

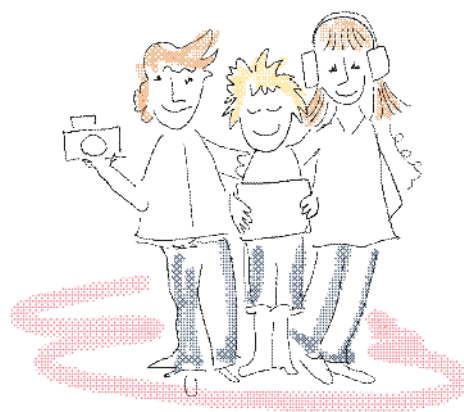
# Growing up with the media

## Kids see media as

- natural objects of everyday life
- treasure chests that are full of stories, windows to different worlds
- a means to stay connected with people who are important to them

## Media & developmental tasks

- Widen one's own independent field of action  
ADVENTURE
- Establish stable relationships among peers  
FRIENDSHIP
- First love, relationships  
LOVE & SEXUALITY



## Media & identity work

- Source of materials
- Ideals and role models
- Stage and place to get feedback
- Affiliation and differentiation

## Media and coping with everyday life

- Experience success and self-efficacy
- Escape
- Mood management
- Feel-good media, media as a reward

## Learning to understand and interpret media experiences (framing)

1. What kind of media text is this?
2. How does it relate to the physical/real world?
3. What does it have to do with me?

# Growing up with the media

## Introduction

When adults think about how children and young people use media in their everyday lives, they often first (or only) see the problematic aspects. The way in which the media deal with this topic does not help us to adopt a different approach: we hear and read about kids who are addicted to media and walk through their lives as “smombies” (smartphone-zombies) or the “head-down generation”, with withered minds and bodies.

This handout and text invites adults to look at children and young people as active subjects of their media lives and to grow aware of the various motives of their media use. We do not intend to deny the problematic, dysfunctional ways of media use. We merely suggest that a broader and more neutral

perspective might be beneficial and help us to gain a common ground.

The handout and this text can be used as an introduction to the topic and discussion starter. We have attached some suggestions and methods for digging deeper into the topic of media and everyday life.

## The role of media in the everyday lives of children and young people

From the perspective of a toddler, media are objects of everyday life; they are simply and undeniably there. A child observes how his/her parents and older siblings interact with media and tries to copy their behavior: the child will reach out to get hold of the smartphone, will hit his/her fists onto the keyboard of a laptop. The child gets a first idea of the

relevance of the media: if the grown-ups pay so much attention to these things, they must be important. Children are much more influenced by what they observe than by what we tell them.

Next, children discover media as a bottomless source of stories. They want to discover the world, and the media offer them opportunities to explore worlds that go far beyond the borders of their own surroundings. As an extension of our senses, the media allow us to visit strange and faraway places and travel in time and experience things we can't experience in our own lives – or maybe wouldn't even want to.

The media are tools of everyday communication, means of keeping in touch with people who are important to us. Today, video calls play an important role in families whose members live in different places. Video calls enable even very small children to experience

mediated proximity. Later, as peers grow more and more important, so do the means that help young people to constantly stay in touch with them. Young people also connect with like-minded communities on the Internet, often reaching far beyond the national borders.

## Media favorites and developmental tasks

Media preferences of children and young people do not develop randomly. The kind of fictional content a child prefers (in TV-shows, films or books) often reflects the developmental task he/she is facing at the respective moment. Accordingly, the key themes of children's media correspond to the developmental tasks of childhood and adolescence.

### Key theme: adventure

A young person strives to enlarge his/her sphere of independent action: from first milestones like spending a

night away from the parents to huge steps like moving away from home. From the perspective of a child/young people, such life events are often ambivalent: pride and joy mixed with worries – what if I don't make it? One way of helping them to deal with these feelings is through heroes and heroines in children's fiction who experience similar things: go out into the world and face challenging and difficult situations.

### Key theme: friendship

While a child wants to grow more and more independent from their parents, they also work on establishing mature and stable peer-relationships. This is why friendship is a further key theme in all types of media texts for young audiences. How friendship develops and grows, how friends can find strength in being different, how you can have conflicts with your friends and solve them. There are also a lot of stories about the extremely burdensome situation of having no friends.

### Key theme: love and sexuality

Long before a young person is ready for his/her first relationship in real life, the relationship-topic becomes interesting for them in the media. The media offer all kinds of scripts for how relationships begin, develop and end; from positive to negative, from realistic to dream-like... and everything in between.

In the same way, it is long before a young person gets sexually active that they actively start searching information on how grown-up sex works.

## Media and identity work

Adolescence is all about finding out who I am: what marks my character, what are my interests and talents.

The media have always served as a source of materials for identity work, offering role models, ideals, courses of action, ... from encouraging to intimidating and unattainable, from beneficial to disadvantageous.

Identity work has also always been a social process. Young people need feedback from their peers to evaluate their identity drafts - for them it is not an option not to be seen. Today, many of us adults are - quite rightfully - worried about the harsh tone that seems to be predominant on several online platforms. It is however, important to keep in mind that similar things also happen in offline situations: a young person, searching for acceptance and encouragement, is met with rejection from his/her peers. Just think back to the situation in your own class at school, let's say when you were 15. Strengthening social skills (including giving constructive feedback) is an important pedagogical goal, both on- and offline.

Young people use media preferences to express social affiliation; to show which groups they (want to) belong to. And they use them to distinguish themselves, e.g., from adults.

