

Navigating the Children's Media Landscape: A Parent's and Caregiver's Guide



Prepared for Cable in the Classroom
and National PTA

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 - Alex Molnar, University of Arizona
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 - Kyle Pruett, Yale University
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Cable in the Classroom National Education Advisory Board members offered critical, thoughtful insights into ways to make the report more relevant. The product reflects their important input.

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Dear Friends,

We began working on this report in what seems like another century. Way back then, the words “football half-time” and “indecentcy” rarely appeared in the same sentence. We didn’t have the Kaiser Family Foundation late 2003 data showing that 36% of our young children had televisions in their bedrooms and were spending more time in front of screens than outside playing. What began as a forward-looking research project to fill in some knowledge gaps about how our youngest children use the media became a more immediate effort to address a nation’s concerns about the abundance of media and how we use it.

In reality, the change in atmosphere altered the research not at all, and our interpretation of it only a little. This is familiar territory for us. We have long realized that, even more important than simply having the media and technology at your fingertips, is having the knowledge to use them wisely and effectively.

For fifteen years, Cable in the Classroom has focused on supporting excellent teaching and learning, wherever it occurs—in schools, homes and the community. As the education foundation of an industry that’s all about video and online content as well as the technologies that bring them to you, we know that media can play an important role in education. Helping parents, educators, and children make the most of the media’s boundless educational power has always been at the heart of Cable in the Classroom’s mission.

This report is the latest chapter in our 10-year media literacy collaboration with the National PTA. As partners in this endeavor, we are offering information and resources, guidance and tools to help adults teach children to understand, analyze, evaluate, and even create their own media productions – always with a critical eye, asking questions and examining the messages and values presented.

We know that media can have a huge impact on impressionable young minds and, of course, we want only the best for our children. So what are we to do?

What better way to tackle this difficult question than to have excellent researchers examine the topic and then talk to parents, children and some experts in media literacy and child development? This report is the fruit of that work. As it makes clear, there is no magic answer. But there are some simple and effective things we can do to help children navigate this landscape.

Is this the end of the journey? Absolutely not! The cable industry has recently launched a new initiative to help families 'Take Control of Your TV'. ControlYourTV.org, a new website devoted to empowering parents with media literacy information, also explains the many options available to families including cable set-top boxes and the TV Parental Guidelines.

This subject is deep and complex. We’ve only scratched the surface and the landscape is constantly changing, so you’ll be hearing more from us in the future.

Peggy O’Brien, Ph.D.
Executive Director



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April 2004

Dear parents, teachers and all others who care about children;

Since the earliest days of our association, members of National PTA have expressed anxiety about the impact the media has on children's education and development. Parents' concerns about the influence of television on children led National PTA in 1994 to join in a partnership with the National Cable Television Association and Cable in the Classroom to provide parents with tools to take charge of their TVs.

The challenge for today's parents is even greater as the number and variety of media have grown by leaps and bounds, exposing children at ever-younger ages to seemingly limitless media contact. *Navigating the Children's Media Landscape: A Parent's and Caregiver's Guide* is a much-needed tool that provides parents and caregivers with clear, flexible guidelines to navigate our rich media environment.

The guide explores all aspects of traditional, electronic, and digital media and explores both the positive and negative influences media may have on children's learning, behavior, and health. The guide provides a six-step strategy which takes into account individual family styles, children's unique developmental needs, and the key role parents and caregivers play in making informed media selections.

Most exciting, and useful of all, is the "Using Media to Support Child Development Chart," which provides graphic and creative ideas about the best use of media at each stage of a child's development.

There are still many unanswered questions about the affects of media on our children, and these can only increase as media continues to evolve and change. National PTA will continue to work with our media partners to speak up on behalf of our children, and to provide parents with reliable information like this important guide.

Sincerely,

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Introduction

In today's hectic times, few would argue with the fact that raising children is challenging. Among the obligations of work and the pace and stress of life, as parents or caregivers we face many choices and are offered many points of view about how we should raise our children. With all of these choices and alternatives comes the responsibility to make decisions for and about our children's welfare. Unfortunately, when navigating these decisions, sometimes it seems as if we have nowhere to turn for advice or expert guidance when we need it most. It can feel as though we have few allies in navigating this most rewarding, challenging, and important role.

Any discussion of modern parenting is sure to turn—at some point—to the presence and role of television, computers, the Internet, and, of late, computerized toys in our children's lives. We have questions about the strength of their influence on our children and how we can best guide our children's use of these media. It is a topic that can evoke strong opinions, and, at the very least, for many of us as parents or caregivers it represents a point of internal discomfort.

“As parents and grandparents we need to be real careful of what our children are looking at. We need to stay informed.”

— Brenda, grandmother of a 10-year-old boy

Having long ago welcomed television and music into our homes, and more recently having begun to embrace computer technology and the Internet, we recognize that these media—despite their sometime challenging aspects—can be helpful tools and teach valuable lessons to our children (Farkas, Johnson, Duffett, Wilson, & Vine, 2002). In particular, many of us have experienced how important it is to become and remain proficient with new technologies in the workplace. We also know that as technologies continue to change and become more powerful, our families will be offered

the possibility of more control over entertainment choices, better access to information, and better management of our time.

