Introducing Professor Sonia Livingstone

Sonia Livingstone OBE is Professor of Social Psychology in the Department of Media and Communications at the London School of Economics. A particular focus of Sonia’s work is the opportunities and risks of digital media use in the everyday lives of children and young people. Sonia has advised the UK government, European Commission, European Parliament, Council of Europe and other national and international organisations on children’s rights, risks and safety in the digital age. She was awarded the title of Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in 2014 ‘for services to children and child internet safety.’

Top 12 Takeaways from the ‘Get a Grip’ Blog with Professor Sonia Livingstone

1. The previous American guidelines that recommended children under 2 should have no screen time have been updated, recognising that some time online, for example skyping with Grandparents or for educational purposes, is unlikely to cause harm.

2. The US guidelines also recommended no more than two hours of screen time for children older than 2 years old. This has now been changed to the recommendation that **parents should agree a Media Plan with their child outlining where, when, what and for how long their child should be using digital technology.**

3. Recently, in the UK, the Royal College of Paediatricians and Child Health have said a review of the evidence has not found that longer amounts of screen time lead to more harm.

4. Sonia Livingstone recommends that rather than focus on just screen time parents consider the Three C’s: **Context, Content and Connection.** Context relates to what else the child is doing and where they use the device. Content relates to what the child is looking at or doing online and Connection is considering whether the activity involves others and who it involves.

5. In terms of Context, if screen time is **not** stopping a child doing other important things, such as social engagement, physical activity, school work, or sleep, then there can be a place for it in a child’s life. Also when thinking about context, this might refer to where the child accesses screens.

6. Evidence is emerging which suggests devices should be kept out of bedrooms at bedtime, especially for younger age groups.

7. Regarding content, where the content is very violent or designed to keep children playing mindlessly on and on, Professor Livingston suggests you prohibit or limit. However, many games are designed to be challenging, imaginative, and creative; games can involve problem solving and working together. These can be positive experiences, so know what your child is looking at and consider the benefits and any risks. **Are they learning something? Are they engaging with others? Are they being stimulated and challenged?**

8. Although we might think of screen time as a solitary activity, many ways in which children and young people use screens involves connection. This might be connecting with others online, or using screens together, or engaging about digital technology. Compared to childhoods of the past, it is harder for kids to meet up with each other and hang out, so screens enable this in the virtual world.
9. Research indicates that giving children unilateral commands about screen time results in some children evading and circumventing 'The Rules'. However, if limits and rules are discussed, explained and negotiated they are more likely to be followed.
10. We should be aiming to ‘parent’ not ‘police’ when it comes to digital technology. This is about open discussion, transparency, explanation, and negotiation. Helping children understand the risks and agree with you how to keep safe.
11. If there are lots of arguments about screen time and technology, take a step back, are there other issues going on here which are being played out in the arena of fights over technology? Are other issues getting enough attention or is all the focus going on screen use?
12. It’s really important to remember that each child is unique and their relationship with screens and the internet will be unique. Many children are good at self-regulating their use of digital technology – they are interested in other things, they want to spend time doing other things and do not want to be dominated by social media. This means no one-size-fits-all can apply and comparing one child with another is unhelpful. Working with your child to find out what works best for them and your family with regards to digital technology will be necessary.

Follow Professor Sonia Livingstone:

✓ Follow her blog: https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/parenting4digitalfuture/
✓ Read her most recent book: The Class: Living and Learning in the Digital Age (2016, with Julian Sefton-Green
✓ Look out for her upcoming book, written with Alicia Blum-Ross: Parenting for a Digital Future (Oxford University Press),

Resources recommended by Professor Livingstone:

Parent Zone, The experts in digital family life. See www.parentzone.org.uk
UK Safer internet centre – a great resource with guidance about new games, apps etc. – www.saferinternet.org.uk