

7 THINGS ALL PARENTS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT KIDS AND TECH

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Parenting in the digital age is hard. New apps, new games, and new information seem to come out every day, and our children are picking it all up so much faster than the adults around them. We've been working with students and parents for well over a decade now, from before social media tools and online gaming were so popular, so we've had lots of experience both understanding these tools from an education and technical perspective, and from a parenting and student growth perspective. Although the tools might be changing faster than we can keep up with, the most critical things for parents to know about technology hasn't changed much at all.

Here are our top 7 things we think all parents should know about kids and technology.



1. THEY ARE MORE SAVVY THAN WE THINK THEY ARE

Most parents are very concerned that their child might fall prey to an online stalker or predator, but research shows that not only are children more aware and conscious of non-peer group interest than we think, but that the numbers of online predators are much lower than initially presented. In fact, it's much more likely to be people known in "real life" that could be a potential threat.

Along with this, children are much more conscious of how and where they share than they seem. The "think before you post" message has come across loud and clear in most school settings, and students are well aware of the dangers of sharing too much online - and how that might impact their college or job prospects. When students have accounts connected with their name, they tend to be more careful about what they post, and in fact, can have multiple accounts so that they feel more freedom to share inappropriate things when not attached to their name.

One thing to try

Have a conversation with your child about making the choice to "think before they post". You can start in two different ways: talking about something they posted recently. Ask them, in a positive way, what encouraged them to post that item? Who or what were they thinking about? How did they make that choice?

have a conversation when your child is taking a picture and talking about sharing it. What makes this picture worth (and appropriate for) sharing? Who and what are you thinking about when you're planning to share it? What do you think about before you hit the publish button?

References / Further Reading

[The Myth of Online Predators](#)
[Report Calls Online Threats to Children Overblown](#)

2. EVEN SOCIAL MEDIA HAS UNWRITTEN RULES

Most adults don't use social media the way their children do, so they may not realize that it's not just a complete chaos in those online spaces. Children are developing social norms, usually unique to their peer group, for each tool they use. We have the pleasure of working with lots of schools around the world, and every group of students we talk to has a different set of social norms for the tool they use. Some examples would be: don't post more than one selfie in a row, and Instagram is for broader school-wide consumption while Snapchat is for more intimate and closer friend groups. Although the way they develop them is different, and the norms they develop are different, the process of socializing is happening both online and face to face. They're learning how to behave using the media of the times, and for the media of the times.

It's also worth noting here that adults are struggling with balancing and managing their online lives just as much, if not more, than their children are. As a society, we are going through "growing pains" as we develop so much new technology so rapidly.

Being open to conversations with your child about how they are managing their time, sharing your own challenges, and reflecting on your progress as a family can be a valuable way to help your child build good habits.

One thing to try

Have a conversation with your child about the "rules" on social media tools that they have developed with their friends. You may have to be creative in the way you phrase the question, because your child may not think of them as rules. You might want to ask about expectations, choices, what "looks good" or what to avoid. You might also want to talk about how it works as an adult, so they know that there are expectations for you too!

