



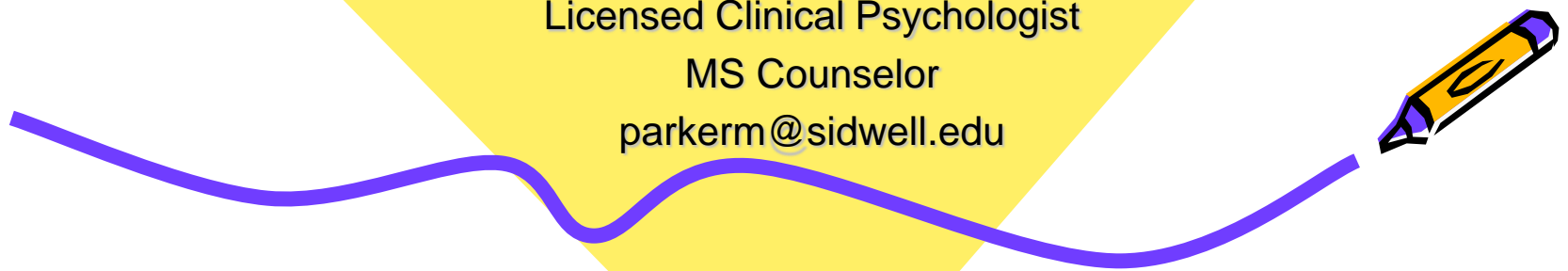
Parenting the Younger Child in the Digital Age

Michelle Parker, Ph.D.

Licensed Clinical Psychologist

MS Counselor

parkerm@sidwell.edu



Parenting Mission Statement

What are our goals for our
kids?

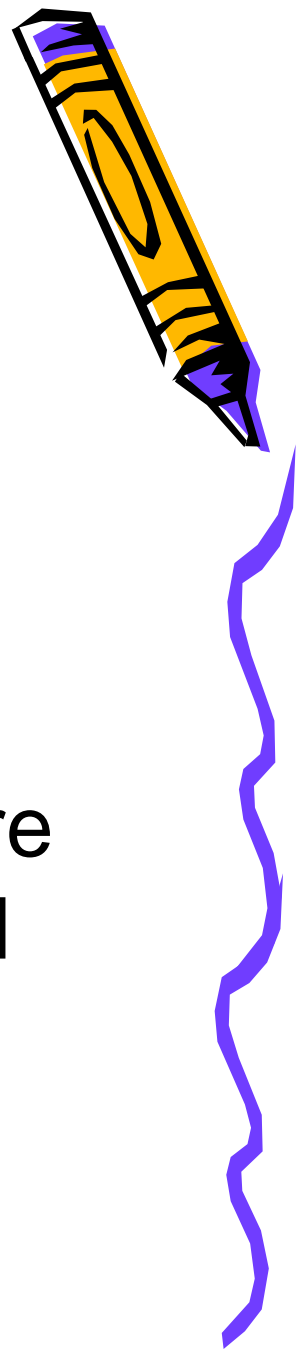


Goals of Parenting

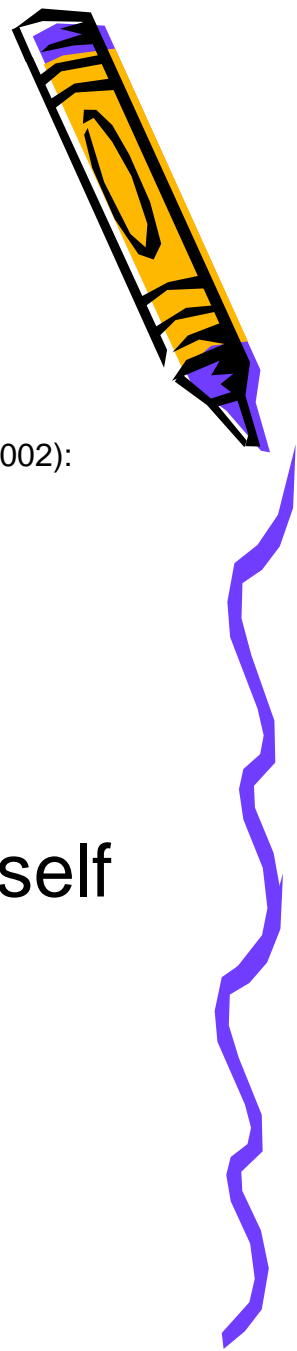
To raise children who are:

- Healthy
- Happy
- Successful in their own pursuits

But what do those really mean, how are they related to brain development, and how do we promote these through our parenting?



But what does that really look like?



