



Bund der Freien
Waldorfschulen



FOR PARENTS

Struwwelpeter 2.1

Shockheaded Peter

A guide **for parents**
through the media jungle



Dear readers,

in September 2014, a working group of the Bund der Freien Waldorfschulen published the brochure "Struwwelpeter 2.0—Media-Maturity and Waldorf Education", envisioned as information and support for teachers. Due to ongoing interest and positive feedback, the 3rd edition has now been published, and translations have been made into different languages.

Having received many questions from schools and family groups, we realized parents also have a great interest in this topic. This brochure has been developed for parents and educators to offer an orientation to media consumption guidelines based on principles of Waldorf education. The authors, working in collaboration, had many exchanges with parents at parent-teacher meetings and in discussion forums during parent councils at the state and federal level. This process has made us deeply aware of how difficult the educational task is, given the power of the media and the media industry, and how often parents are at a loss about what to do.

Authors of this booklet join Prof. Diane Levin, Professor of Early Childhood Education in Boston, who said about her work: "We try to tell parents not to make it perfect but to make it a little less bad."

We wish you every success in doing so.
Corinna Boettger, Franz Glaw,
Edwin Hübner

Make children resilient

It's about media literacy. We—parents and educators—have a deep interest in our children learning how to handle all kinds of media in a meaningful way. To do so, one must lay the foundation for media literacy in their earliest childhood and it must be built up gradually.

Take, for example, driving a car. Laws stipulate that young people are not allowed to drive a car on their own until they reach their mid-teens. It is obvious to all that driving a vehicle requires a mature sense of judgement and responsibility. This reason, self-evident when it comes to operating a car, also applies to the use of technologies such as computers, the internet, and mobile communications. These devices also require an inner maturity before young people can use them sensibly and become immune to the dangers they pose.

It is often argued that because computers, tablets, and smartphones are simply everywhere, and that children come into contact with them all the time, it is necessary to show children how to use these devices correctly as early as possible. However, children have to be around cars all the time, but does anyone conclude that children should take practical driving lessons in kindergarten? Of course not. The widespread use of a device in everyday life is by no means a

formula for deducing the necessity of instructing children in handling this device as early as possible. While encouraging the early handling of electronic devices serves the interests of those selling media products, it does not necessarily have any benefit for children's early education. The crucial question is whether the child yet has the inner maturity to be able to handle the demands made by the technology. This is the critical challenge of media education.

The acquisition of competence for dealing with media, or with modern technologies in general, has an indispensable prerequisite: the development of personal self-regulation and competence. How people handle their media use can show how independent and strong they are. Do they let themselves be seduced by the conveniences and possibilities of the technologies, or have they developed a character strong enough to switch off devices when not needed? Does a person use such devices for his or her own interests or yield to media temptations? Before we can master intelligent technologies, we must learn to master ourselves. How can we become strong ourselves, and how can we help our children become strong? The aim of this guide is to explore these questions.

In eurythmy, which is an important subject at Waldorf schools, the eurythmy sound G provides inner freedom and a healthy defense against the external influences that children are exposed to, for example through the use of media.



Media education has two main pillars—direct and indirect

All media education should be geared to the developmental stage of the child and based on two questions:

1. What must one make possible for the child to grow up physically healthy and mentally strong in the midst of a world marked by technology and media?

2. How does the child learn to understand and use the media world in a meaningful way?

Media education should thus focus on two major areas that can be described as indirect and direct. Indirect media education aims at educating the young person so that he or she can become a self-confident, strong and independent personality in a time when technology permeates our lives more and more. Direct media education strives to ensure that the young person can comprehensively understand the media landscape and apply it in a meaningful way.

To orient education towards the development of the child, indirect media education is especially important in early childhood and remains important throughout life. Direct media education should begin at different times depending on the medium. For digital media, the focus is on puberty. A gradual transition takes place with the beginning of schooling.¹