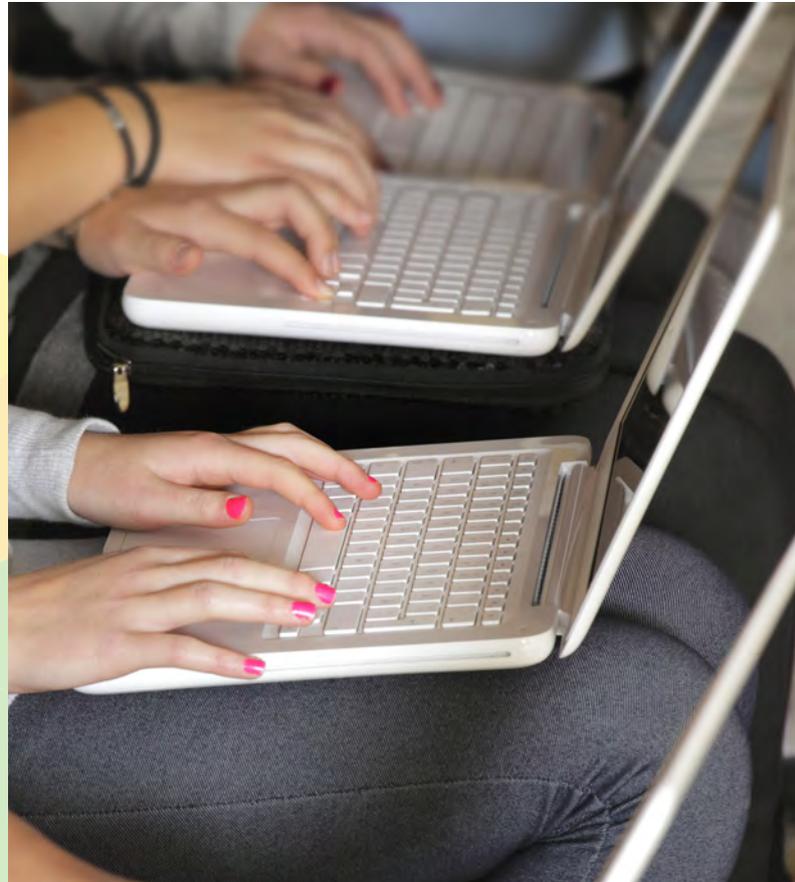
References / Further Reading

[The Unspoken Rules Kids Create for Instagram A Teenagers View on Social Media, Written by an Actual Teen](#)
[What Teens Really Think About Google+, YouTube, Reddit and Other Social Media, Written by an Actual Teen](#)
[Generation X Are More Addicted to Social Media Than Millennials, Study Finds](#)



3. THERE'S NO DISTINCTION BETWEEN ONLINE AND OFFLINE

As adults we talk a lot about what happens online vs offline as being two separate places. We might control more carefully what we share online and where, and most likely we're less eager to make and maintain friendships in online spaces than our children. This is not how they see the world - their friend groups move seamlessly between spaces, and what happens online is just as critical to their socializing as what happens on the playground. This is just one of the reasons your child may want access to a device and social media accounts - without them they might feel left out of the ongoing conversation that moves between online and offline depending on when and where they are. Of course, this doesn't mean that they should automatically have a device, this is just a window into why they might want one.

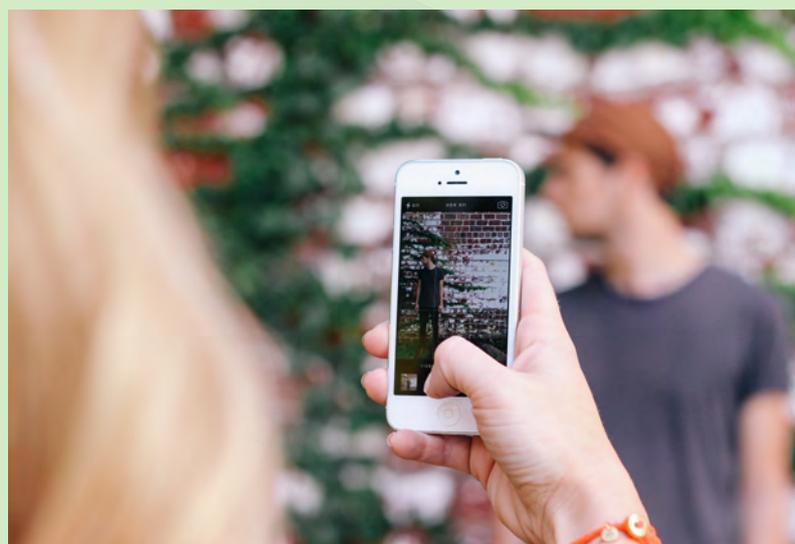


One thing to try

Have a conversation with your child about how they communicate with their friends. Where can they be the most honest? Where do they spend the most time? What do they like about the different ways that they connect with their friends? What happens if they don't have access to a tool that their friends use all the time? Listen with intent, and make parallels and connections to your childhood so that you can support and advise them.

References / Further Reading

[Teens and Social Networking: It Might Actually Be Good For Them](#)
[Teens, Technology and Friendships](#)





4. ONLINE SPACES ARE WHERE TEENS SOCIALIZE

Adults often complain that children spend far too much time online. While this may be the case, and we'd rather see them "outside" or "playing with friends", very often the reality is that this is their only time and space to relax and play with friends. It's this unstructured time that children use to figure out who they are, to explore and expand their boundaries, to make choices and learn from their mistakes. As adults, we can look back on those times fondly, remembering playing outside until it got dark, or hanging out with friends after school until dinner time - usually with our parents having no idea where we were, but knowing we would be home on time.

Today, children's lives are so over-scheduled and over supervised, from multiple after school activities, to sports, to parent-monitored play-dates, to tutoring or special lessons on the weekend, plus extensive homework that must be completed, that children rarely have time to just relax and hang out with friends. On top of all that, in most places in the world, it may not be safe enough to just go outside and play, unsupervised, for several hours before dinner like most of us may have done.