Childhood Roots of Adult Happiness (Hallowell, E., 2002):

- Resilience
- Optimism
- Flow
- Connection to something bigger than oneself



Resilience

(Blake, et al.; Ginsburg)



- -secure sense of who they are
- -a sense of being able to “be themselves”
- -a sense of belonging and connection
- -a solid set of coping mechanisms that allow them to face adversity and manage stress
- -a belief in their ability to influence things and make changes
- -ability to ask for help
- -ability to recognize, care about and take responsibility for the impact of their behavior on others
- -capacity to self-regulate
- -ability to spend time alone and to reflect on their experiences



Optimism (Seligman)



- -“can do, want to do” attitude
- -internal locus of control (opposite of an external locus of control, which leads to learned helplessness)
- -ability to tackle a problem and stick with it until it is solved



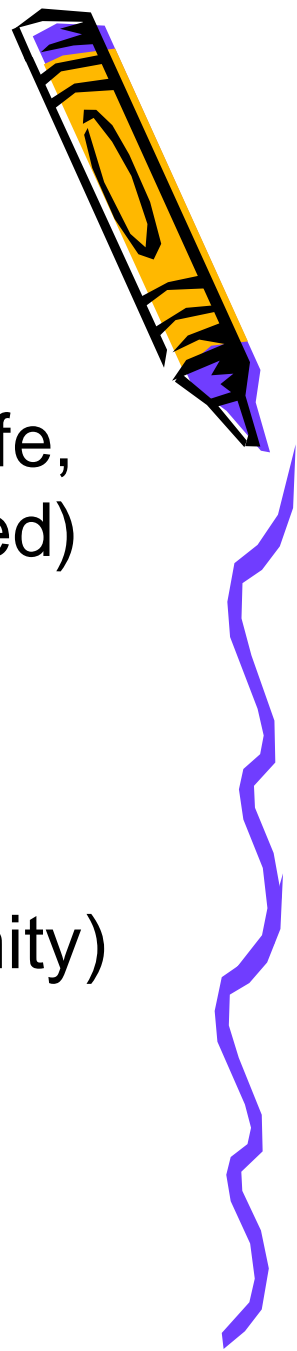
Flow (Csikszentmihalyi)

- -“ability to lose oneself in a pleasurable, rewarding experience”
- -involves momentarily “forgetting where you are, or even who you are”
- -sense of timelessness



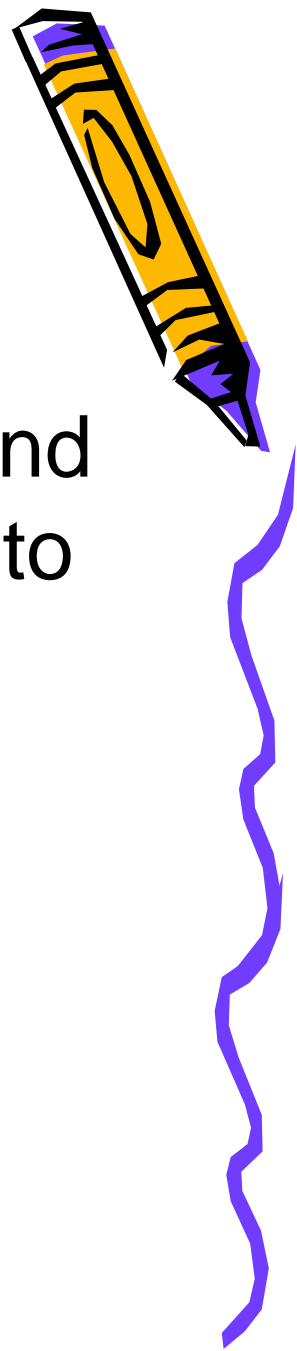
Connection

- Strong attachments to caregivers (feel safe, feel loved, feel understood and feel wanted)
- Connections with other adults
- Good peer relationships
- Connection to “something bigger than yourself” (family, school, church, community)



How do we get there?

- Need to look at brain development and how these characteristics are linked to brain functioning
- Need to look at what kinds of experiences and parenting practices promote optimal brain development



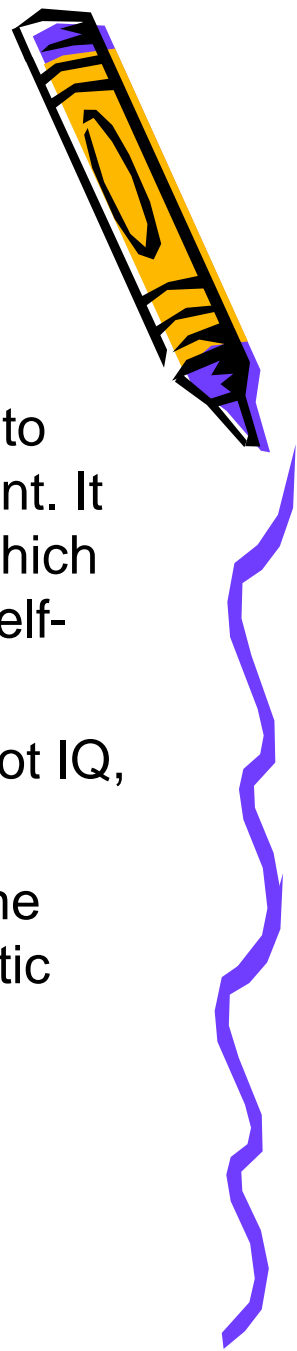
Principles of Brain Development



- Brain contains hundreds of billions of neurons at births.
- Neuronal connections are forged over time and through experience interacting with the environment that allows for increasingly more complex functioning.
- Myelinization occurs over time, which increases efficiency of signal transmission.
- ALL BRAIN DEVELOPMENT IS DRIVEN FORWARD BY OUR EXPERIENCES.
- Pruning process follows “use it or lose it” principle.
- Brain is wired to expect “species-typical experience to facilitate this process.- RESEARCH DATA
- So if experience is important, is “supersizing” it even better?



