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## Contents

- Determinants of Compliance to Authority among Undergraduate Students of University of Ibadan.  
**Catherine Chowwen** ..... 1 – 29
- Influence of Health - Related Lifestyle on the Dietary Behaviour of Male Adults in Corporate Establishments in Nigeria  
**Francisca Chika Anyanwu & Blavo, Jude Femi** .....31 – 45
- Psycho-Demographic Predictors of Academic Achievement Motivation among Secondary School Adolescents in Ibadan Metropolis  
**Adebunmi O. Alade**.....47 – 70
- Assessment of the Knowledge and Practice of Family Planning Among Mothers of Children with Intellectual Disability in Ibadan, Oyo State  
**Tolu Eni-Olorunda & Abayomi Lateef** .....71 – 81
- Effectiveness of Social Work Intervention in Reducing Deviant Behaviour among Secondary School Students in Ibarapa Central Local Government, Igbo-Ora, Oyo State  
**Olufunmilayo O. Folaranmi** .....83 – 102
- Growing Without Parents: Can the Media Build Childrens' Foundation of A Healthy and Safe Lifestyle Habits?  
**Ruth Ochanya Adio- Moses** ..... 103 – 122
- Illegal Immigrants on Nigerian Streets: Inclusion in Government Policy and Implications for the Role of Social Workers  
**Ajala E.M.** .....123 – 142
- Influence of Emotional Intelligence on Training Outcomes of Civil Engineering Construction, Furniture and Wood Workers in Nigeria  
**Kester, K.O & Okemakinde, S.O** ..... 143 – 162

- Managing Persons with Co-Morbidities  
Involving Intellectual Disability  
**Esther Oyefeso**.....163 – 179
- Neonatal Hearing Screening as a Strategy for  
Early Intervention for Children with Hearing  
Loss in Selected Hospitals  
**Ojetoyinbo A. Adewumi & Moji Oyebola**.....181 – 197
- Psychological Factors as Determinants of  
Female Academics' Job Commitment in  
Universities in South Western Nigeria  
**Fagunwa, A. O., Ogidan, O.T & Esan, A.A.**.....199 – 222
- Socio Demographic Factors as Determinants of  
Public Domestic Perception of Domestic Water  
Accident in Lagos Metropolis, Nigeria  
**A.A. Amori** .....223 – 234
- Teacher Factors as Predictors of Nursery Pupils'  
Socio-Emotional Skills Development  
**Odinko, Monica N. & Uzoeshi Ifunanya V.** .....235 – 259

## **Growing Without Parents: Can the Media Build Childrens' Foundation of A Healthy And Safe Lifestyle Habits?**

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### **Abstract**

*The need to work and increase the economic status of families has resulted in both parents working for long hours and this has reduced quality time that should have been hitherto spent with their toddlers at home. Toddlers therefore are left with care givers or some forms of electronic media (television, movies, video games, cell phones, and computer networks) not only for entertainment but also for instruction. Electronic media have indeed assumed central roles in the daily lives of our toddlers and have become an alternative for practical learning. The effect of electronic media could be both positive and negative, on children's cognitive, social, and behavioural development. Most of the health and safety habits imbibed during the toddler years can be viewed as a set of habits that exist on a continuum developed and nurtured by parents. "Can the media replace parents in building healthy and safe lifestyle habits in children?" the answer is in the negative as this article reviewed the risks in exposing children to electronic media especially at their formative age without guidance. It concluded that it is important to minimize the negative outcome of electronic media on toddlers' health. In recommendation parents need to spend more time with their toddlers to reverse the negative impact of electronic media and take the responsibility of initiating early healthy and safe lifestyle habits in their toddlers by serving as models and positive motivators.*

**Keywords:** Electronic, Habits, Healthy lifestyle, Media

## Introduction

The risk in leaving toddlers to electronic media without constant guidance cannot be over emphasised. When a child is born, parents are not given an all-inclusive guide on how to raise that child. Parents may receive tips from the doctor on how to ensure their baby stays healthy and when the baby should be returned for immunisations. Fellow parents may offer advice on what to do when an infant becomes upset or ill. It is however difficult to get a one-time advice on how to build a healthy lifestyle in a child. In other words, building healthy lifestyle habits in children should be a continuous process of monitoring, instructing and correcting by parents and guardians usually spanning throughout the childhood period.