Early childhood

Indirect media education

Media abstinence

Capturing and experiencing

Movement, Sport,

Creating art,

Read aloud

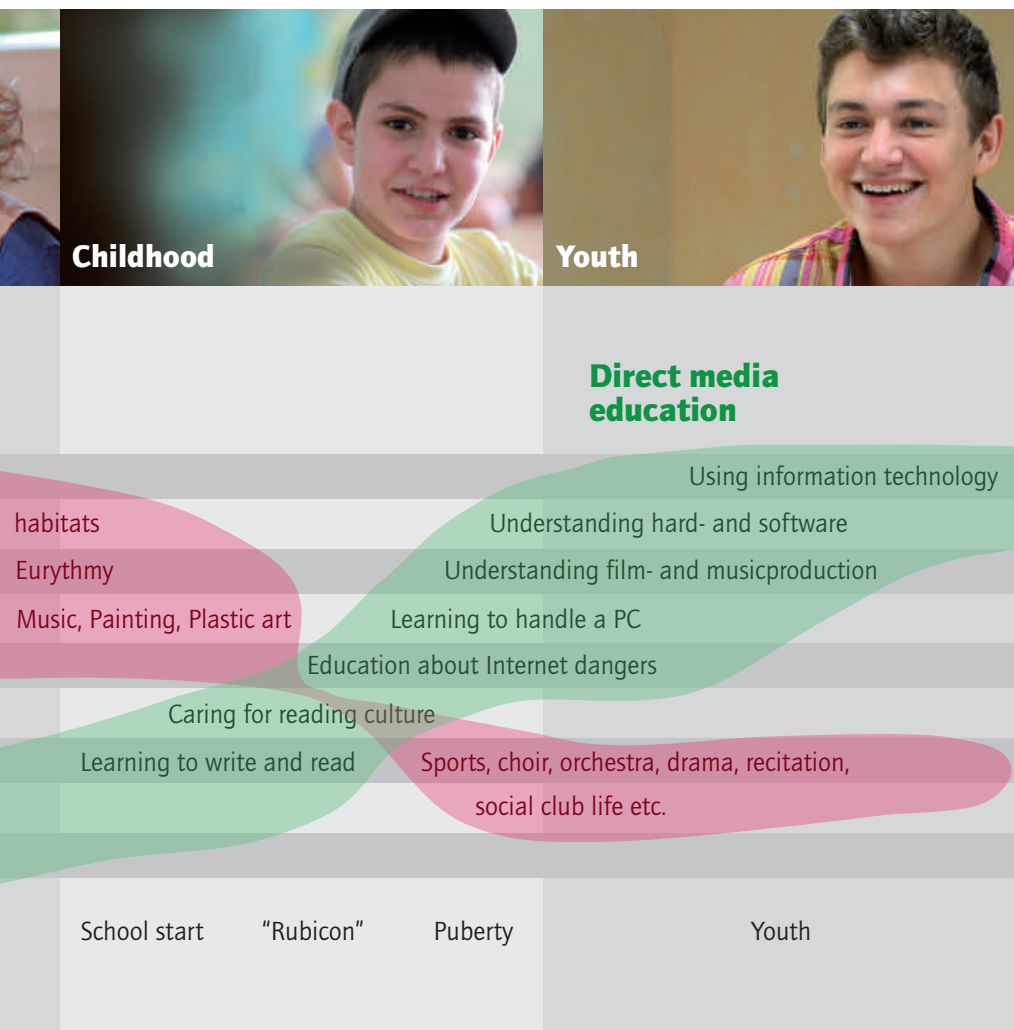
Telling stories

Early childhood

Preschool

Stages of development on the path to adulthood

The maturation processes require external support, as parents and educators enable the children to do everything they need for their development, and keep away those aspects the children are not yet ready for. In order to walk this narrow balancing act between facilitating and protecting, it is necessary to know the course of childhood development.



Three major stages of development can be observed on the path to adulthood:

- Early childhood—from birth to about seven years of age.
- Childhood—from age even to the onset of puberty.
- Youth—from puberty to the beginning of adulthood.

Healthy media education is based on these developmental steps. It supports the child's own stages of development

by offering counterbalances to harmful media effects, and helps the child lay the foundation necessary for subsequently dealing with all kinds of media competently and sensibly. The three phases of life are examined individually in more detail below, and their central development tasks are characterized. Tips are given on how to support children in each phase. Recommendations on the age-appropriate use of media follow.



Media use and early childhood

from birth to about seven years of age

Early Childhood Developmental tasks. The toddler has the job of mastering several fundamental development tasks that support all future development:

Motor activity

The young child must learn to control its body as an instrument of the soul, i.e. a child learns to use its gross and fine motor skills in a purposeful manner; this includes, above all, learning to walk upright.

Language

The mastery of language is the second basic human ability that is acquired. The child becomes able to communicate what it feels and thinks inwardly about its surroundings, and also learns to understand what other people feel and think. By learning to speak, the child lays the foundation for his or her encounter with the concept of the other, the "you".

Imaginative thinking

The third distinctly human ability follows the mastery of language: independent thinking. Although children are able to think very imaginatively, they are still far from being able to logically and abstractly understand the world. Logical and abstract thinking is based on the foundation of imaginative creativity.

Maturation of the senses

Learning to walk, speak and think are the child's three immediately apparent developmental tasks. But there is yet another skill in the background: the healthy training of the senses. With sensory maturity, the child lays the physical foundation for his or her perception of the world. It takes about 6 to 8 years for the senses to largely mature.

This maturation process is strongly linked to the healthy structuring of the brain. Everything humans experience in early childhood is reflected in the growth of the brain structures. These can only be changed in later life with great effort. That is why the experiences the child is allowed to have in early childhood are so very crucial for the child's entire later life. In the active confrontation with the real world—literally the "grasping" of the physical environment, the child develops the physical foundations for his later intellectual abilities—"understanding".

At kindergarten age—about 4 to 6 years—the child starts to expand its gross and fine motor skills. As a rule, children can now prepare their own sandwiches and tie their own shoelaces on their own. They can ride a scooter. A kindergarten child learns to climb independently on playground equipment, can handle and use col-



ored pencils and can do simple handicrafts, etc. Language skills have generally developed well, and the child is increasingly able to communicate his or her feelings and imaginative thoughts to others. As a child's spatial and temporal viewpoint begins to expand, the space the child views becomes larger and the past and future are integrated into current perceptions. By going to kindergarten, children leave their intimate family space. They become a little more independent, their playing behavior becomes more differentiated and expansive, and involves playfellows.

Parents and educators should strive to support this development. Following are some suggestions to help children to strengthen their future personality.

What is important for a healthy development? Conscious support of relationships

The most important experience in a child's life is the experience of intimate relationships. The loving, cheerful, affirmative contact with familiar people in the immediate environment is an excellent prerequisite for the development of a stable personality. Nowadays, parents are often under a good deal of work-related stress. It can therefore be helpful to set up a regular "appointment", so to speak—a time when you regularly do something together with your child: play a game, read aloud, bake a cake together, or just have some fun.

Diverse and varied movement

Children love to move. Movement is how they learn to control their locomotive system and to orient themselves in space. They need a lot of opportunities to run, climb, jump, balance, hop, and simply move about. Plenty of chances to pursue handicrafts, painting, cutting fruits and veg-



etables, and similar activities for practicing fine motor skills are highly recommended.

Diverse use of language

A good training in one's own mother tongue is no longer a matter of course for all children. Language evolves in a lively dialog with the child's caregivers. Adults with whom they can frequently talk, who tell or read exciting stories, fairy tales or legends out loud to them, help them to form as large a vocabulary as possible.

Inspirations for fantasy

An often underestimated human ability is the imagination. It is the basis of all human creativity. That's why a child needs suggestions and inspirations in his or her environment that challenge and stimulate the imagination. The less a toy has its 'own statement', the more the child is challenged to use its own imagination. Offer empty sheets of paper for drawing instead of coloring books, simple wooden blocks instead of over-designed building units, and pieces of cloth for dress-up instead of detailed models or lifelike dolls.

