Children and Digital Media: Rethinking Parent Roles

Smartphones and tablets are on nearly every dinner table and nightstand, and even our youngest children interact with technology on a daily basis. Because technology is so much a part of our every-day lives, parents have to work pretty hard to keep up with what's out there. But more than knowing the latest must-have app or game, parents may need to reconsider how they connect with their child during technology use.

Some experts suggest that adults – parents, teachers, librarians – need to consider their role as one of a "media mentor," a trusted adult who engage with children to use technology in creative and interest-ing ways, beyond games and flashing lights. This sharing can lead to interesting conversations between parent and child, can boost language development, and can lead to a healthy attitude about media and technology.

There are two areas in which technology may provide a good literacy boost: an exposure to new words and ideas, and helping children learn more about topics they're interested in exploring. Here's how:

Exposure to new words: Research suggests that carefully designed programming, for example PBS's SuperWhy! on PBS, can improve children's language development, letter knowledge, and understanding of sounds. Beyond educational television, other media experiences such as watching an author read and talk about a book, interacting with e-books that contain interesting and exciting words, and engaging with quality apps that promote word growth can all help exposure young children to new words and ideas.

Learning more about interesting topics: Does your child love butterflies? Construction equipment? Soccer? Regardless of topic, one can find interesting pictures, video and text about that topic. As your child's first teacher, spend some time familiarizing yourself with some of the reputable sources online and the types of media available. By doing the background work before sitting down with your child, you will be able to use your media time together for exploration and learning.

Regardless of the technology you and your child are using together, **be an active participant**. Make sure your child is following along and understanding what's going on. Keep the conversation flowing with lots of back-and-forth talk. Model healthy technology use by keeping an eye on the time. Most importantly, recognize your changing role in helping your young learner navigate the digital world.

For more information:

- *How True Are Our Assumptions about Screen Time?* By Lisa Guernsey. Retrieved from: http://families.naeyc.org/learning-and-development/music-math-more/how-true-are-our-assumptions-about-screen-time
- Educational Literacy Apps http://www.readingrockets.org/teaching/reading101/literacyapps/