The physical development of a child is determined mostly by genetics which is decided during conception and nurtured after the child is born by nutrition. This physical stage of development is accompanied by cognitive and emotional development. Indeed Ogundele (2006) presented the Erikson 8-stage psychosocial theory of development to include infancy (0-1 year), early childhood (1-3 years), preschool ages (3 - 6 years), school age (7 - 11years), adolescent (12-17 years), early adulthood (18- 34 years) middle adulthood (35-64 years), late adulthood (65- above) and noted that the early childhood period, usually referred to as the toddler years (one to three years) is a significant learning period. It is a period when a child's mind is tutored to think in a particular direction, usually differentiating between right and wrong. Brown (2010) likened the human mind to a sponge which is generally complete in its architecture, built and held together by tiny strands given to it by nature, a sponge is designed to absorb its environment and flourish based on the quality of the environment it takes in. For the sponge, once nature plays its part, it is the quality of the water around it that defines its formation and quality; for the human mind, once nature has played its part in its physical development, it is the quality of the relationships around it that defines the quality of its development which begins in the earliest stages of life.

The mind guides human interactions and behaviour throughout life. Through adequate nutrition, the mind maintains the architecture given to it by nature. Through

stimulation, the mind can further develop to its potential. As cognitive development begins in the earliest stages of life, there is no moment that matters more than those a child spends with his/her parents (Brown, 2010). Every minute an interaction occurs during this time from the simplicity of an affectionate hug, to the punishment for wrongdoing matters. The relationship between toddlers and their parents is a good determinant of how well they will adjust to the environment outside of the home, as well as what kind of relationships they will form with people outside of their parents. The relationship between toddlers and their parents remains an undercurrent throughout life span, as this will define how early or late they integrate into society, as well as their behaviour later in life.

*Omigbodun and Olatawura (2008) reported that the trend in child rearing practices in Nigeria has great implications for child mental health. A lot of parents now spend less time with their toddlers as the economic situation demands that both parents will need to work to support the growing demands of family living in Nigeria. Gbadegesin and Alabi (2014) noted that different child care arrangements are adopted nowadays in caring for children while their parents are busy trying to make ends meet. Quality moments between toddlers and their parents is reduced and this, is the most important factor in a child's development, the implications of spending more time at workplace and less with toddlers at home are profoundly apparent: most children of working parents exhibit decreased emotional aptitude and feelings of security, and increased behavioural problems (Doob,2013).*

Selected research shows that parental work practices may be creating a negative feedback loop on their children and the long-term implications are yet to be fully realized. As a parent disengages from the child during early years for workplace commitments, the child is keep busy with electronic media in the home or at the day care centres. Reported effect of parental absence during toddler years includes decreased mental and emotional attachments, the toddler may fail to form stable relationships and develop short of their intellectual potential. In an evolving culture where parents spend more time working and children spend less time with the people that can have the strongest influence on

their overall development, it is important to step back and consider the quality of the current cultural environment and the ill-developed sponges it may be producing (Doob,2013;Brown, 2010; Haymann, 2003; Roesch, 2004; Phyllis,1989).

Ferris (2010) opined that the first few years of life are the best time for parents to help their child develop a positive attitude to healthy habits and active living, as the child will carry this attitude to his later years and promoting healthy habits from the start encourages a lifelong continuum of healthy choices. Summarily, when healthy choices are made and performed regularly and over time, they become the foundation of an improved overall healthy lifestyle. While referring to toddlers who are left with care givers, it is important for the caregivers to learn and maintain healthy habits, as they serve as teachers, loco parents and role models. Promoting early healthy habits for children is a valuable part of developing quality, nurturing relationships between caregivers and infants or toddlers.

