11th International Conference
Children's Rights in the Digital Age:
Should children be protected from screen exposure?
11 & 12 May 2021
Online event
with simultaneous interpretation in German, French & English

Organizers
Centre for Children's Rights Studies (CIDE), University of Geneva (Valais Campus)
University of Teacher Education (HEP - VS) St-Maurice & Brig
University of Applied Sciences (HES-SO Valais)
International Institute for the Rights of the Child (IDE) Sion
Cantonal Youth Services, Valais

in collaboration with
UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC)
Swiss Center of Expertise in Human Rights (SCHR)

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Haute Ecole de Travail Social
Hochschule für Soziale Arbeit &

CANTON DU VALAIS
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Haute école pédagogique du Valais
Pädagogische Hochschule Wallis

Background

Screens, or more scientifically digital technologies (TV, Internet, smartphone, video games, social networks, etc.), are today part of the daily life of all generations. Especially in young children, their widespread use induces a different way of approaching life, relating to others, learning, and in communicating. An entire generation has evolved, from early childhood, with new technical means and digital tools. This newly established "identity" is not built "against" that of the previous generation, but rather points to a paradigm shift or culture change, hence a new phenomenon to be considered from a child protection perspective.

For the past twenty years or so, considerable research has revealed both the benefits and risks associated with new technologies and their use by children and adolescents. No wonder parents in particular, but also professionals are struggling to make sense of such scientific findings ... all in all an excellent reason to hold this International conference.

What are the impacts of screens (television, computer, tablet, smartphone) on the development of children and young people? On the one hand, the demonization of screens dominates public discourse. Their excessive use, depending on the age of the child, reduces the time of exposure to other more beneficial stimuli as actual play and socialization. Research indicates that immoderate exposure to screens has negative developmental effects, including on language, attention, sleep, mood, and academic achievement. The American Academy of Pediatrics has also provided guidance regarding the "proper use" of screens, highlighting the need for significant periods of no screen down time.

These recommendations also seem necessary in light of Swiss studies, which show that 16 - 25 year olds are online for approximately four hours a day and feel pressured by applications that reward regular use: one in four says they get nervous or are nervous when disconnected from the Internet! Finally, it should be noted that the development of digital media is accompanied by significant misuse, such as sexting, cyberbullying, and other potentially harmful conducts carrying undeniable physical and mental health risks.

On the other hand, digital tools clearly present a number of benefits. Indeed a joint statement by the French Academy of Sciences, the French Academy of Medicine and the French Academy of Technologies calls for reasoned vigilance over digital technologies, indicating in particular that the risks inherent in digital instruments "should not obscure the fact that, if well used, screens, and the information they generate constitute tools of increased knowledge and provide an undeniable greater awareness of the world".[1] This statement coincides with the Swiss Federal Commission for Children and Young People's studies[2], namely that young people (16 - 25 years old) appreciate being in contact with others, obtaining immediate response when searching for information, as well as having fun via the use of digital media.

If young people experience the digital sphere in a positive way, it is essential to remember that "the role of parents, both as models for imitation and for educational authority, remains absolutely paramount in relation to appropriate screen exposure and in the child's harmonious development". [1] With regard to adolescents, we must also acknowledge the role of teachers in the task of how information is received, processed and used constructively. This position underlines a crucial element: for all users both parents and children in order to have a more positive and safe experience with information and communication technologies, they must benefit from more enhanced and

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[1] Academy of Sciences, National Academy of Medicine and Academy of Technologies, Child Adolescent, Family and Screens - Call for reasoned vigilance on digital technologies, 2019, p.3: available: www.academie-sciences.fr/pdf/rapport/appel_090419.pdf

[2] Federal Commission on Children and Youth. Press release from 26.08.2019: www.ekkj.admin.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/ekkj/06Medienmitteilungen/f_19_CP_CFEJ_Alwayson_26-8-19.pdf

comprehensive information about the advantages and risks associated with digital media such as how social networks operate, rules of online conduct, possible misuse or even significant slip ups, etc.

The conference addresses issues at the heart of the children's rights global agenda, inter alia, freedom of expression, right to privacy, access to information, the child's right to be heard, and parental responsibility. Indeed, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child is engaged in producing General Comment 25 on the Rights of the Child in the Digital Environment and the Committee's Working Group and experts associated with its drafting will be present to report on progress made. For Switzerland, cantonal youth laws emphasize that the responsibility in providing for the care, support and education of the child lies primarily with his or her parents, while indicating that the State should encourage measures to reduce factors endangering children and young people in their physical or mental development. Furthermore, programs are designed to raise awareness and to facilitate training for professionals working with and for children.

Objectives

The conference aims to better understand the impact of screens on children and adolescents; to sensitize professionals to the fact that in this domain children are also the holder of rights and not only potential victims; to recognize pathways which serve to help parents guide their children in this digital universe; to highlight good practices based on knowledge gained from sound scientific research as well as to ensure best practices from other countries; and to identify strategies for evidence-based public policy.

Target audience

This conference welcomes the participation of political decision-makers and professionals working with and for children and young people (teachers, social workers, psychologists, doctors, educational specialists, mediators, representatives of the academic and scientific community and all other professionals working on issues related to childhood, education and digital technology).

