



## MEDIA, INTERNET ACCESS, SOCIAL NETWORKING & CYBERSAFETY

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## INTRODUCTION

There is an increasing amount of evidence from various bodies that the passivity inherent in watching television and using other electronic media is counterproductive to learning and healthy development in the young child. In choosing a Steiner school education parents are choosing a philosophy that advises against the use of television and other electronic media in their junior years.

Kindergarten and Class teachers cannot stress enough that without exposure to these media, children benefit greatly both in the short and long term. In the classroom children not exposed to media tend to exhibit a wholesome interest in their work, show considerable will to engage in all activities and most importantly of all, retain that most vital power of childhood.

The educational ramifications are enormous and pronounced: regained childhood, improved ability to concentrate at will, to participate in lessons, creative imagination, penetrative thinking and improve sociability.

St Paul's Steiner School has a firm policy on the use of electronic devices at school and clear guidelines for parents in controlling media access in the early years but it has become clear in recent years that the management of media and technology at home can be a difficult issue for parents of pre-teen children.

In Class V/VI children will often begin to socialise more independently and want to stay in contact with one another – particularly in holiday periods. It may be a time when children are introduced to text messaging, Facebook, email and chat rooms by older siblings and/or friends. This is the reality of the world we live in but as parents we should be aware of some of the potential problems that these technologies can bring.

In Class VII/VIII electronic social networking tends to become even more central to the social dynamic of the class. Parents of Class VII/VIII children will experience significant pressure from their child not to 'isolate them' from their social group by controlling computer access. Children of this age group will be tempted to use Facebook to organise their social life. This comes with its own set of problems and issues.

Some devices such as iPod Touch/ iPhones and game playing devices like Nintendos are particularly insidious: primarily designed for a specific purpose – storing and accessing music/ making phone calls/ playing games – these devices have cameras and/or screens and can provide easy access to the internet via Wi-Fi etc. While many families have good filters on home computers to protect children from inappropriate content this protection is not always carried over to other devices. Phones and iPods may have some filtering available but parents must ensure they actively set up filtering on each device provided to a child.

## **KEY MEDIA & TECHNOLOGY MANAGEMENT ISSUES FOR PARENTS**

The main technology related issues of concern facing parents of pre-teen and early teenage children are as follows:

- Access to inappropriate and confronting content online and via media – and capacity to send this content on to others;
- Access to networking sites which may allow opportunities for inappropriate relationships to form between the child and unknown adults or older children. Potential for harmful and abusive situations such as ‘grooming’ and ‘sexting’;
- Capacity for children to become involved with Cyber bullying – either as a victim or a perpetrator.

### **INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT**

The motivations for accessing inappropriate material online can be very innocent at age 11/12 but the consequences can be significant and harmful. Typing ‘rude words’ into a search engine (in the same way that previous generations looked them up in a dictionary or an encyclopedia!), can instantly bring confronting, graphic images to the innocent child. Older children (13/14) may also access inappropriate material with more sophisticated searching and may be tempted to download or print out images.

Remember that once images are downloaded to a phone, for example, they can be easily forwarded to others.

Internet filters can deal with this issue up to a point – but must be consistently applied to all devices. Supervision of computer/technology use is also critical and computers etc. should be located in a shared or visible place in the home.

Parents should also check in with one another when organising visits, sleepovers etc. to establish the access and supervision rules that are in place in other households.

### **SOCIAL NETWORKING PITFALLS**

On many social networking sites, such as Facebook and MySpace, there are clearly opportunities for people to misrepresent who they really are. A sexual predator can easily establish a false identity via these technologies to gain the trust of a targeted child.

Even if your child does not have a bad experience of this type, Facebook will connect them with many ‘friends’ of all ages. Children may befriend older children they know of from school or elsewhere and therefore be exposed to online chat, posts and images that are not age appropriate for them. In order to participate they may be tempted to post images of themselves that are overly sophisticated and open to misinterpretation by others.

Be aware that social networking sites are also available via iPhones and other more sophisticated phones and some iPods (iPod Touch for example).

Unfortunately is very difficult for parents of Class V / VI children to successfully prohibit all access to social networking sites. Children under 13 years of age are supposedly unable to register for Facebook – but this is completely unenforceable. If your children do not access social networking sites from home they will be very likely to do so from friend or relatives computers elsewhere.

