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Focus: Children using technology

A recent Huffington Post columnist sparked an online debate, with her 10 reasons for banning handheld devices for children under the age of 12. In the column, she argued that the way children are raised and educated in today's society is no longer sustainable, thus affecting their future. While she argued that the overuse of technology would affect children's future and be detrimental to their mental development, critics argued that not exposing children to technology in an advanced society like today, would in fact lead to developmental issues.



Image Credit:

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Compiled by Donia Yassinson, Community Web Editor

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KICKER: No evidence

Technology in moderation is key

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From a psychiatrists point of view, the impact of technology on a child's development is very complex. It is well researched that the aetiology of developmental delays and conditions prevalent in children and adolescents like Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), pervasive developmental disorders, conduct and oppositional deviant disorders, and a range of behaviour disturbances is multifactorial, including genetic and environmental factors. More often, it is a combination of these leading to changes in brain development.

There are a lot of debates about children's use of electronic devices and technology, however, we are not certain about the direct relation of this factor in causing the above mentioned disorders.

Certainly, one might find it difficult to arrive at a conclusion that there is no future for children who overuse technology. However, parents and professionals dealing with the children should be vigilant with regards to the duration spent on these devices, leading to the avoidance of daily routines like sleep, eating habits, meaningful play, interaction with other children and family. Overuse of gadgets, including gaming consoles may lead to sleep disturbances, conduct disorders, behavioural issues and lack of attention.

Overall, the use of technology and its impact on children is quite variable and depends on the context, age, parental monitoring and guidance. However, it will restrict your child's movement and can result in delayed development. Delayed speech or language development are most common developmental problem affecting preschool children and overuse of technology will certainly minimise opportunities for developing kids to explore the world around them as well as face-to-face interaction.

Contrary to this, there is little doubt that technological advance like internet browsing, the use of a range of online programmes stimulate school going children in shaping the way they think and explore. In conclusion, there is no absolute evidence to conclude that children below the age of 12 should be banned from using technology.

From Dr Shankar Srinivas Kuchibatla

Consultant Psychiatrist based in Dubai

KICKER: Moderation

Overuse of anything is harmful

In today's society, everyone is using one form of a smart device, from the illiterate labourer to the cobbler. While they may not know a word in English, they still possess a smart device. One has to explore South Asia to witness this and face the reality. With regards to that, children are no exception and they should be allowed to use technology or else they will become technologically illiterate.

If a child is denied the use of a smart device, he or she will be cornered in society, not to mention in school. I have witnessed my seven year-old son log onto Youtube to search for videos of how to draw a picture or how to make paper crafts. Was this possible a few years ago? Did we have this privilege when we grew up? Times have changed and what is required is to control the time spent on these devices and to be selective in what the children can access. If needed, set up a fire wall to filter unwanted content.

In addition, while medical evidence of overuse of technology has emerged, none of it is conclusive. Besides, the overuse of anything is harmful to anyone, and not just restricted to children. Having said that, my main concern with the rise of technology is the fact that children now have less time for physical activities or social interaction as they prefer attractive devices over getting out of the house. Children's use of technology definitely needs to be monitored by parents.

However, a child that is exposed to technology will be one step ahead in school, especially when going for higher education. With that in mind, are we going to miss the bus by not introducing these devices to our children? At the end of the day, I still think that children should be exposed to technology, but let them use it wisely.

From Mr Shabir Zainudeen

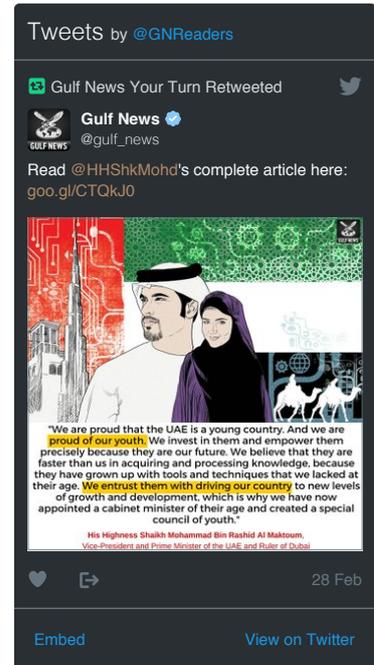
Librarian based in Dubai

KICKER: Responsibility

Parents must save future generations

Early brain development is determined by environmental stimuli, or lack thereof. Stimulation to a developing brain caused by overexposure to technology (including smart phones, internet, gadgets or tv) has been associated with executive functioning and attention deficit, cognitive delays, impaired learning,

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increased impulsivity and decreased ability to self-regulate tantrums. Technology use does restrict movement, and can result in delayed development.

According to a report by the Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP), one in three children enter school developmentally delayed, thus negatively impacting literacy and academic achievement. Movement enhances attention and learning ability. The use of television and video games correlate with increased obesity. In addition, another report stated that children who are allowed to have a device in their bedroom have a 30 percent increased incidence of obesity.

Overuse of technology is implicated as a causal factor in rising rates of child depression, anxiety, attachment disorder, attention deficit, autism, bipolar disorder, psychosis and problematic child behaviour.

Another issue is the fact that there is a lot of violent content, which causes child aggression. However, as parents get more and more attached to their devices, they are detaching from their children, which in turn, reflects on their children. While children are considered to be our future, there is no future for children who overuse technology. A team-based approach is necessary and urgent in order to reduce the use of technology by children.

Apart from the above mentioned points, it is still felt that if the younger generation are monitored and guided with proper use of technology, the effects can be reversed and they might instead experience rapid developmental progress.

Our children are the strength of any country and the future of society lies in their hands, and considering that we must rise up to educate them.

From Ms Sudha Kathuria

Principal based in Dubai

— Compiled by Donia Yassinson/Community Web Editor

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