The science of early childhood reveals that an early relationship with nurturing parents sets both the foundation and the scaffold on which cognitive, linguistic, emotional, and moral development unfold. Since nearly all child health and safety practices are in the context of a relationship with a caregiver (parent, nanny and teacher), healthy habits must therefore involve the daily and constant interaction of a child and caregivers. The promotion and practice of early healthy habits presents numerous opportunities for developing quality nurturing early relationships between the caregiver and child as part of developing a secure, confident person (Center for Child Development, 2014).

Bright Futures (2010) identified some important healthy habits to promote from infancy such as sensible sleep practices, consistent bedtime routines and laying infants down to sleep on their backs to safeguard against sudden infant death syndrome. Other lifelong healthy habits include early exposure to books, sensible exposure to electronic media and general health habits such as caring for personal belongings, frequent hand washing, and good personal hygiene. Habits that promote Healthy eating of local food ( such as 'Akamu' and 'Akara' balls, Amala and Ewedu and

others), safer environment, including daily cleaning, not playing with dangerous materials and using appropriate safety language are largely dependent upon caregivers' modelling. Healthy habits may be viewed on a continuum of practice by adults that are passed on to infants and toddlers, resulting in improved health for the entire family, and for generations to come.

Habits and decision making processes learned and habituated at an early age are likely to be more sustainable over time. Positive health habits may include, developing healthy sleep patterns, developing effective self regulation strategies, employing effective decision making in risk situation, practising proper dental hygiene, eating adequate and nutritious diet, engaging in age appropriate physical activity and / or participating in healthy relationship. Applications to promote positive health habits like electronic media, print media etc should target social and cultural factors, including but not limited to schools, families, communities, population, food industry, age appropriate learning tools and games, social media social networking, technology and mass media. Indeed, healthy habits are developed around food and exercise and other life choices.

Media is the term used to describe the many ways we communicate. Electronic media includes television, computers, cell phones, video games, iPods and more. The amount of time spent using them is sometimes called "screen time". A lot of preschool children have access to more kinds of electronic media than ever before and in order to develop healthy media habits parents and caregivers must find time to monitor screen time and teach them to use media safely and wisely (Ferris 2010). It is important to start encouraging good media habits during toddler years. Otherwise, it will get harder to enforce limits and influence their choices as they get older.

Oswalt (2010) stated that there are a few types of important behaviors that children need to engage in that may become displaced by excessive use of media. These include replacement of physical exercise, of homework and of important family and social relationship interaction time.

Indeed when young children are inactive (for example, watching television), they are at risk for developing health



issues, including weight problems. Preschool children or toddlers who watch more than 2 hours of television a day are more likely than others to experience health and developmental problems. There is no evidence that using electronic media can benefit a child's health or education under the age of 2. In fact, in children who watch a lot of television in these first few years, it has been shown that: They are likely to experience problems with their attention span later on; They are at risk for developing language and memory difficulties; They tend to experience more difficulties in school than children who do not watch a lot of television (Ogunbode, Ladipo, Ajayi and Fatiregun, 2011; Zimmerman, Christakis and Meltzoff, 2007; Certain and Kahn, 2002).

### **Lifestyle development: the critical parent-child relationship**

Spending the first few days or weeks with an infant is one important way to begin forming strong attachments. As a parent, it is time to adjust to having a child; it is time for the mother to cope with postpartum depression, if it occurs. As a newborn, it is time for development beyond genetics to begin; it is time for the newborn to start soaking up the parental water. "Babies don't need mothering and fathering, they need parenting. They need the most important adults in their lives to be models. After birth, the interactions that take place between the parent and the child are the most important interactions of that child's development. The relationship that develops from these interactions is critical to future life style development as described by Nemours Foundation (2011).

The infant brain can be considered in a way as an analogous to a computer. It has a seemingly infinite number of connectors just waiting to be plugged in, an architecture that allows for the development of incredibly complex behaviour. But without a program that helps direct its thoughts and actions the software, it amounts to little. Without the software, morals, emotional stability, language development and much more provided by parents to the child will decrease the chances of developing well into his or her society. This development is best described by Engler (2008) who explained stage one of Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, which states that a child well-

handled, nurtured and loved develops trust, security, and a basic optimism. An affectionate, nurturing relationship between parent and child is paramount to a child's development.