It is therefore wise to speak with your children about social networking and lay down some ground rules to help to safeguard them. Particularly talk to your child about personal information and why it is vital to protect it. This sort of information can be used to identify or locate where they live, go to school or activities in which they are involved. Actively discourage them from communicating online with people they do not know and ensure they come to you if they have any encounters online that they are uncomfortable about.

### **SOCIAL NETWORKING DO'S AND DON'TS**

These are the recommendations of the CEOP Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre on this issue:

Instruct your child:

- a) **To never arrange a face-to-face meeting with someone they meet online**
- b) To never upload (post) pictures of themselves onto the Internet
- c) To never give out identifying information such as their name, home address, school name, or telephone number
- d) To never download pictures from an unknown source, as there is a good chance there could be sexually explicit images
- e) To never respond to messages or chats that are suggestive, obscene, belligerent, or harassing
- f) That whatever they are told online may or may not be true.

Other Issues to discuss with your child:

- Personal responsibility while on-line. Consider talking openly with your child about your suspicions. Tell them about computer sex offenders.
- Privacy concerns on the Internet. What private information is OK to share and what is not?
- Urban Legends and Tales. Just because information is on the computer screen, it doesn't mean it's true. Do not believe everything someone tells you via the Internet.
- Use of Common Sense. While we don't know the motives of everyone on the Internet, children need to keep some facts and tips in mind while on-line.
- Virus checks. Always check for viruses when downloading from the Internet or using software from a friend. Viruses can cause serious damage to your computer and take you off-line.

## **Settings**

Check the settings on your social networking page, change it so only those you know and trust can see anything about you. Check it regularly as the settings may be changed by the Host site. Be aware that even though your settings may be secure, your friends' settings may not be the same which can leave you vulnerable.

## **Profile**

Review the profile you have placed on line, how much does it reveal about you. Are you happy for everyone to know all this about you?

## **Details**

Don't put your photo, contact details or your current school on your profile. If you need to, give these details out to people you know and trust. What you place on the internet is no longer private and is no longer under your control. Others may use it for any purpose they wish.

## **SOCIAL NETWORKING – PARTIES**

- Never use Social Networking sites like Facebook to send out party invitations.
- You child may have safe settings but you do not have any control over the settings of recipients – or over how many times the invitation gets sent on.
- Your name and address, phone number, school, child's age group etc. could become public knowledge overnight.
- Equally if the party is in a public place this could become an open invitation to uninvited guests.
- You and your child also need to be aware that predators use social networking sites to single out targets for their attention.

## **MEDIA**

Children in the pre-teen bracket (8 yrs. and beyond) are likely to be affected by the context and the consequence of what they view. This is largely because children of this age are able to relate to and identify with what they are viewing and with this familiarity and understanding, they are more likely to fear that it could happen to them or take on the feelings that are being expressed (such as anger, sadness, etc. without really knowing why).

This is particularly true for news-based viewing.

However, the issue for children in these later stages of childhood into adolescence becomes much bigger than the various thinking elements described above. As children become older, they are more likely to be exposed to movies and games containing an increasing level of violence on an on-going basis. Violence is defined as the intent to physically harm an "animate being" (including animated 'non-humans'). As a result there are 3 effects noted by researchers: fear, desensitization to violence, and aggression. These effects have been known for over 50 years (since the inception of TV) but now they have become even more noteworthy as researchers make use of MRI brain scans in their investigations. Researchers have found that when we view violent images these are: stored as trauma memories which can continually "bubble up" and replay; they can generate fight or flight responses physiologically & over time this can become dampened down so that the viewer is no

longer “shocked” by what they are watching; and finally, it can even trigger acting out of aggressive behaviour - basically this says it can change your thoughts.

### **MMORPG's**

Massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPG) are a genre of role-playing video games in which a potentially very large number of players interact with one another within a virtual game world.

As in all RPGs players assume the role of a character (often in a fantasy world) and take control over many of that character's actions.

MMORPGs are distinguished from single-player or small multi-player RPGs by the number of players, and by the game's 'persistent world', usually hosted by the game's publisher, which continues to 'exist and evolve' while the player is away from the game.

