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Summary of Parenting Resource Recommendations for Children's Media Use

Mari M. Grief, MD[1], Mari A. Ueno, MD[1] and Loren G. Yamamoto, MD, MPH, MBA[1]*

[1] Department of Pediatrics, University of Hawaii, John A. Burns School of Medicine, USA.

Corresponding Author: *Dr. Loren G. Yamamoto, Department of Pediatrics, University of Hawaii, John A. Burns School of Medicine, USA.*

Abstract

The rapid evolution of the internet, mobile devices, and social media has made media use issues a prevalent topic in pediatrics. Because of the exponential growth of technology integrated into daily life and its effects on child development, there is a great need for parental guidance in this area. The purpose of this study is to summarize the information presented to parents via popular websites and parenting books as they pertain to media use in children and parenting methods concerning media. While certain topics are addressed in a consistent manner, there is still a large degree of variability in advice given to parents regarding children's media use which clinicians should be aware of.

Abbreviations: AAP = American Academy of Pediatrics

Keywords: children, media, internet, parenting, child development

Introduction

In an age of growing social media and smartphone usage, parents are now dealing with decisions and issues concerning media use in children that were not as apparent during their own childhood. Media exposure has been shown to affect food/beverage choices[1,2,3], sleep[4,5], emotional/psychological development[6,7,8], and obesity[8,9,10]. In 2020, 66% of all U.S. parents reported that they believed parenting is harder today than it was 20 years ago, citing technology, including social media and smartphones as a reason for this change.[11] In 2019, up to 16.4% of Hawaii's children ages 0-11, and 30.2% of Hawaii's adolescents, ages 12-17, were reported to have 4+ hours of screen time per day, which included the use of television, computer, and video games, unrelated to school or work.[12] Even the way parenting information is being consumed has changed; parents previously sought parenting advice from books, but the availability of laptops, tablets, and smartphones have made the internet a more immediate source of information. A study by ZERO TO THREE (a Hawaii child development program) showed that 82% of parents examined parenting websites for advice, information, and guidance.[13]

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has published various guidelines for media (i.e., internet personal computers, tablets, phone, social media, and television) use in children, however there are some aspects of media use that are not yet covered in the guidelines.[14-17] As such standards evolve, clinicians should be aware of the information that parenting resources are presenting to parents. The purpose of this study is to summarize the information presented in popular websites and parenting books as they pertain to media use in children and parenting methods concerning media.

Methods

The data analyzed was publicly available, and therefore did not meet the federal definition of human subject's research. No Institutional Review Board approval was needed. No funding was acquired for this research, therefore all sources of data gathered were openly accessible to the public. Sources of data were also chosen based on searchable accessibility, given the large amount of data to look through, and lack of significant manpower to go through all data. A list of 32 websites (see Appendix A) were compiled by performing a Google search with the following search parameters: "parenting, parenting advice, parenting resources, parenting website, effective parenting, parenting media use, parenting social media, parenting technology" (search performed on: 08/06/18). We limited our evaluation to the first four pages of the search results of each, as these would be the most searched and populated sites from which parents would get information. Websites needed to meet the following criteria: (1) U.S.-based, (2) not forum-based, (3) include a search bar (to facilitate searching), and (4) cover topics pertaining to parenting and technology.

We limited the search to US-based websites in order to compare the results with recommendations from the AAP and to prevent differences in practices or beliefs from other nations from skewing the results. Additionally, forum-based websites would reflect the views of multiple internet users and could present conflicting information. Articles posted greater than five years ago were excluded to minimize conflicting information due to more dated parenting views. A list of 15 books (see Appendix B) were compiled by searching "parenting" in the Barnes & Noble website and the results were sorted by "best-sellers." Barnes & Noble was used, as it is the only major bookstore available on Oahu, and physical access to the books was needed to compile necessary data. Only books published within the past 6 years were included to ensure relevancy and up to date information. Titles were then screened for general parenting and medical advice and availability in-store. The number of books used was limited by availability. No audiobooks, podcasts, or online classes were included due to the difficulty of searching through data and the limited resources as previously mentioned.

