

Children at risk of toxic waste ; Sue Palmer tells Janet Tansley how youngsters are being damaged by modern life

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ABSTRACT (ABSTRACT)

[Sue Palmer], author of Toxic Childhood: How modern life is damaging our children and what we can do about it, is in Liverpool all this week speaking at the Every Child Matters Conference at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, and working with teachers in the South Sefton Education Zone.

Sue adds: "The pressures of living in the modern world can inevitably affect the quality time we get to spend with our children but the bottom line is that good parenting is the antidote to a toxic childhood.

ON THE ATTACK: Children who immerse themselves in virtual reality can become more aggressive, believes Sue Palmer' REAL LIFE: Sue Palmer

FULL TEXT

IF we parents want anything for our children, it's that they grow up to be happy and healthy.

But in a world filled with pressures and problems, helping them achieve that gets more difficult by the day.

Sue Palmer, a former head-teacher and government advisor on the education of young children, and an expert in child development and learning, believes modern life is damaging our children.

But, thankfully, she also believes that we can do something about it.

"In the last couple of decades our technological culture has evolved so fast that it's far out-stripped our biology," says Sue.

"Life in an electronic global village is great for adults, but not so good for children whose brains are still developing.

"They need to spend less time in virtual worlds and more in the real world: eating real food, playing real games, and interacting with real people - including the important adults in their lives."

And she adds that small adjustments to children's lifestyles can improve their well-being, their behaviour and their success at school.

Sue, author of Toxic Childhood: How modern life is damaging our children and what we can do about it, is in Liverpool all this week speaking at the Every Child Matters Conference at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, and working with teachers in the South Sefton Education Zone.

She has spent three years researching the impact that today's way of life is having on the development of children and claims that a toxic lifestyle, fuelled by our consumer culture, is the reason behind an increase in behavioural and emotional problems.

Sue also feels that today's children are growing up in a world that is evolving and changing at a rapid rate, resulting in an erosion of traditional family values and an increasing lack of discipline.

Children, she says, now spend an increasing amount of time indoors watching TV, playing computer games, staying up late and eating junk food, but this lack of social interaction inevitably effects their intellectual, emotional and social development.

Sue says: "Parents need to know how modern life can interfere with children's normal development and how, with small adjustments to their children's lifestyles, they can improve their off-springs' well-being, behaviour and

success at school."

She believes a more balanced and structured approach to parenting is needed to ensure the well being of this and the next generation.

And Sue adds: "The pressures of living in the modern world can inevitably affect the quality time we get to spend with our children but the bottom line is that good parenting is the antidote to a toxic childhood.

"It is important to provide children with values they can carry throughout the rest of their lives and in turn pass on to their own children."

Sue's top tips to ensure a happy child.

1. Eat as a family as often as you possibly can.
2. Make sure your child gets plenty of opportunities to play.
3. Establish and keep to a regular, restful bedtime routine.
4. Make plenty of time to talk and listen to your child.
5. Do everything you can to forge a strong family base for your child.
6. Good childcare should be the equivalent of a happy family home.
7. Ensure your child gets a balanced primary education.
8. Protect your child from aggressive marketing, celebrity culture and poor role models.
9. Monitor and mediate all your child's screen-based activities, keeping TVs and other electronic equipment in family space.
10. Aim for 'authoritative parenting' (a balance of warmth and firmness).

Illustration

Caption: ON THE ATTACK: Children who immerse themselves in virtual reality can become more aggressive, believes Sue Palmer' REAL LIFE: Sue Palmer

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