

Common Sense Media's

Advice for Parenting in a Digital World

Teach kids the skills they need to use technology wisely and well. It's hard to gate-keep in a world with no fences. Parents have lost control of the flow of information to our kids who see too much, too soon. We no longer hear conversations or see what our kids create and share with others. Since we cannot cover their eyes, or shadow them everywhere, we need to teach them how to see and how to behave responsibly.

Help them self-reflect before they self-reveal. This doesn't come naturally to kids -- and certainly not in a world where anyone can be a rock star on YouTube.

Explain the essential facts of how the digital world works. They understand cut and paste. But wait until it happens to them!

Keep an open mind. We don't see the world the way our kids do. We don't help our kids when we judge their lives through the lens of a non-digital world. It's important for us to understand that our kids will spend their lives in a connected world where everyone participates in communication and creation.

Don't be afraid. Parents can't afford to be technophobic. Our kids adopt technologies faster than we do. That means they're often way out in front of us. This fact upsets the parent/child relationship. So get in the game. Have your kids show you how to do something if you don't know.

Share wisdom. Kids don't understand the implications of their actions. But we do. We have to remember to extend our basic parenting wisdom to the digital world. We teach kids to use their words, play nicely with others, respect their teachers -- now we have to extend that to a vast, invisible world.

Pass along your values. One of the most important jobs of parenting is instilling in our kids the values we cherish. But in a world where actions are often divorced from consequences, where kids can be anonymous, and where they aren't face-too-face with the people they communicate our kids can lose their way. As parents, we have to be able to translate our values into the digital world and help kids understand the implications of their actions.

Seek balance. It's hard to know how much freedom to give our kids. We want them to explore, enjoy, communicate, and create. We also want to be sure they are protected or they know how to protect themselves. If our kids are going to thrive with digital media, we must balance the negative with the positive, privacy with protection. As our children grow, they need more independence and privacy. But parents have to be sure kids know how to be safe and responsible before letting them loose. Our kids need to see both the possibilities and the perils so they can act responsibly and seize all that is wondrous and have it enrich their lives as people and citizens.

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5 Essential Facts of Digital Life

- **Kids are the creators.** It's all about participating, communicating, making music, images, videos, and posting written content. And the content that's there? Kids must be able to know if it's credible or not.
 - Everything happens in front of a **vast, invisible, and often anonymous audience.**
 - Once something is out there, it doesn't go away. **Everything leaves a digital footprint.**
 - **Information cannot be controlled.** Anything can be copied, changed, and shared instantly.
 - **Distance and anonymity separate actions and consequences.** Kids think they can get away with unethical or unacceptable behavior because they don't see immediate consequences.
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More Resources for Parents

- Common Sense Media at <http://commonsensemedia.org>

This site has many articles, videos, and reviews of books and movies. Their focus is on helping parents and educators navigate relationships with children and young adults in the digital age.

- PBS—Frontline Documentary titled “Digital Nation.” Search for “Digital Nation” within the PBS website at www.pbs.org. You can stream this video for free from your computer.

This documentary examines our relationship to technology in the digital age. It is packed with interviews with experts on technology and neuroscience from Stanford & MIT as well as young adults and their parents. A must-see for those who are interested in this subject.

- Wired Kids at <http://www.stopcyberbullying.org>

This is a site sponsored by wiredkids.org. The site includes useful quizzes for young adults that test them about their online activities.
