

Pasadena Waldorf School Media Guidelines

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Introduction

Why did Pasadena Waldorf School create media guidelines?

For some time, the pitch of parents' and teachers' requests for the school to make some kind of statement about media use has been rising. We embarked on this project in response to requests from parents and teachers who are trying as best they can to provide a healthy environment for the children. Many people know that the deleterious effects of television and media are far-ranging, from the obvious (the encouragement of gross consumerism) to the more subtle (the impact on neurological development). We can only touch upon a few issues here. However, publications, websites, and other resources are listed for those who wish to do further research on the subject.

Why media guidelines? Why not a policy?

When preparing this document, we solicited input from the entire Pasadena Waldorf School community. We received suggestions ranging from "People should make their own choices" to "The school should make parents sign an agreement about media use, and not renew contracts of those who will not do so."

But, we are all striving human beings, and in the end, the input we received convinced us to lay out the logic and reasoning behind the media issue, and give parents the opportunity to come in freedom to a position of enthusiastic support of the school's position on their own. We have stated our recommendations as goals, recognizing that parents are starting this journey with differing attitudes and rules about media use in their homes. We begin talking about our position on media from the moment parents begin conversations with us about enrolling their children. If you find that your family has a fundamentally different point of view, it is probably not just about the media issue, and it is possible that we are not the right school for you. That said, it is our fervent hope and wish that, after you have read the compelling reasons behind our media guidelines, you will decide to adopt them in your own family.

Who created this document?

The Ad Hoc Media Guidelines Committee of Pasadena Waldorf School was formed by the faculty, and was comprised of one PWS parent and three faculty members who are also parents. Our goal was to gather input from across the entire school community, find what consensus we could around the issue of regulating media use among our students, and produce guidelines that reflected that consensus. These guidelines, which have been approved by the PWS Faculty, were respectfully compiled, written, edited, and produced by the committee, whose members included Ania Kubik, chair; Shannon Brousseau, Howard Paull, and Karen Livingston.

What are other schools doing?

As a Waldorf school, we are part of a worldwide movement dedicated to supporting the healthy development of children. Many other Waldorf schools have such guidelines or policies; in fact, our committee researched those produced by some twenty other Waldorf schools from across the United States and Canada. While some have worded their documents more stringently as policies, all have found that guidelines such as these go a long way to helping support parents in keeping their children as healthy as possible.

Research

Imagination

The child is developing the faculty to form her own mental pictures, her internal mechanisms for imagery. In imposing others' images, television stunts the child's critical development of imagination. The child begins to rely on external sources rather than calling up her own internal pictures.¹

Visual System

The development of certain visual skills is critical to a child's capacity to focus and pay attention, and later, to read. "The ability to search out, scan, focus, and identify" what enters the visual field is impaired by watching television and movies.² When children watch television, they do not dilate their pupils, and have little eye movement at all. A lack of use of the eye muscles can cause a weakening, which will negatively impact the ability and effort required for reading. Dilation of the pupils, tracking, and following are part of the reticular activating system, which is the gateway to the right and left hemispheres of the brain.³

Hearing System

The hair-like cells in the inner ear convert sound waves to electrical impulses, which get sent to the brain. These cells, which do not regenerate, can be destroyed by loud sounds. The type of hearing loss once common in aging adults is showing up in younger and younger people. Newer earbud-style headphones, which are placed directly into the ear and can boost the sound signal by as much as nine decibels (dB), are even more likely to cause hearing loss than the older muff style. Not only do kids listen at a more intense sound level, but with the longer battery life and storage capacity of modern music players, kids are listening longer. Students at Wichita State University had the output of their MP3 players' signals measured, and on average, they were listening at 110-120 dB – the equivalent of a rock concert. This level is high enough to sustain hearing loss after only one hour and fifteen minutes of listening.⁴

James Battey, Director of the National Institute of Health's National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders said, "All of these devices (portable MP3 players) have maximum sound output levels that range from 115 to 130 dB, which is comparable to the sound level of a jet engine." Apple Computer Inc. has recently introduced a software update for iPods that lets parents set a maximum volume limit on the device.

