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**Better Together**

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## Out of sight Out of mind

# The Impact of Virtual Reality (VR) on Young Minds

Travel back in time and you will uncover VR's origins way back in the 1830s. Stereoscopic photos (image 1) birthed immersive experiences which are popular today. The Sensorama machine (image 2) and Telesphere Mask headsets (image 3) marked a significant VR leap in the 1960's. These pioneers paved paths to modern technology.

When my VR headset arrived, it was magical. Putting it on felt like entering another world. The mix of games and apps was amazing. I was impressed at how it could teach my family while being fun. I liked using my Netflix account with the headset, watching movies in VR was huge; it was like having my own personal cinema.

However, there were problems too. Motion sickness bothered me when gaming. Long use gave me headaches after removing the headset. These issues reminded me that tech has limits. I went back to my regular devices once the novelty wore off.

VR headsets have their ups and downs. The tech could change how we play, learn, and explore new things. At first it was exciting to enter the VR world, however, I noticed myself and my friends and family were using the VR headsets less. They stated that they found it amazing at first but after a while it had lost its appeal. In hindsight it was hard to justify the price as they didn't use it much.

VR unlocks boundless educational opportunities for our young people, for example:

- Children enjoy interactive learning beyond classrooms and text books.
- They are able to grasp complex concepts through virtual experiences.

- Creativity blossoms when children construct imaginative, virtual worlds.
- Certain VR apps promote exercise through physical movement combining learning with active play.

Yet, pitfalls exist:

- Prolonged use of VR exposes children's developing eyes.
- The weight of the headset could affect the neck and potentially cause strains.
- Regulating content becomes challenging as parents struggle to monitor their children's virtual encounters.
- Too much VR could deter children from real interactions.
- Virtual worlds may begin to feel better than reality.

A BBC news report reveals that paedophiles are using VR headsets to view and store child abuse imagery, [Read More](#). This is VR technology's first recorded exploitation for illegal activities.

As VR headsets and virtual worlds gain popularity, new online risks for children emerge. Child safety advocates now urge lawmakers and tech firms to address this concern. The UK's Online Safety Act has the power to impose strict penalties and criminal charges on platforms to protect children, including those companies behind VR headsets and virtual worlds.

The need for parental vigilance is also imperative to ensure effective protection measures are in place to safeguard children from harm.

Virtual reality tech can educate and entertain but parents should consider:

- VR gadgets should be for children 13 or older as younger brains may be impacted.
- Setting time limits; treat VR the same as you would when monitoring screen time.
- Making sure children have a safe empty space to move around and play.
- Supervising what they are playing.

When exploring its opportunities we need to be mindful not to weaken our connections to reality. Journeying into VR isn't just about advancing technology, but finding a path that protects wellbeing and enriches our lives. The potential is immense, yet our responsibility to use it prudently, especially for young people, is equally as important.

I believe until VR becomes part of the main stream we will not know with certainty what impact this will have on our daily lives.

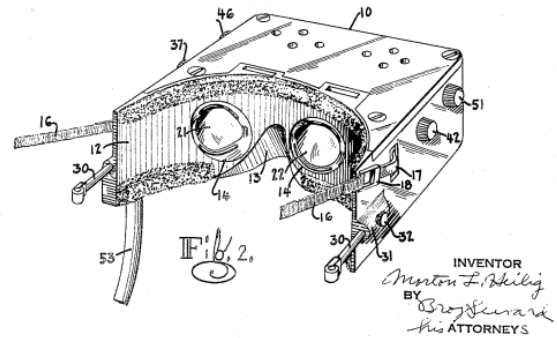
Dave Cosgriff - Netangel



1) Stereoscopic photos



2) Sensorama machine



3) Telesphere Mask headset