

The Digital Corner:

Writing a Family Plan

By Chappy Thomas



It's hard to avoid the use of technology in our interconnected world as it gives us many helpful tools that can enrich education and recreation, however it is important for us to set boundaries for digital device use in our homes. While it can be helpful for adults to think about and write down a list of boundaries to help self-manage; it is crucial for primary school aged children as they need help to create healthy habits.

A great idea is to sit down with your children and create a family plan. This is a deal that outlines how members of the family will use their devices. Think through beforehand what you would like to include and then let your children feel like they have ownership and input into your family plan.

Screen time can be all consuming for children and highly addictive so setting up device-free zones and times can help you manage your child's screen time. For example, your family plan could include rules like this:

- no devices in the bedroom for younger children
- all screens off in bedrooms after a certain time for older children
- all screens off at least one hour before planned bedtime
- all family members switch off at dinner time
- devices are charged overnight in a place your child cannot access
- daily technology time limits

It's good to start with small changes and work towards your goals. **While your children may be resistant at first, setting boundaries pays off in the long run.**

<https://www.esafety.gov.au/parents/big-issues/time-online>

The Digital Corner:

Classifications

By Chappy Thomas



As parent or carer, it is a great idea to understand what your children are watching and playing. You are the best person to decide which films and computer games are ok for your child to watch and play. The Australian government has classifications which provide rating and consumer advice on all movies and games. **Understanding the classification can help you to make informed decisions about what is appropriate and healthy for your child to watch and consume.** Parental controls can also help you limit access to inappropriate content.

Classification markings are the rating symbols on films and computer games which will tell you what rating the film or computer game has been given and give advice about the strongest content. You can find out more about ratings and consumer advice on <https://www.classification.gov.au/> and other useful third-party sites such as <https://www.commonsemmedia.org/> provide reviews and suggested age ratings.

For example, while many children play Fortnite, its classification rating is M (Mature), which means it is not recommended for children under the age of 15. **Common sense media recommends that Fortnite be played by children aged 13+.** Check out what ratings your kids' apps, games and movies score.

| Title | Date classified | Category | Classification |
|-------------------------------|-----------------|----------------|--------------------------------|
| Showing 1 - 10 of 634 results | | | |
| FORTNITE (Online) | 27 June 2017 | Computer Games | Violence, online interactivity |

The Digital Corner: Parental Controls

By Chappy Thomas



Nowadays most devices, gaming consoles and streaming services have parental controls, to help you manage the amount of screen time and ratings of content allowed. Setting limits can cause some friction between parent and child, however **children respond much better when it is the device enforcing the limits.**

If you have bought your child a phone, tablet or console, **it is normal for you as the parent to be able to have control over its settings.** Even though they may know more about their devices than you, they still need help deciding what is appropriate for them to watch and do. **A simple way to find out how to set parental controls is to google;** “How do I set Parental Controls for...” and then add the device name (e.g., iPhone X, Xbox One, Netflix).

With parental controls, it’s important to keep passwords private from your kids – sharing it may mean they can turn off or modify the parental settings which you have put in place. Before you implement or change your parental control settings have a conversation with your children, talk about why you are doing it and what it means for their device use. **Use this as an opportunity to talk to them about the way they spend their time online and the things they may see online.**

- iPhone: Go to Settings > General > Restrictions. Here you can disable apps or features, prevent access to explicit content and specific webpages.
- Google’s Family Link is an app for parents to help manage their child’s device and account and offers additional layers of protection. It enables parents to set screen time limits, review app permissions (such as their camera, location, contacts), block apps and approve downloads, block sites and filter content.

The Digital Corner: Age Appropriate Apps

By Chappy Thomas



The world of social media and other online apps can be a fun and connected one, however it can be filled with complex social structures, pressures to conform, online bullying, and a false sense of anonymity. **It is important that you know what age is appropriate for your children to be using certain apps.** Primary schools constantly deal with issues that have arisen from students misusing social media and the fallout that comes after.

