



Parent-in-Training

You are not alone in this thing called "parenting"

WRITTEN BY Decca Knight

Soapbox Rantings



Now that I have been writing this column for a few months, I feel that I can jump up on my proverbial soapbox and reveal to you the inner thoughts of my psyche. No, you are not going to hear about my OCD-like tendencies for organization or my distrust of clowns.

Rather, I want to talk honestly about my disdain for TV, video games, and other technologies that occupy our kids' minds and time for hours each day. In my work with kids, I often have discussions with them about the amount of time they spend each day interacting with technology. The answers are always horrifying. In fact, findings from the Nielsen Company report that kids ages 2-5 spend around 32 hours a week in front of a TV screen and children ages 6-11 spend about 28 hours per week. That means that kids spend around 1/3 of their waking hours in front of a screen watching TV, playing video games, or watching a DVD.

These statistics are especially disturbing for toddlers and preschoolers. During these critical years, the brain is growing by leaps and bounds. In fact, 90 percent of brain circuitry is developed by the age of four. In those years, a number of important processes are taking place. Brain connections that regulate attention, impulsivity, self-regulation, motor regulation, emotional regulation, memory, and learning are solidifying. In a perfect world, toddlers and preschoolers would be engaging in activities that foster this growth, not sitting in front of a screen "vegged-out."

What kinds of activities enable brain neurons to flourish during these critical years? The short answer is... the meaningful and productive play we participated in as children. Although I am only 29 years old (wink wink), I have extremely fond memories of my childhood play. We rode make-believe horses for hours in the woods, worked diligently on our treehouse, caught salamanders and crawdads in the creek, built Lincoln Log houses for kings, dressed up as mothers and played house for hours, and read and reenacted countless stories.

All of these joyous activities taught us a great deal and expanded our minds. We learned how to ask questions, explore unknowns, challenge ourselves, solve problems, think critically, expand our imagination, stick with and complete tasks, and work through conflict with others. Children who stare at a screen for hours a day do very little of the aforementioned tasks. This is especially evident in our schools when children are asked to concentrate for hours and push themselves academically. Because many of them have not engaged in activities that require task-completion and extended focus, they falter, become fragmented, and eventually discouraged.

Why do we as parents continue to allow our children to sit in front of a screen all day? Because it is easy. It gets them out of our hair and allows us some separation. Besides, kids LOVE TV, video games, and computers. And, we want to make our darlings happy, don't we?

So, turn off the screens and engage with your kids, if only for a week. Your kids will scream and throw fits, but this month you have an excuse. April 30th-May 6th, 2012 is Screen Free Week during which time families, schools, and communities are encouraged to turn off the screens and "turn on life." Imagine the possibilities!

In the meantime, I will continue to severely restrict my preschooler's access to technology. Yes, I know that it is archaic and I know that at some point he will start to protest. But, I relish in the knowledge that right now, during these critical years of brain development, he doesn't even know what a commercial is.

Now that my diatribe is finished, I will step down off my soapbox and go lay on the couch to watch my favorite HBO series because, as an adult, I can choose to rot my brain if I want to!

Decca is a wife, mother, counselor, and parenting educator. In an effort to further help kids and parents, Decca began studying the Love and Logic Parenting® philosophy. She teaches classes to other "Parents-in-training" and runs Blue Ridge Parenting LLC (www.blueridgeparenting.com). You can also "like" Blue Ridge Parenting on FB for more parenting tips and advice.



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