

WTNS Radio OSU Extension Update for December 18, 2023
Healthy People. Healthy Finances. Healthy Relationships.

On today's OSU Extension update for Healthy People, Healthy Finances, & Healthy Relationships we'll talk artificial intelligence with our kids, and as always look at some upcoming programs from OSU Extension.

Last weekend my main identity was "Aunt Emily." It was 24 hours of non-stop sparkly outfit dress-up, glue and marker craft time, and Barbiepalooza with my young nieces. Now that my children are teens, it is a special treat to remember what it is like to be constantly needed, when all your jokes are funny, and excited learning unfolds before your eyes.

Now, this was full-on, focused attention for these girls, and it left me exhausted when they left. That is not comparable to parenting. I think it is a small taste of what grandparents get to experience. "Aunt-ing" is a pretty good gig, every once in a while.

I found myself reflecting on how my own kids looked and acted a decade ago. My 7-year-old niece made a comment that I know my kids never did, because they didn't have the same experience. She mentioned to us that Alexa is her best friend. Now, there are certainly a few real girls out there who are named Alexa. But she wasn't referring to a real girl. She was talking about her spherical speaker with a tiger face that sits on a shelf in her bedroom and is connected to the internet.

Similar to Siri from Apple or Google Assistant, the Amazon Echo Dot is a cloud-based voice service. I ask Siri to send voice text messages while I am in my vehicle, but Siri is far from my best friend. Most of us adults would concur with that.

But what about the youngest among us? If I had a friend that would do whatever I wanted, whenever I asked, I'd probably say that was a pretty cool friend. Play my favorite music. Tell me I'm a great dancer. Make the room darker. Make the room lighter. Children inherently believe the world is all about them. And best friend Alexa helps to confirm that.

Before I get too far, this is in no way a commentary on her parents, my amazing brother and sister-in-law. This is simply an observation of the additional obstacles parents of young children must navigate in addition to all kinds of other influences previous generations of parents never dreamed of.

Research is beginning to examine the effects of artificial intelligence on child development. There are some promising opportunities out there like Penn State developing AI tools to help children with speech development. UNICEF has been examining this topic from a global perspective and has pilot programs in place to promote children's rights in policy guidance on AI for children.

Researchers from University of California recently published a study about how smart speaker-based conversational agents can facilitate language development by engaging children in dialogic reading. Their findings suggest "that dialogic reading with a disembodied conversational agent can replicate the benefits of an adult partner in facilitating story comprehension."

Sandra Chang-Kredl, in the department of education at Concordia University, has concerns about whether the ubiquity of virtual helpers will affect young people's ability to simply sit alone with their feelings. They are being conditioned to avoid difficult feelings by connecting with someone or something at any time.

I think two of the most precious words we can ever hear from our kids are "I'm bored." The temptation as a parent is to react and fill the boredom. Resist. Give them time and space and their little minds will create and imagine and observe the real world around them.

And now let's see what's new from OSU Extension: 2024 programming plans are underway. The next series of ServSafe Manager training will be February 7, 14, and 21 with the proctored exam on February 28. Registration is available on our facebook page or our website coshocton.osu.edu.

In closing, at OSU Extension, we are proud to work for Coshocton County to help educate and improve our families, farms, and businesses. Please feel free to contact OSU Extension for more information at 740-622-2265 or visit our website at coshocton.osu.edu. Make it a healthy day!