

Kids, Parents & Technology: Ice Cream to iPads

In days past, children spent their days climbing trees, running around the neighborhood, and riding bicycles. Today—not so much. Twenty-first century kids are wired. They have never known a world without cell phones, Internet access, texting, and video games. Spending an average of 53 hours a week with media and technology, this generation spends more time in front of screens than any other single activity including school, family, sports, or even sleep!¹

When it comes to your child's safety in the virtual world, parents should not rely on one strategy alone. According to a study in the *Journal of Adolescent Health*, children know how to get around home and school filters to access many digital platforms. These kids are tech-savvy!

Experts recommend parents use multiple strategies to keep kids safe in the virtual world. Marci Hertz, a health scientist at the *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention* (CDC) writes, "Unfortunately, prohibiting access to technology or sole reliance upon blocking or filtering software are often not enough to prevent electronic aggression." She continues, "Kids are savvy and can get around filters and blocking software. Just like putting a seatbelt on before starting the car, there are some fundamental strategies parents should observe to make sure use of electronic technology is a safe experience." The following tips will help parents keep kids safe online.

12 Net Tips

- 1. Pray and then talk with your child.** Just as parents ask their children where they are going and who they are going with whenever they leave the house, parents should take the same approach when their children go on the Internet—where are they going and who are they with?
- 2. Biblical foundation.** Using Philippians 4:8, help your child realize that what they see and hear will greatly influence attitudes and behaviors. "Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things" (Philippians 4:8).
- 3. Develop an action plan.** Together with your child, develop rules about acceptable and safe behaviors for all electronic media.
- 4. Talk with others.** Discuss with other parents and church teachers how they have approached technology use with their children.
- 5. Privacy.** Never give your full name, address, telephone number, social security number, or other personal identification information to anyone or any organization online, unless first approved by you.
- 6. Educate yourself.** Stay informed about the new devices and websites your child is using.

Continually talk with your child and explore the technology yourself.

7. Keep your computer in an open area. If your computer is in a high-traffic area, you will be able to easily monitor Internet activity. Not only does this accessibility deter a child from doing something they are not allowed to do, it also gives you the opportunity to intervene if you notice a behavior that could have negative consequences.

8. Monitor activity. Be aware of what your child is doing on the computer, including which websites they are visiting. If they are using email, instant messaging, or chat rooms, stay abreast of who they are corresponding with and whether they actually know them.

9. Control the environment. Many browsers and platforms feature parental controls that help parents monitor what kids can access on a computer - even when they're not in the room or at home. Parents can select what games, programs and websites children can access.

10. Meeting online friends in person. Tell your kids that they should never meet online friends in person – people aren't always who they say they are.

11. Virtual reality. Teach your kids that not everything they read or see online is true. Encourage them to ask you if they're not sure.

12. Limit Internet time. Homework and school research is one thing, but it's been shown that children who spend more than an hour and a half of free time online daily are more at risk of coming in contact with an online predator.

1. Kaiser Family Foundation Report. Jan 20, 2010
<http://www.kff.org/entmedia/entmedia012010nr.cfm>.