



NEW DIRECTION Mustard Seed

August 2018

PO Box 18745 Asheville NC 28814 (828) 206-0495



Dear Friends,

Once was a time when the majority of households had one telephone and one television set. The telephone was connected to the wall which meant any calls were within earshot of most family members. To the great relief of us teenagers they came out with longer cords which meant one might be able to stretch behind the closed door of another room. The television set was strategically placed right smack in the center of the living room or the den. Each night at 11 after the news the message would come across the screen “it is 11 o’clock. Do you know where your children are?” And then the screen went blank until the next morning for the morning news.

Most of us who were children in those days can also remember dinner time being at 6 sharp meaning everyone was to be washed up and seated around the table to eat a meal that was actually cooked in the kitchen.

Most of us remember spending as much time as possible outside (after chores) playing, riding bikes, swimming. While there were some organized sports most were pick-up games and kids needed to learn how to work out issues such as cheating, mean behavior, etc without the help of adults. We grew through this process and consequently learned that conflict is a normal piece of relationship.

There was little question, back in those days, regarding who was in charge. The parents were the gate keepers. If we invited anyone into our home, our parents were the ones to ok or nix the invitation. The standard of entertainment dished out to families on television was wholesome. There was a steady momentum to life with safe, predictable societal norms from which most families operated. Sure there were shadowy elements of society. But they were on the fringes rather than infiltrated throughout.

Fast forward to today, 2018. The majority of households have multiple television sets, iPads, smartphones, computers, and gaming centers. Very few families actually gather around the table for any meals much less an evening meal that has been intentionally prepared and served. And where are all the children? There is

nothing more wonderful than to hear a bunch of kids playing together in a neighborhood setting. Nothing sadder than to see children, each in their own rooms with a screen as their companion. Now days children spend more time watching other children dance, sing, play, make mistakes on YouTube than actual interaction in the flesh with one another. And important to know that children are interacting with people via technology you would never desire to have in your home. Parents are shocked to find the caliber of people who are invited into their children's bedrooms via social media. These folks would never be invited across the threshold of wise gatekeepers.

As wonderful as we may believe all of today's technology to be it has come with a great price which has greatly affected today's children. It is here to stay. Moving the family to a little house on the prairie is not an option. The challenge before us is how to live a life of digital balance in this era whereby many parents attest to being taken by storm; unprepared for the wake of damage such overstimulation is causing their children.....as well as themselves.

Many of today's parents felt in order to "be normal" their children needed their own ipad, smartphone, video gaming system, television set, computer in their own rooms.

This topic is frequent in our counseling office. Children and teenagers threatening to kill themselves, threatening to jump off buildings and having to be rescued by fire rescue and police, overdosing with handfuls of pills, box cutter knife held to the throat, smashing parents' iphones; threatening to call DSS or run away. The common denominator in each of these situations was a parent saying "we are going to pull the plug for a while until we can get this in balance." While these extreme behaviors may not have manifested in your home it is worthwhile to step back and honestly assess if technology is out of balance in your home as well as understand the toll it is taking on the emotional growth of individuals and relationships. As of late it has been "revealed" that too much screen use can affect the ability to focus contributing to ADD. The tendency of western medicine has been to treat symptoms rather than going to the root of the problem. Too many times a child is medicated when what really needed to be examined was the amount of proper and improper stimulation the child was receiving in his environment.

The purpose of this newsletter is to shed light over this topic, giving parents factual information and a tangible, workable framework from which to

make wise decisions. It is vital for parents to be educated in order to make confident parenting decisions as they navigate their children through this deep forest. It is important for the adults to step back and truly appraise whom they want to be the voice of influence in the molding and shaping of their children's minds and hearts. As well, it is vitally important to understand these devices are highly addictive. It is so much better for parents to be proactive and stay on top of things rather than to be buried beneath and have to dig out.

"Cell phones are addictive in the same way slot machines are.....the immediacy of response, gratification and excitation combine to make the user want more and want more now. With text messaging we see very similar types of things that happen when somebody uses a drug. Dopamine, a chemical transmitter associated with the motivation and reward response in the human brain, gets released in the brain in little doses like little bitty hits. As it turns out, receiving and answering a notification on Facebook results in the same thing." Brad Huddleston (Digital Cocaine)

Dopamine is a neurotransmitter that helps control the brain's reward and pleasure centers. It also helps regulate movement and emotion. As you go for more and more pleasure you push the dopamine level higher and higher. This is called dopamine flooding and creates a spiral effect that results in compulsive drug or behavior abuse. A constant release of dopamine is stressful to the nervous system. Is it any wonder there are more children and adolescents diagnosed and medicated for anxiety disorder today than ever before? The likely culprit is digital overstimulation. Again, before we subject our children to medication it is vital we take stock of the overall picture of their lives, examining where there should be recalibration. When the nervous system is overstimulated this increases the production of cortisol, the stress hormone. According to Dr. Svetlana Kogan (Do Computers Really Fry Your Brain): "It's the flight or fight response. When you are overusing these technologies your cortisol will be pumping through the roof. Higher levels of cortisol increase the risk of experiencing anxiety, depression, insomnia, high blood pressure, and diabetes."