Health Concerns (Obesity, Diabetes)

Obesity and Type II diabetes are epidemic in the United States. One in ten children in the United States is obese. American children spend an average of four hours per day watching television, not only an inherently sedentary activity, but one which stimulates a desire for, and consumption of unhealthy food. Studies showed that approximately seventy-five percent of advertising during children's programming was for junk food, such as sugary cereals, candy, and highly processed sugary snacks. Television promotes unhealthy eating and an unhealthy lifestyle.

Body Image / Anorexia nervosa / Bulimia nervosa

In 1995, television was introduced to Fiji. Prior to the introduction of TV, only three percent of young girls in a survey by Anne Becker, anthropologist at Harvard Medical School, reported using vomiting to control weight. Three years later, fifteen percent of girls did it.⁵ Becker believes the sudden influence of Western cultural images and values is changing the way Fijian girls view themselves and their bodies. In a 1994 survey of female undergrads at a large Midwestern university, a researcher found fifteen percent of the women met the criteria for eating disorder. The study, recently published in the *Journal of Communication*, shows that watching TV, as well as reading magazines that depict and promote thinness, significantly predict symptoms of women's eating disorders.⁶ "We ... found an undeniable influence of mass media in the genesis and maintenance of these [life-threatening] disorders."⁷ "To prevent the observed increase in prevalence and incidence of eating disorders among adolescents, it is appropriate to control the messages, myths and falsehood propagated by media, TV in particular."⁸

Neurological Development / Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder ("ADHD")

Television viewing, even educational shows and videos, is rewiring our children's brains. The quickly-changing images and sounds of the television prevent our higher-thought brain (neocortex) from becoming involved. According to Ron Kaufman, "[as] time is cut up, the brain is conditioned to change at the expense of continuity of thought."⁹ A 2004 study in the *Journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics* shows a correlation between hours of television viewing and subsequent attention problems. Watching television or videos can cause permanent changes in the developing neural pathways, putting the child at increased risk for ADHD. The study showed that for every hour per day of television viewing at ages one and three, the child has an almost ten percent higher chance of developing attention problems by age seven.¹⁰ "Educational" programming is also problematic. Yale University Family Television Research and Consultation Center reports, "Sesame Street creates a psychological orientation in children that leads to shortened attention span, a lack of reflectiveness, and an expectation of rapid change in the broader environment." In addition, some psychologists point to the possibility that viewing is literally addictive, that it changes brain function in the same way chemical dependency does.

Disrespect and Vulgar Behavior

Approximately eighty percent of respondents in a poll in April, 2002, believed not only that a lack of respect and courtesy is a serious national problem, but that it continues to worsen.¹¹ Behaviors such as increased aggressiveness, lack of consideration of others, and public vulgarity are normalized by increasingly vulgar and rude television shows. Experts believe that television has shaped and accelerated this trend. Children watch these shows, see the behavior as normal, and can no longer judge when they are socially inappropriate.

Violence / Desensitization / Culture of Fear

According to the American Psychiatric Association, by age eighteen, an American child will have seen 16,000 simulated murders and 200,000 simulated acts of violence. Countless studies show that children watching television or playing video games are at risk for learning to behave violently. In July, 2000, the American Medical Association and the American Pediatric Association made this joint statement to Congress: "Well over 1,000 studies point overwhelmingly to a causal connection between media violence and aggressive behavior in some children." The majority of these studies reach the same conclusion: television and film violence leads to real-world violence.¹² A study of population data for various countries showed homicide rates doubling within ten to fifteen years after the introduction of television, even though the introductions occurred at different times in each site examined.¹³

Some research also demonstrates that cumulative exposure to media violence can desensitize the viewer to real-life acts of violence. According to the American Psychological Association, children who regularly watch violence on TV are more fearful and distrustful of the world, less bothered by violence, and slower to intervene or call for help when they see fighting or destructive behavior.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (“PTSD”)

“Media viewing of tragic events is sufficient to produce PTSD symptoms in vulnerable populations such as children. Given the links between PTSD symptoms and viewing habits, parental monitoring of media exposure may be important for younger children.”¹⁴

