

# [Cyberspace with children]



⟨ Tips on Educational and Health Issues Needed by Families ⟩



## The Booklet on Media Literacy

Tips on Educational and Health Issues Needed by Families with Regard to  
Their Children's Interaction with Media and Cyberspace

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## Introduction

One of the most important issues related to family life is the issue of “media literacy”. In the past, families never encountered such a large number of mass media and communication systems, and perhaps the only portals available to families for receiving information and communication included television, radio, and landline telephone. However, the widespread growth of various media and communication systems and instruments, especially the availability of smart equipment to children, has resulted in the emergence of such conditions in which family control over what children are being exposed to by mass media has been reduced considerably.

One of the most important issues that can cause distance between parents and children is that of the effect of media. Thus, having “media literacy” or media education is a must for parents and it is through familiarity with and learning media literacy and training that they can monitor, supervise and control the media behavior of their own children.

Therefore, in line with our mission in the area of education, we have decided to provide families with certain educational materials on the subject of media literacy. Keeping that in mind, what follows are excerpts taken from the remarks of **Dr. Saeed Modarresi** (an expert on educational issues and media literacy), which contain important and significant points about media literacy.



## 1. What Can We Do to Protect Our Children from the Harmful Effects of Cyberspace?



At times and in the face of certain crises and challenges, we often think of long-term media training and wonder why the state has not done much about it and why do cultural environments not react? However, what needs to be taken into consideration is that this is a deep-rooted issue and needs to be addressed from several perspectives:

### A - The Family Environment

If we suppose that cultural and educational institutions are not going to do anything, then the family environment is the first environment that must be empowered in order to respond effectively with regard to this issue. It goes without saying that it is the family which is responsible for this and parents should take the necessary precautions and ensure the prevalence of careful educational measures in the family. These actions are long-



term in essence. No one is familiar with media education and literacy or has high media intelligence by birth. Parents need to participate in media literacy courses, be trained, and learn **digital parenting skills** in order to be able to apply what they have learned within their family environment.

Digital parenting skills have several principles. The first principle is that parents must develop a deep and effective emotional relationship with their children. In a family in which parents have an emotional connection with their children, spend time with them and talk to them regularly, their children do not usually have a media bubble or cell to be left alone with media portals. Parents in these families have rational and flexible authority. A powerful parent is a parent who engages in dialogue and ensures that there is a law - in the family - with regard to the use of media by the family members and within their home environment. Such families are characterized by love, affection, support, reasonable expectations, and supervision in a balanced manner.

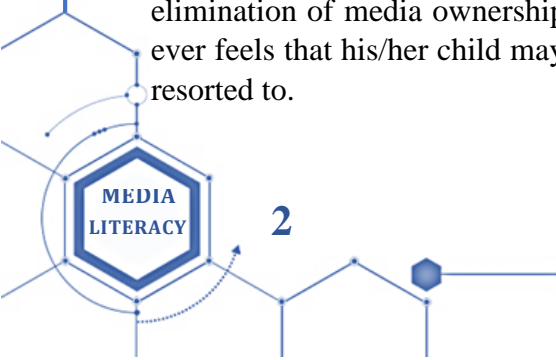


One of the most important precautionary rules in families with powerful parents is that parents have full educational authority over their children and do not give them any form of media ownership before they attain maturity in identity and thoughts. We need to know for sure that we are in **the era of media tyranny**. Even if we have a national information network and a safe and secure internet environment, all kinds of immoral content can still prevail through them. The responsibility of protecting children against the ill effects of this environment rests with parents and its solution is to increase the age of media ownership for their children.

From among other rules and regulations in families with powerful parents is that their children do not access to media content for any personal use. For instance, they do not let them develop the habit of watching a movie and animation alone in their room or have an independent social media account before reaching the age of adolescence.

It, however, should be noted that children have different ages of intellectual maturity. It may occur at the age of 16 for some and it may not occur for some others even at the age of 18. Families should not give media ownership to their children until they are sure that they have attained intellectual, emotional, and behavioral maturity. Furthermore, it is to be noted that even if such ownership is given to children, no media privacy (even for parents) will ever take place for a family that has acquired media literacy.

As a result, if children are to be protected against any harms in their interaction with the media, they should not be exposed to obscene content in the first place. The solution at this stage is the elimination of media ownership and the elimination of media privacy (for children). If a parent ever feels that his/her child may be exposed to such content, there are other solutions that can be resorted to.



In a family with influential parenting, one such solution could be **active and participatory planning**. There are a lot of activities to replace the use of media portals in the family. These include reciprocal conversation, recreational get-together, eating healthy snacks together, family games, etc. These activities enrich the family atmosphere.

In order for principles to be followed with regard to media education, both parents should be aligned and in harmony with each other. It is to be noted that even if preventive measures are taken, the crisis of immoral content in media will continue to exist. Thus, we have to prepare ourselves and parents have to go through a media training course so that they can attain acceptable behavioral maturity with regard to dealing with such family affairs.

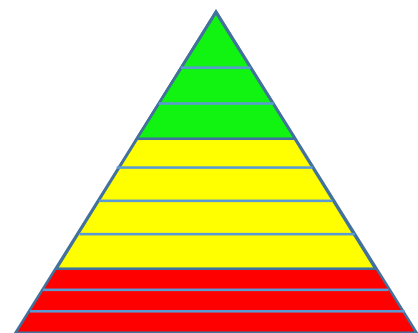
### **B - Having a Relief-Rescue and Treatment Perspective**



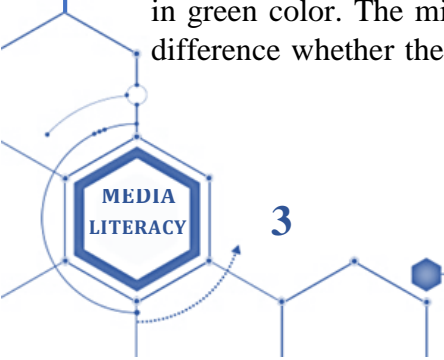
The relief-rescue and treatment perspective is raised in a situation where prevention has not taken place. A cell phone has been put at the disposal of the child (from a young age up to 17 to 20 years of age) due to his/her curiosity and perhaps the suggestion made by peers and other groups, making him/her be exposed to unpleasant content and he/she has not been able to manage his/her sense

of curiosity. Powerful parents do not lose their composure under such circumstances. They have high emotional intelligence and, therefore, do not get angry, do not get aggressive, do not humiliate their child, and do not look at him/her as a sinner. If it is not so, a strange sense of guilt will be instilled in the child that is irreparable and irreversible. Parents should not cut off their emotional connection with their children in such cases and enter into a sore relationship with them and should keep calm. An unpleasant event has happened and parents should not make it worse by their misbehavior.

