

STRATEGIES TO HELP INDIVIDUALS WITH ASD DEVELOP INDEPENDENCE AND ADAPTABILITY

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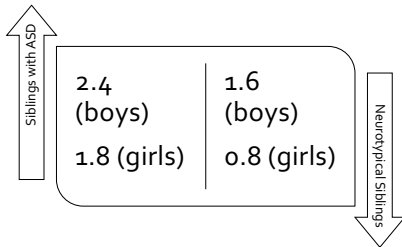
SCREENS AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Common Questions

- How "bad" is the internet/screen time for kids and teens with ASD? Or is it "good" for kids and teens with ASD?
- Are people with ASD more likely to be "addicted" to screens?
- How do we prepare kids and teens with ASD for internet, social media, texting?
- How do we protect kids and teens with ASD from safety risks online and from their devices?
- How do we balance benefits of technology and the internet with "obsessions" or overuse of screens?

ASD AND INTERNET USE, GAMING, AND SCREEN TIME

Hours Per Day Playing Video Games

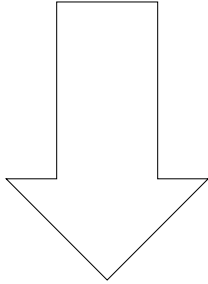


Mazurek and Wenstrup, 2013

- Higher levels of problematic video game use
- 62 % more time watching TV and playing video games than all non-screen activities combined



Mazurek and Wenstrup, 2013

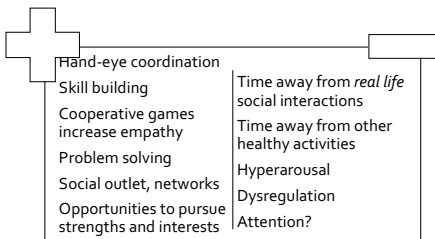


But, siblings with ASD
spent less time on social
media than their NT
siblings
AND less time on socially
interactive video games

Mazurek and Wenstrup, 2013

What's the Attraction?

- Unusual interests able to be accessed online
- Decreased social demands
- 1:1 reinforcement
- Teaching/Interventions may have opened Pandora's box
- Reinforcing for parents



EVERYTHING IN
MODERATION
...OR, NOT?

A Little Goes a Long Way

- Are people with ASD at greater risk for more problems anyway, so negative effects of screens enhanced for people with ASD?

Screens and Sleep

- Access to TV, computer, gaming devices in bedrooms associated with poorer sleep for kids and teens **and these associations are more pronounced for boys with ASD**
 - Time spent playing video games also associated with greater sleep problems **and this is also more pronounced for boys with ASD**
- Engelhardt et al., 2013

Why?

- The Displacement Hypothesis
 - Difficulty disengaging from screen-based media
- Disrupted melatonin production
 - Already at increased risk for low melatonin
- Physiologic hyperarousal
 - Already at-risk for autonomic hyperarousal
 - Hyperarousal linked to insomnia

ASD and Sleep Disturbance

- Exacerbates repetitive and stereotypic behaviors
- Increases inattentive and hyperactive behaviors
- Increased problems with social functioning
- Interferes with learning and cognition
- Adversely affects family functioning

Screens and Stress

- People with ASD prone to arousal and regulation issues
- Some evidence that more time on screens (in general) increase
 - acute and chronic stress
 - Hyperarousal
 - Emotional dysregulation
 - Overstimulation

SCREENS TO DE- STRESS?

Screens and Social Skills

- Some evidence screen time hinders development of social skills (for all)
- Screens on (and even in the background) has been shown to delay language acquisition
- The Displacement Hypothesis

OR...

- Method of teaching social skills
- Cooperation, engagement over shared interest
- Respecting skills and strengths
- Opportunities to meet people
- And, if you can't beat 'em, join 'em

McLeod et al., 2017 Facebook study

- Using Facebook in conjunction with more traditional SSG
- Training, monitoring, supervision, encouragement to interact and continue relationships on FB
- Very small sample size
- No change in social skills, but feasible, acceptable, and practical
- Also highlighted areas: social communication deficits obvious online, self-contained network for ASD?
- How to incorporate training and feedback

Video Games and Violence

- Are individuals with ASD more prone to violence if they play violent video games?
 - Reduced ability to down regulate arousal
 - Perspective taking/empathy
 - Reality vs. Fantasy