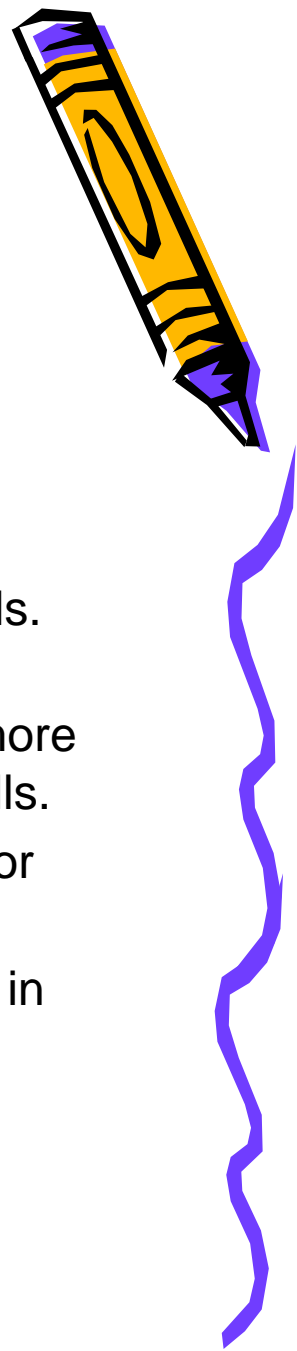
Brain Development and Self-Talk



- Capacity for “self-talk”, the inner conversation that we use to solve problems, is one of the drivers of cortical development. It is language that is the foundation of the executive brain, which allows for higher order thinking, including the capacity to self-regulate.
- Research shows that best predictor of school success is not IQ, but self-control.
- Self-talk is also linked to the development of a “theory of the mind” , which, in turn, is associated with a healthy, optimistic sense of self and the capacity for empathy



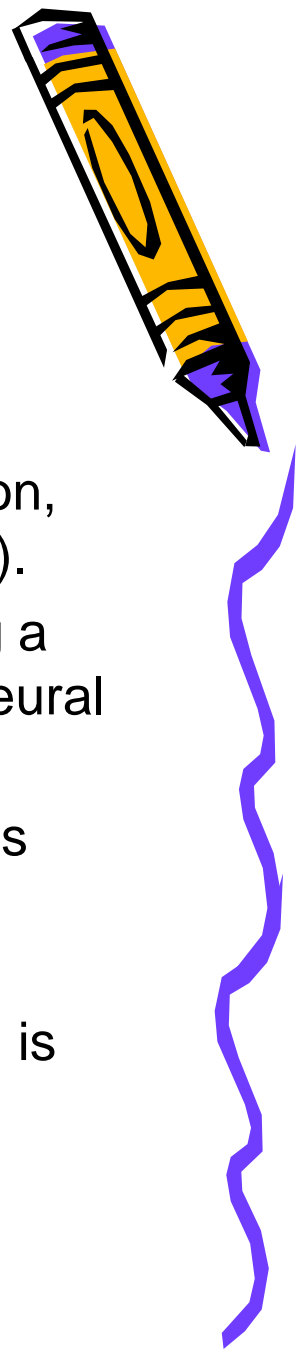
Brain Development and Play



- Play is a central factor in the development of a complex, skilled, socially adept and cognitively flexible brain. Correlated with development of self-regulation and attentional skills.
- Play has been shown to directly stimulate the growth of brain cells.
- Children who spend significant amount of time engaged in unstructured, free play display more advanced language skills, more creative thinking, greater memory and better problem-solving skills.
- Play has been shown to be directly correlated with the capacity for self-talk.
- The more we structure the play of children, the less they engage in self-talk. (same is true for toys that provide a “script”).
- EXPERIMENTAL DATA- 2 studies



Brain Development and Sleep



- Significant clinical and research data that links inadequate sleep in children with higher rates of problems with attention, behavior, emotions, and academic difficulties. (Dahl, 2005).
- The last 10 years have seen increase in research showing a direct relationship between sleep, brain cell growth, and neural plasticity.
- Sleep has been directly linked with the expression of genes involved in promoting neuronal plasticity.
- Brain scans indicate that during sleep, activity in the hippocampus, which is associated with memory formation, is activated.