It should be noted that as far as possible there is no need to talk about harmful and useless content in the media space. For instance: Have you heard that such and such a thing is going to be broadcasted? Did you see such and such a clip? All this is contrary to what may be referred to as having **media piety**. A person with media literacy and piety can always distinguish between what is healthy and unhealthy in cyberspace.



In terms of their being healthy or unhealthy, the contents of cyberspace should be divided into 10 levels. The top 3 levels, the contents of which are good, usable, and promotional, are highlighted in green color. The middle 4 levels (yellow in color) are the ones that do not make much of a difference whether they are used or not. The middle four levels can be compared to puff crisp,



which is not considered food, but if you eat some of it, you will not be poisoned. But the bottom layer - red in color - has extremely harmful and poisonous content.

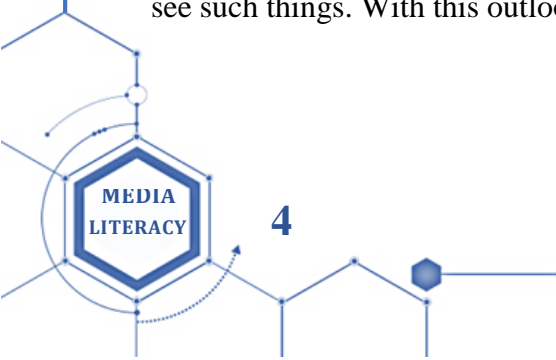
A well-educated and well-trained family with media piety and media literacy makes the connection between the ratio of media content consumption and the health ratio of their own personality and that of their child. At times one is asked if he/she has seen such and such a clip and if the answer is negative the next question would be: "How come you did not see it?" One could respond by saying: "Why should I see it? Are not a lot of such things broadcasted in this space? Now, if I want to be an informed person, do I have to watch all the filth and impurity of the media in order to be able to comment on them? This is not the case at all. I know that my dignity in terms of personality, family, and identity is not compatible with such contents in any way. I may get to know about things, but I will not expose myself to them. There is no reason, logic, or justification behind viewing such contents with the aim of being able to provide some sort of analysis about them."

Therefore, a family should confront the fact that their child has watched certain unpleasant content with complete calmness and authority and talk to their child in a state of absolute calmness. For instance, a parent can talk about it by saying: "Look my child! Did you realize what bad effects this content has on people's souls? Is it not a pity that one should put his/her eyes and soul at the disposal of such contents? Is it not a pity to spend our time on such content? By the way, who really is the singer of this clip? What are his characteristics? Which social classes does he belong to? Is he an honorable personality and does he have a positive educational impact on others? Would you like to be like him?", etc. In this way, our child will not waste his time and energy on such content, and if he/she does, there is a way back: "We apologize (to God Almighty) and decide not to spend time on such content again." This becomes a lesson for him.



Parents are not supposed to make their children feel guilty but are rather supposed to be a support for them. Thus, not only do we not reduce our emotional connection with our children, but we will tend to increase it because we want to help our children through dialogue, communication, and active supervision. For example, we can say to our child: "Do you want your phone to not have a password for a while? Do you want to delete your Instagram and use my account for a while in order to avoid the destructive effects of what is being uploaded there?" These are the alternative solutions that can be pursued with children and strengthen them in terms of identity. We need to make it clear to our children that it is not in the best interest of the family to see negative content. Tell our children that if your friends ask you whether you have seen such and such a thing or not, you do not have to say that you have seen it. Just say that it is below the dignity of our family to see such things. With this outlook, we promote the identity of our addressee.

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## C - Discovering the Roots of the Challenges Caused by Cyberspace in the Real World

Keep in mind that many of the cyberspace challenges faced by our children are rooted in their real world and real life. What should happen in the real world that our children shut their eyes when faced with inappropriate content?

The answer is through strengthening the spiritual and moral foundations, which can take place by observing on-time prayers, hijab, being conscious about the issue of *mahram* and non-*mahram*, heartfelt connection with the infallibles (as) and performing some acts of worship. There is a verse in the Holy Quran that describes the qualities of true believers and says that they refrain from idle talk and what is vain<sup>1</sup> rather than constantly being immersed in such a thing. In other words, if I want to have a believing and pious child, I must pay attention to the elements of his/her spiritual development, which help form a prohibitive force in our children.

## D - Seek God Almighty's Blessings

All the three above-mentioned points are earthly arrangements. We should know that only one part of the objective of having righteous children and doing the right upbringing is possible through the earthly measures taken by parents and educators. The main part of it is seeking God Almighty's support and blessings. God is the true Lord of our children. Even Imam Sajjad (as) sought support from God Almighty to raise his children. In his words: "O God! Please help me in raising and (righteous) upbringing of my children."<sup>2</sup>



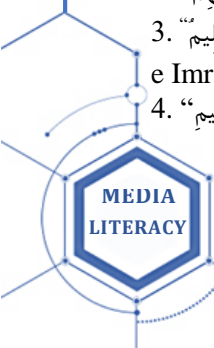
In the age of media tyranny and the time when educational, moral, spiritual and media seditions are being repeatedly created, we have no choice but to ask our occultated guardian (Imam of the Time, Hazrat Mahdi) - who is always present - to take care of our children. It is this noble Imam (as) who is the manifestation of the Lordship of God Almighty. It was for the same reason that Hazrat Maryam (Mary) left her child in the custody of God Almighty and said: "O, my Creator and Nurturer! I have vowed to you what is in my womb to be dedicated, for Your services (of the worshipping place); please accept it from me; You are the All-hearing, the All-knowing."<sup>3</sup> The mother prays for the child in her womb: "God! I entrust my child to Your care against the evil of the outcast Satan."<sup>4</sup> In response to a mother who had made such a sincere supplication, God Almighty accepted her vow and accepted Mary as a heavenly child, and made it possible for her to be raised in the best possible way. He (God Almighty) made His messenger - Hazrat Zakaria

1. "وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ عَنِ اللَّغْوِ مُعْرِضُونَ", See Surah Al-Mu'minun (23), Verse 3.