Direct life experience

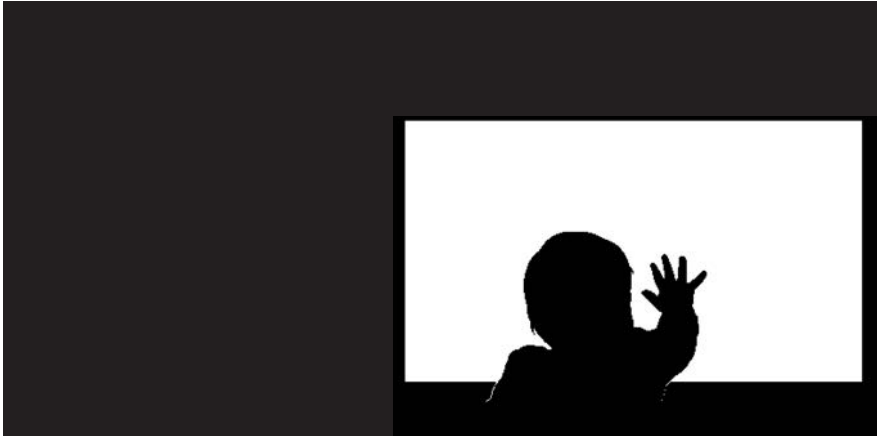
A child needs immediate sense experiences to be able to train its senses healthily: digging in the sand and mud, experiencing color in painting, helping with cooking tasks, listening for sounds while walking in the woods, making fires, building caves, caressing and feeding animals, etc. It is important to maintain a sensible balance between lack of stimulation and overstimulation.

Role models and imitation

In early childhood, what adults do best is to set an example for children. Reminders or detailed explanations are of little help. What Karl Valentin once said (to the effect) is particularly true here: "We can raise our children how we like, but in the end they just imitate us."

"All education is just a handout to self-education."

EDUARD SPRANGER (1882–1963),
PHILOSOPHER AND PEDAGOG



Impact of Screen media on early childhood

Screen media inhibits healthy development of children in their early childhood.

Excessive use of smartphone, TV, and computer near children

As soon as someone becomes involved with their smartphone they are largely isolated from their immediate environment. A parent who is on a mobile phone while being near a child may be physically present, but is mentally completely “elsewhere”. The occupation with the device inserts a wedge between parent and child, interrupting a natural relationship. The same applies if the television is running in the background. Investigations show that the linguistic exchange decreases and the children's play becomes less concentrated and more fragmented.² From a child's perspective, the time parents spend on their mobile phones, TV and PCs is “unrelated” and “speechless” time, lost to the building and maintenance of a stable parent-child relationship.

The following applies when a child is consuming screen media:

- One sits, i.e. bodily movements are reduced to a minimum.
- Of all bodily senses, only the eye and ear are engaged.

The longer children watch TV, the less time they have to train their motor skills. The activity of the senses is reduced to ear and eye, i.e. the eyes are over-stressed (overload of stimuli), the other senses are neglected; sensory and sensorimotor integration is hindered. One's own imagination is almost completely eliminated. This combination has a negative impact on the healthy development of the child's brain.

Recommendations for media use in early childhood

No screen media below four years of age

A child's development is profoundly benefited if it is not exposed to any screen media during the first four years of life—not even “passively”, because TV and media impair speech and movement development.

*“A childhood without a computer ...
is the best start into the digital age.”*

GERALD LEMBKE, INGO LEIPNER

Pre-school and primary school— the less, the better

At kindergarten age and at the beginning of school—and beyond—the following applies: the less television is watched, the better. Above all, children should not watch television regularly in order to avoid (bad) habits.

No TV or computer screens in the children's room

If children have their own TV set in their room, on average they watch more than an hour longer than their peers every day.³ The same applies to game consoles, PCs, tablets, etc. See more below.

Select films to watch together

If a family wants to watch a film, it is helpful if the film is selected with an adult in a carefully targeted manner and watched with an adult.

Do not leave children in front of the screen alone.

Film content is often incomprehensible to children or has an emotional impact on them. That's why it helps children to watch movies with an adult. When watching television together, adults can help their children understand the interrelationships and assess the content.

Experiences

Grace (29) recounts: “The habit crept in by itself, that our oldest boy (3 years old) began watching a 20-minute episode of a series on DVD every evening. When his younger sister also took up this habit, we had screaming scenes every evening, because they wanted to keep watching. This began to get on our nerves. We decided to change the habit rigorously and to reduce the evening TV watching to the weekend, and only in the afternoon, not just before going to bed. We then read from children's books instead. The change of habit wasn't as difficult as we thought. We're all just fine with the present arrangement.”

Screen toys are not recommended

The fixation on the small screen and the uniform handling of virtual images by typing or swiping prevents the differentiated development of fine motor skills of the hands and restricts sensory experiences. The mobile phone radiation from such toys can seriously endanger the health of children in the long run.



No mobile phone or smartphone in a child's hand

A mobile phone or smartphone has no place in children's hands, because the microwave radiation emitted by these devices when connected to the network poses a particular health risk for children (more in section, p. 32).

No game console

It is not recommended to give a child a game console. Virtual games tend to suppress real self-developed games and free play, the temptation to play longer than the parents have allowed is "built into" these games.

Audiobooks in moderation

Audiobooks should also be sparingly used for children. It is important to ensure that they are not only used as a background noise, but that the children listen carefully.

Suggestions for active, preparatory media education at preschool age

Reading and storytelling develop verbal communication

Reading children's books and telling stories is highly recommended; it is the first stage of direct media education. Effective handling of media technologies when older does not require technological skills to be developed in early childhood, it is far more important that in these early years the focus is on language skills and developing creativity. The vital importance of verbal communication is not to be underestimated.

All children enjoy it when their parents tell them a story that they have invented themselves. Have the courage to tell your own stories! You can also tell stories about jointly viewed pictures in picture books.

Handcrafts develop imagination and confidence

Handcrafts, painting, sculpting, designing calendars, picture books, collages, photo albums etc. all train creativity, and the children can be happily productive. They experience



themselves as experts, which has a positive effect on their self-confidence. Self-confidence and imagination are important prerequisites for developing a stable and resilient character, essential for the capacity to use technical media creatively and critically when older.

Singing, dancing, role-playing, theater and puppet productions inspire social competence

Self-efficacy and social competence are practiced in these creative, productive activities that help to shape their environment. Experiences of everyday life can be processed. In an elementary way, the child gets to know how to produce something that other people then look at.

By giving priority to production, i.e. independent activity (plays, dancing, singing, theater, puppet plays), over reception (passive media consumption), a child's understanding of "how to produce" is facilitated. Being actively involved in manufacturing processes themselves makes children better able to master the competent use of technology vs. just being a consumer.

Conclusion:

To sum up succinctly, the media-pedagogical motto for early childhood is: The young person's later media competence is rooted in an early childhood media abstinence.

