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**Publication Date: October 27, 2015**

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**MEDIA MOMS & DIGITAL DADS:**  
*A Fact-Not-Fear Approach to Parenting in the Digital Age*

By Yalda T. Uhls, PhD

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The average American child spends more time with media than with parents or in school. Technological advancements, which put us in a culture that's connected 24–7, develop so quickly it's difficult for parents to keep up. All too often, children seem like they are one step ahead. Parents and teachers are worried about media use corroding young minds and stifling cognitive, social, and emotional development. Few accounts, however, present facts on the matter.

In **MEDIA MOMS AND DIGITAL DADS: *A Fact-Not-Fear Approach to Parenting in the Digital Age*** (Bibliomotion, Inc.; October 27, 2015), Dr. Yalda T. Uhls walks parents and educators through the most common challenges and misconceptions around their kids' media use. Drawing on her years of experience as a Hollywood film executive, child psychologist, research scientist, and as a media expert for the national non-profit Common Sense Media, she pulls together the most current research to put parents' fears to rest.

“In order for children to best learn social and emotional skills, in-person human interaction is essential,” Uhls writes.

She cites a few examples:

- Research published in 2014 found that if a parent *points* to a real-world object that a two-year-old sees on a screen, the child can more successfully label the object.
- When reading to children, researchers found that three-year-olds who read from a traditional book remembered more about the content and sequence of events than those kids who read from a digital device.
- A study examined mothers' mobile use while feeding their six-year-old children. During the meal, 23 percent of the mothers pulled out their phones; those parents spoke 20 percent less to their kids and had nearly 40 percent fewer nonverbal interactions, missing many emotional cues from their children.

- In her own 2014 study, Uhls found that preteens, who spent five days at an outdoor camp without screens, improved their social awareness (i.e. they were able to better understand non-verbal emotional cues).

Through her analysis of the social science, Yalda demonstrates, however, that media use is not without its benefits:

- Reading on the Internet improves language learning in young children.
- A study she completed with colleagues found that it made no difference in memory, comprehension, or critical thinking whether materials were read on screen or paper.
- Texting does not hurt writing proficiency, and, in fact, may encourage literacy and creative writing.
- Innovative technology and media in the classroom frequently helps quieter students feel emboldened to participate.
- Playing video games can improve spatial skills (which is linked to STEM learning); this can help children academically and in many careers.
- The majority of teens do not avoid real-person interaction through texting; quite the contrary—they use it to enhance their relationships.

These examples indicate that media use may do more to help (not hurt) children in their cognitive, social, and emotional development. Media are not going away, and technology will only further facilitate the growth and use of digital tools in our 24–7 globally connected world. This is why the book offers practical advice, with summaries of the research and takeaways that adults can proactively act upon.

“Kids must learn how to navigate the digital world safely and productively, or risk being left behind,” Uhls writes. “By the time this generation of children reaches employment age, many more careers will be created to meet the demands of the rapid advances in technology.”

The bottom line is that humans evolved to communicate in person, and this evolutionary drive will not disappear easily. We are social creatures and our media now enhance that capability. Uhls encourages parents to join their children in the digital world, and to become Media Moms and Digital Dads.

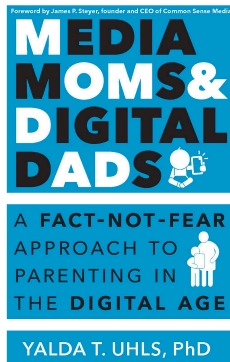
*“It’s time to do our best to adapt so we can guide children using our considerable knowledge of the world, an advantage we sometimes underestimate. Remember, kids may know media, but we know life.” – Yalda T. Uhls, Media Moms & Digital Dads*

## About the Author

**Yalda T. Uhls, MBA, PhD**, is an award-winning child psychologist researcher and leading expert in how media affects children. She is an unequalled and balanced voice in helping parents and educators navigate the overwhelming landscape of opinions, research, facts, conversation, and misinformation surrounding the impact of media on children. In addition to her consulting and other work, Dr. Uhls works with Common Sense Media, a national non-profit, as their Director of Creative Community Partnerships and also does research with UCLA. Prior to her academic career, Yalda spent over fifteen years as a senior entertainment executive and producer at studios such as Sony and MGM. Most importantly, she is a mom of two digital teens (a boy and a girl).