Even with such generally positive views of media and technology's role in society and family life, it is still hard not to be astounded and somewhat overwhelmed by the toys and media created specifically for children today: interactive learning toys that respond with lights and sound, videos and DVDs, whole television channels (not just shows) targeted to children, Internet websites, software “edu-tainment” games that run on computers, video game players, etc. The list goes on. Indeed, some have claimed that the majority of best-selling toys—about 75 percent of them—have some electronics in them (Barnette, 2001). It shouldn't be surprising, then, that it can be hard to distinguish the aisles of children's toy stores from those of consumer electronics stores: they both offer the latest electronic and interactive media for children. Times have changed, indeed.

“I got one (a videogame player) in first grade and I basically taught myself.”

— Christian, 10-year-old boy

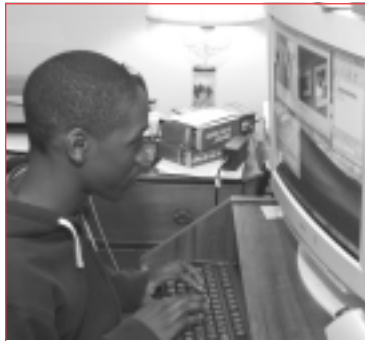
In moments of reflection, we have many questions about the consequences of allowing our children, especially our youngest children, to use or be exposed to these media. We may ask, for instance, whether we should restrict access to certain media. Or, is it okay to not worry about it? Will my children be left behind if I don't let them use the family computer or surf the Internet? Should I worry about what my children are seeing and doing with technology in other settings, such as childcare, friends' houses, and school? What are the best media and toys that can help me raise my children to be good, smart, healthy adults?

Particularly for parents or caregivers of the youngest children—to whom toys are marketed most aggressively on the basis of their “brain-





boosting,” developmental “supercharging power”— negotiating the media landscape can be seductive, dazzling, and downright daunting. A recent groundbreaking report of the Kaiser Family Foundation, *Zero to Six:*



Electronic Media in the Lives of Infants, Toddlers and Preschoolers (Rideout, Vandewater, & Wartella, 2003), in fact, sounds a loud and clear warning that the extensive use of media by such young children should raise a host of questions for parents and caregivers, if not also for the medical and educational communities.

While we wait for such questions to be definitively answered by the experts, though, we are left only with uncertainty—uncertainty that for many of us results in the lack of a consistent and comprehensive strategy for dealing with our children’s use of media. Instead, we find ourselves making and re-making media use choices for and with our children on a day-to-day, hour-to-hour basis. Of course, given that there always seem to be bigger and more important issues to deal with, we often relent to our children’s desires. We buy educational talking plush toys for our toddlers at birthdays, we put children on our laps to surf the Web, and we install VCRs and video game players in our minivans so they will be entertained as we run our errands. We may sporadically consider what our children are doing and watching, but, so long as they are quiet or engaged in their bedrooms or the family room, we assume they are okay as we go about the always-hectic business of the day.

Worried parents or caregivers may feel that the only other viable approach to dealing with the proliferation of media in our children’s lives is to set blanket restrictions on media—no television, no videos, no computer, no use of the Internet, nothing. For many of us, though, this is simply not a viable option (especially as our children grow older) and not in line with our deep-seated beliefs in the positive potential of media as we have experienced it in our own lives. What is one to do?

For savvy parents and caregivers, there is a third way: Parents and caregivers can and should employ a comprehensive family media use strategy beginning with even the youngest children. As an alternative to unrestricted access to TV, computers and video games; and as an alternative to well-meaning but heavy-handed blanket restrictions, a consistent and developmentally appropriate approach grounded in media literacy strategies can help parents to harness the best aspects of media for their children. In fact, comprehensively employed media literacy tools can help parents and their children to be savvier consumers of media—understanding how to better select media and

Six Steps to Creating a Family Media Use Strategy

1. Identify your current family media practices.
2. Consider the unique stages and needs of your children.
3. Educate yourself about the children’s media landscape.
4. Select media for your family with purpose.
5. Encourage active, creative, and open-ended use of media.
6. Teach your children media literacy skills.

media content and harness it in developmentally appropriate ways.

To that end, this report—*Navigating the Children’s Media Landscape: A Parent’s and Caregiver’s Guide*—is intended to provide information to parents and other primary caregivers to help them consider what effects their family media use strategies and practices can have on their young children, and to provide ideas and strategies to help parents and caregivers select and use media resources with their families in developmentally appropriate ways. Drawing on a review of academic literature; the insights of experts in the fields of media literacy and effects, child development and education, and professional and advocacy organizations; and exploratory interviews with a small but diverse set of young children and their parents, this report is intended to help you better navigate the children’s media landscape.

We hope you find it helpful.