The interaction between a child and the parent works to form the undeveloped parts of the brain fostering the development of essential synapse. A child who lacks adequate parental interaction will develop less functionally, in the part of the brain that mediates emotional reactions, than his/her peers. "Children who miss out on sufficient early connection may look normal, but they are likely to be neurologically and physiologically different" (Nemours Foundation, 2011). Loving and healthy relationships are important for any child in order to develop secure attachments and properly defined emotions which will in-turn predict lifestyle choices. While infants have an inherited capacity to bond to their parents, these bonds translate into real attachment only when parents are warm and attentive to the child. This relationship affects many other parts of the child's development as well. For example, when children have loving and healthy relationships with parents, they are happier to play with peers and may divert their attention from electronic media.

Emotions are important to a child's development. Parental involvement and secure attachment induces good emotional conduct from children. Positive emotions should occur regularly in children and serve important functions. Happiness will help a child enjoy life and pleasurable experiences and pride will lead a child to commit to continued good behaviour. Without secure attachments, the vital process of emotional development is hindered. When parents are unable to provide a loving relationship to their children, perhaps due to work demands, divorce, travel, or death, children may become angry, aggressive, or physically ill. These children could also show withdrawal from their customary activities and may grow up developing health damaging lifestyle. Furthermore, a child who has lacked affectionate relationships may have poorly developed social skills and may become difficult and appear uncaring to other's distress, lacking empathy (Brown 2010).

Communication between spouses, and between parents and child, is of great importance. The ways in which a mother

and father interact in front of their child, or within earshot, set the tone for what the child will later consider a healthy relationship. This communication shows a child the fundamentals for problem solving. For example, if a child grows in an abusive environment, the child is more likely to become an abusive parent. When children live with parents who portray healthy relationships, with each other and peers, they gain valuable lessons in cooperation and conflict resolution. This communication also plays a role in the development of morally acceptable behaviours (Lander 2009).

### **Working parents: effects on child development**

Economic status is one of the largest external influences on a child's development. The income of a parent or parents directly influences the quality of care and the quality of life a child has. Children living in impoverished or low-income situations have their share of reasons to feel sad, fearful, or angry. These children are often, more prone to emotional difficulties than other children because parents have limited resources to address these children's needs and may discipline inconsistently. Nevertheless, parental employment will fulfil the basic needs of a child. With the income earned, parents can generally afford to provide food, clothing, and shelter, making employment a necessity. In some families, one parent works and in others, both parents work. Despite its necessity in most situations, employment can have negative consequence on the health of toddlers as more toddlers are dropped at day care centres or with nannies. (Gbadegesin and Alabi, 2014; Tompkins 2003).

Parents work to feed and provide future education to their children. Parents work because they feel they have to give their children a better life. Being a working parent, however, provides unique positive and negative influences on a child's development. For example, parents serve as effective role models for their children when they work by showing that they are responsible, working citizens that contribute to society. However, work can reduce effective parenting especially when work-related pressures or long job hours increase the stress level of the parent.

Parents often have to sacrifice to maintain a job and maintain a high-quality loving relationship with their child

simultaneously. These sacrifices often include sleeping less and spending less time pursuing personal interests. Even weekends, or days off from work, are often sacrificed to help compensate for the lack of available time during the week. However, Gbadegesin and Alabi, (2014) stressed that the largest cause of parental stress or anxiety is from worry over child-care arrangements. Parents worry about their children, and especially about what their children are doing while they are unable to watch them. Schoolchildren are often left to fend for themselves after school and sometimes even before school. This presents numerous problems to a child's development and safety. For example, when a child is left in a self-care situation, they are left with a certain amount of responsibility to take care of themselves. This situation has not only resulted in experimentation but also in accidents and even death.