2. "وَ أَعْتَى عَلَى تَرْبِيَّتِهِمْ وَ تَأْدِيبِهِمْ", See Sahifah al-Sajjadiyah, Supplication 25.

3. "إِذْ قَالَتِ امْرَأَتُ عِمْرَانَ رَبِّ إِنِّي نَذَرْتُ لَكَ مَا فِي بَطْنِي مُحَرَّرًا فَتَقَبَّلْ مِنِّي إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ", See the Holy Quran, Surah Aal-e Imran, Verse 35.

4. "إِنِّي أَعِيذُهَا بِكَ وَذَرَيْتَهَا مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ الرَّجِيمِ", See Ibid., Verse 36.



(as) who was also the Imam of his time - the guardian of this child. This child had been brought up (and had become so purified) that every time Zakaria (as) entered her (Hazrat Maryam) room, he observed heavenly sustenance before her.<sup>1</sup>

If we want a well-trained child to be spirituality-oriented, and psychologically healthy, we need to - in addition to earthly preparations - seek help from the Imam of the Time (as).

## 2. Common Parent and Child Media Memory

Once upon a time, there were very few houses with a TV set and a landline telephone. In those days, families watched the programs of their interest together with their children. The family talked about the TV shows and animations. If anyone would call that house, first the father, then the mother, and then the older brother or older sister would answer the call in order to find out who the caller wanted to speak to.



But nowadays, everyone has come to have access to a personal media portal. In the past, parents and children shared a common media memory, that is, they watched a program together. Thus, very naturally, in those days, parents mediated in their children's interaction with media contents. If these contents had any positive points, they would reinforce them in the minds of their children and talk about them with the children. By the same token, if they contained negative points, they would tend to critically examine them. This trend would make the process of educating children, making good use of media opportunities, and protecting children against media threats to be well supervised by the parents.

1. فَتَقَبَّلَهَا رَبُّهَا بِقَبُولٍ حَسَنٍ وَأَنْبَتَهَا نَبَاتًا حَسَنًا وَكَفَّلَهَا زَكَرِيَّا كُلَّمَا دَخَلَ عَلَيْهَا زَكَرِيَّا الْمِحْرَابَ وَجَدَ عِنْدَهَا رِزْقًا قَالَ يَا مَرْيَمُ أَنَّى لَكِ هَذَا قَالَتْ هُوَ مِنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ “، See the Holy Quran, Surah Aal-e Imran, Verse 37.





Even though the times have changed, the mass media has expanded to a great extent and the volume of media content has increased a lot; the principles of proper education and upbringing have not changed at all. Thus, a family with media education in which parents have improved their media literacy, recognizes that they must share a media memory with their children. In other words, in a balanced family, no one has the media privacy to watch an animation and a movie alone in a separate room. Similarly, children under the age of 15 should not have an independent account in cyberspace and social media in a way that parents do not know who their children are in contact with.

This prevents a situation in which children are not under the educational supervision of the family such that they get to be in contrast with the family spirit after a while. Therefore, parents must mediate between the media content and their children, which manifests itself in two ways:

- a - Strengthening Mediation: emphasizing the positive media messages for children.
- b - Modifying Mediation: being sensitive to the time spent by children on various media and smart computer equipment.

In a balanced family, parents are always alert. Just as they have plans for their children's nutrition so that they do not consume any food that could be harmful to them in terms of quantity, quantity, and age, in the same way, they pay attention to the contents of the media they are in touch with. This is because just as food can make our bodies strong or poison it or cause indigestion, so also media contents can strengthen or poison our children's delicate souls, or cause distortions in children in such a way that parents do not realize what has happened to their children. Therefore, parents should remember the importance of shared media memory and create the right educational and upbringing environment for their children by properly managing media consumption at home.

### 3. Taking Care of Eyes and Ears



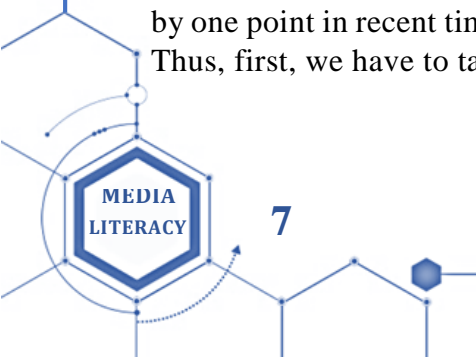
When we want to use a media portal, we must also take care of our body. Media etiquette requires that we do not harm our bodies. We are supposed to bring benefits to our souls, minds, and brains, but we suddenly realize that our bodies are damaged. We need to note that the body is the carrier of our soul, so it should not be damaged.

Perhaps one of the most common physical harms of using media portals such as cell phones, TVs, laptops, tablets, etc. is the harms they could cause to our eyes. The large amount of light that enters our eyes during the day or at night causes serious damage to our body. Did you know that the average number the eyes of our teens has increased

by one point in recent times? This is a generational disorder and should be a cause for concern.

Thus, first, we have to take care of the health of our eyes.

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There are some practical and important points in this discussion. First, we can use the Twenty-Twenty-Twenty (20-20-20) rule in this regard; that is, every twenty minutes we look at the surfaces with blue light, we should rest our eyes for twenty seconds by looking at something, preferably white, that is 20 feet away from us so that the muscles of the pupil and retina relax and, God forbid, will not get into any problem.

One of the problems that may affect some eyes is the dryness of the corneal surface. At times this leads to illness and increases the pressure on the eyes. So we need to practice blinking once every five minutes in order to make secrete fluid run on the surface of the cornea and prevent corneal damage. The next important point is to adjust the brightness of the screen of the device we use. If we happen to use these devices in a dark environment, we must be careful that the light of the screen is not too much and is not brighter than our surroundings, otherwise, it will definitely put a lot of pressure on our pupil muscles. We must take these precautions so that our eyes do not get prone to any damage.