Authors’ Note

Since the completion of this report, national attention once again has turned to issues of the propriety of media content. In response, Members of Congress and the Federal Communications Commission have raised a number of important questions about the role of media producers vis-à-vis parents and caregivers. We are convinced that the ideas and tools described herein can contribute to this dialogue and, in so doing, help us all to work together to harness the best aspects of media for children.

The Changing Children’s Media Landscape

“As an alternative to unrestricted access to TV, computers and video games; and as an alternative to well-meaning but heavy-handed blanket restrictions, a consistent and developmentally appropriate approach grounded in media literacy strategies can help parents to harness the best aspects of media for their children. In fact, comprehensively employed, media literacy tools can help parents and their children to be savvier consumers of media—understanding how to better select media and media content and harness it in developmentally appropriate ways.”

For many parents and caregivers, the familiar media that shaped our youth have been forever changed by the stunning advances of modern digital and wireless technologies. Stuffed animals can now talk to our infants; books literally read themselves to our toddlers; viewing a favorite television program now can occur as often as our children desire—on their schedule, not the TV’s. Board games have been supplanted by single- and multi-player video games; the landline telephone is being replaced by the cell phone and instant messaging technologies; and, of course, the Internet offers up seemingly endless resources for socializing, entertaining, and educating children and adults of all ages and stages.

“I have my own computer. Sometimes I use my mom’s computer. But I have some games on my computer so if I want to play those I have to play on my computer.”

— William, 7-year-old boy

It is hard not to see how quickly our children seem to be adapting to this increasingly technology-infused lifestyle. We encourage their curiosity and even turn to our children for help when the technology in our lives doesn’t seem to quite work the way we expect or is difficult to operate: “Can you go on the Internet and do this or that research for me? Where do you click again? How do you get this thing to print? You can record my favorite TV show on a DVD—and you say it’s easier than setting my VCR? How much does something like that cost?” In fact, trends in emerging market and academic research are beginning to paint a portrait

What do we mean by the term ‘media’?

The term *media* has typically referred to newspapers, magazines, billboards, radio, film, and television. With new digital technologies, *media* now refers to an ever-increasing array of wired and wireless devices and applications. In this report, we define *media* broadly to include traditional print and electronic *media* and computers, the Internet, the World Wide Web, video games, music and film CD-ROMs and DVDs, digital *media* management tools, pagers, personal digital assistants, mobile telephones, and interactive books, television, and toys. That is, we include “traditional” *media* plus anything electronic or digital that transmits information.

of technology-driven changes in our children’s lives that is nothing less than stunning to many, including parents and caregivers, child development experts, and other parent advocates.

Consider the following:

- **Young children’s homes and lives are media rich.** Most young children (ages 0 to 6) live in homes with access to at least three televisions, radio, VCR/DVD, CD/tape player, cable or satellite service, and/or a computer with Internet access. More than one in four young children have a radio, CD/tape player, TV, and/or VCR/DVD player *in their bedroom* (Rideout *et al.*, 2003).

“He’s got one [TV] in his room, one in our room that sometimes we’ll watch, one in the basement which is probably the one we watch the most, and daddy just added one to the living room.”

— Amy, mother of a 5-year-old boy

■ **Young children are exposed to and use a wide variety of media for a considerable amount of time every day.** In a typical day, many young children (ages 0 to 6) listen to music and watch TV and/or videos/DVDs. By the time children reach ages 4 to 6, more than one in four also uses a computer daily. The youngest children (ages 0 to 3) spend almost 2 hours a day with some combination of TV, videos/DVDs, computers, and video games. Older children spend even more time with these so-called “screen media” (Rideout *et al.*, 2003).

■ **Even the youngest children are active users of media—expressing preferences for media use and initiating media-based activities.** Most young children (ages 0 to 3) have turned on the TV by themselves, asked for a particular TV show or channel, and/or changed channels with the remote control. By the time they are a little older (ages 4 to 6), most children have also put in videos/DVDs by themselves. More than one in four 2-year olds have used a computer on a parent’s lap, and many older children (ages 4 to 6) have even turned on the computer and/or used it all by themselves (Rideout *et al.*, 2003).

Nationally, the trends are clear. Our children—from the earliest ages—are immersed in and actively using increasingly diverse media. Given that children develop so dramatically in the early years (White & Coleman, 2001), this trend has some concerned that this sort of media use could have an especially significant impact. But, what do we really know?

“They see us using these things and they develop a natural curiosity and they want to play and do things and we take our cue from that.”

— Ellen, mother of a 2-year-old girl

We know that media exposure and use matters.

Generally speaking, research shows that, depending on a variety of factors such as the content of the media program, the length of exposure, and the context for its viewing, media exposure and use can have positive and negative effects on individuals’ learning, behavior, and health (e.g., Fisch & Truglio, 2001; Marshall, 2002; Nathanson, 2002; Singer & Singer, 2001; Wartella, O’Keefe, & Scantlin, 2000).

We know that young children can benefit from developmentally appropriate media use.