Brain Development and Screens



- Television induces neural passivity and reduces the capacity for maintaining focus. Watching TV demands less interphase between the two hemispheres, does not exercise the capacity for self-talk and problem solving.
- High levels of multi-tasking can lead to shallower thinking, weakened concentration, reduced creativity and heightened stress (Principe, p. 196).
- Constantly scanning environment for next tweet, text, etc. revs up the dopamine pleasure system and leaves us in a continuous state of tension.



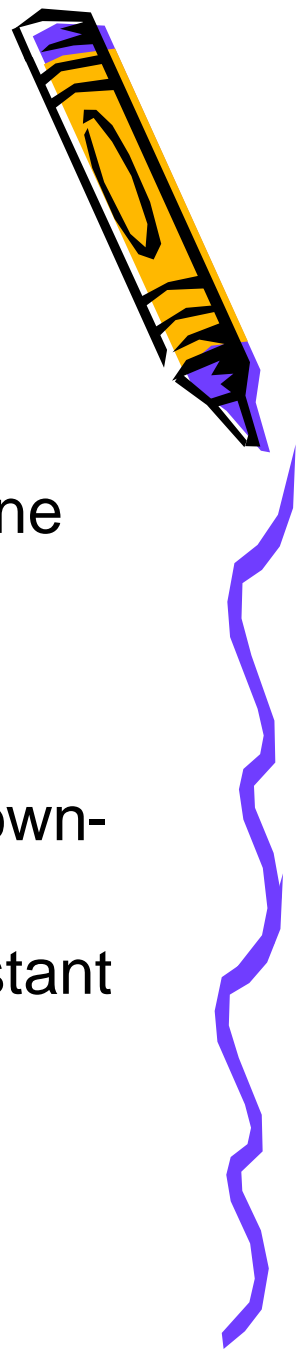


Computer/Video Use and Devtpt. Of Executive Functioning

- Computer/video use associated with less symbolic play (symbolic play is associated with greater creative thinking/problem-solving and overall well-being)
- Computer/video use leads to decrease in verbalizations
- Computers do too much of the “integrating”
- Computers/video games/tv arouse right hemisphere at expense of left (associated with decreased mood, motivation).



Truth about Multi-Tasking



- Kids are better at it than older folks
- Output and depth clearly shown to diminish as one attends to more tasks
- Efficiency improves when tasks are completed sequentially rather than “toggling”
- Multi-tasking has led to a decrease in mental “down-time”
- Over time, brain can become wired to need constant “uptime”, which decreases ability to focus and concentrate



So, what are we to do?

TAKE A DEEP BREATH!



Moral of the Story



- Brain development works best when the child is exposed to experiences that require integrating physical and mental challenges
- Unstructured, lightly supervised play has been shown to be most conducive for brain development.
- Children need quiet down-time to develop the capacity for “self-talk”, which is fundamental for self-regulation, higher order problem solving, and critical thinking.
- Brain development requires adequate sleep (10-11 hours for school age children).
- For everything else, **BALANCE IS KEY!!**



General Implications for Parenting



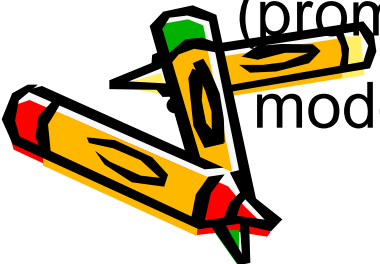
- Love and nurture your children.
- Enjoy them!
- Incorporate humor into family life (laugh with them and model the balanced use of humor as a coping mechanism)
- Set age-appropriate limits so that they feel safe (promotes frontal lobe development)
- Expect them to contribute (chores)
- Let them make age-appropriate mistakes



More parenting strategies



- Use discipline strategies that encourage them to learn how to self-regulate and live in a world that will not ultimately revolve around them (I recommend 1-2-3 Magic by Tom Phelan)
- Have REALISTIC expectations for them (“grow the tree you’ve got”)
- Be open about YOUR “growth edges” and model your own coping strategies
- Help them internalize your “voice of reason” (promotes moral development),
model your own use of “self-talk” for problem solving

