Counsellor's Corner: Screen Time and our Children

Over the course of childhood, children spend more time watching TV than they spend in school.

As an Elementary School Counsellor, a central component of my job is to help students who struggle with behavior that is conducive to learning and friendship. Often for these students being able to focus is difficult and this stress often leads to emotional outbursts of frustration or dysregulation. Part of my work is to teach children about their emotions and how to regulate their emotions before 'erupting'.

The interesting thing about self-regulating or identifying and then managing their emotions, is that when children go on an "electronic fast" (removal of all electronics) these are the skills that seem to return to the children naturally when they stop having screen time.

Children are spending more time than ever in front of screens, and it may be inhibiting their ability to recognize their own and others' emotions.

When children are babies, they're learning about human interaction with time spent face-to- and with speaking to parents and having things they say modelled back to them, that need doesn't go away.

The average 8- to 10-year-old spends nearly eight hours a day with a variety of different media. Technology is a poor substitute for personal interaction.

<u>Older children and teenagers should spend no more than one or two hours a day</u> with entertainment media, preferably with high-quality content, and spend more free time playing outdoors, reading, doing hobbies and using their imaginations in free play.

Children need time to daydream, deal with anxieties, process their thoughts and share them with parents, who can provide reassurance.

Children who are heavy users of electronics may become adept at multitasking, but they can lose the ability to focus on what is most important.

TV has long been a babysitter and now the screens have joined in making it easier to get quiet time in the house. In the end, these excuses work in the short term, but may not enable effective learning and socialization in the long term.

No matter how convenient, educational, or mood-enhancing computers and other devices may be, experts agree that although screen time isn't bad in and of itself, there needs to be a limit. <u>Setting boundaries</u> early on will give our children more freedom later in life, and it will also help parents and educators become a little more creative in the meantime.

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