While leading researchers admit they are just beginning to understand the full extent and nature of the issue (Anderson & Evans, 2001; Plowman & Stephen, 2003; Rideout *et al.*, 2003; Wartella *et al.*, 2000), emerging research strongly suggests that—when used appropriately—media can benefit children. For instance, children’s television programs with academic and prosocial messages have been linked to better preparation for and performance in school and increases in altruistic behavior (Calvert & Kotler, 2003). Educational software programs targeted to 3 to 6 year-old children have been associated with improvements in a wide range of academic skills, including learning to read and write (Revelle, Medoff, & Strommen, 2001; Sivin-Kachala & Bialo, 2000). More recently, even electronic gaming has come to the attention of serious researchers, who recognize the value of the broad range of physical and cognitive skills required to play them successfully (Gee, 2003).



We know that new media tools offer parents and children more opportunities to actively engage with media in a wide variety of potentially beneficial ways. In addition to having vastly expanded choices about media content in an era of 200-plus television channels, the Internet, interactive toys, and computer software, today's digital media tools allow parents and children to employ a wider range of developmentally

“I’m older than my sister, so it makes me really want to watch my movies. But, sometimes it’s better to watch my sister’s movies, because some of mine might not be appropriate for her.”

— Claire, 7-year-old girl

appropriate uses of media as a family (Jenkins, 2003). Recordable and rewriteable CDs and DVDs, digital video recorders (such as those employed by TiVO, ReplayTV, and others), digital cameras and camcorders, camera phones, user-friendly website development tools, and multimedia editing software all offer parents and their children the opportunity to be not only active consumers of media, but creators of dynamic multimedia content. Consider the findings of a recent study that reveals that 32 percent of 6- to 8-year-olds with Internet access—and 44 percent of 13- to 17-year-olds—have or plan to build their own personal website. This trend translates to more than 6 million American children (ages 6 to 17) with their own personal websites by 2005 (Grunwald Associates, in press). As their cost continues to drop and their ease of use improves, more and more families will have the option of employing powerful and attractive media tools like these to enhance the learning and development of their children.

In short, the media landscape is indeed changing. While it is absolutely appropriate for parents and child advocates to raise questions about the exposure of young children to media, especially given how prominent media are in their young lives, there are many reasons to believe that media, used appropriately, can help parents guide their children through critical learning and developmental milestones. Moreover, new and emerging tools offer parents more opportunities to actively engage their children in a wide variety of potentially positive and prosocial media-enhanced activities. How then can parents work to ensure that they harness the best of media for their children? What do they need to know and do?



Creating a Family Media Use Strategy

The children's media landscape is profoundly different from what it was when we grew up (Anderson, 2002; Barnette, 2001; Jenkins, 2003). Today, media content is created specifically for children from the youngest ages and delivered in an increasing variety of formats. Consider, for instance, that at the same time young children's media use is growing, television's dominant influence may be waning owing to competing media options. In fact, it seems entirely likely that computers, the Internet, video games, interactive toys, and other digital media will soon join television on equal footing as primary media in our children's lives.

“The media literacy education movement...will need to have a strong appeal to men, so that men think as fathers. It has to be parents—mothers and fathers—not something that we dump, again, on the mothers.”

— Kyle Pruett, Yale University

In such a rapidly evolving environment, it is important for parents—mothers and fathers together—and caregivers to develop and implement a consistent and comprehensive strategy to better harness the continually evolving variety of media in our young children's lives for good and to prepare our children to become media savvy. Together with our children, we need to become more conscious of the media in our lives, their meanings for us, and how they affect us. With the aid of new digital technologies, we need to learn how to become not just consumers of media, but producers. And, in so doing, we can be confident that we will be helping to equip our children with the tools they need to be successful in school, in their careers, and in civic life.

It has been long established that the way adults use media, and how they mediate its use (e.g., modeling, discussion, rulemaking) can have significant effects on how children react to, and use, such media. (Atkin, Greenberg, & Baldwin, 1991; Austin, 1993; Bandura, 1986; Nathanson, 2001). In fact, parents and caregivers are crucially important in determining their children's media use and helping

“I give talks to parents—90% mothers—and many have trouble dealing with their husbands. I have never heard a husband say that he has this problem with his wife. There are a whole group of mothers who really are trying to engage with these issues. A big [question]...is how to get fathers involved and caring about these issues.”

— Diane Levin, Wheelock College

their children learn to make good media choices independently. What is especially important with very young children is making sure that media selection and use choices are considered within a broad developmental framework encompassing children's physical, cognitive, social/emotional, and linguistic development.

In developing a family media use strategy, parents and caregivers should:

- Identify your current family media practices;
- Consider the unique stages and needs of your children;
- Educate yourself about the children's media landscape;
- Select media for your family with purpose;
- Encourage active, creative, and open-ended use of media; and
- Teach your children media literacy skills.

Each of these six steps is described in more detail below.

Identify your current family media practices.