MMORPG's include games such as Neverwinter Nights, Second Life, RuneScape and Maple Story (the last of which is pitched at young children – 9 & 10 years old). Note that many of these games are available for the more sophisticated phones!

Most MMORPG's are definitely not suitable for Class V & VI children. They can be extremely addictive and lead to or contribute to behavioural problems. Children of this age who regularly play RPG's can have difficulty disassociating their real life from that of their avatar which can lead to social issues with peers.

In addition many of these games contain significant adult content either in the form of violence, nudity or sexual behaviour.

Parents should take great care in purchasing any computer game and be even more vigilant in the case of multiplayer games. Parents with older children playing games should ensure younger children are not participating in games that are not appropriate for them. These games can be very addictive and children have been known to get up in the middle of the night to play online games.

### **CYBER BULLYING**

Cyber bullying or harassment and inappropriate use of internet (including iPods) and phone technology can have very serious consequences even if not really maliciously meant. It is very important for children to understand this and to learn which types of behaviour are unacceptable and in many cases illegal. Children often have the sense that the messages they send via the phone or internet are private and will not be intercepted by third parties – but of course once a message, photo or video has been sent on a mobile phone it can be forwarded or uploaded to the internet with great ease. Once it is out on the internet it is there forever and can never be removed!

Sometimes messages are sent which are genuinely meant as a joke by the sender. Without facial expressions and tone of voice to accompany them they can be seriously misconstrued by the recipient. These messages can still constitute cyber bullying especially if sent repeatedly or copied on to others.

Young people (usually an older age group – but may occur down to Class VII and VIII) can also create serious problems for themselves via ‘sexting’ or sending nude or otherwise inappropriate photographs of themselves to others. This may be done in the context of a boyfriend/girlfriend relationship but in the eyes of the law any nude photographs of a minor constitute child pornography and may be dealt with extremely harshly.

The statistics on online safety collated from government reports and research by the NSPCC say that in February 2014:

- 11% of 9-16 year olds have encountered sexual images on the internet in the past 12 months
- 13% of UK 9-16 year olds say they have been bothered or upset by something online in the past year
- 28% of children aged 11-16 with a profile on a social networking site have experienced something upsetting on it in the last year
- of the children and young people who were upset, 11% were dealing with upsetting experiences on a daily basis
- the most reported issue experienced on social networking sites was trolling, experienced by 37% of children who had been upset
- other issues experienced by children who had been upset included: pressure to look or act a certain way (14%), cyber stalking (12%), aggressive and violent language (18%), encouragement to hurt themselves (3%), receiving unwanted sexual messages (12%), and requests to send or respond to a sexual message (8%).

**CYBER BULLYING** can take many forms:

**Direct messaging** - from perpetrator to victim of hurtful or threatening text messages ‘Text Wars’ – multiple perpetrators sending numerous messages of ill will to victim (can also come via Twitter)

**Direct forwarding** - of threatening photos & videos

**Stealing passwords** - enabling the perpetrator to impersonate the victim and communicate inappropriately with others on their behalf

**Blogging** – publicly humiliating others via a weblog

**Websites** – purposely creating websites to humiliate or threaten the victim

**Sending pictures** – sending humiliating or degrading photographs of victim to multiple recipients

**Internet polling** – perpetrator sets up and runs a poll on the an internet site with questions designed to humiliate/embarrass the victim

**Interactive gaming (MMPORP’s – i.e. Massively Multi Player Online Role Playing Games such as Runescape or Second Life)** – Perpetrators isolate the victim within the gaming context. Can be very threatening.

**Malicious Code** – direct attempt to damage the victim’s computer by forwarding viruses.

**Malicious Subscribing** – perpetrator subscribes on behalf of victim to email marketers, sex sites etc.

**Impersonation** – perpetrator while impersonating the victim sends a message to third parties inviting retaliation. Can be extremely dangerous if the victim's actual contact details are given.

**'Notify Wars'** – perpetrator goads victim into contravening the rules of a website to cause their account to be frozen.

**Prank Calls** – very easy to make when you are carrying a mobile around with you all the time

**False Facebook accounts** – perpetrator impersonating victim sets up a Facebook account on their behalf often including malicious or embarrassing content.

