



Empowering Parents, Educators, and Mentors in the Age of Media and Social Networks

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Abstract

Children nowadays are exposed to a wide variety of information sources and channels, and this exposure makes them scatter-brained and generates great confusion, focus and concentration difficulties, attention and adjustment problems, and a blurring of boundaries and values. The abundance of information sources and channels forces us, more than ever, to be attentive to children, help them, and support them. What are the “keys” to openness, development, goal achievement, and transformation in our work with these “screen kids”? How can we empower them and their coping abilities? How can we create openness and cooperation that would make them listen to us? How can we support them to cope with the complex reality that characterizes our age? How can we use our knowledge and authority so that they do not weaken our children, and instead empower and strengthen them?

The Elements Way, an innovative method for working with children in our age, will help us help children, teach them to deal successfully with the new reality, and empower them and empower ourselves as meaningful parents, educators, and adults. Positive communication, acceptance, and connecting to one’s powers and free will are the tools we possess for educating our children. When we say “educate a child” we really mean “mentor the child,” help children develop their own powers and face difficulties, while relating to their free will and finding the balance that is appropriate for them. The main goal is to empower parents, educators, and mentor, thus empowering their encounter with the children, so that they can support the children, and be there for them whatever they face.

Summary

Studies of children and media – children and television, children and social networks, etc., have revealed that on the one hand, children feel that media – of all varieties – is an additional compensating sphere where their needs are met. On the other hand, they are exposed to greater complexities with which they have to deal, and these complexities are greater than ever before. They are exposed to the blurring of boundaries between private and public, intimacy and sharing, and between adjustment to environmental norms and autonomous choice. Children watch television because they find that the programs provided an additional – at times alternative – source for understanding the society in which they live and the process of socialization they are supposed to experience. Television is the arena on which there are many permanent and transient characters with whom the child creates para-social interactions; these “like social” interactions provide children with an opportunity to examine “how to behave” in various situations. For children, television programs provided essential social learning, and present models for each and every social role, without exposing children to criticism or feedback that could make them feel attacked or exposed. Television broadens children’s horizons, and they feel that the media open new horizons for their development.

Children feel that social networks expand their ability to form communication with others, and empower a sense of social connection. The networks provide a feeling of belonging, the experience of close friendships and of being socially accepted, as opposed to feelings of loneliness and alienation. For children, such interactions create a sense of self-worth, and being needed, being a major contributor to their environment. It also provides them with an opportunity to express their skills and receive feedback and appreciation from their surroundings. Children feel that social networks expand their adjustment skills and help them develop skill that are appropriate to the new surroundings and the society in which they live.

However, children are exposed to many sources of information and to more complex situations than ever before. They operate in an environment that gives them a feeling of a vast space, a space without boundaries that offers infinite possibilities. It is easier to hurt people online than it is to do so face to face. Being invisible – “I’m online but no one can see me” could lead users into risk situations. Users who were not previously defined as being at risk could reach – given frequent use many hours a day, and without clear boundaries or supervision – severe situations of risk and hurting others.

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Information on social networks is open for all to see, and therefore the impact and scope of injury are severe, especially when they involve children. Children have a low ability to contain broad and frequent injuries. Studies I have conducted have shown that children feel that their immediate surroundings do not manage to provide them with enough information on how to manage in today's world, and these feelings are enhanced through using media and viewing their content. Children feel that the interactions they experience in the media are significant, but such interactions do not provide children with the feedback that is so essential to their development – the feedback received from significant people who care about these children and their emotional wellbeing. More than ever, communication media and social networks exposed children to various models of parenting, human behavior, and children's and adolescents' behavior, and these models affect the shaping of children's personality. More than ever, the role of the significant adult is more complex and less clear cut.

As adults who are significant to the children, the change in children's environment makes us take a path that would empower us and our children and fulfill our role as significant educators who shape the next generation and shape it. We will use *The Elements Way* so that children will want us to reach them, will want to reach us, and will want us to help them grow and develop. Positive communication, acceptance, and connecting to strengths and to free will are the tools we have when we want to educate our children. When we speak about "educating a child" we actually mean "mentoring a child" – helping children develop their strengths and deal with difficulties, while connecting to their free will and finding their equilibrium.

Which "keys" will lead to openness, development, goal achievement, and transformation in our work with the "screen kids"? How can we empower them and enhance their coping abilities? Can we create the kind of openness and cooperation that would make them listen to us? How can we support them to cope with the complex reality that characterizes our age? How can we use our knowledge and authority so that they do not weaken our children, and instead empower and strengthen them? *The Elements Way*, an innovative method for working with children in our age is our tool for helping children, empowering them while empowering ourselves as parents, educators, and significant adults, and helping them deal with the new reality. The main goal is to empower parents, educators, and mentors, thus empowering their encounter with the children, so that these significant adults can support children and be there for them whenever and wherever needed.