



Counselor's Corner

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Growing Up Digital

In a world where children are "growing up digital," it's important to help them learn healthy concepts of digital use and citizenship. The American Academy of Pediatrics has shared important tips to help families manage the ever changing digital landscape.

Make your own family media use plan. When used thoughtfully and appropriately, media can enhance daily life. However, media should not displace important activities such as face-to-face interaction, family-time, outdoor-play, exercise, unplugged downtime, and sleep.

Treat media as you would any other environment in your child's life. Apply the same parenting guidelines in both real and virtual environments. Establish parameters and know your children's friends (both online and off). Be familiar with what they are doing online, including platforms, software, apps, and websites.

Set limits and encourage playtime. Like all other activities, media use should have reasonable limits. Unstructured and offline play stimulates creativity and should remain a priority.

Screen time shouldn't always be alone time. Co-view, co-play and co-engage. Don't just monitor them online—interact with them, so you can understand what they are doing and be a part of it. This creates an opportunity to share your own life experiences, perspectives, and guidance.

Be a good role model. Teach and model kindness and good manners both on and off-line.

Know the value of face-to-face communication. Limit digital media for your youngest family members, because very young children learn best and develop language through two-way communication.

Create tech-free zones. Keep mealtimes, other family and social gatherings, and children's bedrooms screen free. Recharge devices overnight outside your child's bedroom. These simple changes encourage more family time, healthier eating habits, and better sleep.

Don't use technology as an emotional pacifier. Media can be very effective in keeping kids calm and quiet, but it should not be the only way they learn to calm down and regulate their emotions.

Do YOUR homework. Look to organizations like Common Sense Media for reviews about age-appropriate apps, games and programs to guide your decision making. Misspellings, pop-ups, and "clickbait" can accidentally lead to a darker internet domain. Equip yourself; learn how to install parental controls and set-up firewalls to safely filter the content available to children.

Warn children about the importance of privacy and the dangers of reaching an unwanted digital audience. Remind children that nothing they do on the internet is anonymous, and every key stroke can be traced back to the user. Once content is shared, they will not be able to delete or remove it completely.

Navigate media mistakes together. Try to handle errors with empathy, and turn a mistake into a teachable moment. Monitor content and children's behaviors carefully for "red flags." If needed, enlist supportive professional help, including the family pediatrician.

Collaboratively, schools and parents play a central role in teaching children to navigate technology wisely. Encourage your child's development and learning, by establishing a healthy balance between their real and virtual worlds. Please review these suggestions and discuss with your child, in order to ensure they have primarily positive online experiences.

*Adapted from healthychildren.org from the *American Academy of Pediatrics*.

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