Appendix A

List of Websites Evaluated

	Website	URL
1	Parenting	https://www.parenting.com/
2	Psychology Today	https://www.psychologytoday.com/us
3	Parents	https://www.parents.com/
4	American Psychological Association	http://www.apa.org/topics/parenting/index.aspx
5	WebMD	https://www.webmd.com/parenting/default.htm
6	Child Development Institute	https://childdevelopmentinfo.com/
7	Public Broadcasting ServiceC	http://www.pbs.org/parents/
8	Zero To Three	https://www.zerotothree.org/
9	BabyCenter	https://www.babycenter.com/
10	Boys Town	https://www.boystown.org/Pages/default.aspx
11	Children Now	https://www.childrennow.org/
12	Center for Effective Parenting	http://parenting-ed.org/
13	HealthyChildren.org	https://www.healthychildren.org/
14	KidsHealth	https://kidshealth.org/
15	Cornell University	https://www.human.cornell.edu/pam/engagement/parenting/parents/pages
16	Empowering Parents	https://www.empoweringparents.com/
17	Center for Parenting Education	https://centerforparentingeducation.org/
18	Parenting For Brain	https://www.parentingforbrain.com/
19	U.S. Department of Education	https://www2.ed.gov/parents/landing.jhtml?src=ln
20	PsychCentral	https://psychcentral.com/
21	Verywell Family	https://www.verywellfamily.com/
22	MedicineNet	https://www.medicinenet.com/script/main/hp.asp
23	Common Sense Media	https://www.commonsensemedia.org/
24	Scary Mommy	https://www.scarymommy.com/
25	Christian Broadcasting Network	http://www1.cbn.com/
26	Crosswalk.com	https://www.crosswalk.com/
27	Aha! Parenting	https://www.ahaparenting.com
28	Disney Family	https://www.babble.com
29	The Conversation	https://theconversation.com
30	Raising Arizona Kids	https://raisingarizonakids.com
31	Thrive Global	https://thriveglobal.com
32	Media! Tech! Parenting!	https://mediatechparenting.net/

Appendix B

List of Books Evaluated

	Book Title	Author	Year Published
1	The Explosive Child: A New Approach for Understanding and Parenting Easily Frustrated, Chronically Inflexible Children	Ross W Greene PhD	2014
2	Parenting with Love and Logic: Teaching Children Responsibility	Foster Cline MD, Jim Fay	2006
3	Bringing Up Bebe: One American Mother Discovers the Wisdom of French Parenting (now with Bebe Day by Day: 100 Keys	Pamela Druckerman	2014
4	Mayo Clinic Guide to Your Baby's First Year: From Doctors Who Are Parents, Too!	Mayo Clinic	2012
5	The Spiritual Child: The New Science on Parenting for Health and Lifelong Thriving	Lisa Miller	2016
6	Permission to Parent: How to Raise Your Child with Love and Limits	Robin Berman, MD	2015
7	13 Things Mentally Strong Parents Don't Do: Raising Self-Assured Children and Training Their Brains for a Life of Happiness, Meaning, and Success	Amy Morin	2018
8	Baby and Toddler Basics: Expert Answers to Parents' Top 150 Questions	Tanya Remer Altmann MD	2018
9	What to Expect When You're Expecting	Heidi Murkoff	2016
10	The Awakened Family: How to Raise Empowered, Resilient, and Conscious Children	Shefali Tsabary PhD	2017
11	The Whole-Brain Child: 12 Revolutionary Strategies to Nurture	Daniel J. Siegel MD, Tina	2012
12	Caring for your baby and young child (Birth to age 5)	Steven P. Shelov MD, Tanya	2014
13	How Toddlers Thrive: What Parents Can Do Today for Children Ages 2-5 to Plant the Seeds of Lifelong Success	Tovah P Klein PhD	2015
14	Raising Human Beings: Creating a Collaborative Partnership with Your Child	Ross W. Greene PhD	2017
15	Calmer Easier Happier Screen Time	Noel Janis Norton	2016

All books and websites were evaluated using a standardized set of questions. Answers were categorized and coded numerically. Parenting books were then compared to websites. Discrete variables were compared using Chi-square analysis. Continuous variables were compared using T-test analysis.

Results

The results are summarized in the tables and figures. The coverage of key issues between online versus book sources was compared (Table 1). Additionally, deciding on limitations on daily "screen time" (time spent interacting with media) is a common issue facing parents. With the exception of one media use issue, the book sources discussed media use issues less often than the online sources. This was to be expected because parenting books cannot be updated as often as online parenting websites, which can post multiple new articles every day, and the search parameters used for the online resources were more specific for content related to media use.

