

How many screens is your child watching? by Michael Grose

Childhood today is an indoor activity. A recent Newspoll survey found that children under 10 spend less than ten per cent of their free time playing outdoors. The older children become the less vigorous activity they engage in. The average time for 5-6 year old children involved in vigorous activity is 4.3 hours. By the time children reach the 10-12 year age group this figure has halved to 2.2 hours. Most of children's physical activities are performed at school.

The biggest factor affecting children's play habits is the revolution in sedentary entertainment options- television, computers and video games. Most of the research available about kids and screens focuses on television viewing, and that is inconclusive. Many children when they leave the TV use a computer or play a video game so they simply replace one screen with another rather than engage in physical activity.

Here are some ideas to help ensure children spend more time involved in active pursuits away from electronic screens:

... Set time limits on the use of television, computers and video-games. One Australian study revealed that 40 per cent of parents in homes with televisions have no time limits or rules for TV viewing and just fewer

than 50 per cent of families eat their evening meal in front of the TV.

... Keep televisions, computers and video-games in public places so that you can monitor their use.

... Have screen-free time. Either once a week or have some time each day when all screens are off, unless they are needed for educational purposes.

... Ensure a range of alternative play options are available that suit the interests of each child.

... Actively encourage each child to participate in at least one weekly creative, community-based or sporting activity.

How children spend their time influences their personal and social development as well as their physical well-being. Some children need little guidance regarding their use of free time, while others benefit from parents' encouragement to try healthier alternatives to the range of electronic screens that compete for their attention. *OK*

Michael Grose is a leading parent educator, a trained teacher and author. For further ideas about raising confident kids and resilient teenagers visit www.parentingideas.com.au

Helping children through separation and divorce by Michael Grose

Children experience a range of emotions following their parents' separation and divorce including: anger, shock, sadness and anxiety.

The way parents communicate to children during and following the separation can make a difference to how they cope. Children often blame themselves for the relationship breakdown of their parents so let them know that the separation is not their fault and they have done nothing to cause the it.

Many difficulties can be avoided or minimised if parents adopt a business-like approach to parenting and keep **parenting arrangements** separate from relationship issues, legal issues and financial arrangements.

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Our Kids

'Helping kids through separation and divorce ' continued

The following ground rules are useful to help you maintain a successful business-relationship around parenting after separation and divorce:

- a. Avoid putting the other parent down in front of children as their identity is often strongly linked to their parents.
- b. Avoid conflict during hand-over times. If you can't avoid arguing, arrange a pick-up at a neutral place.
- c. Never ask children to take sides or choose one parent over another. This leads to confusion and feelings of disloyalty.
- d. Be considerate of the other parent when you contact them. Often the conflict is exacerbated by a breakdown of basic common courtesy between couples.
- e. Avoid mixing relationship issues with parenting issues when talking to the other parent about children. Choose another time to discuss personal issues with your ex-partner.

Adopting a business-like approach to parenting takes enormous good will on both sides, which is often difficult to garner. However research is overwhelming that outcomes are always better for children when both partners can act in the best of interests of children and keep personal relationship issues aside. *OK*

Michael Grose is a leading parent educator, a trained teacher and author. For further ideas about getting your family flying in the same formation visit www.parentingideas.com.au

What you should know about.....Organisational skills by Michael Grose

The ability to organise space, time and possessions is an important but often underestimated success skill.

Some children are naturally well-organised. 'A place for everything and everything in its place' is their mantra even from a young age. These neatniks can be a little compulsive but order and personal organization lead to greater personal effectiveness and efficiency.

Many children need assistance with organisation, particularly boys. It just doesn't come naturally. Give them a complex project and they flounder as they can't naturally break it into neat chunks and manageable pieces. Give them a number of tasks to do and they will leave one out. Ask them to arrange a series of files and they will struggle unless you create a system to follow. Organisational skills can be learned. Processes and procedures once practised can be part of a set of personal skills that stay for life.

There are four categories of personal organisation skills. By understanding each category you can work out your own ways of developing children's organisational skills:

1. **Chunking:** Breaking complex tasks into small, manageable steps. For instance, week-long school projects can be broken down into a series of smaller tasks that can be completed daily.
2. **Goal-setting:** Helping children set small and large goals is one tangible way of increasing their effectiveness. E.G "I want to learn to spell 20 new words from my list by Friday." "I want to save \$15 this month from my pocket-money."
3. **Making plans:** Working out steps required to help achieve goals and objectives requires children to look ahead. "I will learn five words a night. I'll get mum to hear me each night." "I'll put \$4 aside each week. I've got to buy my brother a birthday present. Now that will be difficult but if I..."
4. **Managing time:** Time planning tools such as lists and diaries can help children keep schedules, hand work in on time and help prevent children overestimating what they can achieve.

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