Identifying your current family media practices will help parents and caregivers to reflect on the pervasiveness of media in your and your children's lives. In both subtle and obvious ways, electronic and interactive media technologies are present in nearly every aspect of day-to-day life. From the time we wake in the morning to the time we go to sleep, many of us are constantly exposed to some kind of mass media (including, for instance, newspapers,



radio, television, and billboards). At work and school, computers, the Internet, personal digital assistants (PDAs), and telephones are often standard tools. These various media can also be found at home, along with video games, CD and DVD music and movies, and interactive toys. Media are everywhere, and nearly everyone engages in their use—whether actively or begrudgingly, on purpose or by default.

While many homes with young children could be considered media rich, the media preferences and uses of individual family members won't necessarily be the same. How does each person in the family currently use media? Where in the house are media (such as TVs and computers) located? In your family, say, does one parent prefer to watch television, while the other is online? Do older children in your family prefer to use media in different ways than younger children? Who in the house makes decisions about which media are selected, what programs are watched, what computer will be purchased? What kinds of media do family members use in settings outside the house (such as school, friends' houses, childcare, work, etc.)? What aspects of media use do family members enjoy? What would they like to be able to do with media?

“Some of the guidelines are knowing your child, creating a balanced, comprehensive environment for your child, keeping informed as your child gets older about what your child is doing, using media as an opportunity to build relationships between you and your children and not to reduce relationships via the media.”

— Marilou Hyson, National Association for the Education of Young Children

Consider the unique stage and needs of your children. Each child is unique and grows at his/her own pace while progressing along general developmental stages. What is appropriate for your child is not necessarily going to be the same as what is appropriate for his or her peers and friends.

Indeed, the existing research, literature and guidelines agree that media activities within a child's cognitive, physical, emotional, or social ability range are less likely to be frustrating or under- or overwhelming and that those experiences therefore are more likely to result in positive outcomes. Teachers and school guidance counselors can make an important contribution to the family media use plan by communicating to parents which developmental cues to look for in children to help guide media selections.

Media can contribute to your child's development, especially when such media are selected and used in ways that clearly support a child's interests and abilities at a particular time. Thus, it is important to know your children as well as you can so that you can make decisions—or help them make decisions—that are appropriate to who they are at a particular time. For instance, do your young children appear easily distracted or upset by loud sounds or bright lights? What attracts their attention? What frustrates them? What sparks their curiosity? How do they like to play? Are your children attracted to more structured and sequenced activities? How well do your children understand and follow rules in games? How do your children react when they have difficulty operating, say, an interactive toy? Do your children show interest in using the computer? Here again, teachers can be helpful in offering their own observations about an individual child's development status based upon classroom interactions.

Educate yourself about the children's media landscape. It can be difficult for parents and caregivers to keep tabs on the proliferation of media, toys, and technologies that children today are using for entertainment and learning. Keeping abreast of these changes will help you to better select media for your children to use, as well as help you and your family to make considered and proactive media use decisions, especially since children use and are exposed to media in a variety of settings outside the home.

Every few months, go online or pay a visit to the local toy or electronics store and just browse. Stay abreast of trends in educational software and websites by looking at product reviews and parenting tips in parenting and electronics magazines, websites, and newsletters. There are hundreds of software and game titles beyond those on the best-seller list that may spark your child's interests. Indeed, it seems as if nearly every day there are new media products and services becoming available. What excites you? What products and services do you think your children would enjoy and why? What would spark their curiosity and sense of discovery? What do you think would have been fun for you when you were a child? Talk to other adults—family, teachers, friends, etc.—and find out what media they use, how they use them, what they suggest, and why.

“I guess she also occasionally watches during play dates, like if she’s over at her friend’s house. She’ll come back talking about something that I’ve never heard of.”

— Melissa, mother of a 7-year-old girl

Select media for your family with purpose. On any given day, not every type of media will be right for every child: We may find certain media content inappropriate for our children or too advanced for them to understand and certain media devices (such as computers and games systems) too confusing or frustrating to use. Indeed, one of the hardest things parents do is select or help select media for their child's use. Asking the following questions may help guide your thinking about whether and how particular media can support your child's growth and development: In general, is the medium age appropriate? Does it match your child's physical skill and comprehension level? More specifically, is the medium appropriate for your particular child? Does it provide information and learning experiences that are meaningful, relevant, and respectful of whom she is along with the people and cultures that surround her? Is the medium user-directed (active or interactive) so that your child can

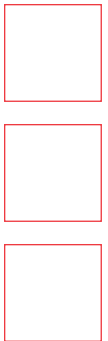
use it in various ways, direct its use, and use it for imaginative play? Does it respond to your child or provide feedback? Does the medium engage your child, or does it seem to be confusing or frustrating?

“We try to limit the TV but not so much the computer games.”

— Judy, mother of a 7-year-old boy

Encourage active, creative, and open-ended use of media. While some types of media are more amendable to offering users choices and control—and are inherently more interactive—it is *how* media are used that ultimately determines their value. As a parent, you can help your children to use media actively to create picture books, digital photo albums, home movies, and websites. Encourage your children to pursue their curiosities and interests across a range of media, such as newspapers, television, the Internet, CD-ROMs, and radio. Create reflective opportunities by asking your children questions about their experience of the media. What did they think of a new media experience? How did they feel? Were their first impressions accurate? Is this new experience worth repeating or recommending?

