ACADEMY OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Critical Thinking Student Artifact

Tween Smartphone Usage

Technology can be so useful to everyone, including children and teens. Tweens are the kids that are 10, 11 and 12 years of age. There is a lot of physical and emotional development going on for this age group. While there are many advantages and learning opportunities to tweens using smart phones, there are some significant negative effects that should be considered as well.

I question the motive by the parents who allow their children to have smart phones at such young ages. "Smart phones are now in the hands of over 80 per cent of secondary school age children" (Stanford). Is it an easy way for a parent to provide a means of entertainment for the child to keep them busy so parents can tend to other duties? There are countless gaming apps that kids love to play and can enjoy for hours. Or is it for practical purposes of providing a means of communication between parent and child for such things as after school activities, etc.? Whether young children are given smart phones for practical purposes or for entertainment, activity and usage should be monitored at all times.

Children do not have the capacity to anticipate the consequences of their actions. The American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry states that, "the frontal cortex, the area of the brain that controls reasoning and helps us think before we act, develops later. This part of the brain is developing well into adulthood" (Collins). This explains why adolescent age children tend to act without thinking and may find themselves in situations that could be dangerous. This does not mean that children do not know right from wrong, it means that they need guidance from their parents and teachers.

Many parents who have been busy raising a family have not heard of all the apps out there that kids are downloading like Yik Yak, KiK Messenger and Whisper to name a few. We all are likely very familiar with the more popular social media apps like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat. Some of these newer apps require the user to provide personal information along with a physical location during the registration process. This can present a very dangerous scenario for tweens as it has the potential to expose them to predators.

I have heard of parents giving their 9 year old an iPod which works much like an iPhone without the capability to make phone calls. The child was allowed to download a few iTunes and play a few kids games. The child was told that she could not have Facebook till she was older. However, the parents did not secure apps from being downloaded from the app store. Pretty soon the child had an app to make phone calls from her iPod and she had Snapchat, she even had Instagram. After all, it wasn't Facebook, so in the child's mind she had not broken any rules. Pretty soon there were over 3000 snaps sent and many pucker faced selfies uploaded. She was online friends with over 300 people and over half of them she didn't even know. This is the start of what can happen when children have unsupervised access to smartphones or devices that use internet
apps.

Another area of concern is that these devices are extremely addicting. Gaming apps are constantly sending notifications to the user to log in to gain points. Friends are updating statutes and snapping new selfies and videos. A person can spend hours using a device before they realize how much time has passed. Overuse can cause the user to experience text neck. "Text neck most commonly causes neck pain and soreness. In 5addition, looking down at your cell phone too much each day can lead to:

- Upper back pain ranging from a chronic, nagging pain to sharp, severe upper back muscle spasms.
- Shoulder pain and tightness, possibly resulting in painful shoulder muscle spasm.
- If a cervical nerve becomes pinched, pain and possibly neurological symptoms can radiate down your arm and into your hand" (Shoshany).

Remember that earlier we said that 80 percent of secondary school age kids have a smart phone. "A recent study shows that 79% of the population between the ages 18 and 44 have their cell phones with them almost all the time—with only 2 hours of their waking day spent without their cell phone on hand" (Shoshany). I don't believe that we should start children on this trend until they are in their later teen years. The physical effect of children looking down at their smart phones for hours each day will be significant causing problems with neck, arm, wrist and hand pain. Children beginning this usage at such young ages can cause damaging physical impairments that will last their lifetime.

There are reports that radiation exposure from cell phones can be harmful to children. There are also studies being done to determine if there are any cancer causing effects from the radiation emitted from electronic devices. The amount of radiation emitted is minimal and considered safe for most people. However, because of their thin developing skull is it thought that babies and young kids absorb a lot more radiation than adults. It can penetrate their brain tissue because it contains a higher concentration of fluids and ions. The article goes on to state that "a phone call only lasting two minutes causes brain hyperactivity that persists for an hour in children" (Parenting). Many devices emit radiation including baby monitors, which I found surprising.

Kids that watch a lot of television tend to be obese due to in activity obviously, but also because of the marketing of junk food in TV ads. Inactivity is not healthy for the body at any age. Without an active lifestyle, kids are not building muscle, they are not further developing their gross motor skills that they'll use playing sports. They are also missing out on the social skills they will learn while playing with other kids.

Giving kids unlimited use of a smartphone sets them up to be the potential victims of cyber bullying. This is real and it most often happens within anonymous apps used such as Yik Yak.

While supervising a child's smartphone usage seems overwhelming and almost impossible there are some great ideas out there and some apps that assist parents with this task. One mom stated that she has the password for her daughter's Instagram

account and is logged into it on her own device at all times. She can see everything that happens in her daughter's Instagram app. The rule that mother and daughter have with each other is that mom cannot post or let her friends know that she is logged into her daughter's account. There are also many apps that work with iPhone or Android devices to monitor usage and have control settings. One app that works with iPhone, iPad and iPod is called Parent Kit. This app allows the parent to set usage controls, time limits and provides remote access to the child's device. There are many other apps that are similar and different in ways to meet the needs of the user. There is even a No Text and Drive app for older teens.

It takes a bit of planning and a bit of work to monitor the use of a child's smart phone device. This is time well spent to assist children in making good online decisions while providing them with the use of technology to enjoy and learn from in a healthy and safe manner. A healthy balance and moderation is essential in all aspects of life and certainly with smartphone usage.

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