Experiences

Evelyn (35) recounts: "My then five-year-old son came home one day and wanted to see a film, since he'd heard about it from his friends. We didn't have a TV set at home and we didn't watch movies when he was little. So on a Saturday we prepared the couch, put the laptop in front of it and watched a children's film together in peace and quiet. I made comments on some things so that he could understand the plot. Since then, we watch a film together once a month on average. Basic rule: only on weekends. My son is satisfied with this arrangement and so am I, because he can play for hours full of fantasy on his own or together with his comrades, and has so much time for his own ideas."



Media Use and Childhood

from age seven to the onset of puberty

When the first epoch of life ends with the change of teeth, the child's developmental focus shifts.

The structure of the neuro-sensory system is now largely complete. The child's own body is now quite well controlled. The development focus in the childhood years, age seven to puberty, is on the acquisition of practical skills: swimming, reading and writing, learning to master an instrument, using tools, skateboarding, etc. Children begin to develop their own inner mental space. They have an equal need for world experience and (still) a need for protection by adults. They seek adults they can trust and look up to and through whom they can get to know and understand the world.

Children of this age have strong needs. These include:

- *Experiencing social bonds and feeling perceived as a person,*
- *Feeling needed, recognized, and trusted to bear responsibility,*
- *Being able to be active and involved,*
- *Learning things, experiencing the world, encountering big and small adventures,*
- *Experiencing life as meaningful.*

All these needs are justified and their satisfaction helps to develop healthy self-esteem, which contributes greatly to a competent future handling of media and technology. One of the

great temptations of technical media is that they appear to satisfy many of these needs, but can do so only as a weak substitute and only partially. For a self-determined life, it is important for children and adolescents to learn how to meet their needs in real life without the use of technical aids.

Activities to support healthy development

Nurturing the relationship with children requires clarity and time on the part of caring adults. The issue is not so much the amount of time spent with the child as the quality of time spent together: if only a little time is possible, then that little time should be used well.

- Many healthy joint activities are those that need to be done anyway, such as cooking, laundry, sweeping, etc.; children learn practical skills and how to take responsibility for small chores on their own. Mastering day to day activities leads to the positive feeling of "I can do something"!
- Instead of putting the children in front of the screen while quickly preparing food by yourself, take advantage of the fact that 3- and 4-year-olds can grate cheese, wash salad or cut vegetables; they will feel useful and simultaneously practice fine motor skills.



- Instead of handing your child a phone to keep them busy while shopping, engage them in hunting for items, crossing items off the list or adding up prices. They will enjoy being a part of this necessary household task!
- Encourage older children to help their neighbors or grandparents, be it shopping, mowing the lawn or taking the dog out. This is a great way to broaden their social horizons and gain recognition.
- Every child enjoys crafts, reading stories (if the child has already learned to read, you can alternate who reads aloud), cooking, making a mobile or a mosaic, playing games together (outdoors or indoors), and much more.

Help children learn to manage increasing demands

When it comes to satisfying needs it should be noted that it is not a parent's job to always satisfy children's "small" needs. It is important for children to acquire a frustration tolerance

so that they do not immediately get a substitute satisfaction in response to every little adversity of life. Children must learn to postpone their needs and wants. For example, it does not have to be possible to eat and drink at any time and everywhere, nor is it necessary for an adult to be available at all times to play or read aloud. The experience of being able to cope with increasing demands is a very important aspect in the education for independence. Children have to experience how one can become better and better in sports or music making, for example, and how one is able to attain a higher "level" of ability in real life. Perhaps the 7-year-old child may or should cook pudding alone, the 10-year-old may or should make the pizza dough, and the 14-year-old may cook a whole meal for the family from time to time.

It makes a lot of sense to support the child in making friends, playing sports and learning to play a musical instrument. Sports clubs and youth music schools offer interesting opportunities for children. Even if it should surprise you, such activities also have an ad-



diction prevention effect. Through a multifaceted commitment, the child learns to anchor itself in life, and this protects against the temptation to search for an apparent replacement in the "virtual" world.

Help children learn artistic expression

Finally, it's important to point out a need that is little or no longer perceived as such, but that clearly shapes our present civilization: the need for images. Rudolf Steiner emphasized that the actual need is based on the longing for one's own inner, imaginative images. The entire photo and film industry aims to satisfy this need.

The ability to create one's own images makes children strong, helping them to become mobile and adapt to new circumstances. Self-created fantasy images strengthen the feeling of autonomy, in contrast to the given images provided by the games industry. The promotion of all artistic activities contributes to the development of discernment in image and sound productions.

Experiences

Virginia (35) says: "Our three boys (two, five, and eight years old) are growing up almost without television. There is no TV set in our living and dining room areas. We have a parent's living room in the basement with a television. For our children this means that the medium is not present in their everyday life. We are also role models for them who do a variety of things in the house, but television is not one of them. This does not mean, however, that our two older children do not know that it exists. On rare occasions there are "cinema evenings" in which at least one parent watches a film together with the two older boys. It is important to us that the children don't watch anything alone. Our children rarely ask if they are allowed to see anything. They have learned that everything in life has its time and the daily reading of books can be just as exciting and fulfilling."



Media in the early school years

The euphoria about the grand possibilities of information technologies drove our perceptions of media into one-sidedness, forgetting that reading and writing are the indispensable basis on which all other competencies in the information technology sector are built. Those who can't write and read well can hardly be prepared to master participation in a technological age. Direct media education thus be-

gins by first ensuring that children develop a deep reading and writing literacy. All computer literacy is preceded by writing competence.

In the first few years of school, children should be helped to develop an active relationship with books. It is highly recommended that parents continue to take the time to read aloud regularly, helping to lay the essential foundation for the later competent use of information technology.