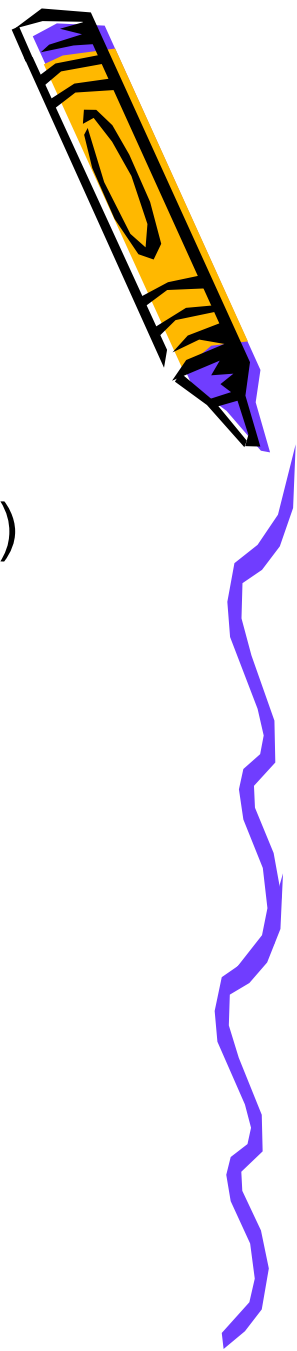


Implications for Scheduling Extra-Curriculars



- Make sure that they are getting enough sleep (10-11 hours)
- Make sure that there is plenty of time for free, unstructured, lightly supervised play
- Make sure that they have enough “down-time” to get lost in their own thoughts
- Limit screen time
- Don’t overschedule your kids- enriching activities enrich, but don’t supplant unstructured play
- Encourage play dates or just playing in the neighborhood
- Make sure that you have enough down-time. If parenting feels “like a job” to you, then life probably feels like a job to your kid





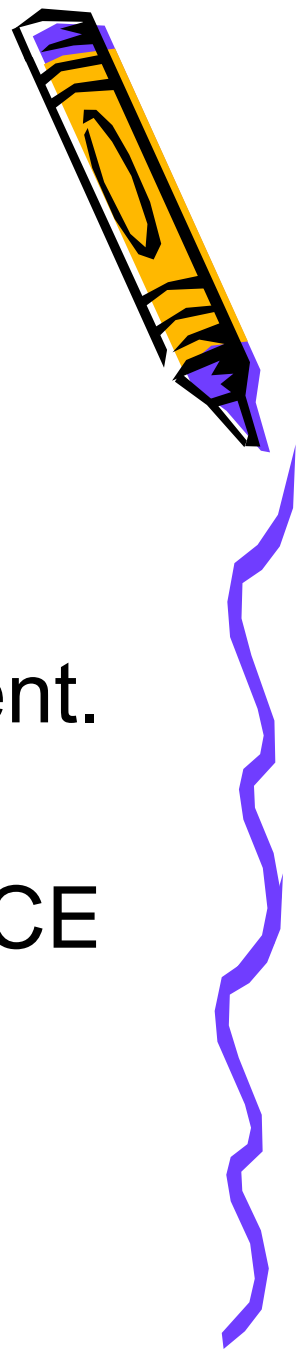
Parenting and Technology

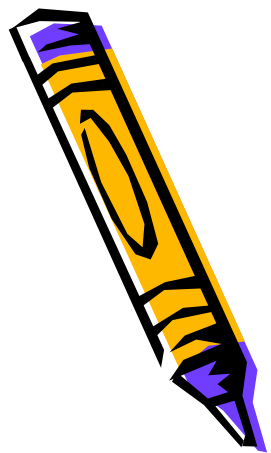
- Postpone cell phones, especially “smart phones
- Set limits on usage (computers, gaming, phones)
- Actively teach “techno-manners”
- As they get involved with social media, insist on having all passwords
- Use passwords as entry into active, ongoing dialogue with kids, rather than as a “spy” tool
- Talk to your kids about safety



But most of all...

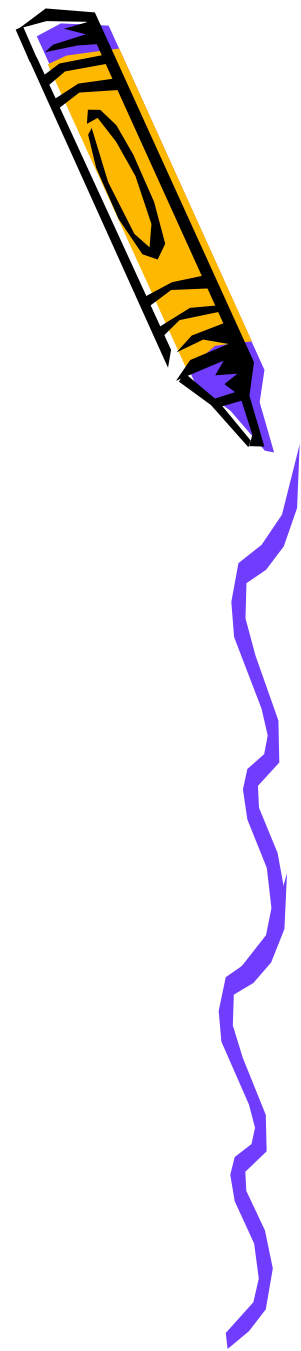
- Remember to breathe.
- Remember to enjoy.
- Remember that it's ok to be the parent.
- Remember that **THERE ARE NO RIGHT ANSWERS** and that **BALANCE IS KEY!!!**



