



Parenting and Supporting Digital Awareness for Children:

Information and Guidance for SAH Parents and Children.

Steiner education embraces the age-appropriate use of all types of technology. It works with the enormous enthusiasm many young people have for change, innovation and all that is new.

However, Steiner education embraces something else: a picture of how the young child develops into an independent and self-directing adult, often negotiating obstacles and hazards on the way. As teachers, parents and carers, it is our job to help young people to negotiate the obstacles, avoid the hazards and enable them to get the best out of technology.

This document offers guidance and support which we hope will assist you in helping your children navigate the digital world. We hope it will support discussion and debate amongst parents and children where appropriate about technology and ultimately, we hope it will help you to make informed decisions about your child's use of screens, be it TV, DVDs, computer games, smart phones or social media etc.

In this document:

- Is screen entertainment at odds with Steiner education?
- What guidelines does the school offer?
- Which apps. and social media sites are popular with teenagers?
- Top Five Tips to keep your children safe online.
- What does the evidence show?
- How to find out more.

Is screen entertainment at odds with Steiner education?

More and more parents are choosing to live screen free when their children are younger, or at least to have clear boundaries around the amount of screen entertainment their children can access. For other parents, however, limiting screen time may be a new idea, an approach that may appear out-of-touch or techno-phobic. These are some of the reasons why parents choose to limit screen exposure and why teachers will often express their concerns if there are signs of uncontrolled or excessive use of screen entertainment.

1. Young children learn by imitation. In the first seven years their susceptibility to images is extreme: they take all sense impressions deeply into themselves and are strongly influenced by what they experience in a way that is unique to this period. Responsibility for the images and impressions they receive is one that needs to be carried consciously by parents and teachers, not by TV programme makers.
2. The cultivation of moral moods such as respect, reverence, gratitude and a sense of wonder for the world around them is a corner-stone of Steiner education. A high level of receptivity and openness in the young child is a pre-requisite for healthy development and engagement with what Steiner education offers. Research referenced in this document supports the view that screen entertainment can significantly impair a child's sense of respect, reverence, appreciation and wonder.

3. Imagination is seen as a good thing by all educationalists but in Steiner education it is not simply another desirable quality, like creativity or a high I.Q., it is seen as the mediator between thinking and willing. Its role for the child is quite literally pivotal, the key to inspiring ideas and insights on the one hand and action and resolve on the other. It is the imagination that allows the child to bridge the two worlds, to integrate thinking with action. Creating this bridge through the use of images, imaginative story-telling and creative narrative is an area in which Steiner education excels and is an area that is most at threat when children are over-exposed to screen entertainment.
4. Sleep plays a vital role in education. Under-pinning the lesson structure in Steiner schools is the belief that children need to `sleep on it` if they are to make sense of lesson content, take ownership of it and work with it creatively. This delicate process is severely disrupted by inappropriate exposure to screen entertainment.
5. Respect for the world of `grown-ups` and a degree of trust in parents, teachers and the adult world generally is an essential starting point if children are to find the security they need to begin their own journey towards adult responsibility and world citizenship. However, the representation of adults in films or TV is often confusing for children: Quite often adults are portrayed in film and on TV as stupid, incompetent and untrustworthy.
6. Our curriculum is based on a link between developmental psychology and age-appropriate content. Bringing the wrong content at the wrong time is at odds with the healthy development of the child. Bringing the right content at the right time makes for effective teaching, inspires the children and gives them a sense of connection to their lessons. The content of screen entertainment shows little or no regard to age-appropriateness.

All of which, when added together, means that your child will get more from this education the less they are exposed to screen entertainment!



What guidelines does the school offer?

Parents, not schools, have the responsibility to make choices about the place of screen entertainment in children's lives. Schools have a responsibility to inform and advise, making sure that parents are supported in the complex task they face, and to alert parents to the possible risks of inappropriate exposure to screen entertainment.

These guidelines are a compilation of ideas gathered from parents, teachers, pupils and some of the books referenced elsewhere in this document. They are intended to encourage discussion. We invite you to talk about them with teachers, other parents and your children. How realistic are they? Do they go too far, or not far enough? Are they practical, or too idealistic? And don't take them at face value! Challenge them if you need to. In the modern world, in an inclusive school, we cannot be prescriptive.

