

RAISING KIDS IN A DIGITAL WORLD

Dear parents of primary school children,

I know just hearing the topic "Cyber Safety" may leave you feeling overwhelmed but I really need you to hear what I have to say. Please keep reading all the way to the end. As a mum of three children (all now teens) I know just how hard it is to keep on top of what our kids are doing online.

None of us grew up in a digital world so we are all learning (and don't our kids know that!). It can be so tough, certainly plenty of upset, conflict and tears over technology in my family over the years! As a psychologist for 20 years, and more recently as a cyber safety & digital wellbeing educator, I see the truly devastating impact of children and young people who are exposed to unsafe situations and inappropriate content online... including:

- Being groomed and/or abused
- Being exposed to pornography and/or hyper sexualised content
- Viewing drug or alcohol themed content
- Watching or playing violent games
- Seeing content related to suicide and self harm
- Viewing horror content and other adult themes
- Struggling with cyber bullying

So I want to share with you today 10 ideas (by no means an exhaustive list) you can start ticking off today so your children can be safer and healthier online.

If you sat with children/young people and heard the first hand accounts that I have, you would not hesitate to make this a priority.

So here goes...

- 1 Make sure devices are **only used in communal areas of your home** and no devices in bedrooms.
- 2 Ensure there is **active supervision** when kids are on devices (an adult must be present and checking in regularly).
- 3 **Set parental controls** on all devices, games and apps. Parental controls are usually found in the settings. They can be enabled and password protected to ensure your child is playing the safest version. For example, Roblox can be made significantly safer by enabling the parental controls (new as of Nov 2024).
- 4 Talk to your children about **the risks of talking to or messaging people** they do not know offline (even if they seem really nice!).
- 5 Reduce the risk of exposure to inappropriate content on YouTube by using **YouTube Kids** app as long as possible and if allowing access to YouTube ensure that **restricted mode** is enabled. I also recommend, where possible, that YouTube is watched on a TV for better adult supervision.
- 6 **Delay kids having any social media accounts** of their own! If you are looking for a messaging app for under 13s, then consider Messenger Kids (by Facebook).
- 7 Any time your children come to you with an online problem, stay calm, take a few deep breaths and **be curious instead of furious**. Remember this is a teachable moment, an opportunity for your child to learn to make more healthy decisions and even more important than that...to learn to trust that they can come to us.
- 8 **Be firm when setting boundaries** and even when kids say "everyone else is on Snapchat" or "all my friends are playing it", make your decision in line with what they need and not what they want... which can be very different! Don't give in! (I get it, this can be so hard).
- 9 **Visit Kids Helpline with your kids** before there is a problem so they are comfortable doing so when they may need it.
- 10 **Download the free, parent friendly Beacon app** to help with all things digital.

I thought it might also help if I share with you the sort of chat I've had with my children many times over the years.

There is all sorts of content on the internet and a lot of it is not suitable for children your age. Just like it is important to eat healthy food to nourish your body, it is important to watch content that is healthy for your brain. If anyone asks you to watch something or do something online that makes you feel uncomfortable you are allowed to say "no". Try saying "I'm not allowed to watch that/do that" and blame your strict parents. If you ever find yourself in a situation that makes you feel yucky, worried, scared or unsafe at all, you can tell me. I promise you won't be in trouble. I can and will help you. No mistake you make will ever stop me loving you - seriously nothing! If there is ever a time you need help and for some reason you can't come to me, don't forget you can talk to another trusted adult or contact Kids Helpline.

I know our children absolutely love what gaming, social media and the internet has to offer but as parents we need to help our kids make safe and healthy decisions. I don't have all the answers. I often worry about whether I'm making the "best" decision. I do know this though... We can change our minds as parents and reset boundaries. So if for example, you have allowed your child on social media, I urge you to re-think this.

Also, us **parents have to be okay with making unpopular decisions**, navigate our way through the tears (theirs and ours) and their anger. If you are already doing this, keep going! Lastly, start having conversations about topics like predators and pornography (even if it's uncomfortable), there's no such thing as a "perfect conversation", just start. When our children become young adults our aim is that they are equipped with healthy habits, accurate information and critical thinking amongst other skills to manage the challenges of our world.

So from me to you - prioritise your self care so that you can show up as your best self and reach out to other parents - hang in there, we really, truly are all in this together.



Kind Regards,

Carley McGauran
Mum and Psychologist

MY FAVOURITE RESOURCES:

Getting started with Parental Controls:
bit.ly/tamingthetech

Starting sexuality (including pornography) conversations:
podcast: bit.ly/sexuality4parents
book: bit.ly/vanessahamilton

Setting up Roblox Parental Controls:
bit.ly/roblox2025

Kids Helpline:
kidshelpline.com.au

eSafety Commissioner:
esafety.gov.au

Beacon App:
Search in the App Store or Play Store

Carley McGauran is a registered psychologist with APHRA and member of the AAPI as well as endorsed by the eSafety Commissioner as a Trusted eSafety Provider with Inform & Empower.