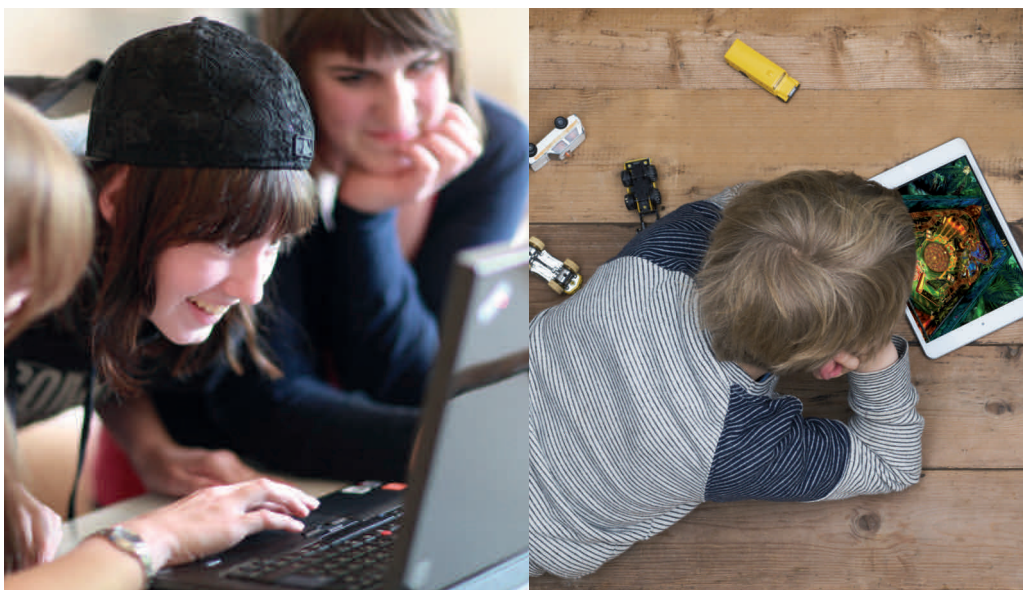
Computers have not replaced books, but have been added to books as an additional medium. If you specialize the children too early in dealing with computers out of a supposed claim to modernity, they are ultimately made incompetent for the entirety of all media.

Statistics show that the reading literacy of each child decreases with increasing screen usage. Children thus profit a great deal more when they are



Experiences

George (44) tells us: "When my daughter Rachel was still in kindergarten, I started to read her fairy tales and short stories. That was a lot of fun for both of us. Later it became a fixed ritual of the day. In the evening before dinner we spend half an hour reading together, sometimes even longer. In the course of the primary school years we read many children classics: Ot-fried Preußler, Selma Lagerlöf, Nils Holgerson, Erich Kästner, Astrid Lindgren etc. Sometimes we didn't read aloud either, because Rachel wanted to talk about something she was worried about, or what she wanted to tell me. In retrospect, I believe that this was an important building block for her development, which also made up for some of the difficult experiences she had to have in the family."



read aloud to, when they are supported in their own reading, when they are allowed to conquer the cosmos of good children's books together with their parents.

Tips for handling electronic media

- **During the school years, television, computers and other electronic media must be kept out of the children's rooms.** Otherwise, the average length of stay in front of the TV set alone increases considerably.⁴
- **A clear limitation of the television time of 30 to a maximum of 45 minutes per day is advisable—but not regularly every day.** If a child spends more than five hours a week in front of the screen, the ability to read and compute is impaired.⁵
- **If the child has already gotten used to spending too much time with screen media,** you can look for interesting replacements, such as puzzles, handicrafts or joint activities, walks, visiting friends, game afternoons or reading. In order to do this, parents may need to restructure their own everyday life as far as possible by focusing more attention on joint activities.
- **The age ratings for films** do not represent educational recommendations, but only a minimum age limit. You can add up to three years if you want to watch a movie with the child.
- **Age ratings for computer games (USK)** do not contain information on the addictive potential of a game. For example, most games of chance in which no real money is used, such as online poker, are released from the age of 0 but are not suitable for children.



Experiences

Steven (36) reports: "We don't have a TV any more, but we have a projector and a big screen, which we set up if necessary. If the two older children want to watch a film, then we choose together on the PC what we want to see and then watch it together. The youngest, who has just turned two years old, does not watch with us. We make sure that she can play in peace during this time. My wife stays with her while I'm with the older children, or vice versa: I do something with the little one and my wife looks at the film with the two older ones."

■ **Computers and especially the internet** should not be used without the company of an adult with whom the child can exchange information about the contents.

■ **If occasionally no accompaniment is possible**, it is a good idea to set up a user account for the child with parental control software. This allows you to select the contents that can be called up beforehand and also to set a technical time limit in the user settings. If you set a time limit for the week, especially older school children (from 12 years of age) can learn how to allocate the available time in a meaningful way.

■ **Seek out internet surfing areas specially designed for children** that only provide suitable content.

Summary:

Computers and internet should only be used in the company of adults or at least with the help of established and functioning protection software.

Conclusion:

The book is the best medium in the child's life until puberty. Television and surfing on the internet as well as computer games, if used, should be carefully monitored and accompanied by the parents and used infrequently.

"It has become clear that upgrading the electronic media alone will not help us. Only understanding reading turns information into knowledge, text into meaning, a judgement from a file."

LUDWIG ECKINGER (FEDERAL CHAIRMAN OF THE GERMAN ASSOCIATION FOR EDUCATION)



Adolescence and Youth

from puberty to the beginning of adulthood

Physical changes mark the beginning of puberty. The growth spurt, the change of vocal pitch and sexual maturity are particularly striking.

This physical development is accompanied by a spiritual development. Childish perceptions and experience become detached from the previous sense of security, and the young person seeks to find his or her own roots in the world. This is a long process that takes many years to complete.

Adolescents have to cope with a number of development tasks. Perhaps the most important of these tasks is to develop and build an identity. Just as the toddler had to learn to walk upright, the adolescent now has to learn to stake out his or her own mental standpoint and assert it in life.

Another development task of adolescence is to build up social relationships and fulfil the responsibilities that accompany them. This is followed by the challenge of finding one's own place in existing society and shaping it in a variety of dialogs. The better a child has learned to speak the social language, the easier it will be for him to do so as a teenager.

A third developmental task in adolescence is based on the human ability to think. Only by thinking is one able to go beyond the here and now of the immediate present, to plan future pro-

jects, and pursue individual ideals. Young people develop many ideals—especially towards the end of adolescence. They express their life's dream, a wellspring for questions concerning the direction their future will take. Adolescents wonder what they want to achieve in their lives, but also how they can change the world.

Practical questions soon arise concerning what training or school programs they may seek out and beyond that, how to realize one's own personal direction in life. "What are my ideals and what do I have to do to make it all happen?"—this is how one could formulate this basic question of adolescence, which is often moved far into young adulthood.