Notes

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13. Centerwall, B.S. (1989). *Exposure to television as a cause of violence*. *Public Communication and Behavior* (Vol. 2, pp. 1– 58). New York: Academic Press.
14. Otto, M.; Henin, A.; Hirshfeld-Becker, D.; Pollack, M.; Biederman, J.; Rosenbaum, J.; *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*. 2007 Jan 10. Retrieved April 25, 2007 from http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/entrez/query.fcgi?db=pubmed&list_uids=17276653&cmd=Retrieve

Resources

Publications

Alliance for Childhood. *Tech Tonic: Towards a New Literacy of Technology*
Buzzell, Keith. *The Children of Cyclops*
Chilton Pearce, Joseph. *Evolution's End: Claiming the Potential of Our Intelligence*
Everett, Miles. *How Television Poisons Children's Minds*
Healy, Jane. *Endangered Minds: Why Our Children Don't Think*
Healy, Jane. *Failure to Connect: How Computers Affect Our Children's Minds for Better and Worse*
Johnson, S. M.D. "Strangers in Our Homes: TV and Our Children's Minds," Fall/Winter, 1999 issue of *Inform, The Newsletter of the Association of Waldorf Schools of North America*.
Kelman, Lawrence. *To Kindle a Soul*
Large, Martin. *Who's Bringing Them Up?*
Mander, Jerry. *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television*
McClendon, Marie. *Where are the Children? In a TV World or in a Tree House?* Self-published.
Postman, Neil. *Amusing Ourselves to Death*
Sanders, Barry. *A is for Ox*
Schwartz, Eugene. *Development of Eye and Ear*
Winn, Marie. *The Plug-in Drug*

Web Resources

www.tvturnoff.org
www.turnoffyourtv.com
<http://www.whitedot.org>
<http://www.aap.org/family/tv1.htm>
www.tvfa.org
<http://www.healthyminds.org/mediaviolence/cfm>
www.ftc.gov/reports/violence/Appen%20A.pdf
<http://www.simpletoremember.com/vitals/tvkelemen.htm>
<http://tv-addiction.blogspot.com/>
http://www.cursor.org/stories/television_and_violence.htm

Other Resources

For movie reviews and ratings:
www.yahoo.com/movies/momreviews

For internet safety:
www.isafe.org

For blocking cable channels:
Consult your cable provider

Pedagogical Background

Intentional community

Families come to Waldorf education actively seeking developmentally-appropriate experiences so their children might grow into interested, interesting people who one day might contribute something to the world. In that sense, Waldorf schools are intentional communities, populated by people who have discovered that schools based on Rudolf Steiner's philosophy and pedagogy not only provide the support parents have been looking for, but also answer beautifully the educational needs of children.

Thus, when enrolling our children in Pasadena Waldorf School, we commit not only to the school's mission and educational philosophy, but also to a home life which complements and supports these values. We join like-minded parents in tacit agreement to uphold them. The success of our community depends partly on the degree to which each individual's actions resonate with and confirm these goals. The consequences of differing levels of parental commitment fall largely to the children, who must live with the results of their parents' choices.

Children tend to self-select friendships and/or play groups at school partly based on what they are exposed to outside of school. If several children see a particular movie or TV program, or listen to a particular kind of music, or are allowed to IM each other well into the evening, then their conversations and/or play at school reflect those experiences. Any child who has not shared those experiences cannot participate. So, here we have social exclusion based on media exposure, an unfortunate criterion, indeed, for choosing friends or playmates. Parents who have made a choice for less media exposure want to know that they can count on the other parents to have similar values, so that when the children go to school, they will be safe from media influence there, too.

In every Waldorf school class, the parents grow in partnership over the eight or more years they spend together. They experience developmental challenges together, compare notes, and offer one another helpful suggestions. Parents do this best when they are operating from common understandings and agreements. It is possible for significant differences in family media choices to create an environment of mistrust, and somewhat erode the efficacy of the community of adults who should be coming together in support of the children. When the parents agree to work from the same assumptions and ground rules, their collective wisdom can create an even more supportive environment for their children.

Pasadena Waldorf School's Mission and Educational Philosophy begins:

In our work with children, we strive to:

educate each child to embrace the wonder and challenge of the world while achieving academic proficiency;

nurture each child's imagination while educating the intellect and encouraging the development of a healthy body and social life; and

teach so that each child might become a confident, capable person with integrity and a sense of social and environmental responsibility.

