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Practice guidelines

Children and screens: Groupe de Pédiatrie Générale (Société française de pédiatrie) guidelines for pediatricians and families

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 6 September 2017

Accepted 10 December 2017

Available online xxx

Keywords:

Screens

Recommendations

Guidelines

Children

Adolescents

ABSTRACT

The Groupe de Pédiatrie Générale (General Pediatrics Group), a member of the Société française de pédiatrie (French Pediatrics Society), has proposed guidelines for families and doctors regarding children's use of digital screens. A number of guidelines have already been published, in particular by the French Academy of Sciences in 2013 and the American Academy of Pediatrics in 2016. These new guidelines were preceded by an investigation into the location of digital screen use by young children in France, a survey of medical concerns on the misuse of digital devices, and a review of their documented benefits. The Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiovisuel (Higher Council on Audiovisual Technology) and the Union Nationale de Associations Familiales (National Union of Family Associations) have taken part in the preparation of this document. Five simple messages are proposed: understanding without demonizing; screen use in common living areas, but not in bedrooms; preserve time with no digital devices (morning, meals, sleep, etc.); provide parental guidance for screen use; and prevent social isolation.

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Following the example of a number of international pediatric associations, the Groupe de Pédiatrie Générale (GPG) (General Pediatrics Group), a member of the Société Française de Pédiatrie (SFP) (French Pediatrics Society), decided to propose a set of simple recommendations on children and screen use, inspired by a number of recent publications (in particular, the report of the French Academy of Sciences in 2013, the proposals made by the

American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) in 2016, and the “3-6-9-12” rules proposed by Serge Tisseron in 2008 and 2015), and the 2 study days organized in 2016 in Paris and Lyon.

1. Why new recommendations?

Several earlier guidelines have already been published, and we took inspiration from five of these. The topic is so important that no learned pediatric society can afford to ignore it. These published proposals do not stem from evidence-based medicine, but rather the opinions of published experts that have been adapted to fit the

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time and place as well as children's ages. We have tried to keep our guidelines simple to provide messages that French pediatricians can readily convey to parents.

2. Published guidelines

Among the numerous recommendations and suggestions that have been published, five proved to be particularly useful as a basis for reflection.

2.1. The "Children and Screens" report by the French Academy of Sciences (2013)

This report contains numerous viewpoints and references to research on this subject. The knowledge presented is still partial and sometimes contradictory. A comparison of learning through reading and new digital cultures shows the advantages and limitations of both methods. The ideal would be to combine these two cultures. The recommendations are based on common sense and risk prevention.

Before the age of 2 years, "screens have no recognized positive effect." The role of interactive play with screens remains to be discussed.

Between 2 and 12 years of age, "passive and prolonged exposure of children to television without an interactive and instructive human presence is not advisable." Use of screens for play or teaching is possible and potentially beneficial. Parents, teachers, and other educators must encourage the preservation of long time periods without screen use.

Beyond 12 years of age, screen use takes place more in the context of games and participation in social networks. The positive contribution of screen use is self-evident, but the risks of isolation, reduced physical activity, obesity, and loss of inhibitions against violence, accompanied by excessive consumption of inappropriate content, must be taken into account. These "cultural and cognitive upheavals" are real and have both negative and positive effects. This very pertinent and complete report encourages doctors to take their place beside parents: "General practitioners and pediatricians can play an important role in preventing the ill effects of screen use. They can convince parents not to give children under 3 years of age access to digital screens. In the case of older children, they can invite parents to build a video library at home that will replace poor-quality programming and also enable their children to escape the influence of advertising, the impact of which is a form of violence imposed on young children, who are incapable of discerning its real intent. Within the family, a dialogue must be established between parents and children regarding any images that the children may find disturbing" [1].

2.2. American Academy of Pediatrics 2016

In November 2016, AAP updated its recommendations for parents of children younger than 5 years of age, pediatricians, and developers of digital products for children [2], thus rounding out its existing recommendations for school age children and adolescents [3]. Its first recommendations were issued in 1999, at a time when the dominant screen media type was television (no screen time before 2 years of age). Experts reminded readers that the rules for preschool children should stay the same as for any activity, digital or otherwise, and should apply both in the virtual and real environments. The report exhaustively analyzes the 49 most recent publications on the relationship between the screen and the young child. The consequences of screen misuse on child health are analyzed and discussed, mainly addressing effects on body mass index, sleep, and neurological development. "hat" the rules for

preschool children should stay the same as for anords through a video chat exchange with an attentive adult, or through a touch screen and an interactive application that encourages the child to choose a response. In a laboratory setting, 15-month-olds also seem to acquire new words, but have more difficulty applying this new knowledge in "real life". The applications used in these experiments were designed for research and are not commercially available. In summary, for children less than 2 years old, proof of the benefits of digital media is insufficient and interaction with an adult during use of crucial importance. On the other hand, clear evidence of the negative effects of excessive use is convergent.

The AAP recommends that pediatricians take an interest in screen use in the family, suggest the development of a "family media plan", and inform parents about the negative effects of screen use on young children when it replaces stimulation from and interaction with family and society. The determination of age limits remains a complex and controversial topic and evolved between 1999 and 2016. It has become apparent that interactive screens can be used with adapted programs recommended by pediatricians.

The AAP insists that parents should not feel pressured to introduce screens early. Digital screen use should be discouraged before 18 months except for video chat (such as Skype or FaceTime). The report reminds us that children less than 2 years old need to engage in manual exploration and social interaction with trusted adults to develop their cognitive, language, motor, and socioemotional skills. Between 2 and 5 years of age, screen use should be limited to less than 1 h per day, emphasize educational programming, and always take place with an adult who can help children understand what they see. Screen use should be banned during meals or within 1 h of bedtime, both for parents and children: "Keep bedrooms, mealtimes and parent-child playtimes free."

Finally, the AAP encourages video content developers to work with educators, psychologists, and child development specialists to develop programming. The AAP recommends that programming for children younger than 18 months be discontinued and denounces advertising campaigns aimed at infants and young children.

2.3. The 2015 CSA (Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiovisuel; Higher Audiovisual Technology Council) audiovisual awareness campaigns for the protection of young people

The protection of children and adolescents from audiovisual programming that may impair their physical, mental, and moral development is one of the essential missions assigned by law to the CSA. The violence, eroticism, and pornography in certain programs, as well as the pressure of advertising, are a constant concern of the Council in this context. Far from suggesting any form of censorship, the Council wants to make the protection of young people a shared responsibility among television and radio media, parents, and regulatory agencies.

Every year, the Council organizes two awareness campaigns on the topic of protection of young people: one to make the public aware of child and youth protection devices on televisions ("youth content management initiative") and the second focusing on the protection of children younger than 3 years of age. Three key messages are directed by the CSA towards children: "Watch programs appropriate for your age," "Talk with your parents about what you are watching," and "Do not spend all your time viewing a screen." Six messages are addressed to parents: "No screen time before 3 years of age," "Only children's programming before 8 years of age," "Limit screen time," "Respect content guidelines," "Television is better when you talk about it," and "Become an active parent and media viewer" to protect children [4]. These messages are broadcast on CSA channels as regular spots.

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