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Digital Parenting and the 'Screen Time Myth'

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How does one become a parent? Sociologically, not biologically. How do parents get to be parents? Parenting is one of the most difficult and vital jobs in the world, but it is sometimes overlooked. It is frequently seen as a natural ability.

That once a person has a child, he or she naturally knows how to

parent. However, experience and everyday observations tell us that parenting is a never-ending challenge. There is no fixed set of abilities or beliefs that will really equip a parent to face the changes and challenges that a child can bring.

As a result, parents' parenting views and practices are typically based on assumptions, traditions, and lived experiences. Social and cultural pressures influence how parents determine what is best for their children.

While there are parenting courses and programmes available, there is never an organised curriculum that tells parents how to respond to certain situations. This is, however, fair. Parenting is a lived experience that is both dynamic and contextual, and it should never be reduced to a set of toolkits. There is no one-size-fits-all parenting technique.

Digital Natives vs. Digital Immigrants

Often, parents use their own childhood as a model. Their parents are the best teachers they could have. They frequently embrace the same ideals they had as children and frequently recall their past when confronted with parenting challenges. While this is normal and understandable, looking to the past alone is no longer sufficient when it comes to parenting in the digital age.

When parents compare their childhood to that of their children, they often find themselves unable to relate to the world in which their children are growing up. Children today are born into a world where digital technology drives everyday life. They are referred to as digital natives. They are inextricably linked to the internet and digital technologies. They would probably be able to swipe before they could walk or talk.

Their parents, on the other hand, are digital immigrants who grew up in a world before the internet and must now adapt to new technology that can be perplexing. As immigrants, parents nowadays frequently reminisce about their childhood, when they were free to play and explore without the use of gadgets and devices. They want their children to have the same experience

and value what they perceive to be a better world. Yet, they recognise that the future is digital, and that is the world for which parents must prepare their children.

Screen Time Myth

Parents become confused at the crossroads between what they consider as a better past and a frightening future. The plethora of digital risks and concerns that are frequently highlighted, such as cyberbullying, mental health, obesity, and many others, adds to parents' digital anxiety. As a result, parents in particular, and society in general, frequently blame technology and the amount of time their children spend in front of a screen for everything that is wrong with the world.

The only way for parents to protect their children from these threats is to limit their children's screen usage. Screen time is frequently utilised as a control mechanism. When the children misbehave, their screen time is reduced or taken away. While this may appear to be a standard action-consequences method to parenting, it essentially informs children that screen time is so vital and powerful that they must protect and defend it from their parents.

This is why, whenever screen time is cut short, children tend to retaliate, which just adds to the conflict in family life, where parents are frequently left angry, and children are left frustrated. This negative perception of screen time must be reconsidered.

Parents must recognise that, while digital technologies affect their children, other changes affect them as well. Major shifts affecting children's lives include new family patterns, a changing labour market, globalisation, climate change, and urbanisation. It would be unfair to blame screen time alone if a child becomes inactive, gains weight, and is socially inept. Parents should consider the food that their children are now eating as well as the lack of emphasis on physical activity at home.

Similarly, mental health issues are significant today, but that does not mean that they did not exist prior to the advent of digital

technologies. Furthermore, if today's children are more vulnerable to mental and emotional problems, additional contributing factors such as academic expectations, materialism, and spiritual disconnection must be identified and addressed.

According to studies, children who have troubles at home are more likely to have difficulties online. This means that there are more underlying challenges that shape children's life. The problem in holding digital technologies liable for everything that is wrong with today's children is that parents may end up jeopardising the tremendous opportunities that come with the digital world. Therefore, it is past time for parents to dispel the myth of screen time.

Balancing Risk and Opportunities

Parents should instead consider their children's interactions with digital devices in terms of risks and opportunities. Parents must accept that to take advantage of the potential provided by the internet, they must tackle the risks. Unfortunately, in most cases, a low-risk environment also indicates a low-opportunity condition. Similarly, high-risk ventures frequently result in high opportunities. It is this logic that should drive how parents moderate their children's' digital use.

The optimal approach for parents is to instil a balance of risks and opportunities. Instead of continually monitoring their children's digital use, parents should mentor them. This brings us back to the basics of parenting, where actions of encouragement, guidance, dialogues, and empathy can aid in the development of wise and confident children.

Most essential, parents must offer a set of shared values that are articulated and negotiated with their children in order for the children to be grounded in these values in their daily lives, whether online or offline. Furthermore, parents must realise that they, too, are learning how to live with technology, and as such, it is best to make it a shared learning experience, with parents learning from their children at times.

Digitally Resilient Children

Letting go of the screen time myth does not imply an overly liberal attitude to parenting; rather, it promotes a more realistic and sustainable approach to dealing with a rapidly changing world. Children cannot be constantly monitored or safeguarded, which is why we must train them to be digitally resilient. That is, they can independently balance risk and opportunity.

Resilience can only be developed when confronted with problems and adversities. Similarly, children can be raised to be digitally resilient if they are allowed to make mistakes, take risks, and face challenges while maintaining a positive perspective. Children who are encouraged to take risks are most often the ones who reap the best opportunities. Thus, children must be permitted to fully explore their digital experience in a future where the digitally proficient will have an advantage.

The best way to allow this safely is to convince the children that they will always have parents who are willing to join them into the digital future. And, if they make a mistake or encounter difficulties along the way, they can rely on their parents to help them get back up and support their digital endeavours. ***

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Guest Submission
