

The Educators' Guide:

15 Real-World Tools

For Conscious Parents Raising
Happy & Healthy Kids





In today's fast-paced world, it's not always easy to raise our children in ways that help them become strong leaders, embody great values, maintain healthy attitudes and bodies, and learn skill sets that will empower them for life. But it is possible!

This guide is thoughtfully designed to inspire and offer ideas for how to raise kids that enjoy their school life, their home life and get the most of their time as kids!

It combines insights from some of today's leading educators, Waldorf teachers, and real-world practices from parents who are in the trenches like you.

Please read on for some great tips on how to inspire your child's creativity at home, stay healthy in the digital age, and develop essential skills for their daily life.

— **The community at Sanderling**

Raising Healthy Kids in the Digital Age

Something is happening around us that is making many parents uneasy. We are starting to see it in our children's friend groups, we are reading about it online, and we are witnessing the statistics of medication use amongst children. What are we talking about? Childhood anxiety and depression — words that hurt us to use in the same sentence.

It's a sad reality, but a true one: many of our nation's children are suffering from some form of depression or anxiety, and it's only getting worse. Let's look at the numbers... A recent Time Magazine article reported that in 2015 roughly 3 million teens ages 12 to 17 had had at least one major depressive episode in the past year, (according to the Department of Health and Human Services.) More than 2 million report experiencing depression that impairs their daily function. And about 30% of girls and 20% of boys—totaling 6.3 million teens—have had an anxiety disorder, according to data from the National Institute of Mental Health.

That's a lot of unhappy children — and they haven't even reached the age of mortgages, financial burden, work stress, and marital complexities.

So what, exactly, is happening out there that is so negatively impacting the happiness levels of this generation of children?

You don't need to be a social anthropologist to realize that our children are exposed to more technology than any previous generation. In fact, six in 10 children older than nine years old now own a cellphone, according to the Pew Internet & American Life Project, and teens text an average of 60 times a day with four in 10 also using video chats. What's more, kids eight to 18 years old spend about 10.5 hours a day in front of a computer, television or mobile device —(up from 7.5 hours a decade ago.) That's a lot of screen time! And while some will argue that our children are growing up as "digital natives" (a term coined by influential video game developer Marc Prensky,) it doesn't mean that it is not having a negative effect on their developing brains.

Richard Freed, a well-known child and adolescent psychologist who authored the book "Wired Child: Debunking Popular Technology Myths," believes that "Technology overuse could be rewiring kids'

developing brains in ways that could explain the growing number of kids diagnosed with anxiety and other psychiatric disorders. Ironically, some of the biggest names in Silicon Valley (such as Steve Jobs and Bill Gates) seem to be aware of this, and admit that they are strict about limiting the amount of screen time their own children are allowed.

In spite of the data, some of the leading minds in traditional education are on board with this all-pervasive tech reality. The increase in technology in the classroom has been touted as a great step in educational development. Yet that hasn't reaped the rewards that were so eagerly anticipated, and in many ways, the technology just comes between the teacher and the student, de-humanizing the element of education that has stood the test of time.

The good news is, it really doesn't have to be this way. While our world is continually evolving, and we are never going to truly go back in time (nor should we necessarily want to,) there are definite steps we can take to ensure our kids find balance and happiness in this increasingly digital age.

5 Tools to Curb the Negative Influence of Tech on Your Child

- 1.** Postpone the age you introduce technology in your child's life. There are so many healthier pastimes for the developing mind such as outdoor, unscheduled, and imaginative play. The American Board of Pediatrics began, ten years ago, recommending NO screen time for children under two. Modern science meets ancestral wisdom as more and more people are coming to realize the dangers and drawbacks of screens in both children and adults. Screens are hard on the eyes and cause the body to become sedentary, reducing brain function and slowing metabolism. But screens also harm the child's intellect and creative abilities — the very things which will allow them to be progressive, free-thinking entrepreneurs in their adult, and young adult lives.
- 2.** Provide as much time in nature as possible. Nature has been called the great teacher, where children not only develop a sense of responsibility for our planet and our natural world, they also meet what is greater than themselves, cultivating a deep sense of reverence and love for their surroundings. Time in nature has been shown to counteract anxiety, depression and even symptoms of ADHD and Autism Spectrum Disorder. In nature, a child can exercise deep creativity, imagination and wonder.