Employees often find themselves stressed out at work over deadlines, new policies, the boss, co-workers, and various other things. When parents allow this stress to affect them at home, it alters the parent-child relationship by affecting moods and energy levels. Children want to be loved, and want parental attention when performing activities that will define their lifestyle and habit in the future. If parents are not conscious and organised, work will distract them and decrease the amount of love and attention they give to their young children. Doob, (2010) stressed that the long hours demanded by modern work in a global economy mean too few hours devoted to the proper upbringing of young people. Employees often put in extra hours to meet deadlines, attend meetings or work for extra pay. By decreasing working hours, parents could increase the amount of time they spend with their children and decrease the amount of time their child is without parental care to help ensure more positive development outcomes. When a parent becomes unavailable due to working hours, it shows in the child's behaviour and educational achievements.

### **Children and Electronic media**

Media technology is an integral part of children's lives in the twenty-first century. The world of electronic media, however, is changing dramatically. Television, until recently which is

the dominant media source, has been joined by cell phones, iPods, video games, instant messaging, social networks on the Internet, and e-mail. Electronic media are thoroughly integrated into the fabric of life, with television, movies, videos, music, video games, and computers have become central to both work and play. A recent study indicate that even very young children in Nigeria are using a wide variety of screen media, many at higher levels than recommended by child development professionals (Kadiri and Muhammed, 2011).

There are rapidly growing markets for early childhood television programming, computer software for toddlers, and video series for infants. Paediatricians, educators, researchers, and policymakers have raised particular concerns about electronic media use among very young children. Developmental science suggests that children may be the most vulnerable between birth and school age to certain negative effects of media use such as obesity, aggression, fear, and sleep disturbances. Paralleling this vulnerability is a unique responsiveness to educational programming that has been linked to both immediate and long range educational benefits. Research studies have confirmed the high level of exposure of children to the electronic media and particularly, television. The interaction of children with the media is more prevalent among today's children than in the past and erodes the communication or relationship they should have with their parents, siblings and friends (Children Now, 1998; Anderson 2011; Kadiri and Muhammed, 2011; Gbadegesin and Alabi, 2014).

A study of Nigerian children and media use showed that majority (97%) of the total respondents, are highly exposed to electronic media, especially the television. It also showed that females (55%) were more exposed to Electronic Media Violence (EMV) than the males (45%). Few of the respondents (29%) watch television and video for 4 hours or more on an average day while majority of them (71%) watch for less than 4 hours a day. The study also revealed that 58% of those who consume EMV, watch television and video for between one and three days in a week. Respondents who watch television between four and six days a week constitute 54% while those who watch for seven days make up 56%. The

findings equally showed that children consume a lot of EMV through imported foreign television programmes and video items. 62% of the respondents consume EMV through imported sources while 38% consume EMV through local or indigenous television stations (Onwubere, 2008).

### **Negative effects of electronic media on children**

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) (2012) recommends that kids under 2 years old should not watch any TV and that those older than 2 years should not watch more than 1 to 2 hours a day of quality programming. The first 2 years of life are considered a critical time for brain development. TV and other electronic media can get in the way of exploring, playing, and interacting with parents and others, which encourages learning and healthy physical and social development. As kids get older, too much screen time interfere with activities such as being physically active, reading, doing interacting, playing with friends, and spending time with family. The AAP was so concerned about these negative effects that they launched a campaign in 2004 called Media Matters to help paediatricians, parents and children become more aware of the influence that media have on the child and adolescent health. Their concerns centred on the following:

**Time:** It has been estimated that children watch about 4 hours of TV every day (that estimate continues to rise). If you also add in the time spent listening to music, playing video games and on the Internet then a large portion of a child's day is spent in front of a television or computer rather than on healthier activities like interacting with others or reading.

**Nutrition:** Obesity. Children who spend a lot of time watching TV, playing video games or on the computer are more likely to be obese because they are not spending enough time playing or getting exercise. They also view thousands of commercials each year for unhealthy foods snacks, and sugary cereals which influence their eating habits. In Nigeria, a lot of foreign foods have found their ways into our meal time table and due to busy parental work schedule children are now feed on fast food rather than our traditional nutritious meals.

