Keeping Up with Technology Use

Raising children in a digital era can seem overwhelming at times.

> **The Internet can offer incredible possibilities for kids — as long as parents, children and teens are aware of the risks.**

▶ **Apps and technological devices are changing all the time and it can be hard to keep up.**

▶ **With more and more people regularly connected to technology and meeting online, there are new responsibilities for parents to protect their children and teach them responsible and appropriate uses of technology.**

Internet Safety and Digital Parenting Tips

▶ **It is increasingly important for parents to teach their children how to use technology safely and supervise their children's online activities. Many apps offer free tutorials for parents to learn more about them.**

▶ **Parents should also try to set a good example by thinking about how much time they spend online.**

▶ **Overall, moderation is helpful for managing technology use in homes.**

- It is increasingly difficult to limit access to devices and the Internet, but appropriate rules and boundaries are vital.
- Finding the right balance of online and offline activities for your family is key.

Other Safety Tips

▶ **Keep phones and devices out of bedrooms. If possible, keep a charging station in a central location in the house and make sure your children's devices are plugged into it before bedtime.**

▶ **Know your children's login information, passwords and email addresses. Parents should also be aware that some teens set up second accounts to show their parents. It is important to ask questions.**

  • It is important that you are able to randomly check how your children are using their devices as a safety measure.

  • Ask what username or character names your children use. Make sure they do not contain any information that could identify your children.

▶ **Try to build a trusting technology relationship with your children.**

  • Talk openly about devices and social media.

  • Communicate often with your children about their technology use and what they are doing online. Children need to know they can come to their parents when challenging issues arise in their digital lives.

  • Explain to your children that there is a lot of really good information on the Internet, but the internet is uncensored and there is a ton of inappropriate material online. Finding it can be very uncomfortable and upsetting. Make sure your kids know they can talk to you anytime.

  • Tell your children what to do if they find something or connect to someone that makes them feel uncomfortable. Reassure them they can tell you about problems without losing their internet privileges or getting in trouble.

▶ **Do your homework! Some video games can benefit children, such as improving hand-eye coordination and problem solving skills. However there are a growing number of video games that include content that is inappropriate for children – and even for teens! If you can, download an app first and try it out. If your child already has an app or game, ask them to show you how it works.**

  • Check out what games your children are playing, looking for content that is violent, sexual, or dehumanizing.

  • Reinforce positive games that enhance children's creativity and thinking skills. The key is watching what your children are doing and making decisions together.

- Explore the online games your children play. Are they age appropriate? Is the game moderated? Is there a chat component? Are avatars used?

- Closely supervise the features offered by the games your children play.

- Ensure your children get your permission before chatting with other online gamers or connecting via social networking sites, instant messaging, etc. Or consider games that allow you to block or restrict individuals who can play with your child.

- Learn how to adjust / increase privacy settings and monitor how they are set up on your child's devices. Most apps and social networking sites have privacy settings that determine who can and can't view a user's profile and information. Learn how to use and increase privacy settings.

- Monitor your child's instant messaging (IM) logs (e.g. Skype®, Facebook® Messenger, Google® Talk, KIK® Messenger, WhatsApp® Messenger, textPlus®).

- Assist your children with the creation of online profiles when they join social networking or gaming sites. Teach them to fill in only what is necessary, leaving out identifying or revealing information.

- Don't allow your children to participate in unmonitored chat rooms that are included with many online games. Closely supervise the interactions that occur in moderated chat rooms, as well. Know what your children are up to – for their safety.

▶ **Teach your children to only have online friends who they also know offline. Explain that the Internet isn't a good place to make new friends. Talk with your children about what friendship is and isn't. For example …**

- Friends will not insist that you keep your online relationship a secret from your parents

- Friends will not ask you to share information or photos that make you feel uncomfortable

- Online friends will not ask you to provide confidential details about where you live, how to find you, private information about your family, etc.

▶ **Monitor how your children are using their smartphones. Discuss all the things to think about before sending text messages, updating social networking profiles, sending photos/videos, accessing apps or downloading online content.**

▶ **Put tape or a sticky over the laptop or iPad camera when it's not in use.**

▶ **Restrict your children's use of adult search engines. Show your children how to use child-safe search engines instead (e.g. Yahoo! Kids, KidRex®).**

▶ **Google yourself and your family. Look for your address, emails, phone numbers, social media usernames, etc. See what shows up before others do.**

▶ **Remind your children that anything they post online or send electronically is permanent.**

- Children and teens need to understand that how they represent themselves online will be evaluated and assessed by future employers or post-secondary institutes.

- Explain to your children that pictures / videos should only be shared between family members and friends.

- Explain that once photos are on the Internet, or sent through mobile devices, it is easy to lose control over what happens to them.

- Encourage your children to check with you before sending or posting any pictures / videos online or through a mobile device.

- Check your children's files in "My Pictures" to see what images they are sending, receiving, and saving.

- Monitor your children's webcam use. Find out whether they are posting or sharing pictures / videos using their smartphone.

▶ **Many mobile digital devices have GPS that allows us to use map Apps to find our way around. That brings with it some dangers. Children should turn off location services on their smartphones / digital device cameras to avoid being tracked.**

▶ **Vault apps have now come into the social media / application scene. Vault apps give users the ability to hide content (pictures, videos, chat conversations). It is important that parents learn more about this new technology.**

▶ **Visit the website of the operating system used on your children's computer (e.g. Microsoft® Windows 8, OS X Mountain LionTM, etc.) and the gaming system used by your child (e.g. Microsoft Xbox 360®, Nintendo® Wii, etc.) to find out about the parental controls you can activate to keep your children safer.**

▶ **Let your children know that you will monitor their online activities because the Internet is a public place.**

- Discuss the difference between public and private information. Personal information is private, and shouldn't be shared on the Internet without parental permission.

- Teach your children the safety strategy; "If Asked to Share and Your Parents Aren't Aware — SAY NO!" Help your children understand that they should tell you before sharing personal information online. Talk about what they might be asked to share. Practice how they will say no.

- Explain that not everyone is who they say they are online. People can pretend to be older, younger, or a different gender. Make sure your children know that they should be cautious about what people say online.
- Explain that appropriate behaviour offline and online is the same.
- Encourage your children to trust their instincts and block anyone who asks questions online that seem 'weird' or inappropriate (e.g. questions about puberty, sex, etc.). Explain why it is important to tell an adult if this happens.
- Make sure your children understand that they need to be cautious about sharing personal information online, because personal information can be misused.
- Explain that it's illegal to threaten someone, and your children should tell a safe adult if they are threatened online.

▶ **Teach your children to create secure passwords that others can't easily guess. Make sure they know to use a combination of numbers, characters and letters (both upper- and lower-case). Remind them regularly – do not share passwords with anyone.**

▶ **Tell your children not to open any email attachments if they don't know the sender.**

▶ **Create family Internet guidelines. Discuss them with your children regularly.**

For more information and detailed tips, see the following sources that were used in producing this paper.

https://bccpac.bc.ca/upload/2017/02/Internet-Safety-Guide-10-12-yr-olds1.pdf

Raising Digitally Responsible Youth. A Parent's Guide. https://bccpac.bc.ca/images/Documents/Resources/Raising-Digitally-Responsible-Youth---Parents-Guide-Ministry-of-Education-2018.pdf

The Canadian Centre for Child Protection. *The Door That's Not Locked. Safety and the Internet.*