



Managing video games and computer use in OSHC

Public use

In OSHC, children most often use computers and video games in public and with peers. Children constantly seek approval, advice from friends, sharing work or progress with each other and discover new applications or 'cheats' together. Ensure children are allowed to use computers with companions and that computer screens are in public view.

Video games

Video games have been central to the OSHC media mix for some time. Research found video games were the most popular media at OSHC. The biggest challenge that video games posed was to regulate turn-taking and turn length with the children. Because demand is high and resources limited games are in constant demand. Video games are designed to be time consuming so the demand remains high. The challenge for staff is to find a way to give each child enough time to enable them to progress in game play to some satisfaction.

Computers

The research found that computer use in OSHC was the least developed area of media use. Some services had access to the school's computer room or the school's computer network, some had relatively new stand alone personal computers, and others have very outdated computers that were unfamiliar to the children because they were not like the computers they used at home or in class.

The best computer access in OSHC services occurred where the service had access to the school's computer room and network on a daily basis. There, children engaged in a wide range of uses such as adding special touches to projects, completing work that they had not had time to finish in class, practising lessons and applying skills they learned in class.

Children spent a lot of time engaged in non-school uses of computers such as surfing the Internet, playing games, looking up hobbies and interests. These activities, while not organised around class exercises, extend children's media competency because the same skills are required for searching, selecting, saving, copying and managing information materials.

Some key features of children's use of video games and computers in OSHC:

- Children play in pairs and groups
- While waiting for a turn, children act as spectators and coaches
- Time limits apply to turns
- Rosters help players take turns in sequence and help maintain equitable access
- Established rules and public view of activities encourage children's self-regulation.

Taking turns

Rules about media use should be developed with the children and be posted in prominent public places. This acknowledges that

media use is a social practice that respects and reflects children's rights and responsibilities.

On any given day more children may want to play video games than there is time so time limits are essential. If each turn is ten minutes long (not counting setting up the equipment, changing cartridges and so on) a child can enjoy an experience that is extended in time by the ability to watch others play and assist others in play from the sidelines.

A common mechanism for turn monitoring is to keep a roster. A daily roster on a white board or chalkboard offers easier monitoring because it can be seen from a distance by children and adults. Staff can also make a paper roster sheet that has time blocks noted and a space for the child to write down his/her name next to the time block. These sheets can be kept by staff for review across the week or weeks so that there is a record of use.

Time limits

Ensuring time limits are kept is not easy. Younger children often need assistance with time keeping and staff may have to teach the children to keep to the time limits by intervening. Useful strategies include:

- placing a large wall clock nearby
- use of an egg-timer or stop watch (may require adult assistance)
- children take turns at time-keeping.

Choosing software

Software preferences follow other media trends and what is popular one year will be replaced by something else the next. However, younger children will usually tolerate what the older ones have cast off. In general, games with short play length are popular in OSHC due to the time limits on turns. Children enjoy mini games that allow the player to complete a game in a short frame of time. They also like games with levels, because they can achieve a sense of completion by finishing a level, if not the whole game, in a short play session.

Children may also choose to play longer games, and when time limits interrupt a player's progress, they can save the game with a password and the next child can commence play from where the other left off. On the other hand, if a child wants to save his/her game to complete later, they should be able to do so and not be forced to give the game up to the group.

Ultimately the children who attend your service are your best resource. Ask them what they like and aim to incorporate their preferences and practices in your programming. Certain days of the week could be designated for certain media activities.

Access and equity

OSHC provides important access to computers and video games that some children may not have elsewhere. Encouraging access to a range of media in OSHC helps to reduce the gap between the 'technology-haves' and 'have-nots'. Children tend to acquire their advanced computer skills at home and if they do not have access at home, they may not develop these essential skills. This is also relevant for many girls as research shows that girls are less likely to use computers and video games at home and outside the home.

CHECKLIST for Managing video games and computer use in OSHC

Video Game Playing

- How many children usually play video games together at the same time?
- Do video and computer games allow multiple players and encourage team play?
- If they are not all holding the controls, what are they doing?
- Where have problems occurred with respect to video game play?
- How have you responded to these problems?
- What is the turn-taking system in your service? How did this develop?
- What would you like to improve about video game playing?
- How do you ensure that everyone who wants a turn gets one?
- Do the children generate other activities related to video game play?
- Is the gaming space large enough for the demand?
- What are the children doing with their bodies as they play?