This means the only places they can learn how to be who they are is online.

So, while we are frustrated by the amount of time they spend in these online spaces, for many children and teenagers, this is the only space they have to go through the socialization processes that are critical to growing up. When we blame them for spending too much time online, it's well worth reflecting on how much unstructured social time in a face to face setting they are allowed to have.

One thing to try

Ask your child when they have unstructured time during the day. Do they ever get a chance to just "hang out" with their friends, unsupervised by adults (dependent on age)? How frequently in their day are they in a formal (even if it's a club or sports team) setting versus a casual setting with friends?

References / Further Reading

[Like, Flirt, Ghost: A Journey Into the Social Media Lives of Teens](#)

[13, right now: this is what it's like to grow up in the age of likes, lols, and longing](#)



5. THERE WILL ALWAYS BE A NEW TOOL

It's easy to get overwhelmed with all of the new tools that are released day after day. As adults we feel pressure to know what each one does, exactly how it works, and to be monitoring our children in these spaces as soon as they have an account. While we encourage you to actively learn about these tools, ideally with your children because this will keep the lines of communication open and allow your child to see you as a learner too, the most important thing to know is that they're all essentially doing the same thing: connecting people.

You can talk with your child about the essence and experience of connecting in online spaces, without knowing the ins and outs of exactly how that tool works.

So, don't feel pressure to know everything about a tool before you engage in conversation with your child about that tool, just think about how you would talk to them about engaging with friends at a party or during the school day - that's really all they're doing.

One thing to try

Ask your child to show you how to use Snapchat. You might want to warn them that they should be patient and that you might need a few lessons. Be a learner, listen with intent, and try to engage in this space. See if they would be willing to snap with you, see if you can build up a streak with your child!

6. AGREEMENTS ARE MORE EFFECTIVE THAN RULES

We all need help managing our time online, and finding that comfortable balance that works for us, as individuals, and as a family. Rather than setting rules that your children must follow, creating an agreement, with your child's input, and regular reviews, can be far more effective. To role model the kinds of behavior choices you would like to see your children make, your family media agreement can even include expectations for parents!

Some sample ideas might be: no phones at the dinner table, or free play time online begins after homework is finished. As you add an agreement for your child, be sure to ask them what they would like to see you do as well. Some sample ideas might be: when I'm telling my mom and dad about my day, they are not using any devices.

It's important for your child to feel like you're not only listening to them, but that you're

valuing the experiences they have in their social spaces.

Working together to come up with an agreement for time spent online will not only give you quality insight into what they're doing and why, but it will also provide buy-in from your child, therefore leading to greater adherence.

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7. IT'S THE SAME CONVERSATION

You already have all the skills you need to help talk with your child about their online life. You have a lifetime of experience in friendships, dealing with confrontation or challenging situations, and solving problems. Almost anything that happens in online spaces has a parallel example in the physical world. As you talk to your children, and plan conversations with your children, think about how you might deal with that situation in a face-to-face situation and structure the conversation accordingly.

The hardest thing about adolescence is feeling alone. It's critical for parents to be

part of their child's life as they grow up, and their lives are merged between online and face-to-face. We encourage parents to engage in parallel conversations about both of those spaces so that children aren't growing up online, alone.

One thing to try

Have conversations with your child on a regular basis about their experiences in social spaces - both online and off. Offer your stories and suggestions based on your experience, and be open to hearing how similar (or different) their experiences are.



WANT MORE?

We have 6 online courses that explore more deeply ways to support your child(ren) online.

Each course ...

- is self-paced and can be taken at any time
- will take approximately 5 hours to complete
- can be taken separately, or as a complete set of six modules.

and features:

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- Technology Never Sleeps: from phones, to laptops, to tablets, strategies for effectively managing distractions, and finding balance, with multiple devices at home
- Citizenship in a Digital World: Learning how to build safe, responsible & respectful habits with your children
- Social Media and Your Child: from Snapchat to Instagram, how, what and why are kids sharing online?
- It's a Visual World: helping your child to navigate and manage what they see in a media-rich world
- Embracing Creativity: Going Beyond the Tools: where and how are students expressing themselves, exploring their passions and developing essential skills in creative digital spaces

Purchase all 6 courses and receive a FREE copy of our downloadable eBook:

[“Top 5 Concerns for Parents in a Digital World”](#)

Each chapter of this e-book addresses one concern and includes many tips, strategies and resources, specifically curated to help you manage those challenges.

You can buy just one chapter or the whole book.