In our educational program, we:

recognize the spiritual nature of the human being, and therefore present a Waldorf curriculum designed to cultivate the child's unfolding and awakening capacities, based on Rudolf Steiner's view of child development; and

educate children from early childhood through eighth grade so that they arrive at concepts through imaginative, artistic, and experiential activities.

Our media guidelines are meant to outline some principles for nurturing physically, emotionally, spiritually healthy children while navigating the terrain of modern life. The ideals in our mission statement inform everything we do, including our media guidelines. Read on to see how.

The wonder and challenge of the world

Challenges are the vehicles through which human beings grow emotionally and socially, develop self-worth, and discover who they really are. Any time a child is not actively engaged in the world itself, she is not busy encountering its wonder and challenge. Even the root of the word “media” connotes something coming between. Passive, “mediated” experiences cannot help us grow in the same way as direct, first-person experiences. Children need to be in the world, not watching it on a screen; they must chafe against real human beings, and laugh with them, not observe actors or pre-recorded representations of people. Even “educational” programming removes the child from the real world, preventing her from experiencing firsthand its miracles, puzzles, jubilation, and unbearable heartache.

The imagination

One of the seminal directives in Waldorf education is to nurture the child's imagination. Why? During the school day, teachers articulate the curriculum in vibrant, lively, compelling images, leaving the child free to form her own internal pictures. But, a child who has already seen someone else's pictures, even if these images are beautiful, has been robbed of the opportunity. These pre-formed images not only impact a child's ability to use her imagination; they also have the effect of deadening the imaginative space where all of the child's lessons and social interactions are processed, impeding her ability to draw conclusions and form concepts, to understand mathematics, to build reading skills, to work out social challenges. Thus, the wondrous work that the Waldorf curriculum continues to perform on children after they leave the classroom can be seriously compromised.

Young children are vulnerable in that they do not separate themselves from what they experience, including what they see. They internalize what they are shown as their own pictures, and take all of what they view as real. Older children are vulnerable in that media exposure tends to encourage them to become cynical, closed, and diffident, and many then feel compelled to pursue an early path to adolescence. If we consider each of a child's experiences as literal “food for thought,” we can begin to appreciate that a diet of content which has been pre-digested and fed to our children could not possibly be as healthy and enlivening as one in which our own stories present food for the imagination, providing opportunities to digest living content, shaping the stage upon which the young person creates the play of his or her own life.

Healthy body

Medical studies attribute the epidemic of obesity in this country partly to sedentary lifestyles. But, we hardly need this evidence to conclude that active play is more helpful to children's developing bodies than sitting in front of a screen. Further, the pace of media

today increases distractibility in children and reinforces the need for instant gratification. Children need rhythmic, carefully-paced activity in order to develop and learn properly.

Healthy social life

TV and film require difficulties to be settled in pre-determined, unrealistic increments, and give children few possibilities to see true problem-solving skills modeled. Instead, media exposes children to a great many character traits we in no way want to see them mirror, including sarcasm and rampant disrespect of self, of others, of property. In addition, children need real, live interaction with other children to figure out how to work out social challenges. Children who lack social skills are much more prone to exhibit anti-social behavior such as teasing and bullying.

Confident, capable people with a sense of social and environmental responsibility

With few exceptions, the representation of people in the media is designed to cultivate viewership. Conflict must occur and be fomented in order to keep viewers coming back for more. People of exceptional character, quality personal interactions, positive human attributes rarely get airplay. The way people treat each other, the way they speak to one another, even the way they conduct themselves when no one is looking all present a picture of human behavior. Children often become what they see. Certainly, we do not want our children to aspire to the negative role models they so often experience on the screen. Moreover, stereotyping is rampant in the entertainment industry. Pre-formed images of races, cultures, genders, whole categories of people overwhelm the inimitability of individuals and their unique roles in the world. Environmental responsibility requires we understand how our actions impact the world beyond our own doorstep. The culture of materialism promulgated by media is directly at odds with this philosophy. Our youngest children have become the new darlings of marketing tactics, the goal of which is to grow brand awareness and loyalty even before the target, the preschool child, sets foot in school.

The spiritual: whom are we educating?