Computers and the Internet

- Where are the computers located? Why are they placed there?
- Can you see the screens from different vantage points in the room?
- Does your space allow children to use computers in pairs or groups?
- Do all the children have access to the computers? How often?
- Which computer activities are popular with the children?
- Are the children allowed to use the Internet? Are there restrictions? What are these restrictions and why are they in place?
- Is there something you would like to improve about your computer provision?
- What sort of rules do you have about computer use? How the rules of use were developed and is this an ongoing process?
- Are the rules for use posted publicly?

When selecting videos, DVD's and computer games OSHC staff should refer to the Commonwealth Film Censorship Board's Classification system as a guide (www.classification.gov.au). OSHC services on DECS sites should refer to the video viewing guidelines outlined in the DECD Administrative Instructions and Guidelines, Section 3 paragraph 94, Section 1, Paragraph 141 and Department of Education and Child Development (www.decd.sa.gov.au/doc/administrative-instructions-and-guidelines-aigs)

The research that informs this resource is based on a three-year study funded in part by the South Australian Department of Education and Children's Services and Flinders University. The research was conducted by Dr Karen Orr Vered, Ph.D. A full copy of the research paper 'Children and Media in Out of School Hours Care' is available at www.decs.sa.gov.au/oshc/

Useful References

The following references may be useful when developing policy & procedures for selecting and reviewing television, video and DVD programs.

Australian Children's Television Foundation (ACTF)

<http://www.actf.com.au>

ACTF programs are generally highly recommended for use in OSHC. Many are made for use in schools and have supplementary materials that accompany the programs.

Australian Teachers of Media (ATOM)

<http://www.metromagazine.com.au/atom/about.html>

ATOM may be able to assist you in developing recreational media activities. Many states have media education associations with local contacts and these are listed on ATOM's website.

Office of Film & Literature Classification (OFLC)

<http://www.classification.gov.au/>

Download the Film and Computer Game Guidelines from the OFLC website and have them on display publicly. The OFLC also maintain an online database of their classification decisions.

Department of Education and Child Development Administrative Instructions and Guidelines (AIGs)

www.decd.sa.gov.au/doc/administrative-instructions-and-guidelines-aigs

DECS Technology & Knowledge Management Services

The DECS ICT Security Policy requires that acceptable use policies are in place for all users of DECS ICT facilities, including staff and students. Such policies "must be in the form of a written agreement, signed by staff, students and/or their parents/guardians (as appropriate), outlining the terms and conditions of use of DECS ICT facilities, and of online behaviour and access privileges, and consequences of non-compliance."

Due to the differing needs of individual sites, DECS has not mandated a common acceptable use policy. However, as such a policy is required for all schools, preschools and children's services sites this standard assists in the preparation of site-specific acceptable use policies. It describes what should be included, how it should be distributed and the rationale for having such a policy in place. This standard must be read in conjunction with the DECS Policy – ICT Security. The acceptable use agreement for DECS corporate staff can be obtained from the DECS website.

http://www.decs.sa.gov.au/docs/files/communities/docman/1/Corporate_Acceptable_Use_a.pdf

This may be appropriate for staff in schools, preschools and children's services sites.

DECS Policy – ICT Security

http://www.decs.sa.gov.au/docs/files/communities/docman/1/DECS_Policy_ICT_Security.pdf

DECS Policy – Internet Access and Use

http://www.decs.sa.gov.au/docs/files/communities/docman/1/DECS_Policy_Internet_Acceptable_Use.pdf

DECS Policy – Email Access and Use

http://www.decs.sa.gov.au/docs/files/communities/docman/1/DECS_Policy_Electronic_Mail.pdf

Office of the Privacy Commissioner: Guidelines on Workplace E-mail, Web Browsing and Privacy

<http://www.privacy.gov.au/internet/email/index.html#Policy>

Cyber bullying, e-crime and the protection of children

www.decs.sa.gov.au/go_to_parents_and_Community>Health_and_wellbeing>Bullying_and_Harassment

NetAlert

www.netalert.net.au