An adolescent's judgement is initially still very much linked to his or her emotional life, and is often not shaped by objective facts. The organizing power of factual judgement still needs to be developed. This is above all a task of school education. Young people need "practice fields" to exercise their capabilities and learn to form their own and appropriate judgements, and thus develop emotional stability. To achieve this, they must learn to distance themselves from their own personal feelings and to pursue deliberately guided thought processes, also against their own feelings. When pronouncing judgements,

one places oneself in a relationship to the world as an individual. This results in the ability to properly judge oneself as an individual. A healthy self-perception only develops if the person is able to objectively reflect on his or her environment. This healthy self-perception is an important prerequisite for the capacity to manage life with digital media.

Adolescence is a time of self-exploration and investigating borders. The young person is looking for answers to the questions "Who am I, what can I do and where do I want to go?" Exploring borders includes crossing borders, while self-exploration involves delimiting oneself from what has become established and accustomed. This process also includes the refining of individual judgement, which can be seen in the joy of arguing and, above all, in the pleasure of contradiction.

Parents and teachers are sometimes given the—not very pleasant—role of "sparring partner" if arguments are to be tested for their persuasiveness and suitability. The limits of tolerance may



also be tested in social interaction. The principle of "command and obedience", sometimes too heavily relied on by parents or educators, has its limits as there is a danger that inner contact and trust in educators will be lost if they misjudge the needs and possibilities of young people. Helping adolescents explore these boundaries remains the adult's task of education, this is different than the role of a "friend". Concerning questions of exploring appropriate uses of digital media, it is important to develop usage agreements that take into account the interests of those involved and the increasing independence of the adolescent, and which are checked for their suitability at reasonable intervals. In conversation, questions of quality can be very helpful: "What do you want to know, what media experiences have you had so far, what fits your intentions?"

It can happen that adult judgements and recommendations to youth on this topic are often rejected on suspicion of "they just want to spoil our fun" or because of the lack of adult expertise.



Some schools have found that advice from older pupils, who are sometimes even more technologically advanced than most adults, is more easily accepted. With this in mind, so-called “media scouts”, older students who give advice and provide valuable tips to younger classes, have been trained to provide information to younger students. This method can be transferred to the private sphere by involving older siblings, relatives or friends.

We recommend the goal of becoming a “media master” rather than a “media servant”; it makes sense to be actively engaged in the media, i.e. to produce rather than merely consume media content. Not only does this give young people an understanding of how the technology works, but it also offers the possibility of shaping one's own world of thoughts and feelings in many different media forms, and communicating them expertly to many people. How could, for example, participation in a radio broadcast at the local radio station contribute to their media literacy? (See Struwelpeter 2.0, section “Media as educational institution”)

Even if the school has robust educational offerings, parents can support or stimulate appropriate additional activities.

Experiences

Phillipp (23), student, recalls: “As a 13-year-old I had my own computer and I was mainly interested in flight simulators. At the same time I was a member of a sail gliding club together with some schoolmates, and spent the weekends out on the airfield. The fascination that computer simulation had for my friends, however, could not keep up with my real experience in the cockpit. I also learned a lot about radio technology and weather, as well as many manual skills through the workshop work. Teamwork was also always in demand.”



What promotes the development of adolescents?

Ideally, the school is a place where adolescents can find plenty of stimulating ideas to help them accomplish their development tasks. But this is not always the case, frequently there is too little offered or the promotion is only one-sided. That is why it is helpful, for example, if young people are able to have another place such as a sports club, a choir or orchestra or perhaps also the voluntary fire brigade where they have to cope with challenges and can experience success.

Parents do well to support every opportunity or to encourage young people to plan and carry out meaningful joint activities with others. This also applies to working with a musical instrument. Mastering an instrument both expands their abilities as well as exercises their endurance for routine practicing.

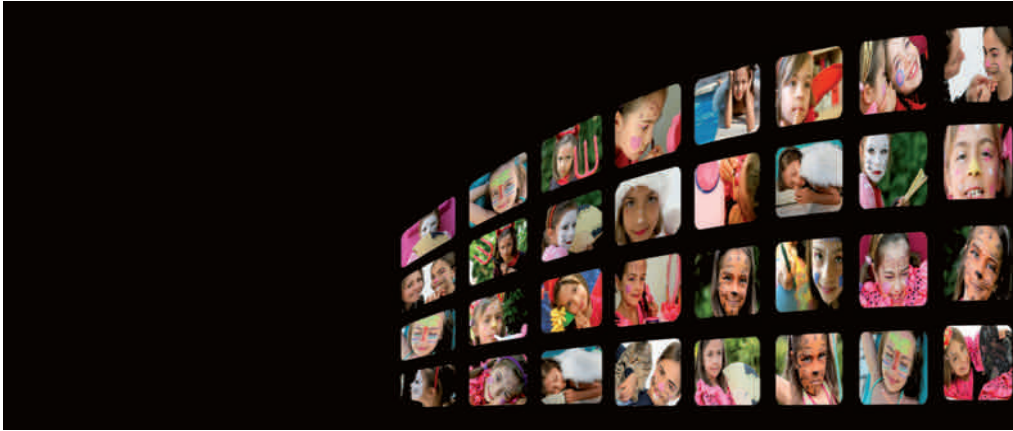
If adolescents fail to fulfil their development tasks, there is a danger that they will find an apparent replacement in the various tempting offers provided on the internet.

Media education in adolescence

If the limits set by the parental home are removed too early, there is a danger that the internet will become more and more commonplace, and extend far beyond beneficial use. According to a study by the German Criminological Research Institute of Lower Saxony, 10 percent of all 15-year-olds spend more than 4.5 hours a day on the internet. This is more than 30 hours a week.⁶ The young people then lack this time to cope well with the actual development tasks of adolescence, which also include the task of working out the best possible and most thorough school education.

If one gets the impression that adolescents in school are not sufficiently informed about the dangers of the internet, one should address the issue at home, as well as the immense effects of advertising (also on TV!) with all its not to be underestimated effects.

It is also important to know how the social environment deals with media, so it is highly recommended to stay in communication with other parents. Of course, this always leads to discussions at parent-teacher evenings. The ideal is to achieve a consensus of common handling among parents



of a class and school. It is typical, however, that in any given class or school, only a certain group of parents will share a common approach to the subject. But even if only some parents in a class have the same approach, something has been achieved if no child can then claim: "But everyone else has ..."

Electronic media: Opportunities and dangers

Dangers

At the age of ten to twelve, there is a marked change in the way children deal with the media landscape: the internet and social networks become interesting. The budding adolescents may be able to use their equipment better than adults, but they still lack the ability to properly judge what they find on the internet. They cannot really assess the risks and dangers lurking out there. They lack the experience of life, the skills for differentiating and demarcation, and the knowledge necessary to make good judgements. That is why children and pre-adolescents need help from adults.