Early Years: No screen entertainment for children in the Early Years: no phones, no computer games, no TV.

Lower school (classes 1-5, Years 2 to 6): Ideally no screen entertainment. Provide alternative activities! If they do watch TV, try the following:

- watch with them;
- watch good quality programmes limited to an hour a day at the weekend for children in Classes 1 - 3 going up to two hours for children in Classes 4 - 6 at the parents' discretion;
- nothing in the school week;
- watch programmes with real people doing real things;
- don't surf the channels; choose a programme in advance and watch it consciously;
- no screen entertainment when children visit each other on 'play dates.' ;
- 'Vet' programmes that your children plan to see; bear in mind that some programmes made specifically for young children, like cartoons are not necessarily appropriate for children;
- not in the car (look through the window and take an interest!);
- limit exposure to adverts by using DVD's, editing them out or watching BBC;
- watch the same programme/films over and over again rather than provide an ever-changing diet.
- **AND NEVER ALLOW SCREENS IN THE CHILD'S BEDROOM!**

Middle and Upper School (Pre-) Teenagers, (classes 6 to 10, Years 7 to 11):

Ideally they are so busy with out-of-school activities, sports, music, homework etc, that they don't have much time for screens, but if they do, try these:

- limit one and a half hour a day of screen entertainment maximum; two hours per day at the weekend;
- absent from school? NO computer or screen time: there is a strong link between poor attendance and online gaming;
- make sure they invest more time in real friendships than in virtual;
- don't combine screen entertainment with homework. (Your child's teacher will inform you if homework requires use of the internet.);
- Take note not only of the official ratings for media films / programmes but also use media rating websites based on parent feedback such as Common Sense Media to get a 'second opinion' as to whether a programme is really a U, PG, 12 etc etc.;
- install software to block undesirable sites;
- disable or control the use of web cams;
- monitor all new phone apps.: the rate of change is fast and level of access to the internet increasingly sophisticated;
- play their computer games yourself, not to be cool, but to experience their effect on you, this will help you make informed judgements;
- which should lead to: zero-tolerance of all violent and 'shoot-em-up' games;
- The first mobile phone does not have to be 'smart', i.e. internet connected. It may only need to tell you they have caught the bus safely;
- Discuss as a family when you feel it is right for your child to access social media (if at all). Do not give in to 'peer pressure' that everyone else in the class is on it. This, more often than not, is not true. Above all let it be a family decision and ensure your child discusses the 'rules' of how to interact respectfully on social media and that they are aware of how to stay safe. As a rough guide, we have found children start to show interest in connecting to social media at around Class 7.

And Beyond?

It is easy for parents to reach the point where they feel 'the horse has already bolted', i.e. their teenagers know far more than they do, they have already been exposed to inappropriate content and survived, let's not be old-fashioned, and I can't live without my devices, why should they??

Before they are launched into complete digital freedom, however, some suggestions:

- Protect your teenager, don't judge. The fear of having their phone confiscated is a major barrier for many teenagers to confiding in parents when things go wrong. To keep your child's trust responses such "You've done the right thing by telling me, we'll fix it" can be used.
- Use the law. Sexting and/or sending inappropriate pictures of each other which are then shared, is a criminal offence. Similarly, using social media platforms for bullying or abuse contravenes the terms of use and the host can will be obliged to investigate.
- Teach your child to set time limits. Many of us are weak on setting time limits and may take the easy option of allowing our children to spend long periods of time in their online world, Remember, they need to `hang out together`, as you did at their age, but now the hang out space is not a bus shelter, park or café, it is a social media site.
- Stranger Danger is not the biggest issue, very few teenagers communicate with strangers. The challenge is more likely to come from closer to home. Cyberbullying is more likely to come from friends, often their best friends, with others in the social circle then joining in. If you know the parents of other children involved, talk face-to-face rather than going onto social media sites to retaliate.
- Tell us of any instances of on-line abuse. We cannot help or offer support and advice if we don't know.

Which Apps and Social Media Sites are Popular with Teenagers?

