

**Children and Screens:  
Institute of Digital Media  
and Child Development**



**Helping children lead healthy  
lives in a digital world**

To Whom it May Concern,

We the undersigned friends and members of Children and Screens: Institute of Digital Media and Child Development ([www.childrenandscreens.com](http://www.childrenandscreens.com)), the leading independent, interdisciplinary research non-profit institute with a mission of helping children lead healthy lives in a digital world, read with great interest the NICHD's request for information regarding its strategic plan for 2020-2024. The plan outlines six worthy research themes. We do ask that the NICHD give careful consideration to adding a seventh research theme that is greatly needed and falls quite squarely in the purview of NICHD's mission: the effects of screen media habits on children's health and development. From the perspective of environmental exposure, there is no greater influence on children today. Existing evidence has already established linkages between specific media habits and obesity, insomnia, academic performance, aggression, depression, anxiety, and sexual risk-taking. Those studies were largely conducted prior to the explosion of smartphones and touch screens which have quickly come to dominate the free time and classroom time of so many children and teens, and well before emerging modalities like virtual and augmented reality. Preliminary data from recent studies including the ABCD study suggest additional reasons to be concerned, namely increased evidence linking screen media exposure to negative mental health outcomes, cortical thinning, and behavioral addictions to video games and other screen entertainment. More than ever, there is a vital need for new research to better *understand* and better *modulate* media usage so children can enjoy its benefits and minimize its harms. While proposed research themes four and five make passing reference to digital media's influence with respect to "sensitive periods" and "transitions from adolescence to adulthood," this by no means captures the full scope or depth of media's impact.

The rapid proliferation of screen media used by children and teens is at once the most exciting and hazardous innovation affecting child development. As research on children's media use and its effects grows, it is becoming clear that technology has incredible power to facilitate access to information, teach, connect, and entertain. As children act as both consumers and creators, senders and recipients, alone or with

others, in real and virtual environments, the Internet also carries grave risks and consequences. These include behavioral addiction, effects on cognition and attention, anxiety and depression, violent behavior, cyberbullying, vulnerability to new methods of propaganda and marketing, sexualization, eroding social skills, socioemotional issues, distracted driving, insufficient sleep, and much more. Many parents are all too aware of the negative effects media habits are having on the lives of their children, but feel powerless to reverse them.

As researchers in the field, we are struggling to answer these important questions that have daily real-world implications for parents and children of all ages. This need has not gone unnoticed. The Children and Media Research Advancement Act (CAMRA) act, which enjoyed bipartisan support, was reintroduced in the Senate in July 2018. It aims to allocate resources to answer some of these fundamental and critical questions. It is our hope that lack of *additional* resources should not prevent NICHD from allocating *existing* funds towards this worthy and pressing cause.

Thank you for your consideration.

Pamela Hurst-Della Pietra, D.O.,  
Founder and President, **Children and Screens: Institute of Digital Media and Child Development**  
Clinical Assistant Professor of Health Care Policy and Management, School of Health Technology and Management, **Stony Brook Medicine**

*and the National Scientific Advisory Board of Children and Screens:*

Dimitri A. Christakis, M.D., M.P.H.,  
Editor-in-Chief, **JAMA Pediatrics**  
Director of the Center for Child Health, Behavior and Development, **Seattle Children's Research Institute**  
George Adkins Professor of Pediatrics, Adjunct Professor of Psychiatry, and Adjunct Professor of Health Services, **University of Washington School of Medicine**

Paul Weigle, M.D.,  
Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist  
Associate Medical Director, Natchaug Hospital Ambulatory Service, **Natchaug Hospital**  
Chair of the Media Committee, **American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry**

Larry Rosen, Ph.D.,  
Professor Emeritus and Past Chair of Psychology, **California State University, Dominguez Hills**

Samuel Aronson, Ph.D.,  
Senior Scientist Emeritus, Former Director, **Brookhaven National Laboratory**

Charles Czeisler, Ph.D., M.D.,  
Baldino Professor of Sleep Medicine, **Harvard Medical School**  
Senior Physician, Division of Sleep and Circadian Disorders, Departments of Medicine  
and Neurology, **Brigham and Women's Hospital**  
Affiliated Faculty, Department of Neurobiology, **Harvard Medical School**

Tracy Day,  
Co-Founder and Chief Executive Officer, **World Science Festival**

Karen Dill-Shackleford, Ph.D.,  
**Social Psychologist**  
Media Psychology Doctoral Program, **Fielding Graduate University**

Elizabeth Englander, Ph.D.,  
Professor of Psychology, Director and Founder of the Massachusetts Aggression  
Reduction Center, **Bridgewater State University**

Carrie James, Ph.D.,  
Research Associate and Principal Investigator, Project Zero, **Harvard Graduate  
School of Education**

Patrick Kelley, M.D., Dr.P.H.,  
Distinguished Fellow in Nursing & Health Studies, **Fairfield University**  
Former Director, Boards on Global Health and African Science Academy Development,  
Institute of Medicine, **The National Academies**

Barnaby Marsh, Ph.D.,  
Visiting Scholar, **Princeton Institute for Advanced Study**  
Former Executive Vice President, **John Templeton Foundation**

David Meyer, Ph.D.,  
Clyde H. Coombs and J. E. Keith Smith Distinguished University Professor of  
Mathematical Psychology and Cognitive Science  
Co-Director, Brain, Cognition, and Action Laboratory, **University of Michigan**

Ellen Wartella, Ph.D.,  
Sheik Hamad bin Kalifa Al-thani Professor of Communication Studies, Professor of  
Psychology, Professor of Human Development and Social Policy, and Professor of  
Medical Social Sciences  
Director of the Center on Media and Human Development, **Northwestern University**