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5 Keys to Monitoring Kids Online Activity

By Caitlin Bootsma

Technology is here to stay. Not only is it here to stay, it's everywhere! Televisions, mobile phones, iPads, interactive video games, smart watches, you name it and it's hooked up online.

The following are five starting points for guiding kids to use the internet and technology safely and well. Each family may come up with their own limits around technology use, but every family should think through how they want to approach these areas of monitoring online activity.

Use Protective Software: One of the most foundational things you can do to manage what your kids access online is accountability and filter software on all of your online devices. Systems like Covenant Eyes, Bark Home Web Filter, Circle, and options on your router or with your internet provider can help you not only limit what sites and apps kids access and when, but also allow you to see their online activity.

Share Passwords and "Friend" or follow Your Kids' Accounts: Many parents establish some ground rules when their kids are old enough to have their own email and social media accounts. These rules may include friending or following them so that you see what's happening on their pages and/or sharing passwords—though it's important to know that many platforms allow them to block some people from seeing everything. Other rules can include only connecting with people they know in real life and not sharing any personal information such as

address, phone number, email, or banking information. You can go through their accounts with them to ensure they are as safe as possible.

Discuss Photo/Video Sharing: Photo/video sharing should only be done with people they know in real life. Let them know any images they choose to share remain online permanently, and that once they share a photo or video, they can't get it back. If anyone ever asks them to send photos or videos of a sexual nature, they should immediately inform a safe adult.

Keep Online Activity Visible: Consider only having your kids use technology in public spaces in the house. This can help reinforce the message that they should not be accessing anything inappropriate and also make it easy for them to talk to you if they encounter anything questionable. Another option to consider is to remove access to electronic devices during bedtime hours. However, keep in mind that children may take electronic devices with them, or may use technology in places apart from your home, which means that regular conversations are important!

Regularly Talk about Online Activity: It can be easy for adults and kids to become isolated in their online activity; it can easily become their own world, separate from the family. Make technology use part of your dinner table conversation—did they hear from any friends today? Read an interesting article? See something new they want to watch? Like any other area of their lives, technology is a sphere where you can provide invaluable guidance and feedback.

As we know from our own lives as adults in the digital era, the internet has a lot to offer. It also has a number of risks, including safety, online addictions, wasting time, and more. We have the opportunity to help guide our kids how to use the internet safely and well!

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What is Your Opinion?

Do you use a filter or monitoring software at home?

○ Yes, on all our devices
○ Yes, on some devices
○ No
○ I'm not sure.
○ I don't have kids at home to monitor.

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