SMART PARENTING IN THE DIGITAL AGE

A HOW-TO GUIDE FOR PARENTS WITH CHILDREN AGED 0-8

DigiLitEY

We help our children to tie their shoelaces (neatly). To cross a busy road (safely). And to explore in the park without getting hurt (...mostly).

Children also need our help with the digital world. From staying safe on social media, to finding the games that help to develop their brains in positive ways, and enable them to have fun. This guide helps you to think more about raising children in a digital age.

We've broken it down into five easy steps, so that you can take the time to focus on what matters - Your child. Keeping them safe. Helping them learn and grow.

Let's get started.

1. STUDY YOUR CHILD'S DIGITAL WORLD

Ask: What digital devices and media is my child using? In what contexts?

Digital media is often in our lives more than we realise. Start with a 24-hour digital review - noting down all your child's activities, devices, and environments in a single day.

Make a record of which devices they use (e.g. TV, tablet, smartphone, laptop, games console, smart watch, Alexa etc.). Note down what activities they do with each device. Also make notes on who they do these activities with, if anyone, and where they use the devices. If they only use one or two devices, break down which apps or websites they are using, or into specific activities - like reading, gaming or watching videos.

Don't panic if, after reflecting on this list, you think they're spending lots of time online. Quality is as important as quantity – and this guide will help make sure their time is well spent.

Child development starts at birth - and scientists now know that the experiences they have shape their developing brains. By finding quality activities - and sharing digital experiences with our children - we can build a strong foundation for their future learning and growth.

2. SHAPE YOUR CHILD'S ONLINE EXPERIENCE

Ask: What do I want for my child online? How can I help them learn and grow?

To learn and grow, children need loving relationships and a safe, supportive environment. They also need lots of interaction and conversation with their caring adults and other children. We need to make sure this applies to their digital experience.

Take some time to think about – and ask - what your child needs from the digital. Think about how this might be different from your own digital needs and habits.

Set consistent boundaries as a team

Talk to your child about their digital activity - and what will keep them healthy and safe. This might mean encouraging certain kinds of activities or sites that you think will benefit them, and helping them to manage their time using devices. If they're old enough, ask them to suggest their own rules for using devices.

It's important to explain to children **why** we need to set limits - and what these boundaries are for. By having this discussion, openly and often, you help your child to develop their own sense of healthy digital behaviour.

Remember: mixed messages are confusing, even for adults. So if you change these rules, try to explain why. Keeping boundaries consistent helps children to, in turn, develop consistent digital habits.

The NSPCC website[1] offers a few tips to start talking.

Help children to take more control online - and build trust

Remember: we can't control everything our children do - or be with them all the time. The most important thing is to help them to develop more control over their online lives, and make wise choices. Build trust, so that your child feels safe to talk to you when something unexpected happens. Try not to get cross if they do something they shouldn't. Instead, thank them for sharing, and explain why you're concerned (including what they should do next time).

From their earliest years, you can help them to find good quality content. You can set your internet browser to guide children towards quality activities – like using CBeebies[2] for your home page, or the Kids Search Engine[3].

1 https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/talking-_your-child-staying-safe-online
2 https://www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies
3 https://www.kids-search.com

3. SHARE, LEARN AND PLAY TOGETHER

Ask: How can digital help my child to learn and grow? How can we help our children to have positive digital experiences? How can I be present in my child's digital life?

Children's brains develop over time. And it's never too early to lay strong foundations for them to learn and grow. By spending active time together, both on and offline, ensuring that you are active together socially and physically, you are helping to develop the skills they need to thrive – from language and logic, to managing social interactions.

With the right digital activities, you can make the most of the time you share together. This can give children a place to explore safely.

Find digital activities that help children interact

Children learn and grow through back-and-forth interactions with those close to them. Like in a game of tennis, children serve[1] with talk, expressions and movements. When others return[2] these by responding and interacting back and forth, it helps to develop children's brains in a positive way.

Using digital media together with your child can provide lots of opportunities for these back and forth interactions.

Find the apps, websites and digital devices that help children to interact back and forth.

Here are a few ideas to get you started:

— Connect and chat with relatives using video chat, like Skype[3] or WhatsApp[4].

— Find fun interactive games that you can play together or solo, like on CBeebies[5], or other children's broadcaster channels.

— Create photo slideshows with tools like Google Photos[6], and talk about what's in each image. You could also talk with them about with whom you would want to share the photos and how to keep them private from other people.

— Play apps with your child that are age appropriate, and fun. You can find useful reviews of apps on the National Literacy Trust[7], and Common Sense Media[8] websites.

— Use free versions of apps such as Puppet Pals, Toontastic and ChatterPix Kids to make fun, interactive stories and pictures together.