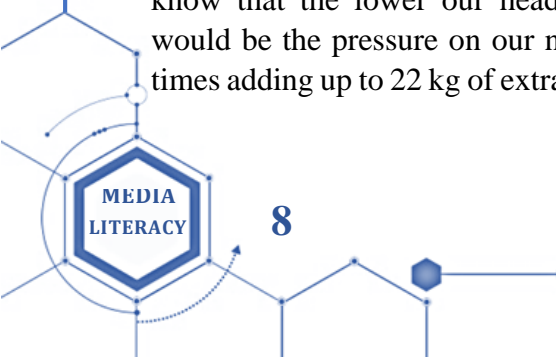
By the same token, we must pay attention to the health of our ears when using media portals. Sometimes we use handsfree to avoid disturbing others. It should be noted that if the intensity of the sound waves we receive from the media port is more than a certain amount, it is going to damage our hearing ability in the long run.

**A few hygiene tips that should be kept in mind:** First, everyone should use their personal handsfree. This is because the use of shared handsfree could cause the transmission of diseases and germs. Second, contrary to popular custom that most people use both sets of a handsfree, it is better to use one set because using both sets increases the intensity of receiving (electromagnetic) waves by the ears. Another point that needs to be kept in mind is to let our ears rest after using a handsfree for a duration of 15 continuous minutes. We should also make sure that the total duration of using a handsfree should not be more than four 15-minute periods (i.e., more than an hour per day).

#### 4. Physical Precautions in Using Cell Phones

One of the most common physical maladies caused by cell phones is the pain we get in the neck. Anatomy and orthopedics specialists are quite familiar with this pain and receive many patients with this problem. As recommended earlier we should use media portals in such a way that they do not cause any physical problems.

One of the most common mistakes in using media portals is the lowering of the head. We need to know that the lower our head goes, the more would be the pressure on our neck vertebrae; at times adding up to 22 kg of extra load on the neck



vertebrae. This can cause serious damage in the long run, especially for the adolescents and young adults who are engaged in virtual education during the time of coronavirus pandemic.

There are several simple solutions to these problems. The first solution is to raise our cell phones and hands instead of lowering our heads. The next solution is to use holders for long-term use of cell phones. The other solution is to use the voice assistant available on cell phones to make notes instead of typing them with our fingers. Yet another solution is to send audio messages instead of typing on the cell phone, which helps a lot in preventing physical damages.

One very important point we need to pay attention to is the standard duration defined for using a particular device. We need to know that each device has its own standard usage time. For instance, the standard time for using a mobile phone continuously is 10 to 15 minutes. The standard time to use a tablet is between 20 and 25 minutes. As regards laptops, it is recommended to use them continuously for a maximum of 45 minutes. The human body tends to shrink in the course of using media portals, which will lead to serious complications in the long run.

Another important point about using media portals is related to our sitting position. What needs to be taken care of is the sitting position of children and adolescents at the time of using such devices. One should not bend forward and one's back should be straight and upright while using these ports. This makes it necessary to use a suitable chair. When sitting behind these devices our chair should be positioned in such a way that we can keep our feet high enough (to keep our back upright) and to ensure this we can use footrests. Thighs should be positioned at 90 approximately degrees and the legs should not be hanging, otherwise, a lot of pressure will be put on the knees after a while. The waist, too, should also be positioned between 90 and 100 degrees (upright). Moreover, our hands should also be placed at a 90-degree angle when using a laptop, which is greatly helped by using a suitable mouse and mouse pad. We are supposed to use the media portals in the best possible sitting position so that our bodies - and that of our children for that matter - will not be harmed while using these devices.



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## 5. Beware of Electromagnetic Radiation

Media portals are severely connected to electromagnetic waves and, therefore, we must be cautious and avoid getting hurt. These electromagnetic waves can affect different parts of the body. Although the creators of media portals claim that these waves are controlled and managed and do not cause serious damage to our bodies, we perhaps have to wait to see if this will actually happen in the future.

The currently ongoing virtual education has exposed our children to electromagnetic waves more than ever. This is caused by Wi-Fi waves, data networks, cell phones, cordless phones, Bluetooth handsfree, etc. When a band of waves opens on media ports such as cell phones it generates intense electromagnetic waves, thus, while talking on a cell phone, make sure that your mobile data had been turned off, your Wi-Fi is not connected, and Bluetooth and GPS are not turned on. Each of these creates electromagnetic waves.

You may have perhaps experienced that sometimes your cell phone gets hot in your hand, this is because its GPS is on. This indicates the intensity of the wave exchange. So when you talk on the phone, the other bandwidths on your device should be turned off.

Another point is the duration of the phone calls. Experts recommend that the duration of a phone call should not exceed 2 minutes, and if it is going to last more, we should disconnect our cell phone and continue the call with a landline phone. Another solution is to use wired handsfree because the Bluetooth handsfree creates a wave center next to the brain.

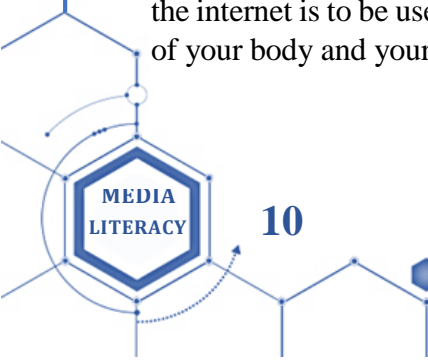
A media literate person never takes his or her cell phone to the bedroom. During sleep at night, our surroundings should be free of disturbing waves. This means that the cell phone is turned off or put in flight mode and home Wi-Fi should be turned off.

Another point to consider is that the data network is supposed to connect the cell phones to the BTS antennas of the city at a distance of 500 meters to one kilometer and, therefore, the power of its waves is very high. But Wi-Fi connects the cell phone to the home modem, which is located at a distance of five to six meters, making the intensity of the waves lower. Thus, if we are at home, it is advisable to connect our cell phone to home Wi-Fi and turn off the mobile data.

The last important point is that the younger the children, the smaller the diameter of the skull of their growing body. Be careful if you give your cell phone to your children, put it in flight mode, and if the internet is to be used (which, of course, is not recommended), make sure to use Wi-Fi. Take care of your body and your children so that, God forbid, you do not get wave-stricken.



