

Uhls: Parenting in the Digital Age

By LAUREL BUSBY
Staff Writer

When Yalda Uhls was growing up, she was allowed one hour of media time each week.

Then, as an adult, media became her life. “I became obsessed with media,” Uhls said. “As soon as I realized, you could have a career in the media business, I was very, very interested.”

After earning a B.A. at UC Berkeley and an M.B.A. at UCLA, Uhls worked her way up to becoming a senior vice president at MGM Studios. She took a break from work to begin raising her own children and eventually chose to earn a Ph.D. in developmental psychology from UCLA, specializing in the effects of media on kids.

“I found my movie background informed my academic career. I understood how to communicate to the public and I was excited about it,” said Uhls, who worked on the ‘90s movies *Stigmata* with Gabriel Byrne, *Permanent Midnight*, starring Ben Stiller, and the Edward James Olmos epic, *My Family*.

“I did [the Ph.D.] because I was interested in the subject, not because I had any

career goals. It ended up really changing my life in wonderful ways.”

Uhls is now a regional director of Common Sense Media and the senior scientific researcher at The Children’s Digital Media Center@LA at UCLA. This month, she released the book, *Media Moms & Digital Dads: A Fact-Not-Fear Approach to Parenting in the Digital Age*, which discusses scientific data on children’s media use in a clear, easy-to-read manner to help parents navigate the varied issues.

“I felt it was important to share this information with the people who really need it,” said Uhls, who will discuss her book and sign copies on October 27 at 6:30 p.m. at Diesel Books in the Brentwood Mart.



Media Moms & Digital Dads examines topics ranging from “screen time for babies and toddlers” to “video games and learning.” Uhls pulls together the most current research, including

some she conducted at UCLA, and advises parents on what scientists have discovered about the pros and cons of various media use. She talks about the positives of social media—such as how it allows teens to connect and socialize—but also discusses downsides, such as the explosion of selfies

that is potentially increasing narcissism in our culture.

“The interesting thing about research is a lot of it proves our intuition,” Uhls said, but she noted that, “sometimes we’re wrong. If the science proves it, you can feel better about it.”

In her book, she also shares some of her personal experiences as she has worked to address her parental concerns about her children’s media use. One thing she emphasizes is that “the way that you use media and what you’re doing in your home as an adult will inform how your children use it. Look in the mirror, say ‘This is what I do,’ and be okay with that,” Uhls advised.

Unlike her own time growing up, her kids, Chloe, a 16-year-old Palisades High student, and Walker, 13, a Mirman School student, are experiencing a media-rich childhood, yet time away from media is part of their family culture—something she recommends for other families too.

“We are a media family,” said Uhls, who moved to the Palisades with her screenwriter husband, Jim Uhls in 2002. “My daughter likes watching television shows; my son likes playing video games. Phones aren’t allowed at the dinner table. We spend time putting stuff down and taking breaks. However, we definitely like media, and our kids do too. It’s not like it’s something that doesn’t lead to grown-up desir-



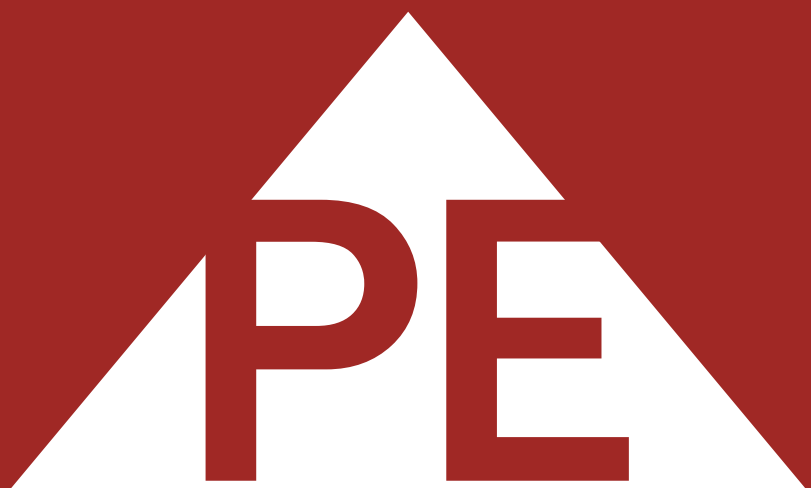
Yalda Uhls

able job prospects.”

And yet, in some ways, Uhls didn’t stray far from her parents’ guidance. Both her parents, who raised her in Berkeley, were scientists. Her mother, Mina Bissell, is a breast cancer research scientist, while her father, Montgomery Bissell, is a doctor specializing in liver disease. Now Uhls is a scientist too.

“Family values end up informing how the child will develop more than anything else,” Uhls said. “Peers and media may seem to dominate and may not match the family values . . . I did that for a while. I went into the film business, because I did not want to be a scientist like my mother, but look at me.”

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