



Tips and Resources for Navigating the Tech World with your Child

Caring for children in the age of technology is challenging! We've gathered some resources and created some recommendations to help as you navigate this process. Every family has different values and expectations, so we ask that caregivers review any material before sharing it with your child. This allows you to assess whether it's appropriate for your child specifically, see how it connects to your values and expectations, and gives you a chance to prepare for conversations that may come up. If the message doesn't align with your values, it may still be beneficial to share it and discuss the ways it does and doesn't align. You are the expert on your child and should explore what topics, content, and messages are important for them. We hope that the information included here is helpful regardless of where your child and family are at in using and discussing technology.

There are many decisions to make during this process: when to give your child access to different devices and types of media, how much and how to supervise them, and how to teach them to be safe. We encourage families to be thoughtful in making these choices for each child. Remember, these decisions do not have to be all or nothing. Consider ways that you can give your child opportunities to demonstrate trust and practice relevant skills while giving them progressive responsibility with media and devices. If your child asks you if they can have a phone or a tablet and the answer is "no" or "not yet", find ways to set that limit while keeping the communication going.

- As you consider when to get your child a phone, [this article from the Child Mind Institute](#) has a good overview of factors to consider.
- If you decide to move forward, take a look at [FOSI's article](#) about steps to take before and after the purchase of a device for your child. They also have [device-specific cards](#) that help you set expectations about your child's use of that device.
- If your child has their own device or spends unsupervised time on the internet, it's time to talk with them about porn. [Amaze has a good overview](#) to help you decide if it's time to have that conversation and [other resources](#) to support you in navigating those conversations.
- Proactively teach your child skills to be safe on the internet. Don't wait for the point when you get them a device. Thorn has [a guide for starting discussions about social media](#) and the [fundamentals of digital safety](#).

All of these conversations can be really challenging, and the issues associated with technology use often feel overwhelming! There are some great guides and resources for caregivers that can help you think about these topics and prepare for conversations. **We want kids to have an open dialogue with their caregivers so they feel like they can ask questions, address concerns, and share the fun parts of this aspect of their life.**

- The FTC has created some resources around online safety and their [Net Cetera booklet](#) is a great general guide for talking to kids about being online.
- The Family Online Safety Institute has a [video series and tool kit](#) about how to be a good digital parent and an [article about preschoolers and technology safety](#).





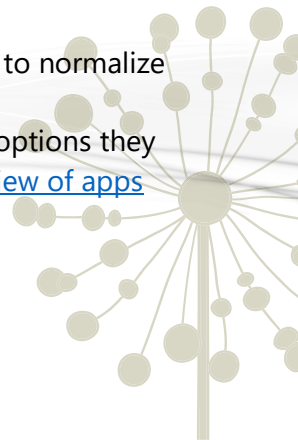
- The [New York Times has a great guide](#) going over consideration for screen time, family media use, and limiting kids tech use.

We encourage every caregiver to have an agreement about the use of devices and internet with their child. If you don't already have one, this is a great way to start a discussion. Simply the process of creating an agreement has benefits, and it will give you common ground to start with if you need to address concerns in the future. The [Family Online Safety Institute](#) and [Common Sense Media](#) have good templates you can use and additional resources below may be helpful in having these conversations with your child. Some benefits of creating and maintaining an agreement include:

- It creates an opportunity to clarify and teach your family's values.
- Caregivers get to communicate their concerns and expectations to their child. Although phones and technology are deeply integrated in our lives, the norms and expectations about using them vary across settings, communities, families, and individuals. Those expectations often aren't explicit. Kids do well if they can! Starting with clear expectations and information gives them the foundation to be safe and successful.
- Kids get to share what the internet, media, and devices mean to them. We know that these technologies are a significant source of identity and connection for kids in this generation. How they use and feel about these technologies is different than the adults around them. Expressing curiosity and empathy about its importance in their lives sets the stage for collaboration and can help caregivers understand how to continue to support your child.
- The process of creating an agreement builds collaboration and problem-solving skills. Gaining the privileges of device use, getting a phone, and other digital access can be a great mechanism for kids to practice gaining progressive responsibility. An agreement can start even before you give your child access to a device or specific content, by laying out expectations for them to meet in order to gain that privilege, and ways they can demonstrate the necessary responsibility in other areas of their life. A good agreement should outline next steps including consequences for if the agreement is broken and how the child might gain more responsibility. Having a set timeline for when you will review the agreement can be a great way to check in about how things are going and consider any changes.

The culture of technology continues to change quickly. Kids are savvy, and not everyone using these spaces is safe or making good decisions. Porn and other inappropriate content is easy to come across without intention. **We encourage every caregiver to consider using parental controls and content monitoring programs as part of the plan to support and protect your child.** There are a wide variety of options out there and some platforms have content filtering options built in, as well as mechanisms for reporting inappropriate content.

- We encourage internet and device use to take place in shared spaces in the household to normalize supervision and make technology use a shared experience instead of an isolating one.
- Familiarize yourself with the apps, sites, and devices your child is interested in and the options they may provide. Protect Young Eyes (a faith-based organization) has a [comprehensive review of apps](#)





based on their risks and features, as well as a [guide to parental controls available on different devices](#). Common Sense Media also includes reviews of apps and websites along with movies and games in their [database of content reviews](#).

- Explore other parental control and content monitoring options. There are many different types of programs for different devices with a variety of features, ranging from free to expensive. Tech Radar has [an article reviewing the best parental controls](#) and Common Sense Media has a [good overview of options](#) that are organized based on your goals.
- Once you decide what strategies to use, include them in your family agreement. Although kids often express that these systems feel invasive, many of these programs filter/monitor content and create alerts so caregivers can do less reviewing content directly. Regardless of the tools used, we encourage caregivers to set the expectation that kids' devices can be accessed by the caregiver at any time.

There is also a lot of creative content and resources directed to kids about these topics. One of the challenges facing kids using technology is that their brains aren't fully developed! **Since the skills of forward thinking and understanding other people's perspectives are still being learned, it's extra important that adults teach kids about the potential outcomes of their actions.**

- NCMEC Netsmartz runs a [website for kids](#) with videos, learning games, and activities about online safety.
- Google has helped develop the [Be Internet Awesome program](#) that has a lot of activities for caregivers to use with their kids to learn and practice skills, including a video game style series of games that help kids practice online safety skills.

It can be really hard to be a caregiver addressing these issues with a child, and it also can also be really hard to be a kid navigating these issues! Outside of these types of resources we've suggested, don't forget the resource of your community. Discussions with other caregivers about the concerns they're dealing with and how they've addressed them is an important way to continue the conversation.

Website Resources

www.fosi.org

www.commonsensemedia.org

www.missingkids.org/netsmartz

parents.thorn.org

www.protectyoungeyes.org

www.rethinkwords.com

www.amaze.com

beinternetawesome.withgoogle.com