Most social media platforms are not designed to be used by children younger than 13 years old, and while they have age restrictions they often aren’t enforced. It can be tricky if your child’s friends are using social media platforms before they’re old enough and your child wants to do the same.

If you want your child to wait, here are some options you could think about:

- Could you compromise? What if your child uses a family social media account until they’re old enough for their own? This could give your child a way to connect with friends with your help to navigate social media.
- **Could your child use a child-friendly social media platform,** like YouTube Kids or Messenger Kids? These have stronger safety settings and age-appropriate content.

Many parents have found that after cutting out certain apps, at first there is a short period of withdrawal from their child. However, once that’s over, the attitude and behaviour of their children improves dramatically. **A parent once said to me “I have my sweet little child back”**

The Digital Corner: Passwords

By Chappy Thomas



Passwords are increasingly important in our digital world. They can help to prevent identity theft, and keep our private information safe. Help your child set up a pin or password to lock their phone. In addition to protecting their personal information, this will ensure that no one else can use their phone. Help your child set up strong and unique passwords for their apps and websites. It is important to teach your children not to share passwords with friends even if it might be convenient or seem fun.

Your child should not know your passwords and if your child learns it, then it is time for you to change your password to something more secure. But it is more than fair that you know theirs. Respect of privacy and intimacy are two values that should be taught and respected in the family. However, parents have the right and duty to look after their children's best interests as they navigate these complex environments. So, without obsessing about it, **parents can and should do regular audits and conversations about their children's use of technology.**

The Digital Corner: What is TikTok?

By Chappy Thomas



TikTok, previously called musical.ly, is well known for being one of the most used apps of the Gen Z demographic. The majority of TikTok influencers that have exploded since the app's inception have come from their generation. Of its 27 million monthly users, 69% are between the ages of 13 and 24. **TikTok is famous for being a platform where anyone can go viral on any given day** and many kids use it in hopes of becoming famous.

TikTok is a short-form content platform where users make videos no longer than one-minute which can be set to music, filtered or dubbed over. Users can create and upload videos, remix others' work, or browse content created by other users and famous recording artists. Trending dances to songs like "Renegade" and "Say So" took the world by storm, but Gen Z finds all kinds of useful content on the app in many different categories.

As the app employs popular music, **expect swearing and sexual content in the songs.** Some families have encountered sexually suggestive or even explicit material.

The full TikTok experience is intended for users age 13 and over, however TikTok has been developing Digital Well-Being settings and Family Safety modes for allowing restricted use for under 13's. There are numerous options to determine use and function of the app however note that kids can get around these controls by setting up a new account. **Common Sense Media rates TikTok as appropriate for ages 15+.**

The Digital Corner: What is Snapchat?

By Chappy Thomas



Like TikTok, Snapchat is one of the top mobile apps for Gen Z users. Snapchat reportedly reaches 90% of 13-34 year-olds in the United States. The platform is photo-based but unlike Instagram, photos shared do not automatically stay on a record in the app. Instead, users can send photos to one another that disappear in 3-10 seconds, or they can post stories that disappear after 24 hours. Like TikTok, the app takes advantage of its audience's interest in constantly seeing new content.

While photos automatically delete, recipients can take screenshots. Doing this will notify the sender that the image was captured, but there are third-party apps that don't trigger a notification. When Snapchat first started, it was labelled "the sexting app" because people sent intimate photos, assuming they'd self-destruct. But it's important to remember that the picture could circulate the school by tomorrow morning. **For these reasons, it's best that teens understand that nothing done online is really temporary.**

With a constantly updated supply of photo filters, effects, and fun features, **Snapchat feels like a party. But the app poses some risks:** Snap Map lets friends see each other's location on a map, which isn't always safe; Snapstreaks requires kids to exchange messages for as long as possible, which is a major time-suck; Discover offers some age-inappropriate content; and Quick Add allows kids to connect with a wide circle of strangers.

