

Survey: Parents binge on media, say they're good role models

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Parents spend more than nine hours a day with TVs, computers and other screen devices while also giving themselves high marks as role models for their children's media use, according to a survey released Tuesday.

Among all those surveyed—nearly 1,800 parents in the U.S.—daily screen time averaged nine hours and 22 minutes, with the bulk of that, seven hours and 43 minutes, categorized as personal screen time and the other roughly 90 minutes spent on work.

The study also found they were enthusiastic about technology's role in their kids' lives but wary of the risks it may hold, including loss of sleep and online oversharing. Researchers from the nonprofit Common Sense Media group and Northwestern University's Center on Media and Human Development conducted the project.

Two-thirds of those surveyed, 67 percent, said monitoring their children's devices and social media accounts is more important than allowing them privacy.

Another finding: Latino and black parents expressed more concern about their kids' media use (66 and 65 percent, respectively) than white ones (51 percent). Latinos are more diligent in managing it than other parents, checking devices and social media accounts more often.

It was the gap between how much adults use media and what that might mean for their offspring that was particularly striking to James P. Steyer,

founder and CEO of Common Sense Media , which helps families and educators assess and use media and technology effectively. The group's first-ever deep dive on parents' tech habits mirrors its ongoing analysis of those of children and teenagers.

"I found the numbers astounding, the sheer volume of technology used by parents," Steyer said. "There's really a big disconnect between their own behavior and their self-perception, as well as their perception of their kids."

"Yet 78 percent of all parents believe they are good media and technology role models for their children," according to a survey summary.

The range of activities includes TV or other video viewing; video gaming; social networking or website browsing, and any other task on a computer, smartphone or tablet. Media consumed with a child or another family member along with solo use is included in the personal screen tally, according to Common Sense Media.

Personal media usage by educational level ranges from about nine hours for parents with a high school degree or less to about six hours for those with a bachelor's degree or higher.

White parents averaged six hours and 38 minutes on personal media, with Latinos spending about two-and-a-half hours more and African-American parents four hours more.

The top concerns among all parents about potential adverse media effects included the fear that children may become technology addicts (56 percent of parents); that their physical activity will be affected (50 percent) and their face-to-face communication and sleep habits will be hurt (both 34 percent).

When it comes to kids' online activities, parents worry about how much time is spent (43 percent), how much personal information is shared (38 percent) and whether youngsters are being exposed to pornography or violent images or videos (both 36 percent).

But nearly all parents, 94 percent, believe technology is helpful for children's schoolwork and education, with 89 percent agreeing it will prepare youngsters for 21st-century jobs. About three-quarters of those surveyed said technology increases exposures to other culture and supports kids' expression of their personal beliefs.

For parents seeking guidance on their family's media use, Steyer offers these tips:

— "No. 1 is role-modeling your own behavior so kids can learn from that. You have to start with the fact that when your kids are around, you have to use media the way you want them to use it," he said.

— Have times and places set aside that exclude all media devices. Steyer suggests family dinners, an hour or two before bedtime and, of course, never while driving. His group recently launched a #DeviceFreeDinner challenge.

— Use media with your kids and be engaged. "Learn from them, ask them questions, have an ongoing conversation," he said, including on topics they may otherwise be uncomfortable addressing, such as sex and drugs.

"Media can give you a lot of teachable moments, if you use it wisely," Steyer said.

More information: www.common sense media.org/

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