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## 6. The Effect of Media Portals on Disturbing One's Sleep



Adequate and sound sleep during the golden time of rest is one of the hallmarks of a healthy body. The golden time of sleep is from 10 pm to 2 am in which sleep is deep and it is referred to as soft sleep and it gives us extraordinary energy. Of course, besides midnight, there is another timing for a powerful and energetic sleep, which is the midday nap and is about half an hour before noon and is known as *qiluleh* sleep (in Islam) and is highly recommended

as it provides the body with a lot of energy.

Unfortunately, with the increase in media portals in modern life, people's sleep has come to be disturbed since they tend to sit at the media portals till late in the night and perhaps do not know that the average life expectancy may be shorter in the long run and bodies may be seriously damaged. Insufficient sleep, irregular sleep, and unsound sleep affect people's mood during waking hours and also affect the body in terms of metabolism and bodily functions.

People who do not get to have sound sleep usually lose their temper soon and their mind does not function properly during the daytime, and at times their memory gets impaired. We do not sleep when we should, and we sleep when we should not. One should not sleep after the morning call for prayers and before sunrise. Those who like to have a strong memory are advised not to sleep after the morning prayer since the hadiths and the *sireh* of the Ahl al-Bayt (as) advise against sleeping during this time period.

Deep and sound sleep is the one that takes place at its appropriate timing. When we use media portals such as cell phones, televisions, media networks, etc. until the moment before sleep, the blue light radiation causes disturbance in sleep. Our body secretes a hormone called melatonin (the hormone that distinguishes day from night). When it gets dark, this hormone is released and people begin to feel sleepy. This hormone is not secreted much during the day because as there is a lot of light.

What should we do to get enough, deep and sound sleep? We have to turn off all media portals an hour before bedtime. The blue light rays on the screen of cell phones cause a delay in the release of the melatonin hormone. If we want to use media portals we need to use the capabilities of our devices to remove blue light. Modern cell phones have a feature that is referred to as a blue light filter. If we use a tablet or laptop, there is a setting called night mode, which when activated, the blue light is removed and we can have a more restful sleep.

A book can give us a good night's sleep. The parents who read books before going to bed are sure to be good role models for their children so that they do not get caught up in the pre-sleep media portal.



## 7. Beware of Media Obesity

The outbreak of coronavirus pandemic and virtual education has caused our children to get overweight. About 21% of children and adolescents are overweight and about 25% of them have hyperlipidemia. The diseases that were supposed to emerge after the age of 40 to 50 have tended to come to teenagers today. Why? Because they just sit behind computers and do not have much physical activity. Children do not go to school and have become



less active. This new generation is called Digital Native or Generation Z. These are the people who see media outlets as part of their bodies. By the same token, adults are called Digital Immigrants.

The important question is that what is to be done with this coronavirus stricken generation? The generation that is spending their childhood and adolescence in the days of coronavirus pandemic. They may not be conscious, but parents should be conscious about what needs to be done. As parents, we must be careful that our children should not be made to spend their time in front of the TV at their young age so that they are silent and do not bother and disturb us. TV can never be a good nanny for kids.

We need to be careful to change the media food model. But what is media food? Unfortunately, some families set their food table in front of the TV. Everything has its own culture. At the dinner table, which is a time for a family get-together and interaction with each other, children should learn that the father thanks the mother for the colorful table and the delicious food she has prepared. If the TV is on, the mouth is eating, but our eyes and senses are on the TV shows. Unfortunately, this etiquette is not observed in some families. These families do not understand that they neither understand what they are eating nor do they understand the program that is being broadcasted. The mother of the family clears the table and no one thanks and appreciates her efforts and cooking. Thus, one of the most important habits is to change our media food habits.

The other important point to remember is that when children are in front of a media portal and are playing computer games, no sugary foods should be kept next to them. This is because the games increase their excitement and they begin to eat mindlessly and because they are not active enough the level of their blood sugar and blood cholesterol will rise unnecessarily. If they are to be provided with something to eat, we recommend using fruits and water instead of nuts, sweets, and chocolate.

If you want to take care of children's physical health, you have to make sure that they need to be physically active for the same amount of time they spend behind the media portals. For instance, if our children play computer games for 30 minutes, they should also be physically active for 30 minutes. A healthy lifestyle should include 30 minutes of light exercise a day. This time can be divided into two 15-minute walks or three 10-minute light exercises. These practices can result in

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avoiding such damages as excess cholesterol and glucose that the use of media portals can cause in our body and, God forbid, make us vulnerable to physical illnesses.

## 8. Talking to Children About the Media



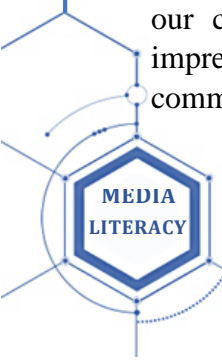
During the coronavirus pandemic and especially during the holidays we need to remain alert about the messages we indirectly receive from our children. There tends to be a rise in the time they spend on playing computer games and watching animations and movies. Meanwhile, there appear a series of challenges caused as a result of receiving education virtually, which include a sharp decline in the level of social interactions of children and adolescents. Each part of our brain manages a part

of our activities and when the level of interaction with others decreases, it naturally results in a decrease in the vocabulary used in these interactions. Thus, there is a concern that the vocabulary and emotional behavior of children and adolescents will be overshadowed and become poorer day by day. This is because they do not see their friends and teachers and are so busy with devices, virtual portals, games, and animations that they no longer even have the opportunity to be with their parents or to ask how they are. We need to be careful about our children's social interactions. If children can see their friends by following hygienic measures and protocols, we should not hesitate to make it possible for them.

The next important issue to be mindful of is that the number of information children receive from social networks is on the increase. They see and receive a lot of media content that we need to talk to them about it; but how? Shall we make it look like a trial? No! We can ask our child to tell us what the movie or animation and/or the content they saw was about, and if it is good, we can see it too. When the child watches a movie and/or an animation, ask him/her to tell you the story and what the movie was about. In this way, you can find out which point of the film was important to him/her and which content was not suitable for them.

Next, we should ask our child to tell us the positive points of the film and/or animation, which part of the story was interesting or useful for him/her. Then ask him/her to tell us which part of the film and/or animation was not beautiful and of no use; for example, it was too scary and too violent or immoral. In this way, our children begin to learn to manage impressionability step by step.