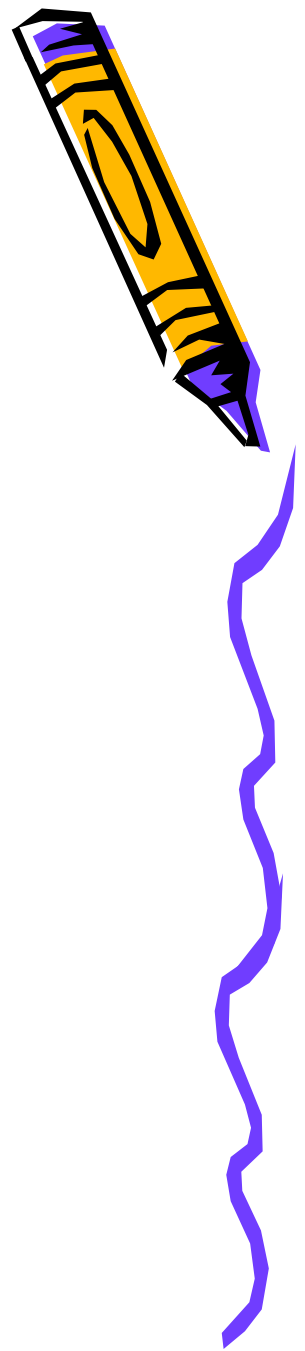




"What's an imagination? It was something kids used to enjoy before they invented video games."



Additional Slides...



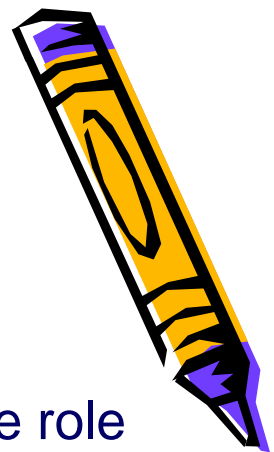
Recommendations- General

- Safety first
- Be an active parent
- Help your kids learn “balance”
- Establish good dialogue with your child
- Educate yourself about their digital world- have your kids teach you
- Remember that kids feel safe when parents “have their backs” and set limits/boundaries
- Explicitly teach “techno-manners”



General Recommendations

- Practice the art of parenting-be willing to give up the role of “manager” for that of “consultant”
- Remember that, although teenagers may look like they are ready to go out into the world alone, they are really just practicing and they still need your guidance
- Pay attention to how much time is being spent plugged in and multi-tasking. Make sure that they are also learning to be comfortable in a quiet space and “lost in thought” (Remember that their brains need that downtime to develop higher order thinking).



General Recommendations

- Make sure your kids are learning strategies other than using search engines to solve problems or answer questions. (Remember that active problem-solving promotes more brain development than always letting the computer generate the solution).
- Don't be afraid to step in if your child seems to be struggling to regulate themselves



Recommendations-Cell Phones and Texting

- Establish clear rules and consequences for texting or talking on phone while driving- NOT ALLOWED!!
- Monitor your monthly statements- Beware of excessive usage and late-night usage
- Work with your child to establish appropriate time limits- Beware of texting time seeping into “down-time” and of “constant texting”
- Work with your child to establish appropriate manners for phone use
- Discuss “sexting” with your child, including dangers and legal ramifications
- If your child is showing signs of having hard time self-regulating, consider limiting texting and having phone “reside” in central area of the house
- Don’t forget that you ultimately own the phone and have control over it



Recommendations-Computers and Social Networking Sites

- Safety first- If you are concerned about how your kid is using computers, consult with a school counselor or professional
- American Academy of Pediatrics and American Psychological Association strongly recommend that computers always be placed in a central location in the home and never in kids' bedrooms.
- Talk with your kids about how and how much they are using the internet.
- Ask them specifically about how they are using Facebook and MUD's (multiple-user domains such as "Club Penguin" and "Farmville")
- Work with them to establish healthy parameters for usage



Recommendations-Computers

- To ensure that you are able to parent in the digital world, make sure that you have passwords for all of your kids accounts, including Facebook and IM. That does not mean you have to use them daily, weekly or even monthly. Although your kids may balk at giving them to you, they will ultimately feel safer knowing you “have their backs”. Don’t be afraid to use the passwords as a last resort if you are concerned, but it is better to create parenting opportunities in collaboration with your kid. Have them periodically take you on a tour of their Facebook site
- Talk openly with your kids about the dangers associated with the internet. Don’t lecture. Ask them what they know and brainstorm together ways to keep them safe and how you will act to protect them (take over some regulation) if they are not self-regulating appropriately.



