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## **Can Facebook Destroy Your Child's Brain?**

Great news from the United Kingdom: children that use Facebook and other social media websites are harming their brains. Evidently, children that use Facebook are more likely to “live in the moment,” “have smaller attention spans” and “kill conversation.” The article, published in the UK's Daily Mail newspaper ([www.dailymail.co.uk](http://www.dailymail.co.uk)) does not mention how many children are affected, but I harken to bet that the number is somewhere around “all of them.”

I grew up with a lot of technology. Things like Facebook, MySpace, Twitter and so on have been around for a while. Things like word processors have been around practically all my life and so has the Internet. Unlike what some people believe, I am not a dimwitted, socially unaware or retarded youngster. In fact, I'm going to go out on a limb and say this is all a good thing. Let me prove it to you.

The article, titled *Social websites harm children's brains: Chilling warning to parents from top neuroscientists*, says that children spend an average of 7.5 hours a day in front of a screen. That could be a TV screen, computer screen or a screen door (I guess).

It goes on to say that children develop shorter attention spans when they spend a lot of time on social sites like Facebook. This is probably the best reason why parents should sit their kid down in front of flashing and spinning things for lasting periods of time. This way we can raise a generation of children that loathe meetings. Have you ever sat in a meeting? A real one. In an office. With co-workers. Yeah, those worthless drains on morale and hourly wage rates probably cost this nation billions. A generation of people with short attention spans means less meetings and more work actually being done.

Still not convinced? You know that big stimulus package the federal government just passed? That probably wouldn't have happened if politicians had shorter attention spans. If they weren't bored out of their minds with the meetings, they would have simply forgotten what they were voting on to begin with and the whole thing would be dead in the water. We'd never have spent all that money.

One of the researchers in the article, Baroness Greenfield of Oxford University, wonders “whether real conversation in real time may eventually give way to these [sanitized] and easier screen dialogues.” Frankly, I hope so. Have you ever had to talk with someone that really likes to hear their own voice? So many words and not a lot of substance? Those kinds of conversations can't be healthy, either. Those “real” conversations result in road rage incidents and legislation. I love email because, unlike the phone, I can see your message and say, “I'll deal with you later. Right now, I'm more interested in watching this YouTube video of a cat on a Roomba vacuum cleaner.”

Lady Greenfield goes on to urge parents to keep their kids away from video games until they're seven years old. Video games, evidently, trigger only the "flight or fight" response part of the brain instead of more important areas that deal with reasoning and thought. I do love reason and logic, so I'm going to say we need to build better video games. For example, when your character rounds a corner and is faced with a monster, the game should prompt the player to either shoot it or "sit down and talk about their feelings." Then, kids can retort with "I'm sorry mom. I tried talking to the monster, but it just wouldn't listen. Diplomacy failed, so I killed it."

Before readers start phoning in with angry and misguided comments proclaiming that I'm destroying the future of America, let me say I'm only being half serious in this column. I'm obviously a proponent of technology. Facebook, among other sites, has some serious upsides to it. For example, the popular website Twitter allows people to right short micro-messages up to 140 characters to other "followers". It's hard keeping a lengthy idea confined to 140 characters. That's about two sentences. You try telling everyone about your trip to Florida in two sentences or less. There's a communication medium that teaches people to keep it short and keep it simple. A lesson that gets drilled into everyone's head once they reach their sophomore year of college. Evidently, someone realized that if you have your employees right lengthy papers based on word count and not substance, you'd actually have to sit and read all of them.

Parents, do you keep tabs on what your kids are doing online? Do you know who their friends are? Seems to me that parents are ultimately in charge of shaping their child's development. Otherwise, it'll be up to Facebook and MySpace to take care of them for you.