

EARLY CHILDHOOD & LOWER SCHOOL MEDIA GUIDELINES

The Highland Hall Waldorf School media guidelines are designed to support the objectives of Waldorf education and to be workable in the homes and lives of school families in our current times. Parents have consistently found that reducing the influence of media on their families has facilitated communication and fostered a deeper connection to the world around them. They have also experienced that the conscious awareness of the use of media in the home, as children begin using it as a tool, continues to support a healthy family and school environment.

What do we mean by “MEDIA”?

- Television, movies, DVD's, videos
- Computers and internet usage
- All other video and audio devices, including cell phone and personal digital assistants
- Video, arcade, and computer games, i.e. Nintendo, play station, Xbox, Wii and hand held games, etc.
- Recorded music, iPods, mp3 players
- Radio
- Magazines, newspapers, e-zines, blogs

Our ultimate goal:

At Highland Hall, we strive to create a healthy social and educational environment wherein the benefits of a Waldorf education are allowed to flourish in each classroom and in each student. Creating, nurturing, and maintaining such an environment takes hard work, commitment, and some measure of social agreement among community members. It is easy to fall into a path of individualism in which we are guided by individual drive for our own freedom, without careful consideration of others. The flip side of that coin would be to create rules and regulations for all members of the community that are policed for compliance to the “norms” of the group. Highland Hall Waldorf School tries to take into consideration both of these poles: a willingness and openness to consider the individual within the context of community, and the community for the individual.

Foundations:

Waldorf Education is based on a very specific understanding and view of human development. It is founded on the knowledge that children grow continuously throughout the first 18 years of life and that different approaches to education are appropriate at different stages in the child's development.

We understand that our work is not solely for today but rather holds a mighty influence over the entire life of each child who receives a Waldorf Education. We are preparing them for lifelong learning, encouraging them to become socially responsible thinkers with strong creative and critical reasoning skills. In concise terms, our students spend time in activities that help build better brains. Research shows that the more complex a person's neural network, the better able he is to make creative associations, to think in non-traditional ways, and to develop discernment and critical thinking.

The Negative Influences of Electronics

Brain development:

A 2004 study in the Journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics shows that attention problems are related to hour of television viewing, putting the child at risk for developing ADHD. Children's programming, such as Sesame Street, requires the children's brains to respond to short bursts of information rather than sustained and deepened thought. Some psychologists believe that television viewing is habit forming, leading to unhealthy consequences overall.

Human relations:

The ability to communicate effectively, to listen attentively, to respond with empathy, to relate to another being in socially appropriate manners are skills developed through repeated healthy interactions with other human beings. When children witness aggression, vulgarity, sarcastic humor, rudeness, and violence, they take it in. They have yet to develop enough life experience to readily discern what is appropriate and what is not.

Independent thought:

The young child begins to learn about the world through imitation. Adults in the child's life provide wholesome, strong, and loving models worthy of the devoted child's attention and imitation. They are on a path to make sense of the world and find their place in it. We have noticed that when children watch media images that are created by adults, it interferes and handicaps the child's own ability to make mental pictures, to imagine. Even the capacity for visual imagery is dulled. We want our students to be able not only to create images, but to enter into them fully, ever deepening their creativity. We have seen consistently that when children are fed images and story lines, they are less able to enter into imaginative play.

Overall health:

Health concerns from media use range from vision and hearing impairments to obesity. The child's eye muscles are strained to accommodate constantly flashing images. The delicate inner ear is exposed to volumes beyond the healthy range. The child, sitting passively watching television is not moving his body, developing movement skills and abilities, and strengthening neural pathways between right and left brain hemispheres.

Violent tendencies:

The American Medical Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry recently issued a statement that, based on thirty years of research, they believe that consuming violent content on TV, video games and movies and in music, leads to increases in aggressive attitudes, values and behaviors, particularly in children.

Community:

In each class, the children and their parents form a small community within the larger school community. Parents forge supportive relationships with one another as they spend time together through the years. They form the circle of adults who are there in support of the children, the teacher, and the school. It is essential for each family to be able to depend upon other parents in the class to share a common vision for what is healthiest for all the children. While we are all individuals, it is a reasonable expectation in a Waldorf school that all parents share a similar acceptance and commitment to the principles and policies of our school.

We encourage parents to work actively with their children and keep an open dialog with their teachers, other class parents, and advisors regarding the use of media. Highland Hall parents who have been successful in navigating the use of media can be excellent sources of support, help, and information.

The impact of media exposure is passed on to other children, reverberating through the community and showing up in children's play, attitudes, language, and inner life. It is vital, for the health of the entire community, for each family to understand and support the media guidelines.

The school reserves the right to require students to reduce or alter their use of media if that exposure is undermining their education or the education of others within the school. We expect families to agree to these guidelines as part of their entrance into Highland Hall. If media becomes a problem with any particular family, there will be a parent-teacher conference to review the guidelines, to discuss ways to support the family, and to suggest healthy alternatives.