The fourth step is to initiate a creative dialogue and to ask our child which part of the story he or she would change or add something to if he or she were the author of the book or director of the film, game, or animation in order to make it have a more positive effect on the readers or viewers. The initiation of such a dialogue will result in forming a shared media memory with the child, and our child will begin to have a critical outlook on media content and learns to manage impressionability. Therefore, interactive dialogue is very important in establishing media communication with children and we should give it sufficient importance.



## 9. How to Raise and Train an Influential Media Child?

The ongoing pandemic has deprived children of attending classrooms, laboratories, and libraries. Our children now watch their school from the small window of a cell phone screen, tablet, or laptop, and there is no sign of the multifaceted lessons that occupied children's minds. This will cause a change in the information processing system of children's brains and will disrupt the multifaceted model of learning that usually happens during the normal and conventional form of education.



Now the question is that what should be done in such a situation? Under these circumstances, our children will not be able to turn their mental ideas into an objective situation or to create and build something and use their creativity to produce crafts of their interest.

Viewing the issue from a positive perspective, there are some key and practical recommendations in this regard. First, be careful to make it possible for children, especially the younger ones, to improve working with their hands. For this purpose, we can provide them with all kinds of play doughs, pottery clay, origami games, needles, paper, and scissors, and encourage them to engage in creative work and design. We can teach them artworks, calligraphy, painting, physical skills, and sports that are appropriate for them. These activities will help improve our children's sensory system, which is a matter of great concern at present times.

Make sure to include integrated activities in your schedule. For example, one of the interesting things to do during the holidays, which is of both media and entertainment dimensions, is to ask children to turn some of their storybooks into audiobooks. For this purpose, the child should read the book and record his/her voice in several parts and send it to friends and relatives. One good thing to do is to have indigenous content circulated among children. There are also some simple mobile applications that have interesting features and our children can use them to create media content. For instance, they can take pictures of the images of the book they want to turn into an audiobook with a cell phone and combine it with their sound to make a beautiful video clip and share the final product with friends and others.

There are also some mobile softwares that can make motion graphics or short animations and children can use them to make short animations of their own by using their home appliances, toys, dolls, etc. They can also narrate a story, record it, and dub it and, in this way, turn their mental ideas into good media content. The sum total of these activities strengthens the very being of our children, including their handwork skills and the skill of producing media content instead of falling prey to excessive use. Even at their young age, our children can be effective media producers instead of being mere consumers, and we must not forget that we have a responsibility to prepare our children for the future.

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## 10. Beware of Children's Information Overload!



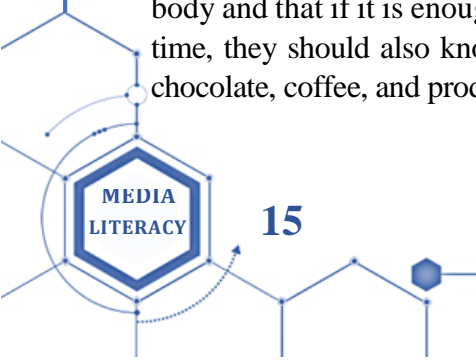
There is a theory in the field of media education and literacy, which is called media organism or technology. This means that some technologies replace our body parts, which has, over time, actually happened in the past. For example, hammers have replaced hands and cars have replaced feet. One of the things that have happened to our children with regard to using media is that their memories have become external, i.e., they are less likely to memorize anything (such as phone number, poem, Quran) and, instead, refer to the media portals and leave it to the media to remember. When one's memory is left unused, it can face problem in retaining information.

This is not only true for children but for everyone. No one memorizes phone numbers anymore and they record them on their phone. No one memorizes poetry anymore, because it can be found on Google. No one memorizes the Holy Quran anymore because there is such and such Quranic software on his cell phone. Our children no longer make use of their memory and, therefore, tend to suffer from the lack of ability to retain information in their memory. When short-term memory is impaired, it would naturally not be possible to think well, since the area where the information is processed is the short-term memory.

We need to be careful that children's virtual education and their excessive contact with media portals do not replace the empowerment of memory. We should make use of games and other methods to strengthen children's power of memory. There are some games such as word games or "name place animal thing" or memory card games, etc. that help strengthen memory.

For instance, before leaving home for shopping, and especially when there are many things to shop for, we can ask our child to write down the shopping list and tell us by heart and then go through the list to see if he or she has missed anything. Holidays are a great time to engage children in memorizing poems. We can start with their own literature books and use the poems available in them to initiate a poetry contest (just as a game among ourselves). Also, if they are interested in memorizing verses of the Holy Quran, we can encourage them to give us company in doing so and do it in the form of a game.

One of the other measures that will strengthen our children's memory is familiarizing them with memory concentration techniques. We need to teach children how to keep their bodies in good form in order to increase their concentration. They should know how much water should enter the body and that if it is enough it will, along with enough sleep, help strengthen memory. At the same time, they should also know that eating fatty foods or food with free radicals in the body (such as chocolate, coffee, and products that cause disturbance in sleep) can impair memory.



In the meantime, our children need to know that information overload in the brain causes loss of memory. That is, when they wake up in the morning and the first thing they do is pick up their cell phone, check the various channels, news and pages, then the mind becomes overloaded with information. This situation also causes anxiety in the person lest he/she loses some information. When memory fails to focus on one topic and jumps from one topic to the next, which is happening to children as a result of frequent reference to social media, strengthening of memory gets disrupted.

It is important to learn that we are not supposed to jump from one news to another and from one channel to another. Turn off cell phone notifications and set a specific time for accessing media portals and social networks. For this purpose, there are some programs that can be installed to manage our time so that we do not get tempted to refer to media portals and social networks repeatedly.