- 3.** From a young age, children learn about the world around them through imitation. Be sure to model healthy tech usage around children by putting your phone down when speaking with them, looking them in the eyes to let them know you are listening, and by keeping your phone away from the table at mealtimes. For older kids (and once cell phone ownership becomes more inevitable) establish a rule from the start that cell phones stay downstairs overnight.
- 4.** Question whether you want your children to be learning through devices in early grade school. Explore alternative education models such as Waldorf that focus on hands-on and teacher/child centric learning. Waldorf schools are not anti-tech—they simply believe that children under 12 receive no benefit from learning through technology, while the benefits of hands-on learning of core subjects are plentiful.
- 5.** Understand that there will be no disadvantage to your child adopting technology later than today's "norm." You only need to see how quickly a three year old can navigate their way around an Ipad to see there is little barrier to entry into the world of technology once a child is developmentally ready. In fact, high school students who have studied in a way that encourages critical thinking skills and curiosity can quickly learn computer skills, but the reverse is not so easy.

Why Handwork is a Critical Piece of the Education Puzzle

Handwork (noun): work done with the hands and not by machines

Humans were built to work with their hands. And since the beginning of time, that is exactly what we have done. From the pottery and tools made during the Bronze age, to the clothing and shoes that we have worn in more recent centuries, mankind has imagined, created, and produced. Yet the tides are changing. Today, with mass production and machines taking the place of a lot of handwork, it's hard to always connect the sweater that we buy to the person who made it, or the rug in our living room to the people who weaved it. In fact, the very need to create ourselves has in large part been taken away, with many people never learning some of the most basic handwork skills.

Handwork is integral to the development of a human being and helps educate the whole human. The Head, Heart, and Hands are brought together in a seamless manner through the practice of handwork and crafts. In fact, it's such

a fundamental aspect of education that Rudolf Steiner -- the founder of the Waldorf education system -- formally integrated handwork into the curriculum for Waldorf schools. Kids learn to make their own musical instrument cases, design patterns for small blankets, and so much more.

While this means students will learn to weave, knit, crochet and sew, his intention was not to produce weavers and crochet professionals. Rather, it was to help students feel confident when going out into the wider world that they would be perfectly capable of managing the practical affairs of life. While you impart confidence in pottery, woodwork and structure building through school art projects, you simultaneously plant the seed for careers and futures that go beyond linear thinking and demand more complex problem solving.

While the benefits of handwork and crafts in childhood are virtually endless, these are some that we see as particularly relevant.





Key Benefits of Handwork

- Promotes the healthy capacity for thinking and judging
- Develops the dexterity, sensitivity, and fine motor control of the hands and fingers, which in turn has a positive impact on brain development
- Moves the child from 'play' to meaningful work
- Builds confidence
- Encourages a living connection to math -- (just ask anyone who sews or knits how patterns, numbers and measurements are critical to success!)
- Helps to develop patience and perseverance since a handwork project takes time
- Makes a connection between mankind and nature, as the materials used are from the earth rather than manufactured plastic
- Builds the capacity to solve problems. Students have to notice mistakes, keep count of their stitches, and focus while knitting
- Teaches children to regulate themselves as they become frustrated or learn how to ask for help
- Offers a form of therapeutic activity throughout the day

Pretty compelling, right? Are you motivated to incorporate handwork, crafts, and all manner of working with hands into your child's life at home? Simply try some of these easy, everyday ways we've put together for you here.

5 Easy Ways to Incorporate “Working With the Hands” Into Home Routines

- 1.** Get dirty with your kids in the garden! Even the simplest garden project like pulling weeds can help develop their fine motor skills
- 2.** Have your children help you in the kitchen by chopping vegetables, assisting with baking and cooking, and doing the dishes (it’s even good for your little ones to use a knife to cut if done with adult supervision)
- 3.** Learn a new handwork technique by taking up knitting or cross-stitch with your children ages seven years or older
- 4.** Let your kids clean up by sweeping the floor. The sweeping motion enables their bodies to cross the midline which integrates left and right brain development
- 5.** Have them braid a friend’s hair, build a homemade craft, or paint with watercolors. Working with their hands helps to ground them and create necessary life skills that create a lifelong foundation for learning.



How to Inspire Free and Imaginative Play at Home

Have you ever witnessed a small group of children playing freely on their own? Or maybe you've even seen your own kids find their way to their own unstructured play. And... dare we say it... you experience a moment of calm?

As Rudolf Steiner, founder of Waldorf education, explained, we must “Develop free human beings, who are able themselves to impart purpose and direction to their lives.” Children have the capacity to use a wide range of their senses, and learn in a tactile environment. This way of learning has been shown to lay the groundwork for an

adulthood that embraces a varied skill set, allows for critical and independent thinking, and frees the mind's creativity.