"Smartphones have turned tens, if not hundreds, of millions of people around the world into players of videogames such as Angry Birds, Temple Run or Candy Crush. But as the games made their way to everyone's pocket, reports of addiction to them also escalated." Liraz Margalit Ph.D Behind Online Behavior

“As the pursuit of pleasure has increased dramatically, resulting in change in brain chemistry, it also has a numbing effect in the pleasure center of the brain. This decreased ability to sense pleasure in everyday activities is called anhedonia and it is epidemic. (Anhedonia from Greek An-which means without and Hedone which means pleasure). Scientists are adamant that as we push the stress level exciting stimulation higher and higher, we are literally overloading the pathways to the pleasure center of the brain. This overload causes our brain’s pleasure center to demand a further increase in the level of stimulation before delivering more feelings of pleasure. This results in a decline in our pleasure system’s ability to deliver enjoyment out of ordinary, simple things.” (Dr. Archibald Hart Thrilled To Death: How the Endless Pursuit of Pleasure is Leaving Us Numb.)

The reality is what we have before us is chronic hedonism (hedonists primarily engage in the pursuit of pleasure; sensually self indulgent). Are we as a society becoming more kind and loving or more selfish and hard hearted? Are families connecting in deeper ways or has connection become more shallow? What ever happened to eye contact in conversation? Have you ever looked around a restaurant? Most are interacting with their smartphones rather than one another.

When Steve Jobs, Apple founder and CEO, was asked, “So your kids must love the iPad”, his response was “they haven’t used it. We limit how much technology our kids use at home.” He, like many other parents in Silicon Valley, send their children to Waldorf Schools which either have limited or no technology. Why? Because they want their children to learn how to process information by thinking and allow their

minds and brains to properly grow. This is the same type of school we had on the mountain for 17 years. Many of the teens who came to live with us had been overstimulated by the use of video games, computers, television (this was long before the Smart Phone.) Many of them did not know how to engage in conversation, play games, write stories. Most of them had stunted imaginations. Their story lines were as shallow as “Hank shot John” However when they began to receive proper stimulation new neuro- pathways were created and lost territory began to be reclaimed. We didn’t know anything about the brain, etc. We were just old school enough and led by the wisdom of the Lord to immerse these kids in what was of substance and simply do life with them.

Technology is powerful. How can we bring about balance in our homes? First and foremost is for the parents to not take back by storm what they have allowed to occur under their watch. It is not your children’s fault the elephant is in every room. The change must begin with the parents taking an honest inventory of their own screen use. Be honest if it is out of control and decide what steps to, personally, take.

Secondly: don’t ever allow your children to tell you that you have no right to set guidelines in your home. You not only have a right but a responsibility. You are the designated custodial gatekeeper of your home. The enemy is not circling your home. You have already been invaded. Now is the time to take incremental steps.

There should never be screens in your children or teen’s room. Computers should always be in a common area. Television sets, computers, video games, etc should never be in bedrooms. Many children and teen are experiencing sleep issues. Why? Because of overexposure. Many teens are taking their iPads, smartphones, etc to bed with them. Parents who have learned to be on top, rather than under, the situation gather all of the devices at night and charge them in their room. When children and teenagers say this is unfair, tell them that while it may seem unfair it is wise and as long as they are living under your roof you will guard their hearts and minds. If they sneak into your room to take it back they should lose it for a significant period of time. Set limits on usage. There is an app called Qustodio – prime which automatically shuts your child’s phone off at a scheduled time.



<https://www.socialworkhelper.com/2017/08/11/technology-children-parents-survival-guide/>

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, “Parents should make a media use plan, including mealtime and bedtime curfews for media devices. The average 8-10 year old may be in front of a screen up to 8 hours a day; teenagers up to 11 with 75% of teenagers owning their own phones and nearly all teens texting. The old “no more than 2 hours daily” rule no longer exists. Therefore a healthy media diet needs to be enforced. Make a media use plan that is healthy and wise. Limit entertainment screen time to less than two hours daily. For children under 2 totally discourage screen media exposure. Parents these days need to monitor how much time is spent in front of a screen, what their children are watching, how they are interacting with one another on social media and make sure that essentials such as meal times, bed times, school work, active play and healthy family interaction are included in their child’s daily life. We, as parents, are going to have to work harder to make sure our kids get what they need in this electronic universe.”

Parents it is 2018. Do you know how much time your children are spending on screens? And whom or what has been invited across the threshold of your home? If you find you need help in this area we will be offering workshops for parents starting in October. If you feel you need to begin taking steps now and would like help feel free to call and set up an appointment. We would be glad to help you.

Be Strong and Wise

All of us At the Mustard Seed Project

www.newdirectionmustardseed.com



NEW DIRECTION
Mustard Seed
PO Box 18745
Asheville NC 28814