The recommendations, separated by age group, from the online and book resources are shown in Figure 1. Most sources did not make specific screen time recommendations with over 50% of sources for each age group having either no screen time recommendations or no specified time limit. According to the AAP guidelines, screen time should be avoided for children under 18 months old with the exception of video-chatting, children 18 to 24 months old can be introduced to high quality media under the supervision of a parent, and children two to five years old should be limited to one hour per day of screen time.[14] While there were sources that agreed with and endorsed the AAP guidelines, the majority of resources provided either a conflicting recommendation or no recommendation (Figure 1). The "not addressed, no recommended limit" group included resources that did not provide any limit and resources that did not believe that time limits were the most effective method of monitoring children's media use. These sources noted that the effects of media are multifactorial and are determined by more than just the overall time of use.

Table 1: Comparing the Number of Sources that Discussed Media Use Topics.

Question		Online (n=32)	Book (n=15)
At what age should you start introducing media to children?		25 (78%)	4 (27%)
At what age should children be given cell phones?		20 (61%)	2 (13%)
Are the possible negative effects of media use discussed?		31 (97%)	4 (27%)
Are possible positive effects of media use discussed?		29 (91%)	5 (33%)
What cautions about social media are covered?		24 (75%)	4 (27%)
What benefits of social media are covered?		26 (81%)	2 (13%)
When should children be allowed to have their own social media accounts?		13 (41%)	0 (0%)
Is cyberbullying discussed?		25 (78%)	2 (13%)
Should privacy settings be used?		20 (61%)	0 (0%)
Should parent controls be used?		24 (75%)	3 (20%)
Should phones be used as tracking devices for children?		10 (31%)	0 (0%)
What is the latest time that kids should use media before going to bed?		26 (81%)	6 (40%)
Should media use be limited to certain parts of the house?		27 (84%)	2 (13%)
Should screen time be allowed during meals?		25 (78%)	3 (20%)
Should taking phones/media privileges away be used as a method of discipline?		13 (41%)	2 (13%)
Should young children be allowed to video chat – Skype, FaceTime (with friends, family, etc.)?		19 (59%)	1 (7%)
Are the parents' media use habits discussed?		29 (91%)	4 (27%)
Does the media (tv, movies, video games) promote violence?		26 (81%)	3 (20%)

Figure 1: Recommended Screen Time for Ages 0-5.
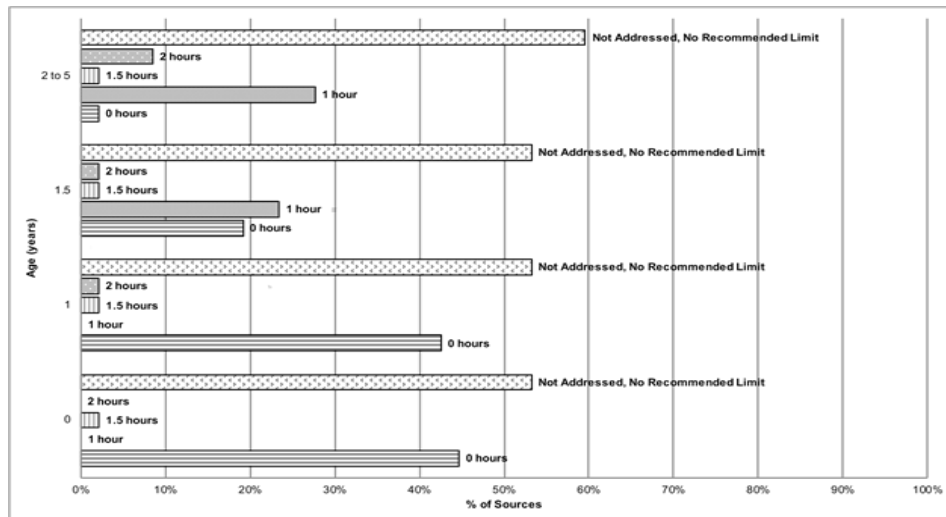
The attribution of specific positive and negative effects to media use in children was also evaluated (Table 2). This summary was limited to online resources, as the majority (73%) of the book resources did not discuss this topic. While this is also a noteworthy finding, for the purposes of evaluating positive and negative effects of media use, adding the book resources would have skewed the data in favor of a "not discussed" result, and thus was excluded from the final analysis of this topic. Of the 32 online sources that were evaluated, there was significant variability in the information they provided. Of the 18 questions asked, only 9 had a consensus (over 50%) agreement on recommendations, and there were no topics that had complete agreement on recommendations. Topics with a majority agreement on recommendations included giving a child a cell phone for safety or emergency reasons (59%), cyberbullying (59%) and privacy (53%) as major concerns about social media, use of privacy settings (59%) and parental controls (75%), limiting media to certain parts of the house (81%), prohibiting media use during meals (75%), and supervising children while using media (94%). For four questions, the majority of online sources (over 50%) did not discuss the topic. The AAP does not provide specific recommendations regarding these rarely discussed topics.[14,16,17]

