

Parenting in The Digital Age

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In December last year, we found that few students from one of Mumbai's prestigious school were found to be indulging in sexual conversations on their Whatsapp groups that included conversations around "gang bang" and raping their classmates. Again, just a few days back, another shocking incident was found to be involving a group chat of teenaged boys around 16- 19, named 'Bois locker room', was exposed on social media for making such derogatory comments and exchanging private photos of girls. An incident which has shaken the belief of people has necessitated the need for parental involvement and supervision of young kids in today's digital age.

Parenting is an art and is becoming a challenging task these days. It is challenging to protect our children from various distractions provided by the excessive use of technology, such as the internet, smartphones, laptops, I Pads etc. Adding to this pressure is the surmounting presence of various social media handles, like what's app, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, snap chat etc. These days, we have children who can't stay in a conversation for more than a minute, or focus on their studies for hours because as soon as they hear that Ping! On the phone, they are off and running to check their Whatsapp message or a new Insta story or a Facebook post.

Parenting in this digital era is very different than it was earlier, as this digital exposure is playing a massive part in the physical and mental growth and development of children. Today's children are far more intelligent, informed and updated about all the latest progress in the world due to their access to technology. From information to entertainment, everything is on their fingertips. Google guru is playing a significant role in providing all sorts of information on a platter to this generation kids. So, though there are numerous benefits of growing up in this digital age, parents cannot ignore the fact that there are multiple negative aspects of growing up amidst a plethora of devices and internet.

In a world, where children are growing up digital, parents are playing an essential role in teaching their children the healthy concept of digital use and citizenship. We all will agree on the fact that we cannot deny a child access to the internet; the only thing required is that parents should teach them the fair use of these technological devices. We do understand that it's not easy to become a digital parent and raising kids in this digital age is getting even harder.

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Today's parents do not have a road map to follow, the experience of the previous generation to guide them, or the benefit of being able to ask their parents for advice. They are the first mums and dads bringing up their children in this digital age. So, we think that the following guidelines can help the first generation of digital parents meet that challenge effectively:

1. Parents should treat digital access as any other environmental factor affecting their child's life

They need to be careful about both real and virtual environments. Set limits for their usage of digital technology. Parents should know their kid's friends: both online and offline. They should know as to what their children are using, all platforms, websites or mobile applications and what are they doing online.

2. Talk and listen

Many children turn to these devices when they feel that their parents are too busy making their career and have no time to attend to their needs. They complain of intolerable boredom and in the process, get glued to social media platforms, where they can connect themselves to the entire world. Make friends, chit chat and discuss all small and significant problems in their life. You need to take out time for your children. Listen to their problems, play with them and involve them in other outdoor activities.

3. Set the right examples

Children mimic their parents. So if parents want their children to make reasonable use of technology, they need to set a proper example before them. If they are themselves going to spend hours sitting in front of computer screens and fiddling with their mobile, their child is going to do the same. So, parents need to limit their usage of technology and spend time with their children, playing, reading or cooking. When their children see them having the kind of fun that doesn't require a plug or a battery, they'll be more inclined to follow suit.

4. At times parents have to be strict with their children

Parents have to be less fearful of their children. They have to make peace with the fact that their children will sometimes be unhappy with their decisions, but they have to be strict with them. Be kind and acknowledge their frustration, but don't be afraid to set limits.

5. Screen time can be shared

Try to take active participation with your children when they are using screens, as it encourages the interaction and the bonding time between you and your child. Encourage playtime or you can watch a show with them and have healthy discussions. Try to interact with them so that they can understand what they are doing and be a part of it.

6. Keep the role of technology to the minimum possible

Keep family dinners, playtime and children's bedrooms away from any digital media. Parents need to turn off the television that they aren't watching because background TV can get in the way of face-to-face interaction with their children. Don't use or charge your devices in your child's bedroom to help them avoid the temptation. This will help encourage better family bonding, healthier habits and a better routine.

7. Don't use technology as an only means of emotional support

Social media should not be the only way to keep the kids entertained. This should not be the only medium to keep them busy or channelize their emotions. They should be encouraged and taught other ways to identify and handle their emotions, think of activities to manage boredom, or finding other strategies to problem-solving.

8. To some, an extent going online should be permissible

Online relationships are part of healthy development. They can help them explore and discover their standing in the grown-up world. Your job should be to teach them how to behave appropriately in the offline and online worlds. Keep that space and communication open and assure them that you are there for them always and no matter what, they can rely on you completely.

9. Educate and warn children about privacy needs

Kids should be taught about the fact that whatever content they share online, can't be removed or deleted once it has been uploaded. Hence, they should be extra careful while uploading their photos, status or any personal message. Educate them about the use of privacy settings and should be warned about the cyber crimes that are so common these days.

Remember: Kids will be kids and they are bound to make mistakes when it comes to social media. You should know how to handle it with care and turn these mistake into a teachable moment. Media and digital devices are an important part of our lives today. The benefits of these devices can be significant. We should just know how to use them moderately and appropriately. Restrict and **ACTIVELY** manage your child's digital exposure. While it is so convenient to buy some silence in the house by giving them a device, using all your parental skills to manage this aspect of their lives is critical for their long term development. So wishing happy parenting to all the parents in this digital age.

References

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