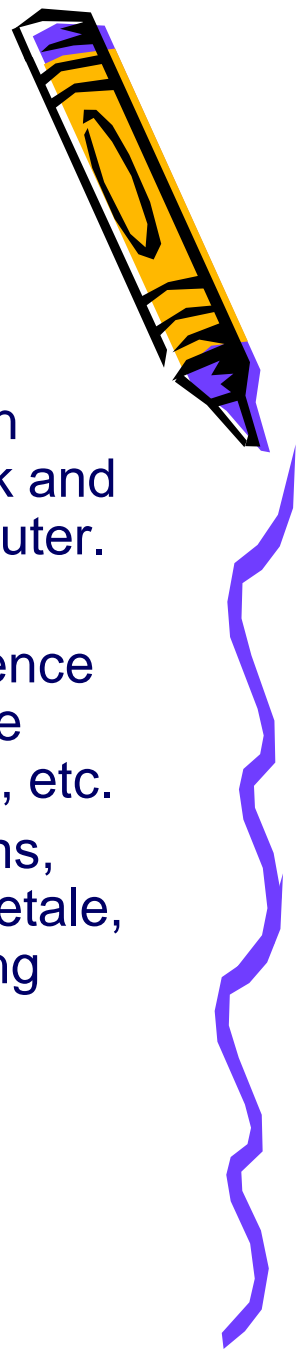
More Computer Recommendations

- Establish clear consequences (take over some of the regulation) if your kid sets up a “hidden” profile or identity.
- Make sure that they know that they should NEVER meet up with someone they met on the internet.
- Talk to them about the lack of privacy in anything they post on internet.
- Make sure that their Facebook settings allow for the maximum privacy.
- Make sure they understand the dangers in posting identifying information, including birthday and photos that reveal location, etc.
- Have them ask themselves “would I want my parents to see/read this? my principal? a college admissions officer? A future employer?” before posting anything.



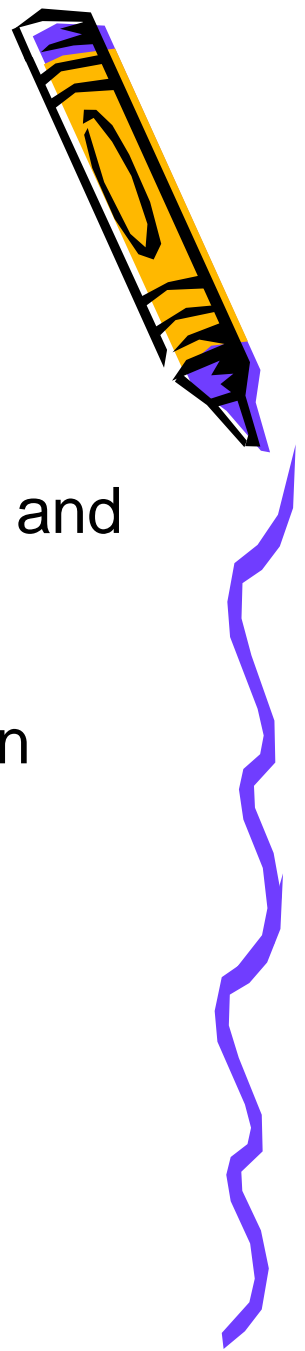
More Computer Recommendations

- Make sure that they do not have their passwords on “remember me” setting. Many misuses of Facebook and IM’ing occur when other kids use your child’s computer. (especially common in Middle School)
- Encourage your child to come to you if they experience anything that makes them feel uncomfortable on the internet- cyber-bullying, solicitations from strangers, etc.
- Don’t be afraid of setting firmer limits and regulations, including monitoring software (CyberSitter, PCTattletale, or CyberPatrol) if your child shows signs of not being able to self-regulate.



And finally...

- For younger kids (3rd-9th), good to start with Parental Controls that limit time on the computer and internet. Be realistic and use them to introduce “parenting moments”. If they ask for more time repeatedly, review with them how they have been using to ensure that they are learning good self-regulation skills.



What kind of Digital Parent Do You Want to Be?

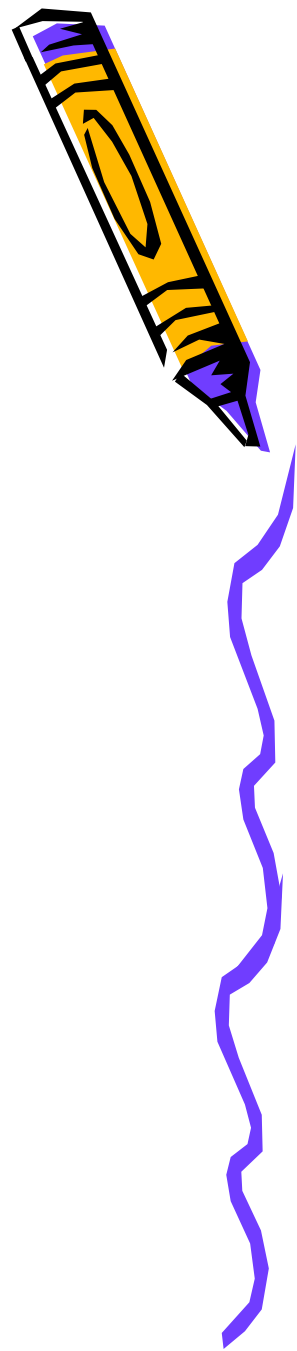
- Clearly outline your rules and expectations.
 - Are you going to limit time?
 - Are you going to filter?
 - Are you going to monitor?
 - What is acceptable online behavior and what is not (use real life examples from the news)

[Common Sense Media Excellent Resource](#)

- Make a contract
 - [Cell Phone contract](#)
 - [Internet/Social Media contract](#)

Model Appropriate Behavior

Do you text at appropriate times? Do you post appropriate things?



