

Talk Tips: Digital Media and Kids

It can be challenging for parents to talk with kids about digital technology. To kids, digital media are a part of life—there's little difference between the "digital world" and "real world" to kids. But it is important that parents get involved in kids' digital media use, talk with them about it, and set house rules early on. Consider the following "talk tips" with your kids and teens.

"How Will This Be Used?"

Whenever new media technology is brought into the home, it can be exciting. But parents should consider its use before it's taken out of its packaging. Where will it be placed? If it is wireless (laptop, cell phone, handheld game), where is it allowed and not allowed? Who can use it, when, where and how often? Most digital technologies offer parental controls and limits, so be sure to set these up right away. Digital media can change the home environment, so before your kids play with their new "toys," discuss expectations about their uses.

"What Are You Doing?"

Many adults aren't all that interested in kids' media. But kids truly enjoy sharing the media they love with parents. Show curiosity. Ask your kids to share what they're doing, playing, watching, reading or listening to. Take a couple of minutes to see what Web sites they like to visit and games they like to play. Getting involved in their digital media landscape shows them that you are interested in their lives and paying attention.

"I Don't Like That!" and "I Like That!"

Parents don't need to wait until a negative incident happens to discuss the use of digital media with kids. Tell kids things that you don't like—and what you like—about what they're doing (or what they might be doing). Oftentimes parents focus on the negative, so be sure to tell your kids the ways that you'd like them to use digital technology, and praise them when you see them doing something you like.

"House Rules"

According to a recent Kaiser Family Foundation study, only about three in ten young people say they have rules about media use in the home. But instituting "house rules" about media is a good way to share your expectations with your children. Perhaps time limits are important to you. Perhaps you don't want media interruptions during dinner. You and your kids can create the rules together, and even post them on the fridge or near the computer. You can always refer back to the "house rules" if kids are pushing the limits.

"Show Me How"

Kids love to teach adults about digital technology. They enjoy showing their "tech-savviness" and mastery of these tools. Reverse roles: Ask your kids to teach *you* something new. Whether it's programming your phone, joining a social networking site or using a photo-sharing service, you may learn a new skill and feel closer to your child. (And it can be fun, too!)