

MEDIA FRENZY

by Sally Burgess, Forefront Families LLC

I just can't keep up with all the latest gadgets and computer programs. It all seems to be gathering momentum way faster than my brain can cope with. I barely get the hang of one new piece of equipment before the item has been superceded by something far better and brighter, and all our kids are insisting on buying one. The Ipod has been replaced by the Iphone and now we have the Ipad and a new version of Iphone. I don't even understand all the functions of my previous model Iphone, let alone try and take in something new. We have gone from My Space, to Face Book and then there is Twitter. Is there any advance on that before I try learning about it?

Let's face it. For many of us, our memories of play revolved around dolls, trucks, swings, balls, bats, bikes, and perhaps an outside tree house. We loved to listen to the kids' request session on Sunday morning radio. We played board games and cards and had friends over to play. So what has changed from those 'good old days'?

What has significantly changed is that entertainment today requires no initiative or physical activity. Kids sit and watch movies on TV or watch DVD's. They play computer or hand held games. They sit for hours on the Internet talking to their friends. How did we let this happen?

I think it has just basically sneaked up on parents. Today we live in such a technological and sedentary world that we have allowed our kids to follow it without question. In the 60's and 70's our life-styles were different, with one parent often home to supervise kids' play time. So much technology was not around to provide the competition it does today.

I have always told my kids that their minds are a blank canvas. Once images are painted on that canvas, they are not easily removed. We need to protect our kids' minds from negative input. Movies today are far more graphic than we ever knew. TV programs are much more explicit than ever before. Kids' minds become numbed to the horror of those images. They are getting less and less shocked by what they see on the media. Their brains are being washed over and over with violent and extreme images, and we wonder where some kids get such cruel and violent ideas.

Is there a light at the end of the tunnel? A major improvement today is the positive difference in children's stories. We were brought up on 'Hansel and Gretel', 'Little Red Riding Hood', 'The Seven Dwarves', and 'Punch and Judy'. Why more of us didn't have nightmares I will never know! Many children's stories these days have a much more positive and gentle message.

As well as the lack of activity that video games, internet and movie watching brings, kids today are not often doing anything tactile – not getting their hands dirty by playing in the soil. We were visiting New Zealand just a few months ago and saw a dear little 2 year-old girl wearing what started off to be a spotless baby pink top and bottom. She had found a dirty puddle and, before long, she was covered in mud and was completely unaware of the amused crowd that had gathered around her. How cool to see her enjoying herself and to see parents allowing this to happen!

Dare I suggest that at least three times a week parents turn off the TV, ban the video games and Internet, and send the kids outside to play? If the yard is not fenced, put your children in the car and take them to a park. Let them feel the bark on the trees and check out the bugs on the ground. Teach them about handling little creatures with care.

Play a game with them. Bookstores have game books that you can use if you run out of ideas. Keep it simple and see what fun your children can have. There are many more healthy ways to entertain your children than letting them sit and munch while painting with permanent markers on their memory canvases.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.