Snapchat is intended for ages 13+ and users are required to enter their birth date to set up an account, but there's no age verification, so it's easy for kids under 13 to sign up. **Common Sense Media rates Snapchat as appropriate for ages 16+.**

The Digital Corner: What is Instagram?

By Chappy Thomas



Instagram is a popular social network, with the core feature of enhancing photos and videos with cool effects and sharing them across a number of other social media platforms. Photos shared in Instagram are public and may have location information unless privacy settings are adjusted. Also, it's possible to save other users' photos.

Instagram has numerous features and sections. In the app's Direct section, users can send private messages directly to other users, video call and send audio messages up to a minute-long. Vanish Mode lets friends send messages that will disappear, Snapchat-style.

Users can livestream video, can subscribe to other people's video collections called channels (like YouTube). Users can also use the Reels feature to create TikTok-style short videos with visual effects and clips from popular music that they can share in their Instagram Stories or in their main feed. Users can use Remix to build on another user's Reels, like with TikTok Duets.

The terms specify that users not post partially nude or sexually suggestive photos but do not prohibit the portrayal of violence, swear words, or drugs. Users can flag photos for review, but **mature content still appears in some photos and in the comment sections.**

Instagram requires everyone to be at least 13 years old before they can create an account and people must enter their birth date to use the platform. Many children simply lie about their birth date. Accounts that represent someone under the age of 13 must clearly state in the account's bio that the account is managed by a parent or manager. **Common Sense Media rates Instagram as appropriate for ages 15+.**

The Digital Corner:

Regular YouTube vs YouTube Kids

By Chappy Thomas



YouTube is a great place to watch music videos, comedy shows, how to guides, recipes, hacks and more. However, it also contains a lot of content that isn't suitable for children. Unfortunately, on the regular app, it is very easy for videos to auto-play and children to end up watching content which is mature in nature.

YouTube itself can be very addictive for children and lots of parents find it common for their children to have a tantrum when it comes to turning the device off.

YouTube Kids was created to give kids a more contained environment that makes it easier for parents and caregivers to guide usage. YouTube Kids tries to keep its videos family-friendly. It has tools to customise your kids' experience in the app, from choosing what content they can watch, to limiting screen time, to blocking videos.

Children however often want to watch their favourite YouTubers and channels which could be limited by the kids app. This can mean that children may complain about the kid's app and would rather use the regular one. **The kid's app is most suitable for younger ages and may not fly as easily with older children.**

The YouTube Kids app cannot replace proper supervision; but, it can help to limit what negative content is out there. All that being said, **the best way to know how your kids use YouTube is to regularly sit and watch with them and have those important conversations.**

<https://www.youtube.com/kids/>

The Digital Corner:

Be internet Awesome

By Chappy Thomas



Google has developed a pretty **good interactive learning module to help children** understand important things about being internet awesome. Its modelled as a game with four sections.

BE INTERNET SMART: Share with Care

Good (and bad) news travels fast online, and without some forethought, kids can find themselves in tricky situations that have lasting consequences. The solve? Learning how to share with those they know and those they don't.

BE INTERNET ALERT: Don't Fall for Fake

It's important to help kids become aware that people and situations online aren't always as they seem. Discerning between what's real and what's fake is a very real lesson in online safety.

BE INTERNET STRONG: Secure Your Secrets

Personal privacy and security are just as important online as they are offline. Safeguarding valuable information helps kids avoid damaging their devices, reputations, and relationships.

BE INTERNET KIND: It's Cool to Be Kind

The Internet is a powerful amplifier that can be used to spread positivity or negativity. Kids can take the high road by applying the concept of "treat others as you would like to be treated" to their actions online.

Each of these carry the underlying principle of being **INTERNET BRAVE**. When kids come across something questionable, they should feel comfortable talking to a trusted adult. Adults can support this behaviour by fostering open communication at home and in the classroom.

Search "Be Internet Awesome"

Potential but controversial Topics

- Pornography
- <https://www.esafety.gov.au/parents/big-issues/online-pornography>
- <https://families.google/topics/family-wellbeing/>