

Ask an Expert: Setting Healthy Boundaries with Kids and Technology

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Technology has become an integral part of daily life, but children are at risk in this rapidly evolving environment. Consider these tips to help keep them safe online.

- Make sure the technology is age-appropriate. Select high-quality media that help children connect with the world and understand their environment. Many options are available that can help them think critically, be creative, and engage in the arts, science, and other areas.
- Use technology intentionally (not as a babysitter). Screens can be helpful during short periods when parents need to complete tasks, but frequent reliance on devices to occupy children can limit opportunities for creativity and independent play.
- Set boundaries for screen use. Establish when and how long children can use devices. Mealtimes are a good example of when screens should be off-limits. Some families have boundaries regarding where technology can be used, such as only in shared spaces, and when it is allowed.
- Decide on guidelines based on your child's age.
- Make sure kids are engaging physically. Encourage physical activity and in-person interaction. Time with friends, sports, and family is important so they stay focused on things other than technology.
- Be alert to changes in how children use technology. If they begin to prefer screens over real-life activities or relationships, spend excessive time on devices, or rely on them as their primary form of social interaction, it may signal a problem. Sneaking devices or trying to access unsupervised screens are additional warning signs that something may be wrong.

Ways parents can help:

- Be online. People, children in particular, behave differently when they know they are being supervised

or monitored. Knowing that their parents are also engaging online can be a strong deterrent to participating in potentially dangerous or harmful online activities.

- Set boundaries. Create a plan to clarify expectations. For example, outline safe boundaries, the types of media children can use, the times they can use them, and the consequences if technology is used in a way that is dangerous or harmful to themselves or others.
- Use parental controls. These can help ensure that children do not have access to content that is not developmentally appropriate and that others cannot access them. Check with your provider for assistance.
- Model the behavior you wish to see. If we want our children to be present in life and engage with friends and family, we need to make sure we're not spending too much time on screens and that we're engaging in our own lives.

Contact

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