide, while also developing coordination in running to catch each

other or squeezing into hiding spots and learning social skills like turn taking, following rules, social problem solving and sportsmanship which is not learnt virtually.

Children who spend their time playing games and working on gadgets all day, often have difficulties in social interactions. One of the more popular electronic devices children like to use, video games, can result in a lot of problems as proven by research.

Following are some of the issues most observed

- Behavioural concerns: Aggression and violent thoughts coming from the violence seen in these games. There have been various cases of youngsters getting influenced by these games and consequently engaging in anti-social or even criminal behaviour.
- Health issues like obesity, cardiovascular problems and epilepsy have been linked to these games.
- Writing concerns: Children who often use gadgets may show errors in writing rules, grammar, spellings, spacing, handwriting and so on.
- Attention concerns: Paying attention in class becomes difficult, not only because these children keep thinking of ways to get to the next level in the game, but also because they are often sleep deprived for the same reason.
- Language concerns: Research finds language delays in these children since the time spent on electronic gadgets takes away from time talking to family and friends. This also affects their social skills development.
- Possibilities of addiction to video games or chatting can lead to a lot of other concerns as well.

In summation, introducing children to electronic gadgets at a young age has various benefits as well as disadvantages. In worrying about the negative impact of electronic devices on children, we may deny them of essential learning experiences.

On the other hand, enabling children by providing them these experiences as well may lead to various health, developmental and academic concerns. It seems like one of those important questions that could change the shape of your child's life. The answer to this question is balance.

Striking the balance – Tips

Balancing the amount of time and nature of exposure to electronic gadgets helps to somewhat effectively pick up the benefits and leave behind as many negative effects as possible. Managing the amount of time spent on these devices is essential. Another important aspect to consider is the kind of things children are exposed to on the devices. Here are some ways to help bring about and maintain this balance:

1. Infants and toddlers **do not** require any exposure to electronic devices. Research has shown that infant and toddler development thrives on interactions like talking, singing, playing with adults and so on. At this age, it is best to keep gadgets away from children.
2. Lay ground rules when introducing children to gadgets. Limit the amount of time children use gadgets. Priority should be given to other important life activities, especially play. Generally, a maximum of half an hour a day is alright. A lot of parents restrict it to an hour a day only on weekends.
3. Set clear consequences for breaking these rules and follow up on them as required.
4. Model the behaviour you want your children to learn. If you don't want them to watch certain programmes on TV, avoid watching those programmes around them. Keep in mind that if your child is studying, you must avoid having such distractions around him or her.
5. Avoid keeping devices around the house freely or easy to access.
6. Avoid giving your child a gadget to keep him or her occupied when you are busy. Plan activities or carry books that your child can work on while you are busy.
7. Include educational apps and other such learning activities in gadget time. Minimize games and internet browsing.
8. Internet Safety is important to consider. Keeping a check on websites that children can access and the kind of information they can give out online is essential. As children get older, talking to them about internet safety is also imperative.
9. Do not set up electronic devices in the bedroom.
10. Keep communication lines open about the kind of things seen on the gadgets like movies, video games and websites. Encourage sharing of thoughts and opinions regarding the same.
11. Avoid using any devices during meal time.
12. Do not use gadget time as a reward or punishment. This makes it seem less important or like a non-event. Thereby, providing more importance to other activities as a family culture.

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Colour your child's life!

Your child may find it tough settling in after a long vacation. You will need a bunchful of activities ready at your disposal to keep him motivated. We have done some research for you & have come up with these wonderful online resources which can add fun,creativity & also education for your special little ones.

Lists of Websites for Art & Craft Activities for Kids.

www.pitara.com

www.kinderart.com/

www.make-stuff.com/kids/index.html

www.mothers-home.com/activities/sherri2.htm

www.kidinfo.com/young_children/young_children.html

www.creativekidscrafts.com/

www.linkopedia.com/kids.html

www.quickcraftonline.com/www.coloringpage.org

www.puzzlepixies.com/pixie-paintings

www.allkids.co.uk/kids_pages/kids_colouring_pages.shtml

www.billybear4kids.com/colorme/colorbook-pages.html

www.google.com/Top/Kids_and_Teens/Pre-School/Drawing_and_Coloring/

www.learn4good.com/kids/color-in/printable-coloring-worksheets.htm

www.indianchild.com/coloring_sites.htm

childparenting.about.com/od/kidswebsites/tp/coloringbook.htm

www.artistshelpingchildren.org/coloringpages.html

www.myfreecolouringpages.com

www.do2learn.com

Children Online Student library -

www.storyplace.org

www.childrensbooksonline.org

www.library.eb.com/kids

www.childrenslibrary.org/

www.icdlbooks.org

www.awesomelibrary.org/Classroom/English/

Online Games -

www.preschoollearningonline.com/

www.dimdima.com/

www.4to40.com/

www.indianchild.com/

www.thisismyindia.com/online-games/index.html

www.on-lyne.info/kids.htm

www.onlinerealgames.com/kidszone.aspx

www.thisismyindia.com/children/dots-game.html

www.freestuffpedia.com/category/free-games

www.indianwebshowcase.com/Kidswebindia.com

Kids online Dictionary -

<http://giraffian.com/dictionary>

Kid's International library

www.en.childrenslibrary.org

Social Skills Activities for Special Children

www.sensetoys.com/

www.ehow.com/way_5200778_social-skills-activities-special-children.html

Creative Initiation

June is the month of new beginnings and fresh starts. In India, the month of June usually opens with the first welcome showers of rain which helps to cleanse the body, mind & spirit of all dirt, lethargy and exhaustion. Everything appears new and fresh.

June is also the month of school reopenings. After a rather long vacation, the child eagerly waits for the school to begin as he is eager to show off his/her new pencil box, bag etc. and keen to reunite with friends or make some new friends. However, with the new academic year, come new challenges, which could cause stress or anxiety. There are numerous ways in which a parent can prepare the child for his/ her school reopening.

- 1) Plan a visit to the school before it opens officially;
- 2) Show the child his classroom, canteen or take a walk on the playground.
- 3) Plan his day as per his school timings a few days earlier.
- 4) Prior to school reopening, schedule his daily activities as per school schedule like his play time, sleep times etc.
- 5) Motivate him with positive stories about school experiences.