Presentations will take place in French (F), German (D) or English (E) and benefit from simultaneous interpretation in the two other languages.

Tuesday May 11, 2021

09:00   Welcome of participants

09:15   Opening
M. Christophe Darbellay, Chef du Département de l'économie et de la formation, Canton of Valais
Mr. François Seppey, Director, HES-SO Valais-Wallis
Prof. Philip D. Jaffé, Center for Children's Rights Studies - University of Geneva and UN Committee on the Rights of the Child

1st module
A new social order: The influence of screens on children's lives

09:30   *Session chaired by Prof. Nicole Langenegger Roux, HES-SO Valais // Wallis*

             Dr. Serge Tisseron, University of Paris VII Denis Diderot, France
Apprivoiser les écrans et grandir (F)

10:15   Break

10:30   **Prof. Sonia Livingstone**, London School of Economics, Great Britain
Global Kids Online project (E)

11:15   **Prof. Amanda Third**, Western Sydney University, Australia
What do children from all continents tell us about their digital environment? (E)

11:45   **Ms. Gerison Lansdown**, Independent Child Rights expert, Great Britain
Freedom of expression and association (E)

12:15   Discussion

12:30   Break

2nd module
Rights of the child: Screens, protection and health

13:30   *Session chaired by Prof. Michelle Cottier, Faculty of Law, University of Geneva*

Ms. Martina Robbiani, Swiss Federal Social Insurance Office - OFAS
*Plateforme nationale Jeunes et médias : promouvoir les compétences
médiatiques chez les parents et les personnes de référence (F)*

13:50   **Dr. Simon Charles Fluri**, Pediatrics Department, Visp Hospital, Valais
L'avis d'un pédiatre (D)

14:10   **Ms. Angélique Wüthrich**, Promotion santé Valais and HES-SO Valais//Wallis
Stratégie pour une éducation numérique responsable (F)

14:30   **Dr. Rahel Heeg**, University of Applied Sciences Northwestern Switzerland, Basel
Wie gehen Kinder mit Online-Stress um? (D)

14:50   Discussion

15:15   Break

15:30   *Session chaired by Mr. Christian Nanchen, Cantonal Youth Services, Valais*

Prof. Stacey Steinberg, University of Florida, USA
*Growing up Shared: How Parents Can Share Smarter on Social Media and What
You Can Do to Keep Your Family Safe in a No-Privacy World (E)*

16:00   **Prof. Warren Buckleitner**, The College of New Jersey, USA
*Technology and Interactive Media as Tools in Early Childhood Programs Serving
Children from Birth through Age 8 (E)*

16:30   Discussion

16:45   Synthesis and conclusion

Wednesday May 12, 2021

3rd module
Screens and education

09:00   *Session chaired by Prof. Zoé Moody, University of Teacher Education (HEP-VS) Valais*

        Prof. Daphné Bavelier, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, University of Geneva
Cognitive abilities and new technologies (E)

09:30   **Ms. Myriam Bouverat**, Haute école pédagogique (HEP-VS) Valais
De l'école à la maison, (mes)usages du numérique, une réalité ? (F)

10:00   Discussion

10:15   Break

10:30   *Session co-chaired by Prof. Olga Khazova, former member of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, and Prof. Philip D. Jaffé, CIDE - University of Geneva*

        Dr. Phil. Eveline Hipeli, University of Teacher Education, Zürich
Familienleben heute – Einfluss der Neuen Medien auf den Alltag (D)

11:00   **Prof. Claire Balleys**, University of Applied Sciences – HES-SO, Geneva
Quelle est la place des écrans dans la maison ? (F)

11:30   Discussion
12:00   Break

4th module
Screens usage: Conclusions and Round Table discussion

13:00   *Session chaired by Dr h.c. Jean Zermatten, CIDE - University of Geneva*

Mr. Sébastien Kulling and **Ms. Virginie Pache**, digitalswitzerland
Tour d'horizon des initiatives helvétiques innovantes dans le domaine digital (F)

13:30   **Prof. Olga Khazova** and **Prof. Philip D. Jaffé**
A new United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child's General Comment on Children's Rights and the Digital Environment (E)

14:00   *Round table discussion led by Ms. Özlem Lakatos, CIDE - University of Geneva*

Mr. Christian Nanchen, Head, Youth Services, Canton of Valais
Prof. Claire Balleys, University of Applied Sciences – HES-SO, Geneva
Mr. Stéphane Koch, independent expert in digital issues
Mr. Laurent Sedano, Swiss Federal Commission for Children and Youth – CFEJ

Closing remarks and Synthesis
Dr. h.c. Jean Zermatten, CIDE - University of Geneva, and **Prof. Zoé Moody**, University of Teacher Education (HEP-VS)

15h45   Conclusion

Useful information

Registration fees: 1 day: CHF 80.- (student CHF 30.-)
                               2 days: CHF 120.- (student CHF 50.-)

A certificate of participation will be provided on request.

Registration online: www.unige.ch/cide/fr/

Contact: *Centre interfacultaire en droits de l'enfant* (CIDE)
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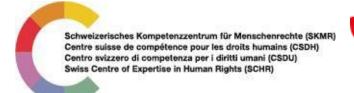**Steering committee:**

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