



Austin Montessori School

Screen Media and Technology Policy and Guidelines

Purpose and Social Context

The mission of Austin Montessori School is to guide the intellectual and character development of each child along a path towards their full and unknown potential. Through parent and staff education, we work to develop a school and family culture that preserves and protects a healthy childhood.

Over the past decade, the pervasive use of media and technology has drastically affected the lives of families and has potentially harmful effects on the development of children. When children encounter media and technology in developmentally inappropriate ways, it can present obstacles to their healthy social, emotional, and intellectual development. At Austin Montessori School, concepts and skills that include the use of technology are introduced to students when they are developmentally ready to learn and benefit from them. Students are enabled and empowered to use technology as a resource and a tool only after they have fully benefited from the concrete and experiential foundation that is the cornerstone of the Montessori pedagogy.

Partnership with Parents

Austin Montessori School values the support of parents in honoring the principles of the Montessori philosophy as it relates to a child's home life. Developmentally appropriate experiences should be a part of *all* aspects of a child's life, and not limited to school. A family's partnership within the framework of the Montessori philosophy and school culture has far-reaching positive effects on a child's educational and social experiences at school. A lack of synchronicity can impact the benefits a child can derive from a Montessori education.

It is the expectation of Austin Montessori School that parents understand and support the media guidelines to the best of their ability, in support of our work in the classroom. We have developed these guidelines based on over five decades of work with children and an ongoing review of studies on screen media and its impact on child development.

Austin Montessori School's Screen Media Policy and Guidelines aim to protect, prepare, inform, and empower our students and give parents information to aid their children's development in a digital age. Below you will find our general orientation for media and technology usage. Accompanying this document are guidelines listed by the type of device and mode of communication.

Overview of Screen Media Policy and Guidelines: Protect, Prepare, Inform, and Empower

Early Childhood: Protect

During the first six years of life, human beings create themselves based on what their environment offers. Dr. Montessori referred to early childhood as the time of life when a child has an “absorbent mind” - literally absorbing, without discretion, all aspects of their surrounding environment. Children of this age need concrete, sensorial, real-life experiences in the three-dimensional world, which help them to develop functional independence. These experiences form the basis of the personality and are foundational to the development of the child’s intellect.

The Austin Montessori School classroom environments for children aged 0 - 6 are devoid of screens and are prepared to facilitate learning by sensorial exploration, movement, and communication. In these environments, children develop to their fullest potential by engaging fully in what the environment offers.

Our guideline for home is for children to be protected from exposure to screen media except for video communication with family members, with the child’s parents also being part of that interaction.

[Click here for Guidelines for Home by type of device and mode of communication.](#)

Elementary: Protect and Prepare

During the ages of six to twelve, children develop imagination and the ability to abstract information from what they have absorbed concretely during early childhood. Elementary-aged children are still in need of rich and varied real-world experiences as they cultivate their intellect and what Dr. Montessori termed “a reasoning mind.”

In the Austin Montessori School Elementary program, children are not exposed to media or technology in the Early Elementary. In Upper Elementary, computers are introduced very intentionally and minimally as a tool for productivity.

At home, our recommendation is for parents to introduce screen media thoughtfully and to monitor and limit a child’s access to technology. The American Academy of Pediatrics’ [Family Media Plan tool](#) allows parents to consider the purpose of media and its alignment with the family’s values. Where appropriate, resources such as Common Sense Media can be used to select high-quality and developmentally appropriate programming.

[Click here for Guidelines for Home by type of device and mode of communication.](#)

Early Adolescence: Inform and Empower for Conscious Use and Intentional Choice

Dr. Montessori asserted that in support of the healthy development of adolescents, an environment that will "abandon the schoolroom and open the gate of life" should be prepared. Early adolescents develop their potential to the fullest by engaging in real life and by having authentic responsibilities.

In the Austin Montessori School Adolescent Community, students are introduced to a wider variety of technological tools and are taught the skills associated with them. Healthy habits surrounding the use of media and technology are established at school, and lessons on the impact of working with digital media are presented. Guides work with students and parents to help support the development of life-long skills in managing positive and negative behaviors associated with the use of digital media.

We recommend that students' use of media and technology at home be coached by parents and monitored for appropriate use.

[Click here for Guidelines for Home by type of device and mode of communication.](#)

Resources

Wait Until 8th (<https://www.waituntil8th.org/>)

Conversation between Brooke Shannon (Executive Director of With Until 8th) and AMS Head of School, Grae Baker.

- [Part 1 \(Grae interviews Brooke\)](#)
- [Part 2 \(Brooke answers questions from the audience\)](#)

The Password to access these recordings is: **AMS123**

The Resource Library of the Children's Screen Time Action Network (www.screentimenetwork.org).

Talk by Max Stossel, Head of Education at the Center for Humane Technology
(<https://humanetech.com/parents-students/>).

Concord Promise for information on delaying smartphone use and finding alternative methods for communication
(<https://www.concordpromise.org/why-delay>).

The following publications by the American Academy of Pediatrics (www.aap.org):

- Media and Young Minds Policy Statement
- Media Use in School-Aged Children and Adolescents Policy Statement
- Children, Adolescents, and Digital Media Tech Report