

Parents' Fears About Screen Usage

Parents and children watch the same screens but have different reactions.

By Michael A. Kashmer / *Digital Broadband Programming Consultant*

At any given time, parents and children can be watching the same video screen. Parents have an eye out for anything that looks harmful to their children, and kids are looking for something to entertain them and shows they can learn from.

There are so many kid videos on TV and the internet. How many of these videos effectively appeal to a younger audience busy with after-school activities, homework, family time, entertainment and hanging out? How could school kids be aware of all of these programs, let alone catch an actual broadcast?

For adults, fear of strangers is far more dangerous than strangers themselves. Humans are conditioned to be intensely protective of their children. Communities do not condone any questioning of dangers and safeguards.

After visiting CE Week in New York this spring, I reported that many devices were geared to childhood safety.

None of the exhibitors showed off infant car seats or interactive toys. Their focus was all about monitoring children from their first steps out the front door until they were back home, safe and sound. Invasion of privacy is an issue that I will address in a future column.

Every device I saw at CE Week was built around parents' knowing where their children were at all times when they were away from home. There was no allowance for spontaneous hanging out with pals in school after class – or trips to the town library to hang out under the watchful eye of library staff.

FAKE VIDEOS IGNITE PANIC

Public service announcements aim to show parents how to watch their young children more closely. A clever edit job can result in a very different final cut. Leaving out key visuals and adding a menacing male voice and scary background music make the video frightening.

The reason for this is part of our 2018 culture. Being fearful of anyone or anything “different” seems, right now, to be just fine. It's one of the hallmarks of a closed, hostile society. Readers may or may not agree that 24/7 child monitoring is simply a bad idea and impacts the historical tradition of inclusiveness.

When the video is shared via social media, it takes on additional validity and authority. A video sent by a friend is easier to pass on.

Lenore Skenazy in *The New York Times* reports on American-style stranger-danger fears. Several YouTube videos show how easy it is to snatch a child off the street.

One video states that 700 children are kidnapped every day. Skenazy quickly debunks this attempt to stoke fear. In fact, in all of 2011, 105 children in the United States were taken in crimes similar to those dramatized on programs such as “*Law & Order*” and other detective TV series.

Suppose you are generally pleased with the way your child handles his Facebook account. Out of the blue comes an urgent request from your child to stop using Facebook and to start using Snapchat. Why, you ask? “None of my friends use Facebook anymore. Everybody is using Snapchat, which is way cool.”

A platform that works at the start of high school may not make it all the way to graduation. The social media landscape continues to evolve, and teens especially are keen to recognize the next big social media thing.

Disturbing and threatening video will follow viewers to their new sites until the company managing the site recognizes and deletes the offensive material.

But let's not forget that the technology opportunities youngsters find useful today will also follow them into adulthood. There are new and improved learning experiences, such as blockchain-type platforms that adapt along with users. Here's another one: My 8-year-old nephew had to read a book over the summer and be ready to discuss it with the class in the fall. Yesterday, he learned that the author would Skype with the class, discuss her experience writing the book and listen to the children's reactions to it.

A wonderful experience all around. If we put our minds to it, we can come up with new and exciting ways to learn and grow. ❖

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