The internet portal "safekids.co.uk" brings the danger to children to the "short Merk formula: "CCCC" Content, Commerce, Contact, Culture.⁷ One can explain the risks as follows:

- **Content:** Right-wing radicalism, Islamism, Satanism, pornography, sects of all kinds, anorexia forums, suicidal forums, tactless videos, etc.
- **Seduction (Commerce):** Advertising, aggressive marketing, spam, poker sites, erotic offers, fraud, rip-offs, etc.
- **Contact:** False contacts, seduction, verbal sexual abuse by pedophiles, real abuse from physical contacts
- **Illegal activity and mobbing (Culture):** Downloading illegally distributed music files, games, programs and movies as well as other copyright infringements, downloading malicious software, mobbing.

Another danger is the temptation to increasingly extend "online time". In the worst case this can lead to online addiction. According to a study by KfN, 4.7 percent of 15-year-old boys and 0.5 percent of girls are in danger of addiction; 3 percent of boys and 0.3 percent of girls are addicted to online use.⁸



So, as children become more familiarized with using the internet, it is important that they are taught the basic rules and precautions they need to use the internet properly and sensibly.

The goal is that children learn to develop a “medial awareness”. This means that children have to understand that when they enter a media construction it is different from the real world, but can still have serious repercussions on everyday life.

In addition to the legal aspects (see “Internet and law—information for parents”), children must also learn what cyberbullying is and how to defend themselves against it. But they must also be able to protect themselves against false approaches by cyber-grooming approaches from pedophiles.

Opportunities

The internet does contain dangers, but also offers almost inexhaustible possibilities of gaining information, so young people need to learn how to make the most of these extraordinary opportunities.

■ First and foremost, this means that adolescents need to learn how to use search engines in a meaningful way, how to participate in productive communications, and how to begin to competently design internet offerings from presentations to website development and basic coding.

■ Secondly, adolescents need to have the necessary criteria to assess the trustworthiness of a website they have found.

Developing this ability to judge is a long process that continues until the end of schooling and into adulthood. In essence, the school can only practice using good judgement with pupils, and offer information and advice. When it comes to observing the recommended precautionary measures in everyday life with social networks, parents, relatives and friends are first priority sources of help and support.

Recommendations for computers, smartphones and tablets at home

Computers and the internet are extremely practical tools of work and communication for high school students, and all adults. It is not appropriate to demonize the internet, but parents must be aware that an internet connection not only offers free access to a great deal of useful information, but, as a youth coordinator once said to the police, "it also opens up all the dirt in this world".

The following recommendations can be given for the adolescent's home use of computers:

- **No own personal computer in children's rooms.** Put the PC in a "public" place. For example, in the hallway or living room so that you can see what the child is doing on the PC.
- **No Administrator rights** on the PC for the child.
- **Stay in touch with children.** Be interested in what children experience on the internet, with whom they communicate and where on the internet, what games they play.
- **Learn from children.** Parents are less familiar with equipment and programs than their children. This fact can be used to get help from the children themselves.
- **Be sure to observe the age specifications.** Many games (especially those containing violence) are harmful to the mental development of children and adolescents. It is considered particularly "cool" to play games for which they are too young. Particularly important for parents: the age information is not based on pedagogical or developmental psychology aspects; one can therefore confidently add a few years.





“All the great things that have been accomplished in the world have first taken place in a some person's imagination, and what the world of tomorrow will look like depends to a large extent on the level of imagination of those who are learning to read today.”

ASTRID LINDGREN

- **Provide protection.** It is not a question of monitoring children, but of protecting them from dangers they are not yet capable of dealing with on their own.
- **Consider setting a good example.** Your own use of computers, smartphones, etc. has a stronger effect on the children's understanding than all attempts at lecturing.
- **Make agreements about online computer time and content.** This helps to avoid conflicts and grueling discussions. Mutually agreed family rules are highly recommended.
- **Use technical aids.** It can be helpful to install software programs that specify which pages children can and cannot access on the internet.
- **Continue self-education on a regular basis.** It is possible to request further training, for example during parent-teacher meetings

Mobile communications

Internet and mobile communications have developed in parallel since the early 1990s. With the development of the smartphone, mobile devices are now connected to the internet. On the one hand, this opens up many possibilities, but on the other hand it poses special risks for children.

First of all, there is the health risk from the high-frequency electromagnetic fields. As early as the 1930s, it was observed that being exposed to EMF radiation, used by today's mobile phones could have serious health consequences. With the spread of mobile phone networks all over the world, these consequences became more and more apparent. They are currently known as the microwave syndrome:

- Disturbance of healthy sleep,
- Headaches,
- Ear noises and dizziness,
- Inner restlessness, irritability, nervousness,
- Loss of appetite, nausea,
- Exhaustion, people feel tired and beaten as soon as they get up in the morning,
- Depressive tendencies in the sense of exhaustion depression,
- Concentration disorders and especially short-term memory problems

- Behavioral and learning disorders in children,
- Cardiovascular problems such as arrhythmias or high blood pressure.

To date, many studies have shown that effects on brain functions can also be observed (changes in the EEG, blood-brain barrier opens). There are also clear indications of a carcinogenic effect. In addition, experiments have also shown that mobile phone radiation has a gene damaging effect.⁹

Numerous medical organizations worldwide point out the health risks of mobile phone technology. The Vienna Medical Association, for example, gives ten tips on how to reduce these risks.¹⁰

The health hazard is compounded by the fact that interpersonal communication is changing. Mobile devices offer the possibility of worldwide communication without borders, but this is accompanied by the temptation to be constantly occupied with your device. An average smartphone user looks at his or her device about 88 times a day, while operating a device function about 53 times a day. This means that every 18 minutes a person is dealing with his or her mobile phone.¹¹ Turning to a voice from the apparatus





tends to take precedence over the real person present here and now. The mindless use of mobile phone technology involves the risk of not noticing how real communication is beginning to erode. It's not a question of wanting to abolish information technology and turn back the clock, but of being aware of critical aspects and setting individual counterbalances. When children live in the household, it is important to show them how to counteract the use of radio, TV, internet, mobile telephony etc. by carving out times of external and internal calm. This skill belongs to the competent use of modern communication technologies.

