

Kids & Media @ The New Millennium: Some Findings

The Kaiser Family Foundation, an independent national health care philanthropy based in Menlo Park, California, recently released findings from their study “Kids & Media @ The New Millennium.” The study examines patterns of media use from a large, nationally representative sample of 3,155 children between 2 and 18 years of age. It explores the full range of media available to children: television, movies, computers, music, video games, radio, magazines, books, and newspapers. Some of the study’s key findings include the following:

American children spend the equivalent of a full-time work week using media.

- American children spend an average of 38 hours a week using media of all forms outside of school or for homework. Children 8 years or older spend an average of about 6-3/4 hours a day using media, the largest chunk of which is spent watching TV. Only 5% of children spend an hour a day or less with the media.
- One out of every six children (17%) watches more than 5 hours of TV a day. Sixteen percent watch 3 to 5 hours daily, 31% watch 1 to 3 hours daily, 19% watch 1 hour or less, and 17% report watching no TV.

Children today grow up surrounded by media.

- The average American child grows up in a home with three TVs, three tape players, three radios, two VCRs, two CD players, one video game player, and one computer. Two-thirds of children 8 and older and one-third of 2- to 7-year-olds have a TV in their bedroom.
- The TV is on “most of the time” in 42% of children’s homes and is usually on during meals in 58% of children homes. Among children 8 and older, two-thirds say the TV is usually on during meals.

Even the very youngest children are widely exposed to media.

- According to parents, 2- to 7-year-olds spend an average of 3-1/2 hours a day using media. Only 8% spend an hour or less a day with media.
- A third of 2- to 7-year-olds have a TV in their bedroom, 16% of this age group have a VCR in their bedroom, and 13% have a video game player in their bedroom.

Many parents do not appear to exercise much oversight of their children’s media use.

- About half of all children do not have any rules about how much or what kind of TV they can watch. Among children 8 and older, 61% say there aren’t any rules about TV watching in their homes.
- Parents do not watch much TV with their children. According to the diaries children kept of their media use, those over 7 almost never watch TV with their parents. According to parents who filled out diaries about their younger children (2 to 7 years), 81% of the time that these youngsters are watching TV, their parents are doing something else.

Despite widespread access, children spend a relatively small amount of time each day using computers.

- Almost 7 in 10 children 2 to 18 years of age have a computer in their home, and 45% have Internet access. More than 1 out of 5 over 7 years have a computer in their bedroom. One in 10 has Internet access from his or her own room.
- Among all children ages 2 to 18, children spend an average of about half an hour a day using

computers, including time spent on computers in school. Children 8 and older who use computers spend an average of more than an hour and a half each day using the computer in the following ways: 22% of their time doing school work; about a third of their time on the Internet either chatting (10%), surfing the Web (15%), or sending email (9%); and about a quarter of their time (26%) playing games.

Most children say they prefer computers to TV, if they're forced to choose.

- When asked to choose which medium to bring to a desert island, children 8 to 18 years of age indicated the following preferences: 33% chose computers with Internet access; 24% selected CD, tapes, or radio; 13% chose TV; 13% chose video games; 8% picked books or magazines; 3% said videos; and 3% said nothing at all.

You can access a complete copy of the Kaiser Family Foundation report “Kids & Media @ The New Millennium” online at <http://www.kff.org/content/1999/1535/pressreleasefinal.doc.html>.

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