## About the Book

### **MEDIA MOMS & DIGITAL DADS: *A Fact-Not-Fear Approach to Parenting in the Digital Age***



Author: Yalda T. Uhls, PhD  
Publisher: Bibliomotion, Inc.  
Publication date: October 27, 2015  
Paperback 5.5 x 8.5; 240 pages  
ISBN: 978-1-62956-084-7  
Price: \$18.95  
Ebook ISBN: 978-1-62956-085-4  
Ebook Price: \$16.95

## **An Interview with Yalda Uhls, Author of *Media Moms & Digital Dads***

*Q: What advice or insights can you offer to parents who worry about screen addiction in kids?*

Addiction is a serious affliction. While it is normal to worry about a child who seems glued to their screen, ask yourself whether instead of addiction, perhaps a better word to describe what is going on is “obsession.” In the book, I offer a checklist of questions about your child and their media use. This checklist should help you understand whether your child has serious issues, for which you should seek mental health guidance, or whether instead he or she overuses the technology. Remember only a small percentage of the population (approximately five percent) will show real signs of addiction.

*Q: Your 2014 study, “Five Days at Outdoor Education Camp without Screens...” found that time without screens improved kids’ abilities to read nonverbal emotional cues. What can parents do to create a healthy balance between screen time and face-to-face time so that kids can develop the social skills they need for life?*

The first thing is to model your own healthy balance with screen and face-to-face time. Make sure your child sees you put down the phone when you are spending time with your friends and family. Second, set time in your day where you, and everyone in the family, spends time without screens. Perhaps the family plays a game together or simply hangs out and shares stories. Third, help your child understand WHY it’s important to be social in an in-person setting. Remind them about tone, context, and other cues that you can only get through communicating in-person. Depending on how old your children are, there is a very funny “Key and Peele” video that gets this point across (it’s on my website under “resources” at [www.yaldatahls.com](http://www.yaldatahls.com)).

*Q: What can parents do to address issues around social media use, especially social pressures like impression management, social comparison, fame, and FOMO?*

These are some of the most difficult issues that children face in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Can you imagine what your junior high school years would have been like if you had the ability to see everything your friends were doing when they weren’t hanging out with you? Talk to your child about what they are seeing online. Point out how the online profile is a curated experience, in other words, could someone really look that perfect and happy every moment of the day? Help them understand what someone who is “famous” is giving up by having to work that hard at such a young age. Link what they see with what they post – for example; ask them “did you post that picture of you being bored and alone? And if not, do you think your friends would do the same?”

*Q: What can parents do to educate their kids about greater risks associated with social media, like privacy, cyberbullying, and oversharing?*

Advocate for teaching digital citizenship in the classroom, so that you will have a partner in your child’s school. Since more technology is in the classrooms these days, educators are becoming

aware of teaching these issues. Our tweens and teens today have to learn how to be a good citizen in the real world, and online, and while some of the rules apply to both (e.g. “be kind”) others are not as easy to understand (e.g. everything you post is permanent and public). On the oversharing front, make sure you yourself don’t overshare photos of your children on social media. Remember, you are your child’s first role model.

*Q: How can parents stay connected with their kids in the digital age, while also respecting their online autonomy?*

It all starts with trust, just as it does in the offline world. If you set the rules and boundaries in the beginning and you are consistent, your child will understand your expectations. As they get older, and if they are exhibiting smart and responsible online behavior (e.g. no cyberbullying or inappropriate postings), then start to ease up and allow them more autonomy. In many ways, we are more connected now than ever to our children; we can track them, text them, and follow their online conversations with their friends. Our parents had to say goodbye at the door and hope we made our way home by evening. Today, we have much more out-of-sight access to our kids.