**Violence:** Research studies have shown a direct correlation between aggressive behaviour and children who see violence on TV or play violent video games. A study by Tompkins (2003), which looked at violence in video games, showed that teens who play violent video games for extended periods of time demonstrate the following behaviours: Tend to be more aggressive, are more prone to confrontation with their teachers, may engage in fights with their peers, see a decline in school achievements. Children may become less sensitive to the pain and suffering of others, children may be more fearful of the world around them, and children may be more likely to behave in aggressive or hurtful ways toward others, children are more likely to have increased feelings of hostility, decreased emotional response to the portrayal of violence and injury that lead to violent behaviour through imitation (Escobar-Chaves and Anderson, 2008)

**Sex:** In addition to increased violent content in electronic media, children are exposed to more adult behaviours, like sex. Much of this content is shown to be normal, fun, exciting but without discussion of the risks of early sexual activity, pregnancy or sexually transmitted infections. Children often copy these behaviours in order to make themselves feel like an adult. TV characters often depict risky behaviours, such as smoking and drinking, and also reinforce gender-role and racial stereotypes.

**Sleep:** Television viewing at bedtime and the presence of a TV set in a child's bedroom in particular have been found to be associated with difficulties in falling and staying asleep in children. Television may also play a role in increasing the likelihood of nightmares and night time anxiety. Parents should be advised to keep electronic devices out of the sleeping environment.

### **Positive effects of electronic media on children**

There are lots of good programmes to watch on television especially, when parents interact with their kids and explain some of the contents the child is watching. The important thing for parents is to control what children see as much as possible and give them a framework for evaluating it. Talking

with them about what they see helps them become educated and critical media users. Use of the electronic media especially television in moderation can be a good thing: Preschoolers can learn the alphabet on public television, primary scholars can learn about wildlife on nature shows, and parents can keep up with current events on the evening news. There is no doubt that the television can be an excellent educator and entertainer.

Children have been known to develop some good behaviours from useful programmes which has served as emphasis to what parents have taught them e.g. toothpaste advertisement involving children could teach the importance of oral hygiene and some soap advertisement could also teach the need to have a bath.

### **What can be done to ensure positive and safe media habits among children?**

The main lesson learned from this write up can be captured in one phrase: supervision of content matters. Rather than focusing on the type of technology used or how much time is spent with media, parents and policymakers need to focus on what is being offered to children on the various media platforms and find time to supervise children.

Government at all levels should fund the creation and evaluation of positive media initiatives such as public service campaigns to reduce risky behaviours. Policymakers should also support research on educational programs that explore innovative uses of media to educate and to teach children basic lifestyle habits. Good educational programming should be made available to children through broadcast television and radio.

Caregivers and elementary school teachers should reduce electronic media hours and increase personal contact hours with children especially toddlers when teaching basic lifestyle habits. If electronic media must be used, it should implement research-based programs to enhance classroom teaching and modify children's media habits constructively. Parents will continue to be central to regulating their children's media exposure in different ways. First, they should not replace themselves with an electronic device in the life of their children. They must make out time for practical teaching



and learning as this will help to build confidence in the toddler and put them on a part of building a positive lifestyle. Toddlers tend to emulate their parents with regards to culture and lifestyle habits, which is only made possible if parents make themselves available to play this role. Parents can also work with government and nongovernmental organizations, to put pressure on the media entertainment industry to create meaningful and healthy content. They can also educate themselves about good media use based on their children's developmental stages and monitor their children's media use to ensure that it is healthful and constructive. Families must put their energies into scrutinizing content to make media technology have positive influence in the lives of children.

Ferris (2010) stressed that it is important to start encouraging good media habits when children are young. Otherwise, it will get harder to enforce limits and influence their choices as they get older. The following measures are suggested to limit children's screen time.

- Consider all electronic media when setting time limits for your family. Television, movies, the Internet, telephones (including social media), video games and gaming devices (whether hand-held, or played through a computer or television) all add to the child's total screen time.
- Children learn many of their values and ideas from their parents. Parents should be aware of their own media habits and change them if necessary.
- Limit television watching to less than 1 to 2 hours per day. Avoid making television watching part of a regular daily routine.
- Keep television, computers and gaming equipment out of the child's bedroom. Keep them in common areas, where children can be watched while they use them. Turn off the television or computer when not in use.
- Balance screen time with sports, hobbies, creative and outdoor play, both on their own and together as a family.
- Collect all cell phone at a certain time at the end of the day so they do not interrupt the children with phone calls or text messages during family time.