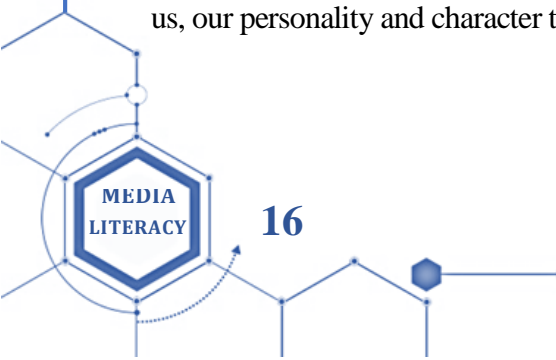
## 11. Gradual Hacking of Personality by Social Networks

Social media has made some beneficial contributions such as facilitating communication and services as well as receiving information, etc. to our daily lives. However, some of these social networks have caused some changes in our behavior, too. For instance, creating interest in sharing personal photographs, being seen, and collecting likes from different people. This behavior of ours, whether we like it or not, has affected our children as well, and our children, too, have learned to seek and collect likes. As a result, our children have come to be thirsty for likes.



Doesn't the fact that our children are so much after receiving likes on social networks and, as a matter of fact, getting other people's approval means that he/she receives fewer likes from his/her father and/or mother? Perhaps the level of approval received from parents has decreased considerably! Perhaps the reason that they seek to be seen so much is that they do not receive enough approval from their parents and there is no deep and effective emotional connection between parents and their children. Therefore, we have to look for the roots and causes of certain shortcomings and disorders in our lives in cyberspace and seek solutions in the real world. We also need to be careful that our desire for being seen and noticed should not cause a change in our identity.

The structure of social networks may create certain inappropriate behavior in us. For instance, when we post photos and short videos of ourselves on some social media and others approve of us, our personality and character tend to gradually fall prey to being hacked - so to say - after a while.

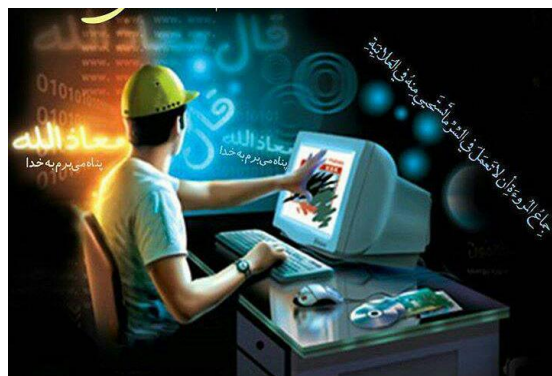


When one notices that he/she was psychologically quite independent earlier and did not look for other people's approval when he/she was about to make the right decision, but this trend has changed after being a member of so and so social network for a while and other people's opinion has become very important, it denotes that one's personality has been hacked. In the case of younger children, this problem could and would result in a decrease in their self-esteem and self-confidence. If and when you notice that your children keep on asking you what they should wear and if they should eat such and such food or not or if they should do this or that, then know for sure that something big has happened and the child has lost his/her ability to manage himself/herself.

A survey conducted in England has revealed that 90 percent of the people who spend more than two hours a day on the Instagram social network are dissatisfied with themselves. This is because their lives depend on being seen, noticed, and approved and their self-image is not very beautiful. Moreover, since it has become fashionable in that network for everyone to display a video clip of themselves, not being careful about the effects of the existing trend is bound to bring change in one's inclinations, attitudes, and behaviors, if one is not cautious. We need to be aware of what we are looking for on social media and take care of our children's moods and mentality right from an early age.

## 12. The God of Cyberspace Is the same as God of Real Space

One of the characteristics of cyberspace or, as people call it, virtual space, is its un-forgetfulness. That is, nothing is erased or lost in it. There is a concept in media education, which is known as "digital footprint" and states that from the moment one enters this space, all his/her behaviors are recorded and that this space has actually been created so that nothing gets erased. The search one does, the word one looks for, the movie one watches on the internet, the audio recording one listens to, the software one downloads, the page one opens up in the cyberspace, etc. are all registered in the Google Browser or any other browser for that matter.



If you do not believe it you can go to "myactivity.google.com" to see your digital footprint or press the ctrl + h buttons simultaneously when your browser is open to see that all the searches you have done, plus their search time, the site you visited, their date details, etc. are recorded there. Let us be careful about our digital footprint.

There is a verse in the Holy Quran, which says: "This is Our book, which speaks truly against you. Indeed, We used to record what you used to do."<sup>1</sup> Cyberspace, too, tells us that everything you do is recorded on their systems and, therefore, we need to be careful about our digital footprint and

1. "هَذَا كِتَابُنَا يَنْطِقُ عَلَيْكُمْ بِالْحَقِّ إِنَّا كُنَّا نَسْتَنْسِخُ مَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ". See Surah Al-Jathiyah, Verse 29.



what we leave behind in this space, what we search for, what we download, and what we listen to, and of course, what messages we send to others.

Let us be conscious that the God of cyberspace is the same as the God of real space. Doing backbiting in cyberspace is just like doing the same in the real world, defamation and posting news that we are not sure if it is true or false is as bad as accusing someone of something in the real world. How bad is it to get into argument with someone in the real world? Getting involved in arguments in cyberspace has the same effects and all these activities are recorded, forever.

There are some people who, in spite of having very little specializations, look for other people's digital footprints. Maybe our child is still small now and is not considered as someone important. Maybe we are teenagers and young right now and we do not hold an important position but is it going the same in the future? Will our digital footprint not become a matter of importance later? Would a part of our children's recreation not include knowing what their parents were interested in? Will my digital footprint not cause problems for me later when it is time for my son/daughter or, any youth for that matter, to get married? Thus, from now on, we have to be cautious about what information we record in cyberspace.

### 13. How Do We Know If We Have Internet Addiction?

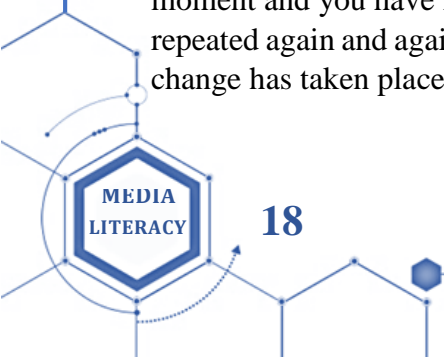
I have a question for you. Would you make a two-month-old baby have “Kabab”? Do you pick up a soft drink from the fridge in the morning and drink it? Do you drink two glasses of juice drink and/or water after eating fatty food? Of course, your answer would certainly be a big “No”. That is because you have a specific diet program and are careful about what you eat and/or drink. In fact, you have a well-planned diet system for yourself.