Teach your children media literacy skills. Broadly, media literacy refers to critically analyzing media messages (Hobbs, 1998). It is an approach to, or perspective on, media that can help adults and children better understand and engage with the world around them through the active mediation of media and their messages. Media literacy has many definitions. At its core, however, media literacy involves the ability to access, understand, analyze, evaluate and create messages in a wide range of media. Media literacy can help parents and children think more deeply about the media and the ways they can be used. Developing media literacy is a process of education.



Scholars, media industry members, parents, teachers, and others have worked to create resources and courses to help people become media literate. Of course, in order to encourage media literacy among children, the adults in their lives need information and strategies for selecting and using media that can help them guide themselves and their children. Luckily, such resources do exist and are available from media literacy, child development, parenting, and progressive media organizations. In addition, there are many resources created especially for children. Of course, because society and technology continue to change, keeping up with new developments is an important aspect of media literacy.

Children need media literacy skills so they can become savvy consumers and producers of media. Indeed, the need for these skills increases in importance as children grow older and become more independent, if for no other reason than the fact that many children spend time in a variety of settings outside the home on a regular basis (such as at friends' or other relatives' houses, school, childcare, etc.) where they are likely exposed to media content and messages that have not been pre-screened or approved by you. Media literacy skills often take the form of questioning: What did you like (or dislike) about the show/movie/game or website? Did it seem real to you? Why or why not? What did you learn? If you wrote the script/made the toy/programmed the game, what would you make different? Why? How were problems solved in the program or game? Was that realistic? Why or why not? How would you have solved the problem? Can you direct it to do things that are different from this main purpose? If it is intended to be used by only one person, can it be used by two or more people, or vice versa? It is never too early to begin to teach your children about media literacy and to help them develop independent critical media selection, viewing, and playing skills.

Given the dramatic changes in the children's media landscape, it is important for parents and caregivers

Media Literacy Resources

Cable in the Classroom (CIC)

<http://www.ciconline.org>

CIC leads the cable telecommunications industry's commitment to education—to improve teaching and learning for children in schools, at home, and in their communities.

National PTA

<http://pta.org/parentinvolvement>

National PTA is the largest volunteer child advocacy organization in the United States. It is a not-for-profit association of parents, educators, students, and other citizens active in their schools and communities.

Alliance for a Media Literate America (AMLA)

<http://www.AMLAinfo.org>

AMLA is a membership organization that provides national leadership, advocacy, and information.

Center for Media Literacy (CML)

<http://www.medialit.org>

CML produces and distributes several media literacy resources.

KIDSNET

<http://www.kidsnet.org>

KIDSNET provides program ratings, study guides, and media guides for children and their parents.

Awesome Library

<http://www.awesomelibrary.org/>

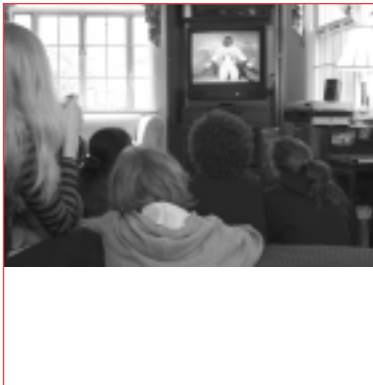
Includes 24,000 carefully reviewed "kid-safe" resources, including the top 5 percent in education. The site also includes an index of other kid-safe search engines.

to begin to consider more broadly the influence of their family media practices on their young children. Consistently employed, such a strategy will help ensure that parents and their children become savvier consumers of media—understanding how to better select media and media content and harness them in developmentally appropriate ways.

Using Media to Support Child Development

As a critical component of a family media use strategy, parents will want to be able to confidently select and use media in ways that are generally positive and growth-oriented, and want to teach their children to do the same. While media and information literacy guidelines for the selection and use of media exist, most have not been created with a developmental focus. Yet, what we know about how children develop is critically important for understanding how media can positively support their growth. As every parent knows, as children grow, what is appropriate for them at one stage of development is not necessarily appropriate for them at another.

To the end of helping parents think about child development as it relates to various media, we have created the *Strategies for Using Media to Support Child*



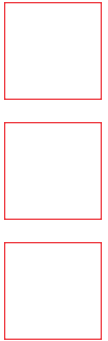
Development Chart. This chart integrates media literacy guidelines with general developmental milestones in order to suggest specific media literacy-promoting activities by age. Media selection and use should address individual children appropriately through their stages of development (recognizing that each child is unique and grows at an independent rate). In addition, we have included guiding questions and activities generally appropriate for four domains of child development (Berk, 2002; White & Coleman, 2000):

“A child of 3 is very different from a child of 5. Parents need to do a lot of mediation and it is different at different stages.”