There was also a certain degree of discrepancy between the suggestions of the online sources and the recommendations in the AAP Bright Futures and 2016 policy statements.[14-17] For example, the AAP recommends that infants and children younger than 18 months not watch TV or use digital media. While many sources recommended not introducing media to children until 18 months (41%) of age, sources ranged from 1 year of age (3%) to 2 years (16%) of age, with a number of sources not giving a specific recommendation (19%).

Table 2: Summary of Online Resource Results.

Consensus (>50% agreement)
Should privacy settings be used?
Yes (59%), no (3%), not discussed (38%)
Should parental controls be used?
Yes (75%), no (0%), not discussed (25%)
Should media use be limited to certain parts of the house?
Yes (81%), no (0%), discussed, but no specific recommendations given (3%), not discussed (16%)
Should screen time be allowed during meals?
Yes (0%), no (75%), yes but limited (3%), not discussed (22%)
Should children be supervised while using media?
Yes (94%), no (0%), not discussed (6%)
Should young children be allowed to video chat - Skype, FaceTime (with family, friends, etc.)?
Yes (59%), no (0%), conditional (0%), not discussed (41%)
Are the parents' media use habits discussed?
Yes (91%), no (9%)
Does the media (tv, movies, video games) promote violence?
Yes (72%), no (3%), discussed, but no conclusion (6%), not discussed (19%)
Primary reason for giving cell phone to child?
Safety/emergency (59%), necessity (50%), child desire to have phone (0%), not discussed (38%)
Non-consensus (<50% agreement)
At what age should children be given cell phones?
Under 9 yrs (3%), 18 yrs (3%), discussed but no age given (56%), not discussed (38%)
At what age should you start introducing media to children?
1 yr (3%), 1.5 yrs (41%), 2 yrs (16%), discussed but no age given (19%), not discussed (22%)
What is the latest time that children should use media before going to bed?
No limit (0%), 30 minutes (9%), 1 hour (19%), discussed, but no specific recommendations given (53%), not discussed (19%)

Table Continued...

What solutions to cyberbullying were presented?	
Have open conversations with child (41%), discuss proper online behavior (28%), document/report the incident (13%), block cyberbully (13%), educate children to identify bullying (25%), take an active role in child's social media account (38%), find adult/school resources (9%), decrease social media time (6%), teach social media literacy (9%), know the warning signs of children being cyberbullied (6%), ignore it (6%), communicate with cyberbully directly (6%), not discussed (22%)	
Which educational media is recommended for children?	
No recommendations (44%), PBS or specialized programming (41%), educational computer games (31%), phone/tablet apps (28%)	
Rarely discussed (>50% not discussed)	
Should phones be used as tracking devices for children?	
Yes (19%), no (6%), not discussed (69%), discussed but no specific recommendations given (6%)	
At what age are children permitted to take devices to school?	
10 years old (3%), according to school rules/No specific recommendations (19%), not discussed (78%)	
Should taking phones/media privileges away be used as a method of discipline?	
Yes (22%), no (3%), conditional (16%), not discussed (59%)	
When should children be allowed to have their own social media accounts?	
13 years old (16%), conditional (22%), discussed but no conclusion (3%), not discussed (59%)	

Key questions regarding parental guidance answered in the online resources were summarized (Table 3). These answers are separated into consensus recommendations (>50% agreement), non-consensus recommendations (<50% agreement), and rarely covered topics (>50% of sources did not discuss the topic). Only online results were tabulated for this analysis as well because, similar to the previous analysis point, the majority of the book resources did not discuss these topics, and thus would have skewed the data.

Table 3: Positive and Negative Effects of Media Use Discussed in Online Sources.