- Talk about the importance of shutting off cell phones and the value of sleep at night.
- Ask the child or teen where else they use computers. Talk to teachers and caregivers about where and when children should use electronic media.

Shilton (2003) advised that children should be supported to participate in organised sport and recreation and get outdoors during daylight hours. Physical activity for children should be fun, social and help kids to learn and develop skills. Informal outdoor play and family activities are good ways to be active. By trying a range of recreation activities, including traditional sports and other recreation activities, there is more chance of finding something the child enjoys eg. Dancing, bike riding walking, running and playing with friends outside the house.

### **Conclusion**

The fact of the matter is that most parents now work and have left the job of bring up their toddlers in the hands of caregivers and electronic media which are used to entertain the children both at school and at home with little monitoring and by the caregivers. The excessive exposure to media content have affected children's nutrition, reading and sleeping time, it has also exposed them to media violence, and game addiction. In keeping to a busy lifestyle Nigerian working parents are beginning to forget the real life issues in terms of their presence in bringing up their children. Most Nigerian kids may likely grow up without their parents and may not be exposed to healthy and safe habits that are imbibed through role play and modelling as children try to do what they see adults do. The media alone cannot therefore building children's foundation of a healthy and safe lifestyle habits.

### **Recommendations**

Parents need to pay more attention to their children's lives and not sit them in front of the television all day, weather it is for movies, video games, or general television shows. Raising a child is hard enough in this day and age but adding all the outside media violence makes it harder to steer children in the right direction. Healthy lifestyle and safe practices, when performed regularly, over a prolonged period of time,

contribute to improved overall physical, social, emotional and mental health. Some examples include sensible sleep practices, proper oral hygiene, car safety (such as use of car seats and seat belts), healthy eating, and regular physical activity. When healthy lifestyle habits are promoted and practiced during infancy and early childhood it will positively improve physical, social, emotional and mental health. Informal outdoor play and family activities are good ways to be active. By trying a range of recreation activities, including traditional sports and other recreation activities, there is more chance of finding something the child enjoys e.g. Dancing, bike riding walking, running and playing with friends outside the house. In addition, parents should:

**Encourage good sleep practices:** Adequate sleep is an important component of an overall healthy lifestyle. Sleeps, and issues connected to sleep, play an early, prominent and perpetual role in the healthy habits continuum. The early establishment of healthy sleep habits such as a consistent bedtime routine and going to bed without a sweet-fluid-filled bottle or dummy is important for immediate and future physical, social, emotional and mental health.

**Teach regular hand washing:** This is an important healthy lifestyle for infants and children to develop, particularly from the perspective of illness prevention. Specifically, hand washing can be the most effective way to prevent the spread of communicable disease

**Encourage oral hygiene:** Daily Oral health regimen should begin soon after birth. This regimen should continue throughout life. Begin with washing the gums with a wet cloth prior to teeth appearing and proceed to soft brushing once teeth appear. Important adjuncts include use of fluoride and dental floss.

**Creating a Safe and Healthy Environment:** All children deserve to grow up in safe, free from diseases or illness and injury provoking environments.

**Prevent stress in infants and toddlers:** Even infants and toddlers experience stress and have stressors that can be prevented and/or blunted. Stress can take many forms: busy schedule, change in routine, change in family, and change in diet, illness or injury of the child or a family member. It is important to reduce the stressors as much as possible.

**Increase physical activity and play:** Physical activity, as a healthy practice for a lifetime serves important roles in the health and development of children. Play for infants and toddlers are forms of exercise for their mind and body. During play, children learn patience and persistence, how to focus on what's important and follow directions, to take small steps to work toward larger goals and to work with others.

**Leading by example:** Most learning occurs through "modelling", in essence, watching another perform healthy behaviour and receive positive reinforcement for doing it. Importantly, children who watch daily activities such as washing the hands, engaging in physical activity, eating healthy, riding a bicycle with helmets and use of safety belts in cars, are likely to imitate what they see

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