Probably Not

- Mixed findings
- In response to media reports, Engelhardt and colleagues (2015) looked at whether violent video games led to increased aggression for adults with ASD
 - Strong evidence that violent video games do not affect individuals with ASD differently than NT
 - Slight evidence that violent video games do not affect aggression in adults
 - But keep questioning

“Obsessed” with Screens

- Youth with ASD report spending most of their free time using non-social media (64.2%)
- This is higher than NT peers, and other groups (SL impairments, LD, intellectual disabilities)
- Qualitative reports indicate attraction to screen-based technology
- Screen time associated with risk for OCD and social anxiety
- Nature of certain platforms that keep feeding more...going down that rabbit hole, endless videos – opportunities to pursue restricted interests through different avenues

Screens and Tics

- Some suggest worsening of vocal and motor tics related to dopamine release during screen exposure

Screens and Attention

- Individuals with ASD already tend to have deficits in attention, EF
- Screen time found to impact attention
- Impacts EF skills
- “multi-tasking” paradox
- Everything else is boring in comparison
- Wait time

Screens and Sex

- Information exposed to
- Vulnerabilities
- Porn
 - Some findings that male teens and young adults with ASD at greater risk for porn addiction
 - Social deficits
 - Isolation
 - Excessive computer time
 - Immediate gratification
 - Romantic delusions or obsessions
 - Fantasy vs. reality

Parents' Perspective (Nally et al., 2000)

- Management of television and video is a major issue for some parents of children with autism and causes stress within their families.

Parents' Perspective (Nally et al., 2000)

- The child's need for repetitive video viewing caused problems inside and outside the home, affected holidays and visits to other families.

Parents' Perspective (Nally et al., 2000)

- Parents managed television and video usage largely on a situation by-situation basis without any long-term strategy.

Parents' Perspective (Nally et al., 2000)

- Parents felt that ceding a large degree of control over viewing to their child was not an abdication of responsibility but simply a means of securing familial balance and harmony.

Parents' Perspective (Nally et al., 2000)

- Parents felt that their management of viewing was not understood by their extended family or by child welfare and child development professionals.

What Do I Think This Means?

- Parents are likely to feel guilty, judged, and unsure about “coming clean” regarding screen use
- Parents feel like they are in a no-win situation re: screen time
- Parents need help developing a long-term strategy (and will likely need help implementing the strategy)

GUIDELINES

Set Parameters

- Find the appropriate limits, make it very concrete
- As much as possible, build in cooperation and interaction
- Keep systems and devices out of bedrooms
 - Ideally with an adult nearby
- Fight fire with fire – utilize technology

Keep in Mind

- Parameters have to be palatable for the family
- Parameters can be individualized – not a one size fits all
- Probably don't have the luxury of much flexibility
- Think about the Displacement Hypothesis and use it to your advantage
- Likely impossible to limit all exposure

Electronic Fasts



- Find a period of time to remove screen exposure and rip the band aid off
- “Reset Your Child’s Brain: A Four-Week Plan to End Meltdowns, Raise Grades, and Boost Social Skills by Reversing the Effects of Screen-Time.”
- Track behavior and keep data!
- You’re going to have to make changes, too

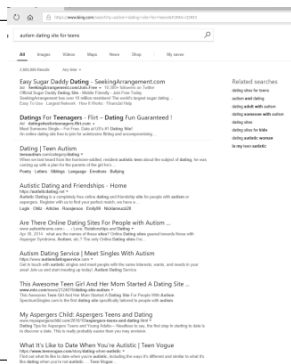
INSTRUCTION

Social Skills

- Remember we use social skills anytime we share space (physical or *virtual*) with others – the internet, interactive gaming, social media, texting all require us to use social skills

Perspective Taking

- What others want to see online
- Other people's intentions
- How people might interpret your comments, posts, "likes"
- Why certain articles are written, if they are "fact" or not
- How people are reacting to your comments, posts, texts
- What's "safe;" what's not



And, by the way, you have to be able to do this often without being able to see facial expressions, hear tone of voice, hear actual words...

