

Managing Your Child's Use of Multimedia

From television and radio to video games, social media and cell phones, our kids are “plugged in” more than ever before. Multimedia tools can be a valuable source of information, entertainment and communication. However, excessive use of media can lead to obesity, interfere with sleep and school, and lead to aggressiveness and other behavior problems. Education and parent involvement can help kids benefit from technology while also protecting them from danger. Here are some ideas you can use to help your child use media responsibly, followed by a few websites you can visit for more ideas and information.

1. SET GROUND RULES. Agree on what is reasonable for each child, from the amount of time they can spend online each week, to which sites they can visit without permission. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends limiting entertainment screen time to no more than two hours a day.

2. EXPLAIN SAFETY RULES. When children know what you expect of them and have clear, consistent consequences for not following rules, they are more likely to follow rules and avoid dangerous situations.

If young children are searching for information online, it is a good idea to assist them during the search process and then let them navigate the sites once you are sure they are safe.

Personal Information Let your children know that it is dangerous to reveal any personal information about themselves to someone they meet online. This includes their names, where they live, their ages, the school they attend or where their parents work. Tell them to let you know if someone is asking for this information while they are online. Be sure to praise them when they follow through with this rule. Also, tell your children it is never a good idea to share user names, logins or passwords with friends or people they chat with online. This is personal information and should not be shared.

Pictures Do not allow your children to send any pictures of themselves to someone online without your permission.

Meeting in Real Life Tell your children never to get together with someone they meet online without your permission. If your children make a friend online they wish to meet in person, go with them to a public place to meet the person.

Cyberbullying Have your child agree never to post anything that is mean to another person online. If someone sends your child a nasty message, tell them to let you know so that you can report it to the website.

3. KEEP THE COMPUTER IN A COMMON ROOM. When everyone in the house can see the screen, there is a better chance kids will follow the rules of online safety. Children who have computers with internet access in their bedrooms are more likely to come across inappropriate content online.

4. SUPERVISE. Just as we want to know where our children are physically, who they are with and what they are doing, we need to know where they are going on the internet and whom they are meeting there. When kids are first learning about the internet, use the internet with them.

5. RESPECTFULLY MONITOR ONLINE ACTIVITY. Online activities are unrestricted and open for your review. Checking up on children online for their safety is very different from looking through their rooms for their private diaries. What is available about your children online could place them at risk, while personal thoughts they journal and keep to themselves allow for healthy self-expression and reflection.

Social Media Talk to your children about the dangers of social media, as well. Predators of all types surf social media channels looking for vulnerable youth. They may start out with benign conversations in chatrooms but can rapidly



progress to asking for pictures. Predators may use bribes and false promises or threats to get them to comply. Children with low self-esteem are particularly vulnerable to this type of abuse. Remind your children that anything they post online is discoverable, data lasts forever!

Browser History Check your computer's history. This will tell you what websites were viewed recently. However, many children and adolescents know how to clear a browser history or delete records of certain websites. Fewer children will clear cookie files. If the history is consistently empty, your computer may be set to automatically delete the history each time you exit out of the internet. This is a feature that you can easily disable.

Filtering/Monitoring Software Check with your Internet service provider to see what free filtering and monitoring options are available. Software can track how much time kids spend online, allow them to access the internet during only certain times of day when you know you will be home, and filter content so children aren't accidentally exposed to inappropriate content while doing a search on the internet. Software programs can be a big help, but there is no substitute for adult supervision.

Smartphones If your child has a smartphone, ask your cell phone service provider how to filter your child's internet usage, limit usage and block certain content or phone numbers. You should also password protect your child's phone and have the screen automatically lock after a few minutes of non-use. Teach them to use the caller ID and not to respond to calls or texts from anyone they do not know.



6. TALK TO YOUR CHILDREN. Music, television, magazines, and the internet are all sending messages to your children. Balance these messages with what YOU want them to know about different issues. If your children tell you about something they found online that is a concern, DO NOT OVERREACT. Talk to your child about what you know and believe about the issue. Remember to praise your child for coming to you with this information!

By establishing clear expectations with your children, and supervising and monitoring their online activity, you are being a responsible parent. If you feel your children are hiding their online activities from you, or you believe they might be in danger, it is up to you to find out what is going on.

Websites with additional information about keeping kids safe online:

Web Safety Guides	Safe Sites for Kids & Tools for Adults	Supervision Tools
www.getnetwise.org	www.mymobilewatchdog.com	www.netlingo.com
www.ikeepSAFE.org		
www.cybertipline.com		

HERE'S HELP



Use the **Family Resources on pages 72–78** to learn about a variety of family support services available in your community.