



Parent handout: Understanding your child's online life

'It's time to stop playing that video game. Turn it off RIGHT NOW!'

Sound familiar? Perhaps you've found yourself in a confrontation with your child after telling them to put their phone away? It's often a frustrating conversation; frantic kids or teens angry that they have to tear themselves away from their beloved devices, unable to comprehend why their parents would be cruel enough to separate them from a world that is such an integral part of their lives. Meanwhile, as parents we're left wondering how things escalated. The inevitable 'You just don't understand Mum' will almost certainly crop up at some point.

It can feel like a no win situation. You're worried about how much time they spend online, what they're doing and whether they're safe and if they're suffering from a bad case of FOMO (fear of missing out).

The trouble is, everyone is right. Technology *does* need boundaries and parents have to set them and children do need to be able to socialise with their friends online and have fun on the devices that are defining the 21st Century.

So what can you do?

Hard as it can be, it's important to try to see the digital world through your child's eyes. If it feels as though you are constantly criticising the technology they love, they are never going to talk to you if they need your help, or something goes wrong. It's also much tougher to guide them through the digital world if you can't empathise with their feelings about it. But how can you get inside the mind of a teenage techie – or your wannabe primary school vlogger? Here are our tips for finding ways to walk a mile in your child's digital footsteps.

1 Look interested, even if you're not

We've all done it. It started with pretending to enjoy the Disney film they loved even on the 37th watch.

You don't have to enjoy filming yourself singing on Musical.ly or beating the opposition in a virtual football game but you do have to be interested. Find something for them to explain or show you, even if you're still not sure what the attraction is. The point is sharing their enthusiasm. Don't be the parent that says 'what a waste of time'. It's creative play – that's good enough.

2 Remember this is the social generation

It's easy to think of this generation as the phone-obsessed, bedroom-locked, virtual hermits. The reality is completely different. They are socialising and communicating all the time – they're just doing it differently to you.

Chances are your children have a large network of friends all over the world, even if they may never have met many of them.



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3 Channel the United Nations and negotiate!

We all know that technology can be absorbing (to say the least). It's actually really hard for children to put down their device or turn off their game the minute you ask them to. They're emotionally involved, so instantly pulling the plug can be hard. Negotiate a finish time and give them a 10 minute warning, then five, if you need to.

4 Don't weaponise their smartphone

It's really tempting to take their mobile away if they do something wrong. The trouble is, if you do this, you are turning it into a weapon and the result is going to be messy.

Their phone is very personal and important to them – it's their connection with their friends and taking it away will mean they are out of the conversation.

The fact is, if you use their smartphone as a punishment they are unlikely to come to you if something goes wrong online for fear of having it taken away again. So remember – removal of smartphone isn't a small punishment, it's HUGE.

5 Love my tech, love your tech

We all love tech. Talk to them about why you like it and what it helps you to do so that the conversation in your family is positive. That way they get the message that you 'get it' and love it too and you're all making sure it doesn't take over family time.

6 Be a guide *and* a participant

Try to find things you think your child will enjoy online. It gets harder as they get older but if you can recommend the occasional app or YouTuber, or mention a funny video you saw on Twitter, you'll get lots of Brownie points. More to the point, you will be demonstrating that you understand what they like and why they like it. Speak to their teachers about interesting apps or games that your child could download if you're stuck for ideas.

'When I was your age'

The fact is we all know how hard it can be growing up, because we've all done it. The internet has made it even more complicated – try to remember your younger self and imagine how much you would have loved (or hated) growing up with Instagram, YouTube and Snapchat following your every move. It might help you get through the next frustrating conversation about tech with your child!

About Parent Zone

Parent Zone is the official parents' representative on the UK Council for Child Internet Safety and chairs the UKCISS Digital Resilience working group. Parent Zone is devoted to providing expert information to families, schools and family professionals. It creates, curates and checks the best available advice and information on all of the issues that are caused or amplified by the internet.

The Digital Schools Mission

Create a digitally resilient school community by working together to keep children safer online, while helping them to enjoy all the benefits of a digital world. With resources for parents, pupils, staff and governors, plus a help service and initiatives that adapt as new issues emerge, Digital Schools are part of a community that is building the resilience of their students.

Digital Schools Membership has a wealth of parent-facing resources, information and support, plus many other tools to engage the whole school community. For more information, visit <https://parentzone.org.uk/membership/digital-schools-membership> or contact membership@parentzone.org.uk to request a demo.

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