What are the negative effects of media use?	
Weight Gain/Lack of Exercise	53%
Decreased Academic Performance and Learning	44%
Sleep Impairment	35%
Addiction	31%
Distraction from other activities or person-to-person interaction	25%
Exposure to Inappropriate Content	22%
Attention Problems	22%
Mental Health Issues (depression, anxiety, etc.)	22%
Cyberbullying	12%
Online Predators	9%
Increased Stress	9%
Decreased Creativity	9%
Behavioral Issues (Aggression, Moodiness, etc.)	6%
Not Discussed	3%
What are the positive effects media use?	
Increased Academic Performance and Learning	72%
Build & Maintain Connections	31%
Increased Creativity	16%
Not Discussed	9%

Discussion

An interesting finding regarding the positive and negative effects of media (Table 3) was that changes to academic performance, person-to-person connections, and creativity were listed as both possible positive and negative effects. This supports the idea that quality of media, and the way in which children use media, not just the duration of use alone, contribute to the overall effect of media use.[18] For example, joint media use (children using media with a parent/adult, also referred to as co-viewing) is speculated to be more beneficial to learning. A study by Dore et. al. found that when joint media engagement was low, media use was negatively related to literacy gains. One theory includes that passive viewing of media replaces activities that are more likely to focus on literacy skills, such as shared reading or interactive play.[19]

One of the negative effects of media use that is commonly mentioned by resources is weight gain/lack of exercise. Increased amounts of screen time are linked to obesity and cardiovascular risk throughout a person's life. However, associations can be observed even in early childhood, which has influenced the AAP's recommendations for limits on screen time in children.[15] In 2015, 28.3% of Hawaii's high school students were considered overweight or obese.[20] Excessive amounts of time spent using media can take away from time spent outdoors participating in physical activity. As noted before, 30.2% of Hawaii's adolescents spend 4+ hours on non-school related media time; however only 13.3% of Hawaii's adolescents participate in daily physical activity for at least 60 minutes.[12,21] Excessive media use can also promote unhealthy eating habits through distracted eating or advertisements for unhealthy foods. On the other hand, media can also be used as a tool to promote and engage in healthy habits. For example, social media has been used as a platform to engage groups in exercise and nutrition. Influencers post workout videos or healthy meal ideas to create a community that encourages each other to become physically active and eat healthier. These conflicting outcomes from media use highlight the fact that the way in which media is used is crucial for determining its effects on the health and development of children.

One limitation of this study was the limited sample size in books and websites. The original goal of the study was to include larger numbers of parenting resources, but the number of available and relevant parenting books was scarce. There were also many websites that were not included because they did not include original articles but rather linked to articles from a variety of other sources, such as newspapers, other parenting websites, and research articles. Additionally, for the online resources, data was gathered by searching within each website and reading the relevant articles. This introduced potential bias and limited the number of articles within each website that could realistically be analyzed.

Future directions for research in this area include looking at the type of media children use, instead of just the duration of use, as some of our findings indicate that how media is used plays an important role in its impact on children. Another future direction is the continuation of longitudinal studies on the effects of media use on child health and development. The Common Sense Media website has a research section (https://www.commonsensemedia.org/research) where they provide timely, independent data on children's use of media and technology and the impact on various aspects of child development.[22] This content can be accessed for free by parents, educators, health care professionals, and policymakers in order to educate the public about the effects of media and children. One study by the National Institute of Health is currently underway, observing the effects of media on mental health and development, and includes magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) of research participant's brains, which is a positive step forward in understanding the impacts of media use on children.[23]

Resource Guides for Media Recommendations

To facilitate counseling and to consolidate the numerous specific recommendations, Gabrielli, Marsch, and Tanski (2018), have recommended the TECH mnemonic: (T)alk to kids about media use and monitor their media related activity; (E)ducate children about the risks of media; (C)o-view and Co-use media with kids; (H)ouse rules for media use.[24] Cross recommends that parents create a Family Media use plan, which is facilitated by referring parents to:

https://www.healthychildren.org/English/media/Pages/default.aspx (English) or
https://www.healthychildren.org/Spanish/media/Paginas/default.aspx#home (Spanish).[25]

The strategies that parents adopt for intervention or control of media use (also known as mediation styles) often relate to their parenting style (permissive vs. laissez-faire vs. authoritative), and the developmental stage of children. Parents typically permit greater autonomy for adolescents. Mediation styles include: 1) active mediation in which parents engage and teach children the appropriate use of digital media; 2) co-use (co-viewing) mediation in which the parent is present when the child is using digital media; 3) restrictive mediation in which the parents set rules such as time restrictions or access restrictions; 4) technical mediation in which the parents use technical tools (e.g., internet filters, electronic parental control features) to control media access. This variation suggests that one recommendation does not necessarily apply universally in all families.[26]

Conclusion

In conclusion, the parenting websites and books present highly variable recommendations on media use for children that are often inconsistent with the AAP guidelines .

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