Today’s children grow up immersed in digital media, which has both positive and negative effects on healthy development. Parents’ confusion about children’s media use prompted a team of University of Wisconsin-Extension Family Living colleagues to develop eParenting® Little Ones. The program helps parents and caregivers of children from birth to 5 understand new media recommendations for children, learn how to use digital media to enhance children’s growth and development, and deliver the information in a way that is flexible, relevant and applicable for families with young children.

“Digital media can be a means of bonding with your child.”
—Parent participant eParenting® Little Ones

“The curriculum content focuses on brain development, parenting styles, parenting functions and ideas for meaningful, positive uses of digital media with young children.

Face-to-Face Workshop: Parents who attended the face-to-face eParenting® Little Ones workshop in Summer/Fall 2016 provided feedback through a pre- and post-workshop questionnaire. When comparing pre- and post-workshop scores, all 24 parents and caregivers who attended the eParenting® Little Ones workshop showed a positive change in their understanding of and confidence in how digital media can be a positive parenting tool and were more likely to agree that digital media can be beneficial to children’s growth and development.

All respondents agreed that they intended to integrate at least one new idea from the workshop into their parenting. Ideas they might tell a friend supported the workshops’ learning goals such as:

- “Use it [digital media] with them [kids] for short periods of time and not as a babysitter.”
- “Use it [digital media] with them.”
- “Digital media can be a means of bonding with your child.”
Online Facebook Event: In March 2017, we hosted a live, 45-minute, public Facebook teaching event. Nineteen parents attended (17 females, 2 males). Every 2-3 minutes during the event, the eParenting® Little Ones team posted a new learning moment for participating parents. Learning moments included six eParenting® Little Ones short videos, educational images such as a fact or list of parenting styles, and discussion questions. Parents followed along at their own pace and added comments under each post.

Feedback was collected through online analytics and through parent response during the online event. Engagement with the eParenting® Little Ones short videos skyrocketed during the learning event. On the day of the learning event, the eParenting® Little Ones YouTube Short Videos channel received 129 views – nearly 1/5 (17%) of the total views to the channel from March to June 2017.

Parents reported that they found the Facebook learning event to be a convenient, fast-paced but accessible method for learning new parenting information and ideas. A mom of three children said, “I was able to listen and read the content at my own pace – also [I liked] being able to replay videos if I needed to.” Even those hesitant about spending extra time online said they were more likely to attend an online event than a face-to-face gathering. Furthermore, 1/4 of the parents shared ideas for how they would use information they learned. Ideas included “stick to screen time limits,” “setting technology limits for myself,” and “talking about using media together and not just as a way to entertain child.”

Conclusions

All methods for delivering eParenting® Little Ones built parents’ understanding of and confidence in positive uses of digital media with their young children. The combination of face-to-face and online delivery increases the reach of eParenting® Little Ones and meets needs of parents for either in-person support or easy accessibility. Of the online delivery methods, the Facebook learning events have the greatest reach for the least effort and could be an effective, streamlined way to frequently offer this and other content to families throughout Wisconsin.

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