Just as we take care of our body, we should also have a media consumption diet. By the same token, just as our temperament gets disturbed by certain types of food, so also our mental temperament may get disturbed by the model of our media usage. At times, the first thing we do after waking up is to look at our cell phone so that we do not miss a message and we visit it repeatedly during the day. This issue has been referred to by the European Union as smartphone

addiction or dopamine dysregulation syndrome.

Dopamine is a pleasure hormone that is secreted in the brain. When you open your social network and find out that a message has been sent to you and you will be happy about it the dopamine hormone is secreted in the brain at that moment of happiness and since you have enjoyed that moment and you have felt satisfied with what you had seen, you want that pleasant moment to be repeated again and again and after a while, it becomes a habit for you. It is at this time that a serious change has taken place in your brain and it has become hormonal.



In order to change this habit, we must first find out how many times a day we go through our cell phone and how many times we check the social network. Then we need to know what is the ideal and appropriate time period one should use his/her cell phone during the day. Of course, the mentioned appropriate time period does not include making the necessary calls, etc. by our cell phone, but it refers to doing and getting engaged in unnecessary stuff with the cell phone.

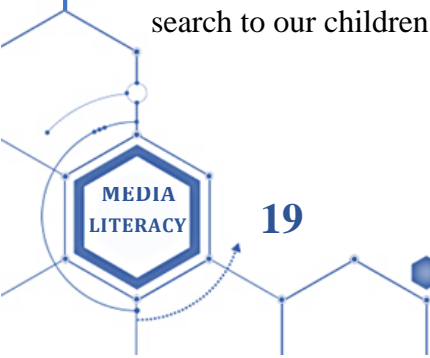
It is recommended not to engage in unnecessary and recreational stuff on the cell phone for more than 90 minutes in 24 hours. But the question is that how to keep track of the mentioned time period? There are some softwares called media consumption management program that you can easily find on the Internet and use them. One of these softwares is entitled “Quality Time” that you can install on your cell phone. This software tells you how many times you have unlocked your cell phone and which of the social networks you have used the most. With this software, you can design a suitable system for using your cell phone. For instance, if you decide not to use a program or a social network for more than half an hour during the day, this software notifies you if you have surpassed and exceeded 30 minutes during the day and that you need to be careful about your consumption time.

If you want to find out whether you have become dependent on this space or not, there are tests called tests on addiction to the cell phone or internet (including a test called the Young test) in which you are asked 20 questions and when you answer them, the level of your addiction is determined.

Once you find out about the level of your addiction or dependence, it is time to manage your time. Our time is not unlimited, we have a time limit and, thus, we need to know how much time to spend on media interactions and on using our cell phone in order to avoid media addiction.

## 14. How to Protect Our Children from Inappropriate Cyberspace Content?

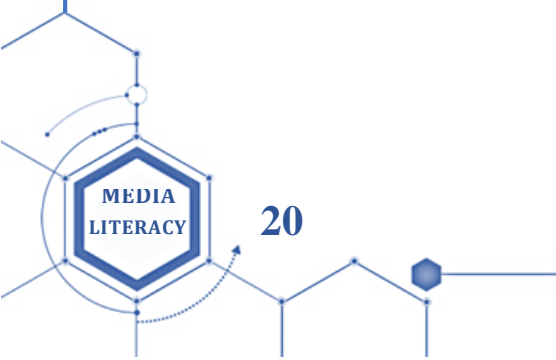
It is everyone’s right to have access to clean and protected internet, which is free from immoral content. However, we cannot benefit from and enjoy this right for many reasons, including the lack of a national information network. It is quite natural that when we enter the internet and/or our children are engaged in their educational program or doing a simple search on the internet, we (and they) may encounter a series of obscene and immoral content. This is not in our control when an ad suddenly pops up on the system or offers a search to our children.



There are two key recommendations in this regard. There are certain settings in browsers that facilitate getting rid of such pop-ups. For example, there is a section in Google browser, called Safe Search (safety.google) which, if checked and clicked on, will automatically filter all immoral content and does not allow it to be loaded on your system. What is also important to know is that if we encounter erratic content on the Internet, the web, and media content that are outside of our control but do not get affected by them and they do not make us slip, this is rooted in our real life.

When there is a lot of probability that our children are exposed to inappropriate content in cyberspace, they need to be strengthened religiously and spiritually. We recommend that you do not neglect group and individual acts of worship in these days of coronavirus pandemic and virtual education. How beautiful are the congregational prayers offered by the family members at homes; how pleasant it is when the members of the family members make a heartfelt appeal to the Imam of the time (as) on Friday evenings. These religious activities become a spiritual asset in the lives and hearts of our children and confer spirituality and enlightenment to their souls and hearts and as a result, when they are confronted with inappropriate and immoral content in cyberspace they can exercise self-control and feel and know that it is detrimental to their spirituality and morality and, therefore, do not watch such things and click the cross button and close them.

How long do we have to be with children in cyberspace in order to take care of them? This is not possible, but it is possible to prepare such grounds in the real life of children that spiritual light shines in their hearts and a beautiful spiritual experience takes place in their real life that protects them from the misfortunes and inappropriate content of the media and does not allow them to get affected and harmed by them and recover immediately if they happen to get harmed by any chance. On-time prayers, supplications, spiritual experience, and a heartfelt relationship with the Ahl al-Bayt (as) will definitely help this self-preservation and self-protection.

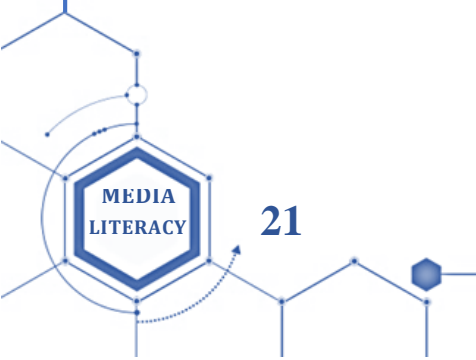


## Source

The above text is the translation of what has been quoted by the International Quran News Agency (IQNA) from the website of the “Baran Media Training Center”.

<https://bmtc.ir/magazine>

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# انتخاب آگاهانه کاربری مسئولانه

