

Moving beyond cyber safety for happy, resilient digital kids

As digital devices becoming increasingly immersed into our lives, it is certainly clear they will continue to play a major role in the education, learning, entertainment and socialization of our children's lives.

This can be a scary prospect for a parent today as we are saturated with news about predators, pornography, cyber-bullying and sexting. And certainly these are real concerns, as is the safety of our children on these devices.

But these devices are not going anywhere and so we need to be smarter when it comes to helping our kids navigate this world. And for me, that means moving away from a fear based approach, toward one that helps our kids get the skills, behaviours and thinking to become not only safe, but happy and resilient users of digital technologies.

Our kids are getting pretty good at keeping their passwords safe, not sharing private information, and thinking about talking to strangers online. All important lessons we need to continue to teach.

But being immersed in this world requires skills and behaviours well beyond safety measures. It needs to be an ongoing lesson in critical thinking, resilience, self-esteem, empathy and the promotion of good habits that they can carry with them throughout life.

Digital Resilience

The online world opens us up to comments, judgements and even abuse from people known and unknown, all coming from different backgrounds and situations, all with different beliefs, and all with a little extra keyboard courage or anonymity. Whilst we would like to be promoting kindness and respect online, this is not always the reality. We need our kids to be able to

recognize and move on from the people whose opinions do not matter. The greater audience and the permanence of the online world also means the effects of mistakes are magnified. They need to be able to withstand the very permanent and public nature of this world. There may always be a party they are not invited to, or a sleepover they were excluded from, so how will they deal with the constant flow of images appearing in their social media feeds?

Self esteem away from the screens

There will always be comparison online. With access to so much and so many, there will always be someone prettier, smarter, skinnier, with more friends, more likes or more followers. We need to be constantly working on the self esteem of our kids, both online and off. Conversations about our self worth, where that comes from, whose opinion matters, what success and happiness really looks like. These all need to form part of the equation, not just how many likes you get on your latest selfie.

Digital skills

Our kids need skills to know how to handle different situations that arise online. Do they know how to abort a conversation that is going badly? How do they speak up in a group chat when someone is being excluded or spoken about in a nasty way? How do they deal with unwanted attention online? Do they have the words to respond to a nasty comment? Should they respond? As so much of their social life and connection to others will be based around online conversations, these are just some of the skills our kids need to have in order to keep those interactions positive.

Good habits

The earlier we start with good habits, the greater chance we have of them becoming behaviours they adopt throughout adolescents and beyond. So start out with your own rules to ensure these habits are formed. Maybe it is no devices an hour before bed, no devices in the bedroom, no devices at the

dinner table, asking permission before sharing pictures of others. Making sure there is plenty of time for friends, extra curricula activities, outside play, chores, homework and good sleep. These all help us be in charge of our time management and the control we have over our devices, so they don't end up controlling us.

Critical thinking

There is so much content online, so our kids need to be really good at determining that which is real, fake, relevant, helpful and worthwhile. This can be a difficult task (even for adults), but a crucial skill. Critical thinking must be an ongoing process every time they watch a video, look at a photo, read an article or connect with someone. Why was this written or produced? Is the language bias? Are they trying to sell me something? Is there research to back up their claims? Would this video have a warning if it was on TV? Is this worth my time? These are just some of the critical thinking questions kids need to be asking of themselves every time they consume content online.

So whilst keeping our kids safe and giving them the skills to do this is of utmost importance, there is so much more to cyber safety than avoiding predators. The emotional and social well-being of our kids and the ability for them to be in the best position possible to learn, grow and thrive are imperative, and will help them become resilient and happy both online and off.

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