

learn

GROWING UP Digital

The consumption of media and technology is now common among children. *Beanstalk* explores how parents can guide their little ones in navigating the virtual world.



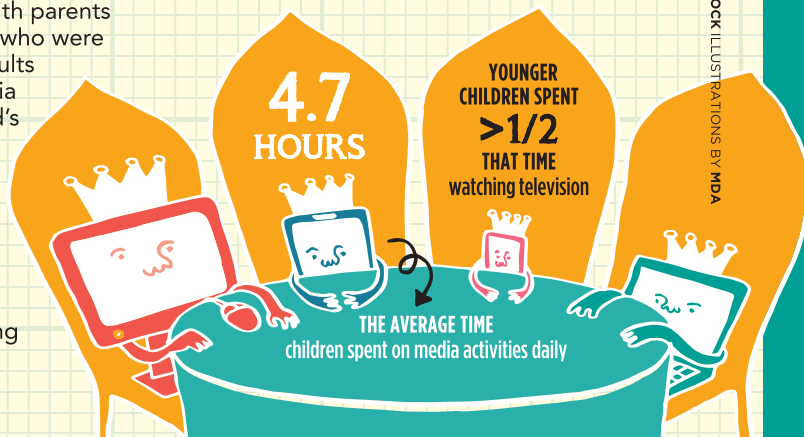
Children in Singapore, even the very young ones, are becoming increasingly adept in handling gadgets like smartphones and tablets — tapping and swiping screens with their tiny fingers almost instinctively. It is a trend that has been identified by the Media Development Authority (MDA) via the Zero-to-Fourteen Media Consumer Study*, which was conducted from November to December 2014. With a focus on the media consumption habits of children from birth to 14 years of age, the study aimed to shed light on the role of media in the lives of young ones in Singapore.

About 1,200 children were interviewed face-to-face during the study, with parents answering on behalf of children who were six years old and below. The results showed that time spent on media activities increases with the child's age. Children interviewed spent an average of 4.7 hours daily on media activities, mostly watching television and playing video games on mobile phones. Younger children aged six and under, specifically, spent more than half that time watching

television with the family.

Worldwide, similar observations have prompted even the American Academy of Paediatrics (AAP) to change their guidelines on children and screen time in September — the first time it has done so in 15 years. Previously, the AAP had recommended no screen time for children below the age of two. For older children, it was advised that screen time be limited to just two hours a day. The AAP's latest message for parents, however, is that media is "just another environment" — children are doing the same thing they have always done, only virtually. But like in any environment, media exposure and consumption have positive and negative effects. Hence, it is always important to proceed with caution when navigating the virtual world.

PHOTOS BY GETTY IMAGES & SHUTTERSTOCK ILLUSTRATIONS BY MDA



BE SCREEN SMART

MDA's Deputy Director (Outreach) Ms Carol Loi explains the importance of content. "We are living in a time where anyone can create and put out content easily. Some content may not be developmentally appropriate for young children," says Ms Loi, citing sexuality, horror and violence as examples. "This is where parents, who would know their children best, should determine whether they are ready to consume certain types of content."

She urges parents to be pro-active and guide their children in the use of media and technology. As a safeguard, parents ought to also download filtering or monitoring software to know what content their children are consuming. Parents should also openly discuss and talk about any issue or question their children may have.

As much as possible, however, Ms Loi recommends replacing screen time with play time. Even as media and technology is merging seamlessly with our lifestyles, young children learn best through human interactions and from observing the environment and the people around them. To limit children's screen time, Ms Loi suggests designating 'tech-free' spaces in the home. These can include the dining room, bedroom and bathroom. "Having such spaces not only helps to ease parents' task of monitoring their children's media usage, it also protects time for family bonding, promotes healthier eating habits and healthier sleep patterns," she says.