**Outing** – Perpetrator publicly displays information about the victim designed to cause humiliation or embarrassment

**'Flame Wars'** – heated and or threatening arguments in a chat room environment.

Of course we all hope and pray that our children will not succumb to, or be the victim of, any of these behaviours but it is important to be aware of them as parents and ensure we do what we can to protect our children from becoming either perpetrators or victims.

#### **WHAT CAN WE DO TO SAFEGUARD OUR CHILDREN?**

The answer to this question will vary widely according to the ages, temperaments and circumstances of our children but some suggestions are:

- Think twice about giving your child a mobile phone and if you must, keep it as simple as possible and preferably without a camera
- Think twice about giving your child a sophisticated iPod device. If your child must have an iPod, consider a simpler device like an iPod Shuffle (music only).
- Talk to your children about their use of computer and phone technology and ensure they understand the serious implications of inappropriate behaviour
- Talk to your children about sharing personal information online. Ensure they check with you first before signing up for or joining anything online.
- Monitor their use of phone/ iPod and internet technology
- Don't allow computers or any device with a screen in bedrooms or other areas where they can be used in an unsupervised environment
- Install filtering software to restrict access to inappropriate websites and ensure filters exist on all devices that children have access to
- Prioritise the safety of your children over their privacy while they are at a vulnerable age
- Prioritise the safety of your children over their entertainment. Children travelling on bus journeys can read to pass the time.
- Look at the rating - despite inconsistencies - this is generally a useful guide on the appropriateness of the movie, game, etc.

- Know before you go - <http://www.common sense media.org/> is a useful website that provides commentary about the content of specific movies, TV shows & games, as well as many other useful links to information.
- Watching with your child/adolescent enables you to mediate between the content and the values you would like your child to possess as well as “keeping it real” - bricks to the head from a 2-storey building does lead to serious head injury or death, not just a few grazes & getting back up again (Home Alone 2).
- Limit amount of viewing as it impacts on children’s thought patterns.
- Ask your children what they already connect to online: do they have an email address, Facebook account, avatar etc.? – you may be surprised at the answers, especially if they have older siblings.
- Try to support other families in dealing with these issues. Communicate clearly with parents of other children about what boundaries you are trying to maintain for your child and respect the boundaries of others. Remember that families with older children may have a more open internet/media environment than you want for your younger child. If this is a concern to you, discuss putting certain mutually acceptable parameters in place during visits.

## **USEFUL LINKS & RESOURCES**

The content of this booklet is directed at parents as adults and each parent will need to determine the best method to bring this information to their child(ren) in an age appropriate way. There are many very useful websites for parents providing specialist assistance in these areas. Links for some of them are:

### **WEBSITES**

<http://www.ceop.police.uk/>

[www.stopcyberbullying.org](http://www.stopcyberbullying.org)

<http://www.getsafeonline.org/safeguarding-children/safeguarding-children/>

[http://www.nspcc.org.uk/help-and-advice/for-parents/talking-about-sex/sexting/sexting\\_wda96795.html](http://www.nspcc.org.uk/help-and-advice/for-parents/talking-about-sex/sexting/sexting_wda96795.html)

[http://www.parentsprotect.co.uk/internet\\_safety.htm](http://www.parentsprotect.co.uk/internet_safety.htm)

<http://www.internetsafety.com/internet-safety-tips-for-parents.php>

<http://www.bewebaware.ca/english/cyberbullying.html>

[http://pediatrics.about.com/od/safety/a/109\\_intrnt\\_sfty.htm](http://pediatrics.about.com/od/safety/a/109_intrnt_sfty.htm)

<http://www.aap.org/healthtopics/mediause.cfm>

<http://www.mediawise.org.uk/>

<http://www.common sense media.org/>

<https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/>

## **BOOKS**

Carr-Gregg, Michael - Real Wired Child

Healy, Jane - Endangered Minds

Palmer, Sue - Toxic Childhood

Sigman, Aric - Remotely Controlled: How television is damaging our lives

THE FOLLOWING ARE SCHOOL POLICY EXCERPTS REPRODUCED HERE FOR YOUR CONVENIENCE.