Some tips for that:

- Set up technical-free rooms in the home; for example, the children's room and the bedroom.
- Establish rest periods from smartphone, TV and PC (certain hours in the day or maybe even a whole weekday). Families with children could, for example, set the motto: "On Sundays mom and dad are there for the children!"
- Devices always remain switched off during meals together.

Experiences

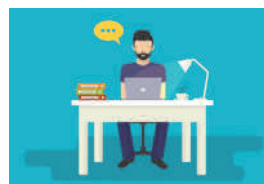
Finn (20), student, reports: "Last summer I lost my smartphone while dancing at a music festival. Since a friend of mine in America was using my second device, I decided to use a simple mobile phone that only allows telephoning and texting. I rediscovered the landline phone and the ability to install WhatsApp on the computer in such a way that it is not permanently active. I realized that I don't miss anything and that my life is much more relaxed because I only read news at certain times and don't get distracted every few minutes. It's also a lot easier to concentrate on my studies. I refused my parents' offer to give me a new smartphone for my birthday, and instead I'm the proud owner of a new bike."

- The smartphone is placed in the "mobile phone hotel" in the evening.

Conclusion:

Especially at a time when highly technical communication possibilities are omnipresent, the real person present must become important again in the literal sense of the word.

Strengthen parents



What do I want?

If you want to accompany your children in our digital civilization in a responsible way, it is essential to first become aware of the risks and opportunities of media usage. It can be

helpful to reflect one's own media consumption behavior and assess what good and poor habits you may be modeling. On this basis, if possible together with your partner, you can become clear about what you want for your child. Ask yourself—"What do I want to make possible for my child, where do I set limits, where do I make compromises?" Once you have worked out a clear position, you can defend it—both to your children and to other parents and grandparents or friends.

Often parents are afraid that their children will not be able to participate in their peer group, that they will become an outsider and be bullied if they do not own the latest media equipment. This fear is justified, because there will always be discrepancies between what children in different environments have. However, the more a child has developed self-confidence and alternative fulfilling activities, the less vulnerable he or she is to such challenges, and the less parents need to worry about it.

It may be necessary to get involved in such disputes, to contact the respective parents or to discuss the situation in parent-teacher meetings. And it always necessary to provide continuing support to your child.

Parents support each other

Your own efforts will be greatly supported if you join forces with other parents, establish common rules and set examples. It matters, for example, that you don't sit in front of the screen when you visit other parents, or that you don't take a smartphone into your room when you go to bed in the evening. The children's argument "All the others are allowed to do it" is diminished. In general, experience at parent-teacher meetings shows that there are always several parents who tell us that their child claims: "I am the only one in the class who..."

No mobile phone/smartphone without previous family agreement!

Parents are often surprised in retrospect how their son or daughter was drawn into the spell of a device, such as a smartphone, and how dealing with it goes beyond reasonable bounds once the offspring has unrestricted access. It proves to be difficult to subsequently establish restrictive rules for children and adolescents.



It is therefore advisable to think about this subject in advance and make appropriate agreements. However, as a parent, you have to be sure that you can check compliance with the rules and are able to follow through with consequences!

Tip: Commonly established rules and consequences for children and parents ensure greater acceptance among children. Suggestions for such an agreement can be found on the website: www.mediennutzungsvertrag.de.

Is everything too late?

And, if despite all the good will or lack of understanding, it should come about that a child or adolescent has slipped into a worrying technology use behavior, parents should get help, whether at an educational aid center or directly at a media addiction counselling center. Even if it can be very arduous and costly to extricate your child from a dangerous or initial addiction situation, it is definitely worthwhile to go that route, because a happy life can only be led in independence and freedom!

Experiences

A mathematics teacher (53) reported: "It was on a class trip with a 10th grade. During a break, I had a chat with two students about the on-line role-playing game World of Warcraft, which was very popular at the time. They said they both spent a lot of time playing the game. Actually, they were addicted to it. Their parents then gave them a lot of stress to stop them from playing. And in the meantime, they had realized their parents were right. 'Now we're trying to get Oliver from the parallel class who played with us out of it' was their final remark."

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Footnotes

1) This idea is presented in detail in: Struwwelpeter 2.0. Medienmündigkeit und Waldorfpädagogik", http://www.waldorfresources.org/fileadmin/files/teaching-practice/Media/Medienbroschuere_Struwwelpeter_2.0.pdf, as well as in: Hübner, Edwin (2015): *Medien und Pädagogik. Gesichtspunkte zum Verständnis der Medien*. Grundlagen einer anthroposophisch-anthropologischen Medienpädagogik, Stuttgart: edition waldorf, p. 270 ff.

2) Lembke, Gerald; Leipner, Ingo (2015): *Die Lüge der digitalen Bildung. Warum unsere Kinder das Lernen verlernen*. Munich: Redline, p. 27 ff.

3) Möhle, Thomas; Kleimann, Matthias; Rehbein, Florian (2007): *Bildschirmmedien im Alltag von Kindern und Jugendlichen. Problematische Mediennutzungsmuster und ihr Zusammenhang mit Schulleistungen und Aggressivität*. Baden-Baden: Nomos, p. 12, 18.

4) Möhle, Thomas, Kleimann, Matthias; Rehbein, Florian (2007): *Bildschirmmedien im Alltag von Kindern und Jugendlichen. Problematische Mediennutzungsmuster und ihr Zusammenhang mit Schulleistungen und Aggressivität*. Baden-Baden: Nomos, p. 12, 18

5) Möhle, Thomas (2012): „dick, dumm, abhängig und gewalttätig?“ Problematische Mediennutzungsmuster und ihre Folgen im Kindesalter. Results of the Berlin „Längsschnitt Medien“. Baden-Baden: Nomos, p. 193 ff.

6) Florian Rehbein, Matthias Kleimann, Thomas Möhle (2009): *Computerspielabhängigkeit im Kindes- und Jugendalter. Empirische Befunde zu Ursachen, Diagnos-*

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7) www.safekids.co.uk/childreninternetrisks.html Version September 2016.

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9) A good overview of the current state of research (in German) can be found at www.diagnose-funk.de and <http://www.aerzte-und-mobilfunk.eu/>

10) http://www2.aekwien.at/1964.py?Page=1&id_news=8972

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durch den Medien-
Dschungel

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