— Dorothy Singer, Yale University

- Physical development (i.e., children’s physical growth, perceptual skills, and motor skills);
- Cognitive development (i.e., thinking and problem-solving skills and development);
- Social/emotional development (i.e., self-identify, interpersonal skills and the expression of feelings); and
- Linguistic development (i.e., oral and written language development).

Guiding questions are provided across each domain in the chart. While they are specific to each developmental stage, these questions were generated from the overarching media literacy question: How do the selected media and media content support children’s development in one or more of the following domains: physical, cognitive, social/emotional, and linguistic?



Using Media to Support Child Development Chart



The *Using Media to Support Child Development Chart* was developed in direct response to recent research by the Kaiser Family Foundation, which raises concerns about appropriate media use by young children and points out the general dearth of research knowledge in the medical and educational communities on the effects of media on children. Indeed, such research is critically important to conduct. In the meantime, however, it is our hope that this approach to considering media selection and use among young children will be a helpful starting place.

It is designed to help parents and caregivers of children of various ages to select media and use them in an active, creative, and open-ended manner with their children. As such, it is designed to spur creative ideas and possibilities for positive media use, rather than to dictate a rigid developmental path or one correct way to use media. In looking at the chart, parents and caregivers can see—by age and stage of their children—what types of media use activities might be likely to be beneficial across the major developmental domains.



How do the selected media and media content support children's development in the following domains?					
Approximate Age	Developmental Milestones	Physical	Cognitive		
		Social/Emotional	Linguistic		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improves balance Begins to use utensils Becomes less self-centered Begins developing recognition memory Increases vocabulary rapidly Follows mostly correct word order Begins to develop self-concept Increases empathy Begins to show cooperation and aggression Plays alongside other children but not with them May become easily frustrated 	<p><i>Do the media require small/large motor skills not yet developed with children at this age?</i></p>	<p><i>Do the media include bright colors and lights that encourage child responses?</i></p>	<p><i>Do the media used with caregivers to foster nurturing environments?</i></p> <p><i>Do the media produce and encourage sounds of spoken language?</i></p>	
Media Use Strategies					
2 — 3 years		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Include the use of small utensils (mouse, crayons) Sing songs and play games that incorporate hand motions (e.g., patty-cake) Encourage tracing and drawing on paper, electronic media and the screen 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask the child to retell what happened in the story after reading, watching, or listening to a story Find objects and letters on the screen that are also in the environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask questions about how a character feels Actively use the media with your child (e.g., by sitting at the computer with your child on your lap) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sing songs and read books with repetition and rhyme Use various pictures (on paper and on screen) to increase vocabulary



How do the selected media and media content support children's development in the following domains?					
Approximate Age	Developmental Milestones	Physical	Cognitive	Social/Emotional	Linguistic
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begins to hop, throw, and catch • Becomes better coordinated • Begins using scissors • Begins generalizing information from one situation to another • Begins to count small numbers • Aware of some features of written language • Understands culturally accepted ways to adjust speech for listeners • Talks in complete sentences of 3-5 words • Begins to form friendships • Increases joint and interactive play • Seeks attention and approval of adults • May become fearful (e.g., dark, monsters) 	<p><i>Do the media require the development of large and small motor skills?</i></p>	<p><i>Do the media encourage reading comprehension, problem solving, and memory?</i></p>	<p><i>Do the media encourage sharing, communication, and interaction?</i></p> <p><i>Do the media easily frustrate or frighten the child?</i></p>
Media Use Strategies					
3 — 4 years		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage the use of smaller utensils (e.g., mouse, crayons, pencils) • Create artwork using electronic painting and drawing programs • Encourage your child to imitate moves and dances from an educational program • Listen for clapping patterns in songs and try to copy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use toys that encourage the acquisition of letters, numbers, and new words • Watch programs that encourage your child to predict and make conclusions • Read and listen to stories that are repetitive • Make predictions about stories • Discuss the difference between reality and make-believe 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose media that do not easily frustrate or frighten your child • Put a few chairs around the computer to encourage social interaction • Discuss games, stories, and experiences with media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read environmental print (e.g., street signs) with your child • Read books while listening to an audio version • Make and read sentences using "pictures" or "drawings" • Use software and interactive books and toys that incorporate labels for familiar objects

How do the selected media and media content support children's development in the following domains?				
Approximate Age	Developmental Milestones	Physical	Linguistic	
		Cognitive	Social/Emotional	
5 — 8 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improves large and small motor skills Writing becomes more legible Increases logical thought Interested in cause and effect Increases attention span Improves recall memory Begins to show signs of early reading Increases vocabulary to about 10,000 words Has mastered grammatical forms Begins to understand social cues Predicts and interprets others' emotional reactions Increases peer interaction 	<p><i>Do the media require the development of small motor skills?</i></p> <p><i>Do the media involve typing or writing?</i></p>	<p><i>Do the media involve problem solving and critical thinking and memory activities?</i></p> <p><i>Do the media involve reading and reading comprehension?</i></p>	<p><i>Do the media encourage oral and written language and communication?</i></p>
		Media Use Strategies		
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have your child use the keyboard to compose text and letters Have your child use the mouse to navigate the computer and Internet Encourage your child to imitate moves and dances from an educational program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss the elements of the story (e.g., plot, characters, setting) after watching a television show or DVD or reading an interactive book Discuss the difference between reality and fantasy Play memory and problem-solving games with interactive toys and on the computer Write and illustrate stories and letters using the computer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask questions about how characters feel Put a few chairs around the computer and encourage collaborative use Compose emails and instant messages with your child Encourage your child to share his/her favorite software, websites, games, etc., with siblings and other children