The human being is, at its very essence, a spiritual entity. If we encounter the child before us as much more than just a physical being, we begin to conceive that all of the child's experiences, and our every interaction with her, have far greater impact than we could have imagined in our wildest dreams. Our task, then, is to provide healthy spiritual food. Not only are artificial, vicarious, virtual experiences not healthy, they actually dull the organs critical to healthy spiritual growth. Steiner admonishes teachers to remember three paramount elements in the education of the school-age child: truth, beauty, and goodness. It is difficult to imagine any form of media conforming to any one of those, much less all three.

The child's unfolding and awakening capacities

While teachers do not teach anthroposophy to the children, they do teach from the anthroposophical view of the human being. Rudolf Steiner indicated that the child develops in stages, and with each phase, new capacities are born. For healthy development, each stage must be addressed at the appropriate time and in the appropriate way. While a child can outwardly seem intellectually capable of processing all kinds of information, introducing particular content before the child is ready to receive it, or presenting it as one would to a child at a different developmental phase, sets up an impediment to the proper processing of the information at the appropriate developmental time.

Arriving at concepts through imaginative, artistic, and experiential activities

Another core element in a Waldorf curriculum is that we do not begin with concepts, but provide a series of multi-faceted activities which lead the children to arrive at concepts themselves. This active process ensures that children internalize what they are learning, and are far more likely to understand and retain the information. Clearly, passive exposure, even to the same information, will have a far different effect. Abstract, intellectual approaches to learning are not developmentally appropriate until after puberty. In the elementary school child, hearing stories of great men and women, and experiencing the secrets and beauty of nature, cultivate a deep, soulful connection to the stream of creation that gives a child the proper background to focus later on developing intellectual faculties.

Who is providing commercial content?

We really do not know, do we? We are careful about choosing play date companions, but we give our children up to TV programming, films, commercials, music content, and video games created with the goal of selling something to them. The billions of dollars spent by advertisers to manipulate consumers, especially children, dwarf parents' efforts to counter marketing techniques after the fact.

What do teachers see at school?

Granted, this is fairly subjective. But, of the children who return to school on any given Monday or on the heels of a vacation, the teachers find that they can fairly easily identify those who have had a diet of media. It manifests in many arenas: physical demeanor, attention, interest in encountering the lesson, quality of work, social issues in class and on the playground. What do we tend to see in healthy children who are supported at home in being media-free? We encounter children who are alert, interested, active, industrious; children who have longer attention spans and do not need to be entertained to stay engaged; children who are excited about learning, who participate enthusiastically; children who are less likely to judge and criticize others; children who persevere, even when a task gets challenging; children who see their teachers as authorities and their peers as partners.

Moving Toward a “Media-Less” Lifestyle

How do I start?

Let us begin by re-orienting our thinking. What if we perceive curtailing media use not as depriving our families, or taking something away from them, but instead, as providing wholesomeness? Then, making a shift might feel different to us. We have stated that our ultimate goal is creating a media-free lifestyle for our children. Some families just go cold turkey and eliminate media completely. Because they find it simpler when the option is not even there, they remove all screens from their homes. The children watch no television, videos, or films, use no computers, and listen only to live music.

However, lots of people who are not ready for that dramatic step have found extremely creative and thoughtful ways to begin: they simply curtail media usage. Many decide to implement the changes not just for the children, but for the entire family, and discover benefits to family life.

Some families reduce the amount of time of exposure. They have pre-arranged times when media will be allowed, and set a timer as a signal when the time is up. As an example, a parent might decide to prohibit media altogether on school nights, but allow a (parent-previewed) movie at home on the occasional weekend. Some families discontinue subscribing to cable, leaving only one screen on which to view carefully-chosen movies. Other families limit the types of media they allow: for example, no computer, no TV, but one video every other week. Or, some families use it only very, very occasionally, as a special shared media experience.

If you have not yet taken the step but want to do something, just try one thing at a time. We have a community of teachers and parents to support you in your efforts. Seek out your child’s class teacher and other parents for their ideas. Share with one another.

Play dates

See if you can get the parents in your class to agree to make all of your play dates media-free events. Remember, if the children are watching a screen, they are not playing! Plan, lay out the rules, and review them with your child and the other parent ahead of time to avoid any surprises.

