

Ten Tips for Parents Regarding E-safety and Screen Time Management

Rapidly evolving technology makes life easier in many ways, but it also means that today's parents need to have a thorough understanding of [cyber safety](#), the effects of excessive screen time on children's health and well-being and an understanding of how to achieve a [healthy balance of on-line and off-line activities](#). At school we have systems in place to filter and moderate pupils' internet usage and we have a programme of education, support and guidance for our pupils to help them stay safe and make good choices in their digital world. Outside school, younger pupils and teenagers are particularly vulnerable to online threats and the allure of social media, on-line games and apps which are all designed to capture their attention and focus.

The following 10 tips are given to help parents negotiate the digital world that our children live in and there are many inserted hyperlinks which you can follow for more information and guidance.

As with all aspects of parenting, discussing all of the below with your children and ensuring an ongoing dialogue regarding their digital wellbeing is key.

1. Set the Ground Rules - and Follow Them Yourself

As soon as your children start to use the Internet, teach them some [basic rules for online safety](#) and screen time management. While each family's specific rules might differ, important rules would include:

- Never share passwords, and always use strong passwords
- Don't enter personal information such as name and address.
- Create user names that don't reveal your true identity.
- Do NOT agree to meet a stranger you meet online in person.
- Tell a parent or trusted adult if you [encounter bullying](#) or suspicious behaviour.
- Agree rules to [manage the amount of screen time](#). Agreeing (and adhering) to a maximum amount of "screen time" during the week and at weekends allows a healthy balance of work, relaxation, family time and other healthy activities.
- Agree on a switch-off time for technology each night – there are serious [sleep-related health issues](#) associated with screen time late at night. After this time, all internet-enabled devices should be switched off and placed outside of bedrooms.

Children are influenced by their parents in all sorts of areas, including the use of technology. Research shows that parents are just as likely to break family technology use rules as children, which gives mixed messages to children and dilutes the importance of those rules. It is vital that if we are to teach our children how to use technology safely and responsibly that we [demonstrate this ourselves](#).

2. Understand the Technology They're Using

Forget the *"I'm too old to understand Facebook"* excuse — if your children are using technology you don't understand, then take the time to do some research.

According to [What You Don't Know Can Hurt Your Children](#), "there is no substitute for keeping up with technology." The article offers important information about the online threats that children face, and includes tips from experts about what parents need to learn in order to protect teens online.

3. Be Aware of ALL the Technology They're Using

Today's mobile devices [allow for online access anytime](#), anywhere, and parents need to realize that simply monitoring activity on the home computer is no longer enough. Smartphones, laptops, tablets, iPods, and even the Xbox, Playstation, Wii and DS systems can all be easily connected to wireless Internet by tech savvy teenagers.

Parents also need to be aware that many teens set up secret accounts. By creating multiple email accounts or [turning to Twitter to communicate privately](#), teens can be creative when it comes to avoiding the watchful eyes of their parents.

[This list](#) shows some current smartphone apps that parents should be aware of.

4. Set the Parental Controls

If you want to automatically limit which types of online content your children can access, then you can use the [parental controls on your computer](#). And if your children use smartphones or gaming systems, be sure to read this article on [Setting Parental Controls on Mobile Devices](#) as well. Additionally, [Apple](#) and [Google](#) both have pages which show you how to setup family controls on their devices.

5. Monitor Online Activity Closely

When it comes to online safety for young people, there is no substitute for good, old-fashioned parental vigilance. Keeping our children safe is vital and so there needs to be a careful balancing act between safety and privacy. Our goal should be to build autonomy within our children in almost every area: finances, emotions, relationships, jobs... and so much more. You will want your child to be able to take care of himself or herself and the same is true for his or her cyber-self. Trying to block and/or monitor everything or eliminate technology completely isn't going to help our children regulate their digital behaviour once they leave your home. That said, many children under 14 don't really have the ability (developmentally) to regulate themselves, so blocking and/or monitoring as much as possible is essential. As they get older, you can expand their cyber freedom as they earn your trust.

- Avoid allowing internet access in private
- Periodically view your browser's web history.
- Visit the online communities your child uses to see what information they have shared
- Statistics show that most teens *won't* report suspicious online activity to their parents for fear of losing computer privileges, so keep the lines of communication open.
- Consider installing monitoring software, it is possible for parents to read emails and instant messages and monitor their child's online activity from any location.

6. Know Who Your Children Are Talking to Online

Social networking sites allow teenagers to communicate instantly and innocently with their friends, but unfortunately, they also introduce the potential for predatory relationships. [Chatrooms](#) can be particularly dangerous, so be sure you know which ones your children are entering and insist on knowing who they're talking to.

7. Learn the Lingo

Children and teenagers today have their own online language, and you can't decode a text or instant message if you still don't know what LOL means. Need a cheat sheet? Stay informed with this long list of [Teen Chat Room Acronyms](#) or get help from this article on [Interpreting Internet Slang and Symbols](#).

8. Use the Resources at Your Fingertips

Cyber safety isn't a topic you need to tackle alone — there are lots of online resources devoted to helping parents learn about and address this tough issue.

[CyberSavvy Sites to Help Parents Protect Children Online](#) lists a variety of online resources that promote cyber safety, including several that are targeted directly at young audiences. [NSPCC](#) is a fantastic website with up to date resources and advice for keep your children safe

[Think you know](#) and [Parentzone](#) are super websites with lots of resources to help parents.

9. Empower Them With Knowledge That Will Last a Lifetime

By continually making online safety a priority, we can help our children learn to make better, safer choices. As parents and teachers, it is our job to protect our children from the threats that accompany today's technology — but more importantly, it is also our responsibility to teach them how to protect themselves.

10. Keep the School informed