

# The issue

Screen time is *the* most significant lifestyle change for children over the last decade. The average American child today spends 44.5 hours a week consuming media. The building blocks for success in school and life are formed in early childhood. They include self-discipline, the ability to delay gratification, perseverance, imagination and respect. Study after study show that poor media habits undermine every single one of these building blocks. Instead of being given the tools and experiences they need to succeed, more and more kids are shaped by a media culture that promotes “more, easy, fast, fun” and disrespect. Media use in early childhood will form the habits that will influence kids for years to come, with serious consequences. Poor media habits have been linked to overweight and obese children, attention deficit/hyperactivity, lower reading scores, bullying, the need for instant gratification, and aggression.

There is reason to be concerned. Research demonstrates that:

- Children spend more time (44.5 hours per week) in front of computer, television and game screens than any other activity except sleeping.
- Children from lowest socioeconomic groups watch the most media with the least supervision.
- 43% of children under 2 watch TV every day.
- 29% of children ages 2-3, and 43% of children ages 4 to 6, have TVs in their bedrooms.
- Children who watch cartoons or other purely entertainment television shows during preschool years, possess poorer pre-reading skills at age 5.

# The solution

The National Institute on Media and the Family (Institute) is the trusted national voice for families in the media age. **through-u** – *Families Become MediaWise*<sup>®</sup> is the Institute's early childhood program, providing resources and education to parents and providers about the impact of media on children's health, behavior, pre-literacy skills, and school readiness. Since 2003, the Institute has partnered with hundreds of early childcare centers, early childcare professionals and organizations to bring MediaWise information and resources about the impact of media on children's health and development directly to parents and caregivers.

Parents and caregivers are children's most important first teachers and are responsible for children's healthy growth and development. Overall, **through-u** – *Families Become MediaWise* results show that early involvement and education has a powerful positive effect on the media habits of families with young children – and *immediate and intermediate outcomes* can be achieved. Project evaluations have reliably demonstrated that when parents have MediaWise information and training, they make informed decisions on screen time, ratings, and content which leads to increased parent and child interaction, and a family environment that can improve and build strong families.



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