### **Television, Computers and DVD**

These are all embedded in our culture and taken for granted to such a degree that it is often difficult for us to question their value. Medical research shows that screen-based activity such as TV and computer games can have a negative effect on children (brain activity, concentration, heart-beat, emotional balance and well-being); the younger the child, the greater is this negative effect. It is important that TVs and computers are not kept in your child's room so that his/her bedroom is a place of rest. We ask parents to limit their children's exposure to media such as television, cinema, DVDs, computers and console games. Use of mobile phones and iPods should also be carefully monitored and restricted if appropriate.

By sending you child to our school you will be making a considerable investment in both time and money. This investment in your child's education will be undermined by exposure to these media in their early years and childhood. For the wellbeing of your child and to enable them to benefit from Waldorf education, please follow these guidelines:

- Early Years: no regular screen-based activity/viewing
- Classes I to V: limited and monitored access to TV at weekends only, no computer based activities.
- Classes VI to VIII: moderate, supervised access to TV at weekends, moderate, supervised access to computer at weekends

We ask for parental support in this matter which we consider to be very important for pedagogical, health and safety reasons.

### **MORE ABOUT MOBILE PHONES**

Mobile phones are now very much part of our lives. However, while they are wonderful tools for adults they can create serious dilemmas for children and young people. The following Q&A has been prepared to address the questions we are most commonly asked about use of mobile phones:

#### **What is the school policy on mobile phones?**

Mobile phones are strongly discouraged for all children, particularly children in younger years. If you feel it is necessary for your child to have a mobile phone for safety reasons please ensure it is a

simple phone that does not incorporate a camera or internet access. Mobile phones with cameras or internet access and iPod with internet access **are not allowed in school**. From Classes V to VIII simple mobile phones are permitted but must be switched off (not on silent) within the school grounds. On arrival children must deposit their phone in the appropriate box in reception. The phone will be picked up at the end of the school day. If your child is seen using their mobile phone on school premises it will be confiscated for one week and it will need to be collected from the office by the parents after they and the child sign the appropriate paperwork (mobile phone agreement of return).

Mobile phone rules also apply to school events even though they may take place off site or outside usual school hours.

#### **What if my child needs to call me during the day?**

Children can ask to use the school office's phone.

#### **What happens to confiscated phones?**

Confiscated phones are sealed in an envelope with the student's details recorded on it and kept in a secure location in the school office until they are picked up.

#### **Can my child use their phone in the school garden?**

No. Please also note that unfortunately there have been instances of improper use of phones just outside the school gate– e.g.: to display inappropriate images to others.

#### **Some of these measures seem a bit draconian – surely children can't be endangered by a simple phone?**

Unfortunately when you provide your child with a phone – especially an internet enabled phone they become connected to the rest of the world. Some of the issues that arise from this are noted below:

- When children are provided with mobile phones they are automatically able to build up a personal list of contacts - the phone numbers of other children they communicate with by phone (the same goes for email accounts). This contact list can easily be shared.
- It is very important that parents are aware of this and speak to their children about the proper and appropriate use of phones and most importantly about the importance of not passing on their own or other people's details to third parties.
- Bluetooth and download capacity or internet capability make it even easier for children to share contact data with one another.
- Phones with internet capacity and cameras add another element of risk. Cameras in particular expose children to many dangers including risk of pornography prosecution for inappropriate images – often very innocently taken.
- Mobile phones open up opportunities for exposure to cyber bullying. Unkind, abusive and teasing messages are often sent without a moment's thought in the heat of an argument. Children tend to think what they are doing is ephemeral – like shouting something mean during a fight – but once these things are 'out there' they are there forever and can be passed on with great ease.

Statistics tell us that the highest level of phone related cyber bullying is amongst children in CLASS V!

Below are some useful tips for parents in acquiring and using mobile phones for children.

### **Tips for parents of children with mobile phones:**

Choose a mobile phone for your child that does not feature internet access, or alternatively speak with your carrier to block internet access. All carriers provide this service.

