

Parenting in the digital age

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I'm always on the lookout for good practical advice about kids and technology – the sort of tips that stick in the mind and make you think "Wow – that makes so much sense!"

I had that thought the other day when I read a piece on YourMindYourBody.org, the blogging site of the American Psychological Association. Dr. Stephanie Smith, a psychologist based in Denver, CO, was reflecting on the increasing role that technology plays in kids' and families' lives.

Some of the parents she comes across refuse to allow their kids any access to cell phones or the Internet, while others have no rules at all. However, the majority of parents are somewhere in between. They let their children engage fully in the digital world that surrounds them, but are left wondering: Am I doing the right thing? and How much is too much?

As a response, Dr. Smith offered a few tips – not hard and fast rules that you pin up on a wall, but practical guidelines that are worth coming back to time and time again:

- **Know your own rules, boundaries & etiquette.** Is your Blackberry glued to your hand? Do you answer texts, emails, or phone calls anytime, anyplace? If so, don't be surprised if your kids do it too – and end up ignoring the rest of the family in the process. The first place to start when setting rules for your kids, is to set them – and stick to them – yourself.
- **Learn a thing or two.** Part of being a parent today is having a working knowledge of MySpace, Facebook, and other social networking sites. Parents

should also know the basics of texting and emailing (including how to send and open pictures). This is a safety issue. Your kids are using these tools, and it is essential that parents at least attempt to keep up with the rapidly changing technology.

- **Technology is here to stay – deal with it.** I work with lots of tweens and teens, and the reality is, if they don't have at least some access to technology by the time they are in middle school, they run the risk of being left behind socially. Sleepovers, birthday parties, movie nights, and pick-up basketball games are planned via text and other electronic means. If your kids aren't plugged in, they might be left out.
- **Face-to-face relationships are still – and will always be – essential.** All of the above is not to say that "real" relationships are not an important part of all of our lives. Loneliness can be a risk factor for depression, and virtual relationships just aren't the same as the real thing. Accept the role of technology in your kids' lives, but encourage them to spend time with their friends (and you!!) too.
- **Be a Snoop.** Privacy is great – but not when it compromises safety. Be aware and involved in your kids' technology use. Keep family computers in a public place, talk with them about internet safety (including answering messages from people they don't know, texting pictures of themselves, and sexting), and use technology to communicate with them once in a while (through texts, Facebook messages, etc) as a way to monitor their use.

Comments:

Comment by **Dr Stephanie Smith**, posted 3/3/2010, 8:14 AM:

Thanks for reading the blog post - I am glad you found it helpful! As a mom myself, I am always looking for ways to keep my kids happy and safe too.
Thanks again -

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