## Media and coping with everyday life

We sometimes tend to romanticize childhood as a sunny and sorrow-free period of life - in any case we definitely wish life would be like that for today's children. Children and young people themselves often experience their everyday lives as rather challenging and stressful. In order to be able to deal with this situation, they develop a range of coping mechanisms, and the media often play an essential part in this.

The media offer young people possibilities of experiencing self-efficacy and success. For a little child, simply to observe that his/her actions have an immediate effect can be delightful. I press a button and the bus doors open - I touch the screen of the tablet and the colors change. A young person might regard Instagram and the like as a boost to their egos or experience themselves as a valuable member of their online gaming community. The question whether this is beneficial or

dysfunctional can only be answered together with the young person, looking at their whole situation in life. If media worlds are the only source of positive experiences over a longer period of time, he/she may probably need support.

The same goes for an escapist media use. Many of us - also we grown-ups - use the media as a short escape from irksome situations. Initially, this can be seen as a resource. It only becomes a problem, when I start to feel an urge to stay in the media world and become reluctant to return to the troubles of everyday life.

We can use the media to intensify or cool down our emotions (mood management). A young person might put on loud music or play a dark and aggressive game as a way of coping with feeling frustrated. A young person with a broken heart might use music quite differently, to intensify what he/she is feeling at the moment.

Many of us, young and old, know at least some media activities that make us feel happy and content (feel-good media) and use them with purpose. Binge

watching your favorite TV show after a really hard day. Playing a game that is simple, but helps you to calm down. We may use media to reward ourselves: after having completed the troublesome chores, I may spend the rest of the day with the page-turner I started yesterday.

## Framing: making sense of the media

Every day, we are trying to make sense of the media: sort out, interpret, evaluate.

For a child, learning starts with getting familiar with different kinds of media and learning to identify different types of media texts and genres. One big milestone consists in the ability to recognize advertising as what it is: messages that try to influence our (consumption) behavior. This type of learning continues over our entire lifetime, because there are constantly new media phenomena (How "real" is reality-TV? What is a meme?)

The second framing question deals with the relationship between media texts and the real world. A child is trying to understand this connection when he/she asks: "Is this real?" or "Could something like this really happen?". He/she then learns that different media genres show different "degrees of truth". A piece of fiction is, as the word says, fictional, imagined, but it may still be based on real events or issues. News, on the other hand, claim to tell what is really happening in the world. As we grow older, we should be able to ponder the complex relationship between media texts and the real world: media can never simply mirror reality.

The third framing question is a self-reflexive one: how does this media text relate to me? Why does it interest me and occupy my mind? In most cases, we are not fully aware of the motives of our media use, we are only seldom able to put them in words. A 14-year-old girl who, talking about her favorite heroine, says, "I like her because she is brave. I find myself often rather timid and overly careful and would like to change a little." demonstrates a high level of reflexivity.

# Media and everyday life – methods for getting deeper into the topic

## "Good" and "bad" media use – my normative attitudes

When we talk about how we integrate media into our everyday lives, we rarely assume a neutral perspective, but are often quite judgmental. It can be a useful exercise to put one's own attitudes towards media use in words and reflect them with colleagues.

First, collect and write down concrete examples of ways to use media which in your eyes are good and meaningful: When I do this, I am satisfied with myself, and have the feeling of having spent my time well.

Secondly, collect examples of media use that seem questionable, worthless, even wrong. When I do this, I feel like I am wasting my time. I blame myself (or others) for doing this.

Now look at both collections and discuss: What kind of a pattern

emerges? Where do these normative attitudes come from? How do they influence our work with young people and their media worlds?

## My daily life with media

How can we integrate media into our everyday lives in a good and meaningful way? A tricky question. Rather than hoping for a universally applicable recommendations for a "healthy media diet", every one of us needs to answer this question individually and learn to make conscious, responsible choices.

We need to develop a habit of reflecting our media use, learn to sense what is good for us and recognize and be aware of our motives. Before talking about these topics with young people, we might first want to start with ourselves.

The worksheet below (page 8) invites you to look at how your everyday life with media looks like at the moment

(individual work). After filling in the sheet individually, talk about your observations and findings in the group.

## Self-experiment: my different media day

Reflecting one's own media habits is the first step to be able to make changes, if necessary. We are often the prisoners of our media routines without really noticing it. The following two exercises invite you to shake up your routines a bit and see what happens.

### Self-experiment 1: something new

We would often like to try out some new media stuff, but lack the necessary energy or time. Use this exercise as an incentive to give it a try. Start using a new app, try out a game everybody is talking about, or learn a new media skill, like editing videos on your smartphone



or using photo filters. Or break out of your filter bubble and deliberately use other information sources than your usual ones.

You can do this exercise alone, but it is much more fun together with others. The group defines a time frame for the self-experiments (e.g., one weekend). Afterwards, the members of the group tell each other what they did and share their experiences.

The purpose of fasting is not to wean yourself off bad media habits! A period of abstinence allows us to reflect on the importance a certain medium has for us in a new way. The experiment is not a failure if you then go back to your old habits.

### Self-experiment 2: media fast

Which medium do you use really intensely? Try to abstain from using it for a certain period of time (e.g., one day). Is it even possible? What does it feel like? What do you miss? What do you do with the time you gain?



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# My everyday life with media



**Media time ..... hours**  
(free-time media use on a regular working day)

**Indispensable!!!**  
is for me...

## My main

- ... sources of information
- ... communication tools
- ... feel-good media



## My media routines



**Changes**  
in my media use  
in the last 5 years