Media Guidelines that Grow with Your Children:

We acknowledge the importance of conscious, developmentally appropriate use of electronic media as necessary and useful tools in our time. The following portion of the media guidelines is designed to answer specific questions parents may have regarding age appropriate exposure to electronic media. In support of the education Highland

Hall Waldorf School parents have chosen for their children, the media guidelines need to be observed throughout the year.

Early Childhood

The early childhood faculty requests that parents eliminate all media from the young child's life. We have found that media in all forms interferes significantly with the experience to be gained in a Waldorf Nursery/Kindergarten Program. It is important that all families support this request so that the children enjoy days filled with innocence, discovery, and joy. We are grateful for your participation in creating a media-free sanctuary for the children.

Grades 1-5

Consistent with Waldorf education's emphasis on learning through direct experience, children in the lower grades (1-5) should be allowed to develop new ideas and attitudes based on real personal interactions, developing capacities that will be needed for later use, without the loss of sensory congruence that technology presents.

Ideally students in grades 1-3 will continue to be shielded from electronic media. They will be protected from television, movies, video games, computers, etc. Exposure to radio and recorded music will be limited and age appropriate.

Children in grades 4-5 should not have media exposure on a regular basis; we ask that particular care be used to avoid media on a school night or morning. The use of computers, video games, iPods/audio devices, and cell phones are best introduced at a later age. At this age we recommend carefully monitored introduction to age-appropriate movies.

Grades 6-8

Our teachers recognize that having varying levels of media exposure among members of a class can be socially divisive. However, during grades 6, 7 and 8 it may be appropriate for parents to provide a gradual and guided introduction to the use and applications of electronic media, if desired. During these transition years, exposure would be limited, with clear parental guidance and participation. The content of TV programs, commercials, and movies often work directly against what is brought through the Waldorf curriculum by the teachers. We ask that middle school students continue to avoid media exposure during the week and that any weekend viewing be parent-monitored. It is highly important that parents educate themselves on the use and abuse of social media in its ever-evolving forms, in particular, the dangers of cyber bullying, sexual exploitation, internet visibility, and the loss of privacy.

Timing and Use

Decisions we make in guiding our children in their consumption of technology will have lasting effects. Modern life is currently infused with devices that in some ways make our lives easier and more efficient, but that convenience does not come without a price. Please consider the following thoughts as you establish your household guidelines around media use.

- **Computers:** Basic keyboarding skills will be recommended during the time period between 7th and 8th grade. Students will be asked to learn basic keyboarding using a common program such as Mavis Beacon. Students may be asked to type reports during eighth grade.
- **Television and Movies:** Keeping imagination alive is key to our work in a Waldorf School. Regular exposure to a passive, sedentary activity works in a counter productive direction. Movies rated R and many PG-13 movies are inappropriate at this age.

Parents are urged to preview movies to make their own informed judgments. Exposure to what is characterized as humorous, harmless, and common behavior in relation to substance abuse and sexual relationships in movies, may work counter to a family's value system. As a courtesy to other families, and to nurture a positive social climate, parents need to plan appropriate activities for children who are guests in their homes. Students in grades 6-8 would be well served if they refrained from watching television or movies during the school week. Keeping the television out of the student's bedroom is a wise decision.

- **Video Games:** Video games can be addictive, especially for adolescents, and can adversely impact students' work, as well as the social life of the class. Parents should monitor any occasional exposure carefully.
- **Music Players:** Any use of music players should be limited. We encourage music to be played out loud rather than through headphones. Parents are advised to pay special attention to the lyrics of the music children listen to, which often include references to drugs, violence, and sex.
- **Internet Access:** It is strongly advised that children in grades 6-8 have only limited access to the Internet (including e-mail, instant messaging) or use of a computer. Access and use need to be carefully monitored, and for limited time periods. Please password-protect computers in the home to control access. Do not allow computer use when a parent is not at home. Please locate computers in open areas of the home, and never in children's bedrooms.
- **Cell Phones:** New research has indicated that cell phone use affects brain activity. While adverse effects of such use have not been proven, regular use of a close-to-the ear cell phone is potentially dangerous. Cell phones can now provide unlimited internet access and act as a social status symbol. School policy prohibits cell phone, smartphone (iPod) or tablet device (iPad) use during the school day. Cell phones must be turned off and kept in cubbies and backpacks until dismissal.
- **Electronic Communication:** E-mail, text messaging, and instant messaging have become major communication vehicles. Awareness needs to continually be brought to the student's attention, both from parents and teachers, that short and fast forms of communication are no substitute for in-depth, personal conversation.
- **Internet, Audio/Video Devices:** Personal audio or video devices are not permitted on the campus during school activities or on school trips, without a teacher's permission. Excessive internet and video game use consumes time much better spent in productive and creative pursuits, and tends to increase emotional and intellectual detachment in a student. Parents can monitor this at home by locating computers and video games in open areas of the home, and can encourage moderation of use.
- **Social Media Sites:** Current examples are Snapchat, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Though currently prevalent as a communication vehicle, they decrease social interaction.