

10 Talking Points for Media Mentors

These talking points were developed in December of 2015 by the Indianhead Federated Library System, as a result of a year-long Library Services and Technology Act grant project, funded by the Institute for Museum and Library Services. These talking points are merely one distillation of a myriad of facts and important considerations. They are designed to be used with or without the accompanying Power Point and caregiver handout. For questions or more information, please contact Leah Langby (langby@ifls.lib.wi.us) NOTE: updated 1/4/2019.

1. Media is not inherently good or bad, but POWERFUL.

- According to the [Common Sense Media in 2017](#), children under 8 spend 2.25 hours per day with screen media. The proportion of this time spent on mobile devices has grown significantly since 2013.
- As Dr. David Walsh says, “Whoever tells the stories defines the culture.”
- Remember to consider, as Lisa Guernsey suggests:
 - **Content:** Violence, commercial and social messages are powerful. [Barney vs. Power Rangers](#). Also—quality matters, developmentally appropriate content is more beneficial.
 - **Context:** What else is going on in the family? What else is going on in the child’s life? What is the family media ecology (who spends what time with media, and what kind of media)? Co-viewing and enjoying media together is important.
 - **Child:** Each individual child will have different needs, interests, and tolerance.

2. Relationships are the most important thing.

- Young children are working at hard at developing their executive function. They learn best from interactions with other people, and having trusted relationships with caring adults foster their social, emotional, and brain development.
- Use of media doesn’t have to get in the way of relationships, if media is used intentionally.
- If children are spending time Skyping or Facetiming with far-away loved ones, don’t limit this!

3. Reading, viewing and interacting together is important no matter what the tool is.

- There is ample evidence that co-viewing-- watching something on television WITH an adult-- allows for more opportunities for conversation, which is one of the most important things for young children to develop language skills and more.
- Dialogic reading (talking and listening, asking questions about the story while reading) is also an important activity for young children to get the most out of books. Some research indicates that when families read e-books together, there is less back-and-forth talk and more directional talk ("Push that button. No, don't shake it!"). This has resulted in less benefit from reading for the child. E-books are great, just make sure you continue to talk about the story and content, rather than get focused on the medium.
- It's important to look for children's media that YOU like. If it has an annoying song or voice that drives you crazy, you are less likely to want to spend time WITH your child using, reading it, or viewing it. Especially since young children really thrive on repetition!
- Serve and Return—short video (less than 2 minutes) from Harvard about the importance of serve and return for brain development:
<http://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/serve-return-interaction-shapes-brain-circuitry/>
- Make media PART of the whole—watch some cute dog videos online, but then also make animal noises together, visit a friendly dog, check out books from the library about dogs

3. Use media intentionally yourself

- Children are looking to the adults in their lives as role models. What you do matters!
- Also—don't be afraid to talk about this with others who will be caring for your children. Playdates, babysitters, childcare providers, etc.
- According to a study by AVG, 54% of children feel parents check their devices too often.

4. Limit background television

- Even if it doesn't seem like they are paying attention, studies have shown that kids who are playing or talking in a room that has a television on have a harder time sustaining continuous play. They have less continuous periods of time during which they are playing. (*Child Development*, Jul/Aug2008, Vol. 79 Issue 4, p1137-1151).

- In addition, having background television on means that adults are interacting less with children, with less conversation and play: <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/128/5/1040.full>

5. All media are not created equal

- Seek out apps and television that are developmentally appropriate, interactive, nonviolent, and not too competitive for very young children
- Joan Ganz Cooney Center suggest finding apps that:
 - Allow your child to learn and grow (builds on their interests, engages them in creative play, and provides age-appropriate content)
 - Encourage communication (providing opportunities to talk about the activity, ways to create or play together, or connecting distant loved-ones)
 - Connect different experiences (bridging activities between daycare and home; preparing kids for new experiences, like a trip to the barber; helping to make stressful situations more fun)

6. Play is children’s work, so look for apps that include chances to play, explore, and creatively interact.

- There is ample evidence that open-ended play helps children develop physical, social, and cognitive abilities, develop problem-solving skills, creativity, and vocabulary.
- Children benefit from both unstructured and structured play, and it is important to view every interaction and experience as an opportunity for learning
- Article by Erin Walsh on the topic (with additional links): <http://drdavewalsh.com/posts/ask/191>
- Don’t choose apps that are simply electronic flash cards. Instead, look for ones that will allow kids to explore.
- Ask not “what is coming out of the iPad”, but ask “what is going into it?” Lisa Guernsey
- Quick guidelines for choosing apps: <http://iflweb.org/sites/default/files/MediaMentorEWEffectiveMedia.pdf>
- Some suggestions for specific apps to try:
 - Toca Boca (examples: Toca Nature; Toca Pet Doctor; Toca Tailor)
 - Sago Mini (examples: Doodlecast—draw and record a story; Sound Box)
 - Keezy (free app that allows you to record sounds and play with them)
 - Dip Dap (drawing app)
 - Think Rolls by Avokiddo (Maze with problem-solving at different levels. Low pressure)

7. Keep bedtimes and bedrooms screen-free

- The most recent recommendations of the American Academy of Pediatrics suggest creating tech-free zones in your house (bedrooms) and times in your day (mealtimes or bedtimes, for instance).
- Evidence shows that when people spend time with screens before bed, it interferes with sleep. 2015 study in Pediatrics indicates that large or small screens in bedrooms affect children's sleep quality and quantity. Sleep researcher Dr. Sandra Loughran points to three causes:
 - **Timing:** The use of electronic media can lead to delays in bedtimes, resulting in less sleep (or distractions once children are in bed but still have a screen nearby).
 - **Content:** Engaging the brain with exciting or provocative information before bed may trigger emotional and hormonal responses that can reduce the ability to fall and stay asleep.
 - **Light emissions:** Light from electronic devices can disrupt the body's natural occurring circadian rhythm, increasing alertness and suppressing the release of melatonin. <https://www.kidsmatter.edu.au/families/enewsletter/screen-time-and-sleep>

8. Set clear boundaries and limits

- Use screen time as good practice for developing turn-taking and self-control
- Decide together ahead of time what you will do when you turn off the device
- Sometimes, handing your smart phone to your young child to keep them entertained in a stressful or boring situation is a great idea. But remember that just like anything else, you can be in charge of this—you may have to deal with some tantrums or frustration, but it is important for children to be able to develop skills to entertain themselves without screens, too. AAP cautions not to use technology as an emotional pacifier—children need to learn how to handle strong emotions without technology.

9. Whatever the brain does a lot of, the brain gets good at (Dr. David Walsh)

- Think about what habits and skills children need to develop in order to be successful later in life. Children need plenty of chances to engage in free play and build strong relationships with adults and other children in order to develop skills and traits that they will need later: cooperation, creativity, self-confidence, discipline, etc.
- Short video from Harvard about the development of executive functioning, and how important it is to life-long success:
<http://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/inbrief-executive-function-skills-for-life-and-learning/>

- Shorter video from Harvard about the importance of experiences in developing children's brains: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VNNsNgJJkws>
- **7 essential life skills (Ellen Galinsky, *Mind in the Making*):**
 - Focus and self-control
 - Perspective-taking
 - Communicating
 - Making connections
 - Critical thinking
 - Taking on challenges
 - Self-directed, engaged learning

Think about how to use technology as a TOOL to develop these skills.

Short list of resources:

[Common Sense Media](#)

[Mind Positive Parenting](#)

[Harvard Center for the Developing Child](#)

[Zero to Three](#)