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The School Year is Starting. Does Your Child Have The Edge?

Many children struggle with learning. Whether it's printing, reading, math or simply paying attention in class, today's children are facing challenges that we as parents often find confusing and difficult to understand. Children's bodies seem to need to move all the time, yet can watch TV and play videogames for hours on end. While children of today can remember many phrases from the latest Harry Potter film, they can't remember what their homework is, much less to remember to bring it home. While our child might be expert at gross motor tasks such as soccer, they haven't a clue how to hold a pencil or perform consistent letter formation. Children of today need an edge to succeed in the classroom.

In looking for answers to these dilemmas, we might consider the impact that technology has had on our children's development and their ability to learn. North American children watch on average 6.5 hours of TV and videogames per day, resulting in physical and emotional developmental delays, attention difficulties, and poor school performance. In order to help our children, we need to go back to the basics of nature. For generations human beings have engaged in heavy work, and sensory stimulation was nature based and calming. We move to survive; chopping wood, hauling water, plowing fields... listening, looking and smelling nature. Advances in technology and transportation have resulted in a physically sedentary human body that is bombarded with chaotic and complex sensory stimulation. While TV and computers may be compelling and interesting, burying our heads in technology is causing *sensory deprivation* and a "disconnect" from our world. Parents spend on average 3.5 minutes per week in meaningful conversation with their children. Is virtual reality now home and teacher to our children? Are we crippling our children mentally and physically, by allowing our children to watch 6.5 hours per day of TV and videogames?

Well the answer to these questions are largely speculative, Cris Rowan, Pediatric Occupational Therapist and Sensory Specialist spent a decade working with children in a school based setting and observed that up to 30% of primary classroom children have delays in printing and reading and ability to pay attention. Sedentary home lifestyles as well as decreased school gym, supervised recess, and organized sports, have contributed to observed delays in sensory and motor development. Consequently these delays have an effect not only on children's ability to print and read, but also impacts their energy states, creating either hypo or hyper active children with subsequent huge attention difficulties.

As a society of parents, teachers and professionals, we need to work together to address how we can assist children to balance sensory stimulation with exercise, to increase attention and reduce sensory overload. For example, at home, a parent might allow one hour of "box time" (TV, videogame, computer) for one hour of heavy work (bike up hill, haul wood, dig in the garden). Parent may want to ask themselves the question "Does my parenting style reflect the needs of today's child"? Traditional parenting appears to be a style of the past. While modern parenting techniques encourage free choice of the child, this style often doesn't work when we're considering that many children have an active addiction to TV and videogames. When addressing addictions, individual choice is often not effective, especially when we're speaking of an elementary aged child. In an effort to cut down on TV and videogame use, parents may want to consider first educating their children on the detrimental effects of TV and videogames, and then trialing a period of a week without. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no

more than one to two hours per day of TV or videogames for an elementary age child. This can be achieved by then creating a family schedule where each week is planned in advance. Parents may also want to consider their own level of addiction to TV and address this simultaneously. Helpful tools to address TV and videogame addiction can be found on www.zonein.ca/resources/tvvg.php.

So while the pace of technology is accelerating, now is the time to create balance between technology and exercise, because children are the future of our planet. Through modern technology, we have unconsciously created a “virtual reality” for our children to call home, a reality devoid of connection and human interaction. TV, videogames and computers have now become the teachers of our children, not parents, resulting in an alarming increase in attachment and developmental disorders. Now is the time to plant the seed for children to learn in a new and conscious way. Teaching children to bring awareness to themselves, so they know who they are, creates a strong healthy foundation for learning. Using their energy in positive productive ways, children learn to create balance and wholeness of body, mind and spirit.

Cris Rowan has been an Occupational Therapist for 20 years, and Sensory Specialist working in schools and with children for the past decade. Cris has recently developed two new educational programs, Zone'in and Move'in, for use in schools and at home. Zone'in is derived from Sensory Integration theory and helps children get their energy *Zone'in to Learn!* Move'in is based on Fine Motor Development theory and is designed to help children print and read by taking them on a *Printing Adventure!* For more information please see www.zonein.ca, or contact us at info@zonein.ca or 1-888-896-6346.