Messaging Apps:

- **WeChat, WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger** allow free messaging and texting. 
- **Kik** is a cross platform instant messenger where clicking the "Meet New Friends" function accesses to a page of unknown profiles. Users should be over 17 but children aged 8 upwards are using it. 
- **Snap chat** is a photo-messaging site which allows pictures to be sent which self-delete after ten seconds. 
- Photo-sharing such as **Flickr and Instagram** sites are photo blogs. Instagram has set up strict filters for sex/porn related language. 
- **Tumblr** -a photo-led facility blogging facility and social network which gets much of its traffic from hosting extreme porn blogs. 
- **OoVoo** is a popular instant-messaging social network where users can video-chat with up to 12 friends. 
- **Keek, Pheed and Vine** are video sites similar to **YouTube** with a teenage identity where 30 second video diary posts are made with smartphone cameras. 
- **Ask.fm** is a Latvian social network site which made the news last year due to a teenage girl committing suicide apparently due to cyber bullying on the site. It allows posts to be made anonymously making it much easier to post abusive messages without the fear of being caught. Posts on this site are often much more abusive here than on other sites for this reason. Users can now disable the "anonymous question" facility. 

Safety and Privacy Settings:

Child Exploitation and on-line Protection Centre (CEOP): Report on line abuse via the CEOP web site. In addition, **Broadband Providers** provide filters to block porn, but these will not apply when using apps.

- On your **iPhone/iPad/iPod Touch**, parental control can be switched on for age-restricted access preventing young children accessing sites such as YouTube.
- **Facebook.** In privacy settings tick “only friends” for “see my photos”, “see my interests” and “send me messages”. Under “search for me on Facebook” tick “friends of friends” or “friends and network”, or else your profile is visible to everyone. There is a social reporting feature to report abuse.
- **Instagram.** Where it says “posts are private” set switch to “on”. Tap the “three dots” icon below the post. Tap “report inappropriate”, then select why you are reporting.
- **Snapchat.** Set “who can send me snaps” to “my friends” instead of everyone. To block a user, go to “my friends” select the name, press edit” then “block”. Tap the ghost icon, or tap the gear function and choose support.
- **Twitter.** Click the “three dots” icon next to the favourites star o the tweet, select “report” from the drop down menu, choose next step.
- **WeChat.** To stop strangers contacting you, in general phone locations settings select WeChat: “off”. For photos set “visibility” to private.
- **Kik.** “ignore new people” hides any messages from unknown senders.
- **Vine** In “your content” select “posts are protected” to hide them from public view.
- **Tumblr.** Your blog is public, but you can “ignore” specific users to stop them from seeing or commentating on your posts.

Internet safety for Kids: Top five tips to protect your children online. A recent article from the International Business Times by Jason Murdock

Children are 'digital natives' - but parents need to protect them on the web.

It's increasingly difficult to stay ahead of the curve when it comes to technology, especially when you are a parent trying to keep your children safe as they grow up immersed in this digital world.

Cybercrime, grooming, sexting, social media – where to start?

Research released for 2017's Safer Internet Day in the UK revealed that one in five children surveyed had been bullied with online images or videos. Additionally, roughly 70% of kids had seen images and videos "not suitable for their age" while surfing the web.

To help parents feel confident their children are safe and protected when they're online here's a practical list of how to keep children safe when online:



