

Protecting the rights of young children in a digital world

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by Canada and Quebec, states that governments are responsible for ensuring that children's rights are respected. They must help parents to protect young children's rights and to create an environment in which they are free to grow and develop their potential.

The digital environment in which young children are immersed presents risks, potentially exposing them to age-inappropriate content, content-integrated gambling and chance-based mechanisms, and products that claim to be educational, but which can be detrimental to their health and well-being.

In light of the possible negative effects of screens on young children's development, health and well-being, and in a context where the digital environment is constantly evolving, it is crucial that we reflect on the protection and respect of children's rights in a digital world.

The main threats to children's rights

The lack of industry regulation of video games, apps and platforms that offer content that is unsuited to children's development and skills

Fragmentary knowledge on the effects of screens and their many determinants (such as age, content, type of screen) on children between the ages of 0 and 5


Exposure to **advertising** within games or on various platforms

Incomplete legislation on the collection and protection of personal information

The use of **strategies borrowed from gambling** in games intended for young children (such as unpredictable rewards, for example)


Lack of knowledge of the effects of screen exposure by parents and other adults involved in children's lives, such as personnel in educational daycares, schools or in the health and social services network





Strategies used by digital companies

- > Digital companies use specific strategies to increase children's connection time and frequency of use.
- > The use of well-loved characters that are familiar to young children in a fun, enticing universe reassures children and fosters their trust.
- > Designers hide age-inappropriate practices under the guise of content that is seemingly harmless and fun. This is not without risk for their developing brains.



A recent Quebec study examined how 249 free online games work that are very popular with children, including those aged 5 and under. The results showed that these apps familiarize children with mechanisms used in gambling even before they start school, increasing their risk of developing a dependency in adulthood.

The right of children to grow up in a safe, healthy digital environment may be jeopardized if the commercial and financial interests of digital companies supersede the interests of children. In a digital universe primarily controlled by multinationals, parents cannot be expected to be the only parties responsible for ensuring the rights of their young children are respected. Some countries have revised their laws and regulations to ensure that digital environments are not harmful to young children.



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Les écrans et les tout-petits at
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