## Praise for *Media Moms & Digital Dads*

“*Media Moms & Digital Dads* does what every parent who has confronted the ‘digital wild west’ with their children so badly needs! Yalda T. Uhls seamlessly blends groundbreaking research, engaging storytelling, and practical advice. It is a must-read for every parent who is attempting to navigate a challenging media culture that is here to stay.” – **Michael H. Levine PhD**, Founding Director, Joan Ganz Cooney Center at Sesame Workshop and co-author, *Tap, Click, Read: Growing Readers in a World of Screens*

“This book explains how technology has transformed the world of children’s education and entertainment, and shows parents that such change is not to be feared! Yalda’s deep knowledge of the research and her expertise in child psychology along with her many years as a storyteller in Hollywood make for a unique, important, and engaging perspective. As a parent and a creator of children’s content, I appreciate Yalda’s guidance and approach; the book is indispensable for the modern age.” – **Lisa Henson**, Chief Executive Officer of The Jim Henson Company, executive producer on the Emmy®-nominated preschool series “*Sid the Science Kid*,” and “*Dinosaur Train*”

“What’s the best way to parent when it comes to technology? The good news is that someone has finally organized the most current research to help you make the best choices for your family. Yalda T. Uhls combines her experience as a social scientist and an entertainment executive to help make you a better *Media Mom* or *Digital Dad*.” – **Cara Natterson**, Pediatrician and *NY Times* best selling author of *The American Girl: The Care and Keeping of You 1 & 2*

“I’m so grateful for this book! Dr. Uhls offers practical, anxiety-reducing strategies for managing kids’ media use. As a mom, she knows only too well that trying to block all access is futile. Instead she helps parents ‘fight fun with fun’ by making screen time happier and healthier.” – **Peggy Orenstein**, author, *Cinderella Ate My Daughter*

“Educators and parents need unbiased and realistic approaches to the digital world so they can guide the next generation. In *Media Moms & Digital Dads*, Dr. Uhls, a mom herself, gives us a research-based resource, which is also filled with real-life takeaways and actionable steps. I greatly enjoyed this smart and sensible book. A must-read for every parent before they hand their kids a digital device.” – **Willow Bay**, Director of the Annenberg School of Journalism at the University of Southern California and Senior Strategic Advisor for the Huffington Post

“Today, parents living in the digital age often feel as though they have stepped ‘through the looking glass’! The digital landscape is an ever-changing and confounding world in which to raise and educate children. Educators and parents alike are struggling with what to do with the numerous opportunities and challenges this digital age offers children in their homes and in their schools. Yalda T. Uhls new book, based on her extensive research and experience, makes her the perfect travel guide as parents all over the world try to traverse this often bumpy terrain. This is the guidebook you’ve been waiting for. Safe travels!” – **Reveta Bowers**, Head of School, The Center for Early Education

“*Media Moms & Digital Dads* is a well-balanced, scientifically grounded, and thoughtful

roadmap of the often bewildering and ever-changing digital world in which our kids are immersed. Parents will find the author's wise advice very helpful. “– **Laurence Steinberg**, Professor of Psychology, Temple University, and author of *Age of Opportunity: Lessons From the New Science of Adolescence*

“This is a fascinating and deeply practical look at how growing up in this new and amazing digital age is impacting our kids. As the parent of teenagers, I found her analysis of how classrooms and teaching have evolved particularly insightful. Each chapter ends with a summary and some reasonable, actionable advice. Yalda's even-handed and open attitude toward all this technology in our lives, recognizing it as a positive tool even while helping us navigate the challenges, will be greatly appreciated by those who work and educate using the tools digital media afford us.” – **Kristine Belson**, President of Sony Pictures Animation and Oscar-nominated Producer on *The Croods*

“Many parents these days are frightened by the media's frequent depictions of ‘digital dangers’: aggression, sex, and cyber-bullying, to name a few. *Media Moms & Digital Dads* corrects many of these myths regarding Internet usage and explains the truth about digital technologies to parents in a clear and comprehensible way, based on facts from research. She provides reassuring proof that will help many parents overcome their fears about raising well-adjusted kids in the digital age... a “must read” for parents who care about facts and who raise their children in the digital age.” – **Professor David Smahel**, Institute of Children, Youth and Family Research Faculty of Social Studies, Masaryk University and co-author, *Digital Youth: The Role of Media in Development*

“Dr. Yalda T Uhls is leading the way to help bridge the gap between the digital natives (better known as kids) and the non digital natives (better known as parents).” – **Michelle Kydd-Lee**, Chief Innovation Officer for Creative Artists Agency (CAA), the world's leading entertainment and sports agency