Why go media-free? How much is too much?

For the young child, any media is too much. Most people agree with that. But, as children get older, parents often begin to split hairs about how much media is all right. Sometimes, children whose parents have cut back continue to dwell on media-related topics, which can maddeningly recur as topics for conversation. For this and other reasons, some families have chosen to adopt a completely media-free lifestyle. Some of the benefits to children include freedom from advertising aimed at them, time to engage in appropriate childhood activities, availability for ongoing human interaction, and protection of childhood innocence.

Some children do continue to ask for media from time to time. However, the parents of media-free children see such dramatic results in their families that most never go back. They never get tired of saying, “Different families do things differently. In our house, we don’t watch.”

How do I deal with a hostile middle school child when I turn off the screen?

This is never easy. The most helpful thing is probably to establish ground rules up front so there are no surprises. And, we have to get used to the fact that almost all middle school students say to their parents, at least once, “I hate you,” or something even less complimentary. But, this is like anything else we do to limit our children’s experiences. We just have to know we are doing the right thing for the right reasons.

What about when my child is home sick? Isn’t this a perfect time for a video?

Actually, anthroposophical doctors and nurses tell us that this is the most perfectly horrible time to show a video. When a child’s etheric (life) forces are depleted by illness, media exposure can prevent her body from directing its healing powers to where they are needed.

What do I do when another parent in my child’s class tolerates more media?

Open, non-threatening, safe, friendly, compassionate communication is the best way to navigate any subject that may find parents on a different footing. Try asking lots of questions and using “I” statements. You could go for coffee and talk together, you could get together to take the kids to the park and talk there, you could ask your class teacher to allot some time at a parent meeting for conversation and comparing notes. If you are planning a play date, you would probably want to have an agreement up front about the media issue. If you cannot come to such an agreement, then you may have to decide whether to forego play dates with that family. But, remember that everyone is striving, and try to refrain from making assumptions and judging others.

What can I do about other people (extended family members, neighbors, other parents) who do not understand, and offer a television show or movie to my child?

Over and over, explain the choice you have made as a family and why. Offer to have their children over to your house to play. Talk to the other parents about why you have made this choice. Offer them a copy of our guidelines to read.

But, won’t my child be stigmatized and behind in high school if she does not become computer-literate now?

No. This same logic could be applied to driving or any number of other activities that we have determined to delay until a certain level of development has been reached. Almost all high schools now require a keyboarding class in the freshman year of high school and teach students how to navigate the computer. Our graduates have successfully made this transition over and over again.

How do I handle media restrictions when I have children of different ages in my home?

This is one of the hardest parts of parenting. But, look, you already have different bed-times for younger and older children in your family. Privileges always increase with age. This can simply be an extension of that idea. “When you are fifteen, you can listen to an iPod, too.” The more difficult issue comes when you have a screen in your home that an older child is watching, with a younger child in the area. One solution is to wait with the video until the younger child goes to bed. Older children need to understand that it is just as important that younger ones do not see or hear anything inappropriate as it is that they do not eat anything inappropriate. And, there have to be consequences if the older ones fail to honor your house rules. But, honestly, this is one reason some families decide to give up media completely.

Media Alternatives

Instead of these media-related ones...

Weekend morning cartoons

Healthy activities you can do...

Set an activity out the night before: craft table, art table, modeling beeswax. Make breakfast together, play games.

Mid-afternoon doldrums

Read a story, visit the park, ride bikes, play in water, ride scooters, go swimming, take an afternoon bath.

Family movie night

Have family read-aloud passing the book, family-game night, family-sing-along, instrumental-music night (bring out those super-simple percussion instruments or even the pots and pans). Go on an evening walk in the neighborhood, or a moonlight hike with the Sierra Club or local parks and recreation groups. Tell stories around the fireplace, look through old photos, assemble a photo album.

Summer and holiday commercial films

Visit museums, see a play, visit historical sights, attend free-community-musical concerts. Visit gardens and arboretums, swim, go camping, go hiking or rock-climbing. Attend fairs and festivals, visit farmers' markets, visit neighbors, play with other children. Plan a party or get-together, take a trip.