— Use your smartphone to create short videos with your child, which can be on any topic you both choose! A walk to the local shop, for example, can provide the material for a fun film about your neighbourhood, about clouds, about traffic – the limits are your imagination!

3 https://www.skype.com
4 https://www.whatsapp.com
5 https://www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies
6 https://www.google.com/photos/about
7 http://literacyapps.literacytrust.org.uk
8 https://www.commonsensemedia.org/app-reviews

1,2 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m_5u8-QSh6A

Each activity helps children to learn and apply the skills they need. With the right media for your child's capabilities, and with clear boundaries and a shared introduction, you can set your child up to play safely on their own.

Remember: when children have digital experiences that help their development, it's okay for them to spend a little longer online.

The Common Sense Media website offers a library of digital media - with reviews from parents and children[9].

Model positive behaviour

Children develop skills through an active process over time. This involves trial and error, copying others, and learning through interactions with family and friends. As parents, we can help if we:

Stay open-minded. We can learn a lot from our children - and how they use digital - when we keep an open mind. Ask them questions about what they're doing, and listen and respond to their answers. This serve and return interaction helps them, in turn, to listen and learn from others.

Stay curious. Digital media is constantly changing - giving us more chances to create and explore online. Experiment with tools - like ScratchJr[10] - and let your child see you try out new things.

Learn from your mistakes. Don't be afraid to make them - and to share what you've learned. By doing this, you help your child to think about (and learn from) their actions.

Remember: your child will have other role models - like an older sister, their grandpa, or a family friend. You may need to ask for their help modelling good behaviour, too.

9   https://www.commonsensemedia.org/reviews
10 https://www.scratchjr.org

4. STAY HEALTHY AND SAFE ONLINE

Ask: How can I keep my child safe online - and look after their health and privacy?

Take a look at the Internet Matters[1], NSPCC website[2], Parent Zone[3] and UK Safer Internet Centre[4] and for specific advice and safety guidance, which is broken down by age. For very young children (0-5[5]), parental controls will limit access to most unsafe sites. And you can equip them to face later problems by helping them understand boundaries, and come to you with problems.

When they're older (6-8) talk to your child about more specific issues - like cyberbullying, grooming, and body image.

Think before connecting and sharing online

Think about who you connect and share with online. And what your (or your child's) profile and privacy settings are. Once something is made public, it's almost impossible to remove - or control who can access it. However, we can do some things to try and get greater control.

Talk to your child about what they're happy to share with you and others. And look together at family and friends' shared activity for ideas.

Remember: by using technologies to contact people you know online, you're increasing the serve and return interactions that help your child's brain to develop in a positive way - and you're helping them to find their place in the world.

Involve your child in giving consent

We often click through terms and conditions quickly, without reading them. If we do this for our children, we risk their data (name, photos, activities) being used in ways we don't want, and in ways they won't want, when they're older. Children need to be made aware of how to exercise their right to privacy and data protection, taking into account their age and maturity.

Talk to your child about consent from a very early age. Explain what they might be asked online - with words and ideas they'll understand - and that it's okay to say no.

Stay balanced

It's important for us to stay balanced - online and offline, mental and physical, digital and non-digital. And it's even more important for our children and their healthy development.

Keep things balanced by using digital as a springboard for non-digital play. If they spend lots of time watching LEGO videos, for example, suggest they build something they've seen.

Or find activities that combine the two- like Pokemon Go[6], an augmented reality game that links the digital to the physical world.

1   https://www.internetmatters.org/advice
2   https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/online-safety
3   https://parentzone.org.uk
4   https://www.saferinternet.org.uk
5   https://www.internetmatters.org/advice/0-5

6   https://www.pokemongo.com

5. STAY IN TOUCH WITH DIGITAL DEVELOPMENTS

Ask: What's changed since I first explored my child's digital world?

Digital media and technology is always changing. And the support available for parents is growing. We need to stay up-to-date with the digital, how our children are using it, and to keep thinking about how we can embrace the opportunities - while minimising the risks.

Get support from parents and professionals

Reach out to other parents for support early on. We all want to raise thriving children - together, we're helping their brains to develop in positive ways every day. And we all have to help our children to make the most of growing up in a digital world.

Just like you would for potty training and tantrums, ask other parents you trust for advice. If you can't find someone in person, check out the Digital Parenting Community on Facebook[1].

Professionals (like doctors, or health visitors) can also provide support and help you think through anything that worries you.

1 https://www.facebook.com/groups/TheDigitalParentingCommunity

These five easy steps offer a great start in helping you and your child to make the best of the digital world. Most of all, remember to have fun and enjoy your digital experiences together!

DigiLitEY

cost
EUROPEAN COOPERATION
IN SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Funded by the Horizon 2020 Framework Programme
of the European Union