- Talk to your carrier about blocking services that are not required on your child's phone. While GPS and other features can be useful, consider the implications of a complete stranger being able to pinpoint the exact location of your child. Blocking or restricting services can include the opportunity to limit incoming and outgoing calls, text, instant messaging and picture messages
- Monitor your child's telephone usage and be wary of gifts your child receives from unfamiliar people, particularly mobile phones
- Consider setting strict guidelines regarding your child's use of the phone. For example, advise your child to use the mobile phone for emergencies and calls to home only
- Consider purchasing a pre-paid SIM card (available from your carrier) that strictly limits the use of the phone – once the limit is reached the phone card needs to be re-charged with credit.
- Talk to your child about the appropriate use of camera phones. If you decide to furnish your child has a camera phone then it is important you set some guidelines for its use, including when taking photos of others. Ask your child to let you know if anyone else's use of a camera phone makes them feel uncomfortable (Please note that camera phones are not allowed in school).
- Stress the importance of not responding to any messages from unknown people. If your child receives persistent calls or messages from an unknown person, you should report it to the police, taking note of the number and saving any messages or pictures on the mobile handset.

The following websites have very useful information for parents trying to handle these issues.

<https://www.childline.org.uk/explore/onlinesafety/pages/mobilesafety.aspx>

<https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/>

### **CYBER BULLYING POLICY**

Cyber bullying is when one student is targeted by another through the use of digital technology, mobile communication devices or through the internet. The aim of this targeting may be harassment, stalking, threats or other forms of harmful behaviour.

Cyber bullying takes many forms and may involve the use of websites, mobile phones, chat rooms, email, SMS and the uploading of pictures or video. It could involve the sending of threatening messages, communicating false pretences, forwarding of other students private communication, establishment of websites designed to humiliate or the posting of humiliating messages or pictures.

In general the school views cyber bullying in the same way it views other types of bullying and students and parents who are aware of, or have been victims of cyber bullying are encouraged to report the incidents the child protection officers or to their teachers.

St Paul's Steiner School's electronic equipment policy forbids the use of phones at school and in school supervised areas. Adherence to this rule helps to limit opportunities for cyber bullying.

### **Advice for students and parents**

Cyber bullying can have traumatic effects on students and it can occur in or out of school time. Students who are targeted in this way often feel powerless and isolated.

Listed below are some strategies to help protect students from cyber bullying.

#### **Strategies for Students**

- Talk to a parent, friend, teacher or class guardian about the cyber bullying.
- Keep and save as evidence any bullying emails, text messages or images.
- Do not reply to bullying or threatening text messages or emails - do not engage in any communication with the sender(s) as this could make matters worse.
- Do not give out your personal details online - if you are in a chat room, watch what you say about where you live, the school you go to, your email address etc.
- Remember the tone and meaning of written messages can be misinterpreted. Check that your messages are clear and respectful.
- Use blocking software to block messages from certain senders or use mail filters to block emails from specific email addresses.
- Remember that sending/forwarding abusive or threatening messages is inappropriate and could be deemed unlawful.

#### **Strategies for Parents**

There are a number of things you can do to help ensure your children stay safe when using internet or phone services:

- Talk to your child about bullying and harassment.
- Talk to your child's teacher or one of the child protection officers about your concerns.
- Educate your child about Internet safety and the proper etiquette when using Internet or phone services.
- Keep your eyes out for behavioural changes that may indicate your child is being bullied, harassed, victimized or vilified as you may be able to intervene.
- Encourage your child to report any incidents of cyberbullying to you.
- Limit computer use for younger children (refer to section on electronic media)
- Stay involved - have the home computer in a public space (not in the child's bedroom) and monitor your child's Internet habits
- Make sure your home computer is protected with security software

<http://www.bullying.co.uk/>

## **ELECTRONIC MEDIA**

Parents of children at St Paul's Steiner School are asked to commit to a policy of no regular screen-based activity/viewing in Kindergarten, a limited and monitored access to TV at weekends only and no computer based activities policy for Class I to V and moderate, supervised access to TV at weekends, moderate, supervised access to computer at weekends for Class VI to VIII.

It is hoped that this will lead to a reduction in overall viewing during primary school years and beyond. The negative impact of the electronic arena on children and adolescents – television, computer games, videos/dvds and some genre of music – is increasingly being documented.