Friday night video

Have a Friday Media-Free Pitch-In Night with other families, including a barbecue or a read-along party, progressive dinner, use your imagination!

Alternative activities by age and grade

Early childhood: Do domestic work alongside the parent – dishwashing, gardening, laundry, carpentry, polishing shoes or tables. Play with simple toys and objects made from natural materials, listen to stories, watch and create puppet shows, dress up, bake.

Grades 1-5: Parents, read to your child. Always have books available at his or her reading or pre-reading level. Tell stories, visit the library, do chores around the house, clean, keep craft and art supplies on hand, arrange areas in the yard outside where a child can garden, dig, build. Visit the park, climb trees, ride bikes, jump rope, skate, go on walks and hikes, build and fly a kite, draw. Take your pet for a walk. Do simple cooking and mixing activities, make a lemonade stand. Practice musical instruments, have a family band. Play cards, start a photo album.

Middle School, Grades 6-8: Go to the beach, go on family outings. Participate in after-school sports or community sports activities. Play your musical instrument, sing, start a band, write a song. Visit friends, visit museums, do community service work, travel, hike. Start a cottage industry, sew, knit, crochet, cook, bake. Dance, work out, go horseback riding, clean or redecorate your room. Draw, paint, build, model, sketch, write a letter, journal. Write a story or even a book. Ride bikes or skateboards, rollerblade, ice skate, ski or snowboard. Read to a shut-in, visit a nursing home, clean your closet and drop off charitable items.

Parent Education and Ongoing Support

An integral part of the PWS Media Guidelines is providing parents with ongoing education and support for their efforts in making appropriate media-related choices.

Parents should first direct their questions to the child's Class Teacher. Class Teachers will periodically have the Media Guidelines as topics for parent meetings so that parents can compare notes, discuss their experiences, and support one another in a positive atmosphere without shame or blame. Parents could talk about their challenges, what has worked for them, what is problematic and not working for them. They could also share what would be helpful to them in sustaining their commitment to the media guidelines.

Parents should draw upon the success of other community members. Other parents can be a valuable resource for ideas that work.

Parent Council has arranged for the Thursday Reader to publish weekly suggestions of non-media activities in the area. We encourage them to continue that activity.

An interested member of the community could gather and update relevant research and information, including studies on the effect of media, other Waldorf schools' policies and guidelines, and a collection of past Thursday Reader activity suggestions for the Parent Reference Library. Anyone interested in doing this task may contact a Faculty Co-Chair.

A small community-wide parent education committee, with parent and faculty representatives, could form, with one of its goals to help keep these issues on the school's radar screen.

Short excerpts of the Media Guidelines could be published occasionally in the Thursday Reader, so that by the end of the school year, most of the document has been covered in this fashion.

The community should periodically sponsor parent-education events. This may best be done in collaboration between Faculty and Parent Council.

Parents who have loosened up should recommit to the objectives outlined in the Media Guidelines.

The Media Guidelines should be addressed in all admissions events, so that entering families understand what we are working toward and why.

Media Guidelines

Our media guidelines are meant for pre-school and elementary-school-age children.

For our purposes, we define media to include:

Television, DVD, video, film

Computers, internet, cellular phones, PDAs

Recorded music, radios, iPods, MP3 and other portable music players

Video, arcade, and computer games such as Nintendo, PlayStation, Xbox, Wii, handhelds

Our goal for students in Early Childhood through Grade 5

No media, particularly on nights preceding and following school days.

The younger the child, the more vitally important this is.

Our goal for students in Middle School, Grades 6 through 8

Parents, if you decide to introduce media usage, do it slowly and judiciously.

Put the computer in a public place in your home and use a password for access.

Provide rules for computer and/or internet usage, and stick to them.

Prohibit media exposure on any evening preceding a school day, including instant messaging and e-mailing.

Prohibit access to web sites where your child may post his or her personal information.

Encourage regular study habits in a quiet environment, without a backdrop of recorded music and/or video.

Limit time spent listening to iPods and other portable music players.

Review all media content beforehand and discuss it afterwards.

Censor anything that runs counter to your values, or may be developmentally inappropriate. Screen music for content of lyrics.

Observe PG-13 and R ratings for movies.

Rock concerts are not appropriate.