Monitoring/ Parental Control Options

Alternative Browser (Easy, cheap and okay)

[Apple's "Parental Controls"](#)

[Mobicip](#)

[Android Parental Control Options](#) and [Built Ins](#)

Mobile Providers (Expensive, but easy and effective)

[At & T Smart Limits](#)

[Verizon Safeguards](#)

Software

[The Old Guard: Net Nanny, Cyber Patrol, Norton Family Premier](#)

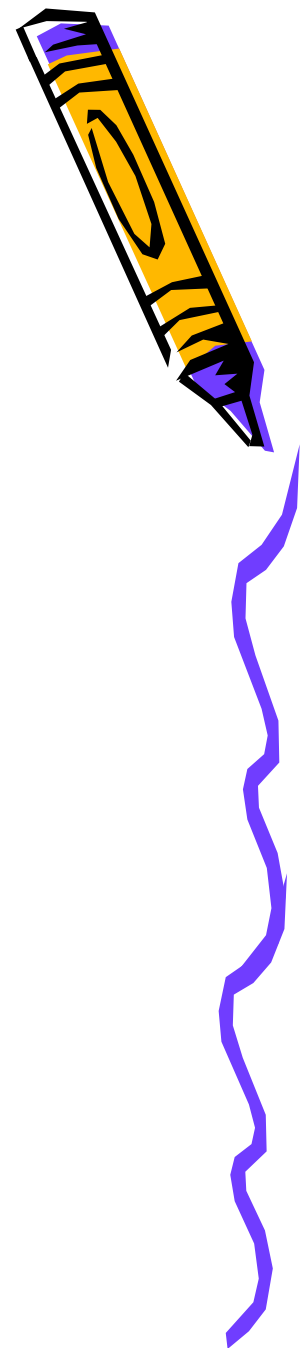
[AVG Family Safety](#)

[Meraki Mobile Device Management](#)

Good for managing laptops, ipads, iphones, etc.

Must have a technical understanding

Can select what apps are acceptable, can even shut down machine remotely.



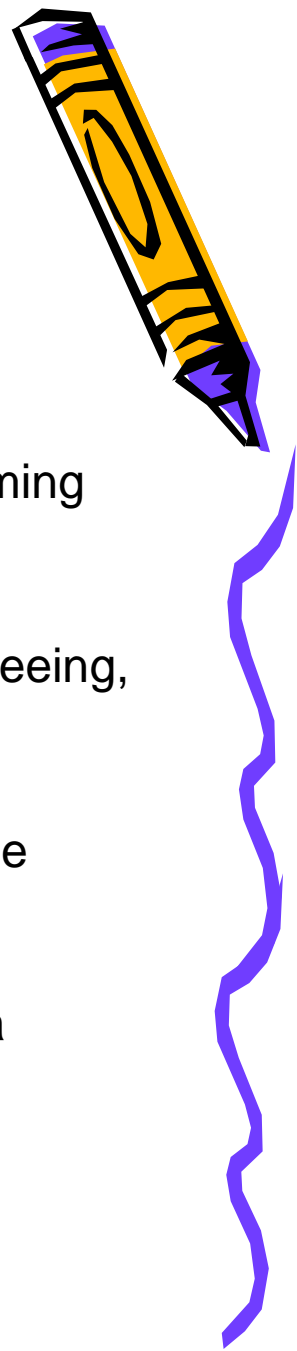
Computer/Video Use and Academic Learning



- Computers exponentially increase access to information, data, opportunities to collaborate with others
- Computers foster surface knowledge at expense of strategic knowledge (which develops as kids are able to see patterns in and create original representations of what they are learning-mental manipulation)
- Children who hear a story rather than watch it on video show greater comprehension
- In a study in which 2 groups were shown same text as either traditional text or hypertext(on screen), the traditional group showed better comprehension



Brain Anatomy 101



- “reptilian brain”- most primitive- basic living functions, instinctive behaviors (foraging for food, grooming, establishing territory, forming social groups); connected to higher centers of the brain
- “mammalian brain”- “emotional brain”- limbic system (amygdala, hippocampus)-primarily involved in survival behaviors (fighting, fleeing, feeding and reproduction), but also participates in emotional regulation, attention, motivation and memory
- “human brain”- cerebral cortex-frontal lobes make possible unique human talents-conscious awareness, rational thinking, emotional regulation, delay of gratification, executive control, and long-term planning. Also defines our personality and allows us to develop a “theory of the mind” and our own sense of self.