How do the selected media and media content support children's development in the following domains?					
Approximate Age	Developmental Milestones	Physical	Cognitive	Social/Emotional	Linguistic
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improves coordination Improves reaction time Expands long-term knowledge base Thinks logically about concrete situations and begins to think logically about abstract situations Emphasizes categorical definitions (e.g., synonyms) Grasps double meaning of words Includes personality traits in self-concept Discovers peer groups Can resolve conflicts through compromise and discussion 	<p><i>Do the media involve the developed motor skills and coordination of children this age?</i></p>	<p><i>Do the media encourage research, problem solving, critical thinking, and reading comprehension?</i></p> <p><i>Does the child understand advertisements and their intentions?</i></p>	<p><i>Do the media encourage peer interaction and communication?</i></p>
Media Use Strategies					
9 — 11 years		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage reaction time by playing quick-response games Help your child build eye-hand coordination skills by playing simulation games Encourage your child to learn and use the keyboard 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When watching TV together, ask your child about the commercials. What are the advertisers trying to sell? To whom? Write and illustrate stories and letters using the computer Discuss story elements (e.g., characters, plot setting) when watching TV or DVDs or when reading interactive books 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask questions about how characters feel Put a few chairs around the computer and encourage collaborative use Encourage your child to use email to interact with friends and family Encourage your child to discuss media with siblings and other children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage your child to use email as a form of communication Use media and technology to create stories, videos, and websites Encourage your child to find words that have multiple meanings Use language to discuss the technology and media used

A Shared Responsibility

In developing this report, we originally set out to consider what key research and sources had to say about media—new and old—and their known or possible effects on the development of young children. How are young children using media? What are the media practices of parents, and what do they think about their children's use of media? What advice do experts, advocates, and researchers have for parents to help them navigate the changing children's media landscape? What we found was both encouraging and discouraging. We found that we know a fair amount about the rapid growth in access to certain media devices and applications in families, and much less about the various ways they are used. We found that we know much more about the effects of some media (television, video games) than others (interactive toys) and that we still don't really know very much about their effects on child development overall, especially with newer media and younger children. Given the pace of change in the children's media landscape, the need for reliable, unbiased information to guide parenting and child development guidelines is paramount.

As concerned parents and caregivers, however, our needs for guidance are immediate and pressing. Until such time as better information is available, a balanced and comprehensive approach to considering media selection and use is warranted—beginning with even the youngest children. As an alternative to unrestricted access to TV, computers, and video games; and as an alternative to well-meaning but heavy-handed blanket restrictions, a consistent and developmentally appropriate approach grounded in media literacy strategies can help parents to harness the best aspects of media for their children.

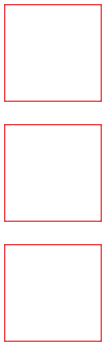
Clearly, adult guidance is critically important. Given the dramatic changes in the children's media landscape, it is important for parents to begin to consider more broadly the influence of their family media practices on their young children, including background and incidental uses of media to which young children may be unwittingly exposed. In so doing, it is especially important that *all* family members be involved in discussions and decision making.

A comprehensive family media use strategy involves identifying your current family media practices; considering the unique stages and needs of your children; educating yourself about the children's media landscape; selecting media for your family with purpose; encouraging active, creative, and open-ended use of media; and teaching your children media literacy skills. Consistently employed, such a strategy will help to ensure that parents and their children become savvier consumers of media—understanding how to better select media and media content and harness it in developmentally appropriate ways.

Of course, adults who guide do not have to be the only ones who have physical or emotional proximity to a child. Adults throughout the nation and around the globe who engage in work that affects children—whether creative work, educational work, the work of funding, and so on—have a responsibility to advocate for children. The media industry, government, research, education, and non-profit sectors and parents and other adult caregivers all have responsibilities relative to their particular roles and resources. Until such time as the children's media landscape feels less seductive, dazzling, and daunting, we hope the tools and strategies set forth in this report are supportive.

“There are a lot of people who have responsibility: anyone who owns any form of media or is in any kind of creative position, for example. Companies that distribute or broadcast—every single person in the supply chain between the creative person and the arrival of the project—has an ethical responsibility that you would hope they were meeting.”

— Josh Lerman, *Parenting Magazine*



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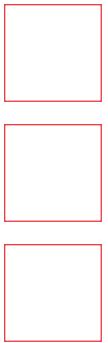
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