

CAWS Media Policy

So that full attention can be given to school activities, including field trips, iPods, electronic games, videos, CDs, cameras, magazines, gum, and candy are not allowed. On occasion, with specified guidelines, faculty will permit students to use cameras on field trips.

There is a growing awareness in our society that media, in all its forms, produces harmful effects in children even beyond the content and time given to it. We have found that its influence significantly interferes with what a Waldorf education has to offer. There are many undesirable effects of television and movies upon children and they are clearly seen in the classroom: uneasiness, lack of attention span, inappropriate acting out, and aggressive behavior. Perhaps the greatest loss is the dimming effect it has upon the imagination which provides the foundation for learning and growth.

The debilitating effects of media on children's developing capacities are increasingly apparent to us, and are well documented by independent researchers. By "media" we mean the full array of visual and aural electronic devices, including but not limited to videos, DVDs, video games, CD walkman units, computers, computer games, television, and radio. Of equal concern are large-screen movies, whether in the theater or at home. We fully recognize the prevalence of media in our culture and the need that many adults have for this in their vacation and leisure time. We must also recognize, however, that the adult has the ability to absorb and consciously process these experiences. This a child cannot yet do. The American Academy of Pediatrics said in 1999 that children under the age of two should not watch television at all because of its effect on early brain growth and the development of social, emotional, and cognitive skills. We believe this to be a conservative warning.

It is not only the content that is harmful, but the actual physical and psychological processes involved. The passivity inherent in media viewing runs counter to children's active engagement with the world, and deprives them of the full use of their senses. The fast-paced imagery and fragmentation works against the more gradual development of their own concentration and imagination. In contrast to the pace with which real life unfolds and is experienced by young children, television can portray rapidly changing images, scenery, and events. Researchers have found (see the journal *Pediatrics*) that early exposure to television is associated with subsequent attention problems, obesity, and violent behavior. Through television children are given thousands of images in no time at all. They cannot sit and wonder at one image, or take it in, since it flies by at such a fast rate. Living images give birth to living thinking, and this happens through play. The dead images given by television, etc., do not allow flexibility in play. The images are fixed, finished, and dead things, while the growing child is alive and in constant motion.

It is not so much a matter of avoiding media, as it is one of simply allowing the natural capacities of children to unfold—capacities such as willpower, self-discipline, self-direction, precise observation, clear thinking, creativity in artistic endeavors, and imagination. It is our experience that these capacities develop best through warm human interaction and the children's enthusiastic immersion in the natural world, with all of their senses fully engaged. Parents express the desire for their children to become responsible, kind, confident, and creative. We

only have their childhood to help the children establish a relationship to the world and to human beings which gives the children (and the men and women they will become) a sense of responsibility toward the earth and toward other people, kindness, confidence, and intelligent creativity. There is no television show, movie, video or computer game which can nurture the child in a way that awakens these desirable attributes. Humans must be educated and loved by humans.

Childhood is a time to learn through activity, nature, playing creatively, and integrating socially. In order to enhance your child's development, we ask that you eliminate the influence of media from your child's life. We find that Waldorf Education works best with children who experience little or no media at all. We ask that no television be watched in the morning before school, and we feel that television watched before bedtime is disturbing to the child's sleep life. After a day filled with creative play and school work, children need a "quiet time" to work through their experiences, rather than additional stimulation. We would also like to discourage the Saturday morning fare, as well as adult sitcoms. We realize this leaves very little but, in fact, we prefer no television at all! This can be difficult, but eliminating electronic media during the school week is especially important. The quality of a Waldorf education for all the children depends on your commitment in this matter and in supporting the school in your home life. Limiting your child's exposure to the media will also support the integrity of your choice to send your child to Cape Ann Waldorf School, which takes a stand on media.

For those parents who are confronting this issue for the first time, we are interested in being helpful and supportive in any way we can. For suggestions on how to go about withdrawing from the television set, ask your child's teacher. It isn't easy, but the rewards are many, profound, and last a lifetime.

The following books are recommended:

Amusing Ourselves to Death by Neil Postman
Endangered Minds by Jane M. Healy
Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television by Jerry Mander
The Plug-in Drug by Marie Winn
Unplugging the Plug-In Drug by Marie Winn
Television and the Quality of Life by Robert Kubey, et al.
Who's Bringing Them Up? by Martin Large
Simplicity Parenting by Kim John Payne