To further explain and inform parents about the school's position on electronic media during childhood we include the following article written by Ann Jacobson, a Steiner Teacher in Glenaeon Steiner School, Australia:

### **Electronic Media from a Waldorf Child Development Perspective**

At the heart of Waldorf education is a picture of the developing child. Fundamental to this picture is the idea of three qualitatively different stages of development through which the principle of metamorphosis runs like a golden thread. All soul faculties (thinking, feeling, and willing) are present from birth; however, how we nurture their unfolding is of critical importance. Each stage has a key idea and a key process that belongs to the dominant soul faculty of the stage. From birth to the change of teeth, goodness lies behind the imitative actions of the young child as they work out of the forces of the will. In the class teacher period from seven to fourteen, the feeling life is cared for through beauty and artistic substance. For the adolescent, the forces of thinking that have been sheathed until now are made available in the search for truth.

When we look at the particular coming into being of a child, in many ways the first thing that we see is the Ego as the primary power of the individuality of the child. It is sometimes referred to as the archetype, a blueprint of what each individual is capable of becoming when they have transformed their being. It remains in a spiritual condition and only a picture of it becomes available to the incarnation human being during the life ahead. The connection to the archetype provides the creative resource for all the striving of life. Its task is to awaken the physical body and make it into a human tool for the life ahead.

In the seven years following physical birth, the ego, with the life forces brings into movement all the life processes – the warming, breathing, nourishing, digesting and growing. The body's life force knits itself into all the corners of the physical body with the help of the ego organisation. This building up of the body's systems of life lasts until the second dentition. At this point the life force has concluded its major task and is freed to take on new work.

As it becomes liberated after the change of teeth, this becomes the time for a conscious attention from without to the growth and cultivation of the memory, in particular the treasures of poetic thought. It is the time when the great pictures of the stories of world history can be imprinted into the growing mind. It is the time when artistic work of all kinds is of fundamental importance; when the spiritual laws implicit in colour and form and music weave into the life forces of the body creating a vehicle for the chaotic and intensely personal soul life to come.

Puberty is the physical mirroring of the third birth process. Now the astral body is taking on separate

existence and an interior world is created in which the personality can live. The bonds that held the younger child in an unconscious relationship with the environment and with the people around are severed. It is this separation that gives clarity of intellect.

At 21 the vehicle of the ego is released and the individual personality is free to take up the tasks of life.

The young adult is concerned with the possibilities of the future, of what can be done in the world and how to become closer to his or her archetype (if we so choose).

Within these pictures of child development, Steiner also characterises a development and metamorphosis of the sensory perception. It is this aspect that is critical when we start to look at the impact of electronic media on the young child. Through our senses we have the possibility to perceive our whole world. Each sense gives us different aspects of that world. Different realms of experience need corresponding sense organs in order for us to perceive them. Rudolf Steiner brings a picture of twelve senses with which we perceive our entire surrounding world. From this picture we can begin to develop a science of sense perception that is directed towards education.

In a curriculum based on the twelve senses it is important to be aware that the most critical structural organisation of the brain takes place during infancy and childhood, up to the age of about twelve. This is when the brain is learning most actively from its environment and shaping itself according to the sensations it experiences. Up until the age of 9 the young child is all sense organ. They are purely perceptive beings making sense of and uniting themselves with the surrounding world with their entire being. They cannot stop their perceptions and work them through with their consciousness. It is not until after the ninth years that thinking and perceiving begin to separate and not really until late adolescence that a true balance and harmony of all twelve senses is achievable.

Out of this background it becomes clearer that there is much in contemporary culture from which the young child needs protection. The Alliance for Childhood prepared a report published in 2002 in which the three central arguments are:

1. Our children face a daunting technological frontier of irreversible changes in human biology and the world's ecology. They need a radically different kind of technology education to make wise choices in such a future.
2. Children's lives are increasingly filled with screen time rather than real time with nature, caring adults, the arts and hands-on work and play. Yet only real relationships, not virtual ones, will inspire and prepare them to protect the Earth and all that lives on it.
3. There is scant evidence of long-term benefits – and growing indications of harm – from the high tech life style and education promoted by government and business. It is time for concerned citizen action to reclaim childhood for children.

The following three quotations give an indication of the variety of ways that screen time is impinging on the space of childhood.