Adjusting Behavior

- Once you make a guess about others' intentions/reactions, adjust your behavior
- Continue monitoring others
- Make social repairs
- Recognize when something doesn't seem right and be able to tell someone, block someone, stop interactions
- Set limits for self; regulate self

**TEENS EXPLAIN
THE RULES OF
SOCIAL MEDIA**

WIRED

Explain the Risks

- You're the kind of kid who might get pretty stuck on...
- It can be hard to stop thinking about the game world and start thinking about the real world when you need to
- There can be fake, confusing, inaccurate, scary, and even illegal stuff online – and sometimes you find it by accident or sometimes it can find you
- There are strangers online and they might break rules or try to trick you; they might want something from you that they should not have

Explain the Risks

- People might do or type mean things to you – they might even be sneaky about it!
- You might do or type things that are mean to other people – and you might not even know you're doing it!
- There are no secrets online or in texts...and you can't ever erase it

A reminder: Do not forget to have this conversation, at different levels, time and time again...In an age when 18 month olds are given their parents' phones to occupy themselves with a game, we see they know how to use these devices and we don't necessarily realize how much they begin exploring without us. Kids end up with lots of online freedom and it can be because of a slippery slope into the online world.

How You Can Protect Yourself

- Remember your privacy
 - Know what private information you should never share
 - Set privacy limits on apps
 - Think of private screen names
 - Avoid posting photos of yourself, your room
- Tell an adult if you find something scary, confusing, or inappropriate online – we can help you understand it
- Learn what is against the law

How You Can Protect Yourself

- Follow your “never” list
- Check with an adult if you’re unsure, confused, or uncomfortable
- You may want to block “friends” who...and you can check with a adult before or after

When You’re Online or Texting

NEVER

- Give up your privacy
 - Name, address, school, birthdate
 - Pictures of yourself
 - passwords
- Agree or arrange to meet an online-only friend in real life
- Give someone credit card/debit card information

MAYBE – Check with _____

- Open attachments
- Download games, software, apps
- Private message with an online friend
- Post pictures, videos

When You're Online or Texting

ALWAYS

- Tell _____ if something you see, read, or do makes you feel uncomfortable, confused, or scared
- Tell _____ if someone asks for your personal information, to meet, or for money
- Remember "this might not be true" and check with _____

ALWAYS

- Take breaks from screens to keep yourself healthy
- Stick to the limits in our plan
- Follow the law

How We Will Help Protect You

- We will make a plan for when, where, and how long you can go online or be on your device
- We will put controls on your computer or device to try to limit inappropriate content, pop-ups
- We will have your passwords and will check in on what you're doing online

How We Will Help Protect You

- We will pay attention to the games you're playing, who you're playing with, and how you're playing
- We will check out games, apps before and let you know if they are appropriate and safe for your use
- We will help you figure out if/when someone is being mean to you online and what to do about it
- We will help you figure out if you are being mean online and what to do about it

Autism Social Networking Sites

- WeAreAutism.org
- WrongPlanet.Net
- AutismSpeaks.Ning.org

Resources

- Autism Speaks Internet Safety, Social Networking, and Technology toolkit
- Internet safety role playing discussions
 - www.safesurfingkids.com/lesson_plans_grades_3_12.htm
- Social Safety: An Online Social Networking Guide
 - <https://socialsafety.wordpress.com/stranger-danger/educationalopportunities/>
- Autism at-a-Glance (CSESA)

WHAT IF THAT'S NOT
ENOUGH?

Fighting Fire with Fire

- Apps for monitoring and controlling your child's access and use of devices
- Wireless networks that can be turned on and off at specific times
- Parental Controls
- Camera blockers

Limit/Remove Access

- Take video game systems out of the house
- Take away non-essential devices and strip down what is essential

Plan for Support, Respite

- Put other things in place
- Engage your team
- Expect challenges and sneakiness

Practice in Session

- Online searches – seems scary!!
- Review text exchanges, with assent
- Go through social media, with assent

Plant Real-Life Coaches

- Older cousins, siblings to be “friends”
- Can provide feedback to individual as well as to their parents
- Feedback should be direct and honest
- Offers to “pre-approve”
- Posting practice sessions

EMBRACE IT

Don't try to fight

- Take the benefits
- Teach and prepare as much as possible, *with the focus being on questioning, checking, and asking for feedback*
- Limit and supervise
