

What do experts say about children and technology?

By Amber Nasrulla on July, 29 2013



Here's some advice from a few experts on how you should mix technology with your children.

Get engaged

Don't give an iPad or other such tablet device to a child under four for the purpose of keeping them occupied, says Michaela Wooldridge, clinical supervisor for a home-visiting early intervention program in Vancouver and a PhD student at the University of British Columbia researching how technology affects infant and toddler development. "Toddlers and infants need to have a lot of hands-on, real world, 3D, multi-sensorial experiences to build up their brains literally, physically as well as experientially." Tablets, she says, don't teach fine motor skills and can't carry a conversation with your child. She urges parents to get involved with their child's technology and make it a learning tool, which will help them function in a technological world. Buy 'apps' that promote creativity, that offer your child control, that are open-ended (a music program or a drawing program), and that prompt your child to reason and strategize.

Don't let it monopolize your child

Jennifer Pinder's four year old son Hunter is adept on the iPad, a gift from his paternal grandfather. It wasn't her choice but now that the electronic cat is out of the bag, she's vetted more than 50 games and apps – phonics, math, doodling – and he's limited to 60 minutes a day. "It's all in moderation and he still enjoys playing outside," she says. However, it can be a challenge. Once, while visiting relatives, Jennifer noted that Hunter was playing with his iPad, and only his iPad. "It was him, sitting on the couch, but he wasn't playing with his toys or socializing with his aunts," she said. Since then, the iPad stays in the Pinder's Hamilton, Ont., home if they go to someone's house or a restaurant.

Don't use it as a boredom buster

Getting bored is a valuable experience, says Caroline Knorr, parenting editor at Common Sense Media, a nonprofit organization in San Francisco. Kids need to learn how to self soothe. "If they can't sit still in a restaurant, deploy those digital distractions very carefully knowing that it is good for kids to develop patience."

Don't use it in place of real-life

Helen Ofosu, founder of I/O Psychology Advisory Services in Ottawa, doesn't want her 10 year old son to grow up glued to video games or his iPod headphones. She suggests delaying access to handheld devices until age six because "if they get mesmerized by that screen, you'll have a hard time getting them to enjoy the real life version of

things and the outdoors.” When children and parents are on their dedicated devices, she said, there are fewer opportunities for a shared collective experience. “I want his main memories to revolve around whom he spent his time with and what he did with them.”

In her spare time Amber Nasrulla Googles topnotch design schools for her son.

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