1. "Using what they call 'age compression', which has been defined as 'the imposition of older children's cognitive, emotional and cultural issues onto younger ones', marketers are deliberately

pushing teen attitudes and adult concepts onto children ... The targeting of ever-younger children by marketers determined to turn kids into customers, into little economic units, is a new form of child labour – we send them into the satanic mills of the shopping malls ...” Consuming Innocence – Karen Brooks 2009

2. “Far from opening up a world of learning, as is often claimed, computers tend to restrict the arena in which children’s learning takes place, emphasising the development of abstract skills at the expense of concrete modes of learning. But the brain is, after all, part of our bodies, and the mind receives information through all our senses ... children today are growing up with less potential to develop sensory acuity because of the monotony of their environments. Watching television, playing with computers and spending extended amounts of time indoors all contribute to a lack of sensorimotor stimulation ... software aimed at children does little more than bombard them with a lot visual information within carefully designed parameters – just like children’s television shows ...”  
The Child and the Machine – Alison Armstrong 2001

3. “While watching TV (and computer screen) the eyes are rigidly directed towards the screen while the pictures on it are moving. The child is sitting with rigid muscles in front of the screen, fascinated by a flood of flickering visual impressions. The immobility of the eyes conveys itself to all the body’s muscles. This way of seeing is abnormal, as normally when one looks at something the eye muscles are in constant movements scanning the object of vision. Moreover neither colours nor proportions correspond to reality and what is in actual fact three dimensional is reduced to two dimensions. Only two senses are communicating with one another: eye and ear, while all other senses are hardly stimulated which promotes the disintegration of their functions. It is as if the whole body, not just the area around the eyes, were set in plaster ... “  
Education – Health for Life – Micaela Glockler 2006

An objective look at the growing evidence of the harmful effects of media on the growing child indicates how important it is to think about media usage. A look at the child development stages that are fundamental to Waldorf education would reinforce this. In a Waldorf school, the class teacher spends a great deal of time preparing imaginative pictures for the children that are food for the soul at the right ages. The stereotypes, the hype and the lack of human interaction of screen time destroy the subtlety and sensitivity of these pictures. While there may be levels of compromise in bowing to what feels like an unstoppable media machine, most teachers in Waldorf schools feel that there should be no media at all before the age of 7-9. Between 9 and 13/14, a judicious parental selection could be appropriate, preferably with the parents watching with their children. From 15 a certain amount of freedom with parental guidance would be preferable.

Together, teachers and parents in Waldorf schools can encourage the creation of a buffer zone between their children and the rest of the world for a few short years. We must have the desire and the ability to deny access to or admit into our homes and schools, the images and ideas we want for our children. The Alliance for Children has developed ten principles for developing a new and more socially conscious technology literacy. They are as follows:

1. Slow down: honour the developmental needs of children.
2. With adolescents, teach technology as social ethics in action, with technical skills in a supporting

role.

3. Relationships with the real world come first.
4. Technology is not destiny; its design and use flow from human choices.
5. Choice implies limits – and the option to say “no”.
6. Those affected by technological choices deserve a voice in making them.
7. Use tools and technologies with mindfulness.
8. To teach technology literacy, become technologically literate.
9. Honour the precautionary principle: when uncertain, err on the side of caution.
  - Ask tough questions about long-term consequences
  - Make time, space and silence for reflection
  - Responsibility grows from humility
  - Be resourceful with the tools you already have.
  - Respect the sacredness of life in all its diversity.

**FURTHER READING:**

Tech Tonic, Towards a New Literacy of Technology - Alliance for Childhood \_  
[http://www.allianceforchildhood.org/sites/allianceforchildhood.org/files/file/pdf/projects/computers/pdf\\_files/tech\\_tonic.pdf](http://www.allianceforchildhood.org/sites/allianceforchildhood.org/files/file/pdf/projects/computers/pdf_files/tech_tonic.pdf)

Education: Health for Life - Michaela Glockler

Consuming Innocence - Karen Brooks

Set Free Childhood: Parents' Survival Guide for Coping with Computers and TV – Martin Large

Who’s Bringing Them Up - Martin Large

The Care and Development of the Human Senses Willi Aeppli

There are a number of articles published on the impact of television on young children, some with ideas on creating alternatives to media dominated environments. Please let us know if you need help to locate them.