Anticipatory Guidance: School

Media can affect a child’s academic performance both positively and negatively, depending on the context of use and how they are used. In the context of school, technologies may be incorporated into the classroom, which can yield innovative instructional methods. Such media use is often guided and structured, and it can teach children how to access knowledge and build practical skills that will be needed in further education and in the workplace. In the context of the home, some use of media designed to teach skills that are relevant for a child’s developmental stage can help children build those skills. However, when media are used alongside schoolwork, they can distract from that work. They can also interrupt sleep when used in the bedroom or at bedtime.

What the Evidence Says

**Television.** Television programs that are developed for preschoolers have been shown repeatedly to enhance basic cognitive skills and socio-emotional development in this age group. Studies have shown that children who had low levels of skills prior to viewing the programs benefitted more than their skilled peers and that the programs may function as early educational interventions for those children who had moderate exposure to them (Baydar, Kagıtçibasi, Küntay, & Göksen, 2008). It must be made clear, however, that though these programs can provide benefits, watching other shows and programs, especially in excess, has been shown to be detrimental to academic performance (Pagani, Fitzpatrick, Barnett, & Dubow, 2010). This effect has long-term implications: Television viewing in childhood and adolescence is associated with poor educational achievement by 26 years of age. Excessive television viewing early in life may have implications for socioeconomic status and wellbeing in adulthood (Hancox, Milne, & Poulton, 2005).

**Video games.** There has been a good deal of focus on how video game violence can contribute to aggression and violent tendencies in its players, but less is known about the positive effects of video gaming. Some studies that have shown that strategic video games (e.g., role playing and strategy games) can promote problem-solving skills and indirectly predict academic grades (Adachi & Willoughby, 2013).

**Social media.** Research to date has revealed that teenagers are the most prolific users of social network sites and spend considerable portions of their daily life interacting through social media. While social media can be beneficial outside of the classroom or as part of guided instruction, used independently, it can serve as a distraction during classes and while trying to complete assignments and homework (Kirschner & Karpinski, 2010). Media multitasking in general can detract from performance and inhibit one’s ability to focus on a task (Junco, 2012).

During the Visit

If your patient screens “positive” on the Media Use History for school-performance related issues, discuss them with the patient and his/her family and touch on how media may play a role in addressing or exacerbating these issues.

Recommendations

- Talk to parents about discouraging media multi-tasking when children are completing their homework. When starting at a younger age, children should do homework in a central location to allow for monitoring by the parents. Suggest using a timer and choosing a period of time (e.g., 30 minutes) during which they need to close all other non-applicable browser windows/programs and focus only on their assignment. And then allow 10 minutes for a break during which they can choose an activity. If this habit starts early, they will more likely do the same when older and studying alone.
- When parents choose video games, recommend that they choose those that are challenging in nature and that include problem solving rather than violence.

- Encourage parents to monitor what their children watch and how much time they spend watching television. Television shows that are designed for a child’s developmental stage and evaluated are good options for children. Recommend that parents watch an episode or two of a given show with their children so that they can familiarize themselves with the content. Restrictions on channel access may help prevent accidental exposure to adult-oriented content.

- Instruct parents to ensure that their child or adolescent gets good and sufficient sleep. Screens should be kept in common areas and out of bedrooms. Talk to parents about charging mobile phones and other media devices in their own bedroom to prevent late-night texts or other alerts from waking children.

**Future Directions**

As technologies evolve and adoption of these emerging technologies in both the classroom and the home increases, we need to continue to monitor their effects on a variety of cognitive skills.

**References**


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