1. **Use free filtering technology/safe modes.** Most online services these days come with privacy or safe modes built-in, it's important to switch them on for your child. Filtering tech can block harmful websites, age-restricted games, forums, chatrooms and anything else you choose. Some applications can do everything from create weekly reports for you about browsing to log the keystrokes on a device. The extent of the control needed is up to you but beware - if you come on too strict you will likely be met with rebellion.
2. **Monitor your child's internet history for every device they use.** You don't have to be the police state in the house, instead, make a point of checking the internet search history at the end of the day to make everything viewed is satisfactory. This is easiest if you create your child a dedicated account on a home computer or device. Note, they may learn how to delete their own records, so like most options you have this is not a full-proof choice.
3. **Only let your child on computers or devices where you can see them.** This will largely depend on the age of your child, but for the younger ones it is advised to only let them use a computer, smartphone or tablet in a place where it can be monitored by an adult. When used alongside web filtering this can be an effective method of keeping an eye on what is being searched for, viewed or watched on the web. The internet can be fun, but is not always suitable for kids.
4. **Talk about the internet and be open about what's out there.** On the internet a 50-year-old man can pose as a 15-year-old girl, chatrooms can be used for grooming and personal information is given away at the click of a mouse. Yet it is also a place for discovery, a tool to help with homework and a way to learn more about the world. Parents and children need to communicate and talk about what the internet is, what is isn't, and how to recognise the more sinister aspects of it.
5. **Know your child is probably smarter than you when it comes to the internet.** Parents, when growing up you had VHS, cassette tapes and dial up. In comparison, your kids have Snapchat, Facebook, virtual reality, streaming services and online gaming. They have grown up in a world of touchscreens and data plans, a world where content is free and where the awareness of the importance personal information is diminished. The world has changed, and you are likely behind the times. Don't accept it, just be aware of it. The key in all this is not to rely on technology to solve your problems, but use it as a compliment to good old-fashioned education.

What does the evidence say?

There is a significant body of evidence to suggest that screen entertainment can be harmful to the growing child and have a negative impact on the social, emotional and academic development of young people.

Why is screen entertainment (including access to social media) increasingly seen as a threat to healthy child development? The following conclusions are all drawn from evidence-based research. This is taken mainly from Aric Sigman's book *Remotely Controlled*, in which the exact references to the research can be found.

A. Mental

1. It can reduce children's attention spans, making it harder for them to concentrate and contributing to an increase in ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder).
2. It can contribute to a decrease in children's academic achievements.
3. It can act as a trigger for autism.
4. It can reduce the amount of sleep that children get.
5. It can impair the child's ability to master their own language.
6. It can favour the development of the left hemisphere at the expense of the right, reducing the ability to solve problems and think innovatively.
7. It can decrease the amount of reading that most children engage in.

B. Emotional

8. It can damage the development of the brain's frontal lobes and therefore the child's ability to feel empathy.
9. It can contribute to the premature on-set of puberty, (physical in its manifestations but emotional in its disruption.)
10. It is linked to aggressive and anti-social behaviour.
11. It is linked to children's low self-esteem.
12. It can undermine a child's cultural expectations and reference points.

C. Physical

13. It has an impact upon the amount of physical activity most children engage in.
14. It can adversely affect children's eye-sight.
15. It is linked to increased obesity.
16. It can contribute to the risk-averse culture which inhibits children's sense of adventure and exploration.

What is the school doing?

- The school has a digital awareness curriculum which is taught to all children from Class 6 upwards - this teaches pupils how to recognise and avoid the negative aspects of digital media / communication but also how to get the best from it;
- The school has a digital awareness support programme for parents and carers to support them in creating a family specific approach to using digital media. This includes: Digital Advice / support page on our website with regular updates and news items / Digital Awareness parents' evenings for Kinder Garten, Lower School and Upper School;
- The school has a no mobile phone policy: pupils can use mobile phones on their journeys to and from school but must hand them in before school starts;
- The school has a dedicated E-Safety Lead, Richard Thadchanamoorthy who works with the school's Safeguarding Lead and is available to support families who may need individual support concerning digital technology related issues affecting their children.

5. How can I find out more?

Reading list:

Managing Screen Time *Edmond Schoorel*

Mary Winn *The Plug in Drug*

Aric Sigman *Remotely Controlled*

Neil Postman *Fool's Gold*

Sally Jenkinson *The Genius of Play*

Lucinda Neall *Bringing the Best out in Boys*

Martin Large *Set Free Childhood*

Sue Palmer *Toxic Childhood*

Carl Honore *Under Pressure*

Danah Boyd *Its Complicated: the Social Lives of Networked Teenagers*

Useful links:

UK Council for Child Internet Safety:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/uk-council-for-child-internet-safety-ukccis>

NSPCC resource:

<http://www.childnet.com> Online safety | NSPCC

Child Exploitation and on-line Protection Centre CEOP):<https://ceop.police.uk/safety-centre/>

