Why Parents and Therapists Need to Know about Video Games and Digital Technologies

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One of the major interests of the staff at South County Child and Family Consultants is the impact of digital technology on children's lives. In our interviews with children who have learning, attentional, and behavioral difficulties, we frequently hear about the skill and involvement that they display with video games, cell phones, and other electronic gadgets. Our observations are consistent with a 2010 study by the Kaiser Foundation, which indicates that children ages 8 to 18 spend an average of 7 hours 38 minutes a day with digital media. We have developed an expertise in integrating children's involvement with digital media into our counseling and evaluation services. A group of our therapists are at the forefront of developing and researching techniques for digital play therapy through which digital technologies are used to develop skills, improve communication, facilitate personal growth, and enhance insight gained in psychotherapy.

We are also interested in how these technologies can help

children learn thinking and academic skills. Because many of the children whom we see at our practice struggle in traditional school settings but flourish with digital technologies, we are committed to finding ways that these tools can help them learn. We do find that many parents and educators have strong opinions against children's use of video games, cell phones, television, and the Internet. While there are many reasons to be concerned, these technologies are not going to disappear but are instead likely to become an even more prominent part of children's lives as they grow older.

Our goal at South County Child and Family Consultants and our sister organization, LearningWorks for Kids, is to find ways to make children's involvement with digital technologies more productive. In addition, we are interested in educating parents and teachers about how to communicate with children about and participate with them in their digital technology use. We also wish to provide parents with guidelines for setting appropriate limits on video game play and other technology use. To this end, we describe our concept of a "play diet," through which we provide parents with guidance in finding a balance for their children between digital engagement and other activities. In addition, we have a series of essays that will help parents understand more about how video games can develop and enhance learning, problem-solving, academic, and executive functioning skills. These essays can also help guide parents with regard to communicating with their children about and understanding their involvement with digital technologies.

Websites on Digital Technologies and Learning

Learning Works for Kids: An excellent source of information on how to work with children to develop their skills (i.e.

working memory, organization, focus, etc.) via the use of specific digital technologies. There is also useful information for educators on how they can use technology in the classroom.

Edutopia: A good resource for parents and educators that provides information on current school practices, including the use of digital technologies in the classroom.

The Joan Ganz Cooney Center: Provides current reports and research, as well as upcoming events regarding digital technologies.

The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation: Information about grants and funding for research regarding digital technologies and their effects on young people.

Books on Digital Technologies and Learning

Gee, J.P. (2004). *What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy*. Palgrave Macmillan: New York, NY. (Offers information about how particular video games affect a child's cognitive development in a positive way.)

Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture*. NYU Press: New York, NY. (Provides an interesting take on how old media and new media are converging, impacting audiences and producers in major ways.)

Johnson, S. (2005). *Everything Bad is Good for You*. Riverhead Hardcover. (An interesting and somewhat controversial read that challenges the common belief that television and video games are not good for the youth of America.)

Prensky, M. (2006). *Don't Bother Me, Mom — — I'm Learning!*. Paragon House Publishers. (Provides information about how

video games can help develop certain cognitive skills, such as problem-solving, multi-tasking, and language skills.)

Shaffer, D.W. (2006). *How Computer Games Help Children Learn*. Palgrave Macmillan. (A useful guide that encourages parents to utilize innovative techniques like computer games to help their children to grow and develop.)