In a world where too many young minds are being dominated by the passive consumption of technology and where childhood anxiety and behavioral issues are on the rise, we believe that ‘simplicity parenting’ is the perfect antidote. And because we know that some simple measures can benefit children everywhere, we wanted to share some easy ways you can inspire and facilitate free and unstructured play at home.





5 Tools for Inspiring Free and Imaginative Play:

- 1.** Using Rhythm: A regular, predictable schedule and routine has been proven to benefit children from all walks of life. With routine, a child does not need to wonder what is coming next, which takes them out of the physical experience of living and being. When we move our children through a predictable routine, we provide security, comfort, and safety in their growth and development. Whether we are talking about the rhythm of the day, the week, the season, or the year, children actually thrive when they know what to expect and when. Chances are, you already have certain routines in your life that your children have come to expect, such as regular meal and bath times. Think about adding small rituals to each of these to mark their arrival.
- 2.** Free Play: Since the 1950s, children's free play has been continually declining with adults increasingly exercising control over children's activities. What do we mean by "free play?" Essentially, it refers to children being in charge of their own play without adult interference and control. Free play has been proven to lay the basis for future mental health, give children a chance to find their own interests, learn how to make decisions and solve problems, and work out how to handle their emotions. Perhaps most importantly, it is a source of happiness for children. Consider having less organized activities and leaving open time windows for child-directed playtime. You may be pleasantly surprised at how it benefits your child's emotional health.

3. Chores: Let's admit it, this one could be a win-win! But chores are not about free labor - the underlying theme is one of promoting positive self-esteem. By taking part in chores at home, a child realizes that they are needed, that their family functions better because of their input, and, in turn, they become more likely to want to give back — not just at home but in the wider world. What's more, chores introduce purposeful movement and sensory activities into the homelife where they might otherwise be lacking. Childhood chores have even been scientifically proven to lead to greater success as an adult, according to a 75-year study of human development at Harvard University called the Grant Study. Take a look at your household and see what chores would be appropriate for the ages of your children. Whether it's setting the table, being responsible for their own laundry, or preparing dinner once a week, the long term benefits will well outweigh any resistance you are met with!

4. Work With Hands: Handwork is an important part of childhood development. In fact, until more recently, handwork featured in the curriculums of most public schools in America— taught as Home Economics. Sadly, that is becoming less and less common in schools across the country as an increasing amount of emphasis is put on STEAM and other programs. Handwork, whether we are talking about crochet, knitting, or simply modeling out of beeswax and clay, integrates the intellect, instills a sense of care, and paves the way for practical skills. It can also be calming in a world that often isolates academic pursuits alone. Think about bringing some of these elements into your home. Let your younger ones get their hands dirty kneading dough and chopping vegetables, while your older children can benefit hugely from learning to sew or knit. Have a constant supply of beeswax on hand for modeling activities. It's inexpensive, natural, and fun for all — why not try?! (here's a great link to ways to use beeswax: <https://blog.bellalunatoys.com/2014/stockmar-modeling-beeswax-tutorial.html>)





5. Take Away the TV and Screens (or at least limit its presence in your child's life): TV and screens have been shown to reduce a child's ability to focus and to build on their intrinsic imagination. Too much time spent watching TV leads to a fractured attention span, and, in many cases, it contributes to health issues such as obesity and diabetes. There are a multitude of studies that show its negative impact on a child's developing brains, and in 2010 Dr Aric Sigman presented a paper to the European Parliament that concluded that "There is a 'dose-response' relationship between the age at which children start watching screen media, the number of daily hours they watch and negative effects on physical health and well-being irrespective of the quality of the screen material. Screen time must now be considered a major public health issue and reducing screen time must become the new priority for child health". Start by turning off the TV set when no one is watching it (there are far better background noises to enjoy in at home,) and look at postponing your child's exposure to TV until much later in his development. Better still, get rid of it! Out of sight is out of mind. It might be tough at first, but his imagination will thank you for it in years to come!

Sometimes, all it takes is a little shift in the way we function at home, and a little more intention towards what we want our children to be exposed to as they are developing, to make huge changes to their overall emotional wellbeing and future success

Closing Thoughts & Your Invitation

The founder of Waldorf education, Rudolf Steiner, once wrote:

“A healthy social life is found only when, in the mirror of each soul, the whole community finds its reflection, and when, in the whole community, the virtue of each one is living.”

By downloading and reading this guide, it is our hope that you'll take some of its wisdom into your own parenting life, and that all of our children and our greater community will be the better for it.

If what you've read here aligns with your values, and you are seeking a leading, accredited N. County San Diego school that embodies this work, we welcome you to tour Sanderling Waldorf's Nursery Kindergarten and Grades School. We would be delighted to get to know you, your child/children and welcome you to our community.

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