*For more information on MDA's Zero-to-Fourteen Media Consumer Study visit www.mda.gov.sg/AboutMDA/ResearchAndStudies/Pages/MediaConsumerExperienceStudy.aspx

POINTERS FOR PARENTS



Keep the computer in a common area so you can monitor your child's Internet activity. This applies to their usage of laptops, tablets and mobile devices.



Use safe search setting for children or parental controls to prevent exposure to inappropriate content. Look to organisations like Common Sense Media (www.commonsensemedia.org) that review age-appropriate apps, games and programmes.



Start with limited access to the Internet (the younger children are, the less access they should have), then give them rules to follow to earn your trust.



Explain to your child the rationale and reasons for the rules and instructions you have set in place.



Be an approachable parent. Make use of teachable moments when your child confides in you.

*Recommended and first published by the Media Literacy Council, MDA.

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All contestants' entry information inclusive of any personal data will be privy to ECDA only and will be used solely for purpose of this contest such as communication on prize collection or redemption.

Jan-Mar 17

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Live Facebook Chat with Media Literacy Council

Do you have a burning question concerning the influence and impact of media on your pre-schooler? Are you worried about how you should set boundaries for your young one? Here is a chance for you to consult child development experts, media professionals and cyber wellness experts — via social media, in real time. Look out for more details from your child's pre-school centre in January.

Date: End of January, 2016
Organisers: ECDA and MDA

Raising a Media-Wise Generation: A Seminar for Parents of Pre-schoolers

Our children are born into a media-saturated world. Parents often have questions like: "When should I introduce mobile devices to my pre-schooler?", "What apps are suitable for my child?", "How can I protect my child from undesirable content?" and "What are some boundaries that are appropriate for my young child?" Learn from early childhood experts, media professionals and cyber wellness experts, and pick up practical tips on how you can raise a discerning digital citizen.

Date: 30 April 2016, Saturday
Venue: Woodlands Regional Library
Organisers: ECDA, MDA and NLB

THE NEW Normal

Dr Chong Shang Chee, Head of the Child Development Unit at National University Hospital, gives her perspective on some of the findings from the MDA's Zero-to-Fourteen Media Consumer Study.

FINDING#1

Time spent on media activities increases with age, with time spent on video games thrown into the mix as they grow up.

➤ This is the new normal — video games are replacing outdoor games, interactive childhood games and board games. After all, many are available for free from app stores, or at a very low cost. Not allowing such games may be irrelevant in this day and age, but parents should be aware of their addictive nature. Young children still benefit more from outdoor activities, which can help to prevent obesity and myopia. Research has also shown that outdoor physical activity helps with attention, learning and well-being, especially for hyperactive children, while too much video gaming has the opposite effect.

➤ Positively, YouTube is a powerful media portal that allows children to watch a variety of short films and videos — mostly for free. However, unfiltered content that negatively influences, frightens or shocks young children is just as easily accessible. Parents should teach their children responsible usage, but also frequently share with children about what they are viewing and how others can use it inappropriately.

FINDING#2
YouTube was the main social media network used by children aged 10 and below.

FINDING#4
Parents are increasingly exposing their children to the Internet at a young age.

➤ In May this year, the American Academy of Paediatrics (AAP) convened the "Growing Up Digital: Media Research Symposium", which resulted in recommendations that promote family participation in screen time as healthy for social interaction and learning. So the phenomenon of little children using media and technology is not an entirely negative one. Experts recognise that media is ubiquitous and thus it is impossible not to have a more nuanced approach rather than strictly limiting screen time to no more than two hours a day. ♥

FINDING#3

The tablet was the device most frequently used by children aged 0 to 6 to go online, while smartphones were most frequently used by older children.

➤ Tablets are likely offered to children by their parents, while smartphones are likely owned by the older children. As recommended, media use in young children needs to be screened for content and exposure should be limited. Excessive media use in young children affects their development, as has been demonstrated in studies. In a particular Taiwanese study, children under the age of three were found to have delayed motor, cognitive and also language skills, if found to watch TV more than two hours a day.

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