



THE 6E'S

OF PARENTING IN THE DIGITAL AGE

- EXEMPLIFY
- EXPLAIN
- ENGAGE
- EDUCATE
- EMPOWER
- EMPATHIZE

Today's youth are growing up surrounded by technology and media. The world is at their fingertips and that comes with incredible opportunities but also difficult challenges. Many parents are overwhelmed by the ins and outs of parenting in the digital age. They are worried for their children's safety, well-being, and health. They are also worried about their ability to help their kids' navigate the complicated digital landscape when it's all new to them, too. Don't fret! Creating a healthy relationship with media and technology in your home is not only possible but can also bring you and your child closer. Explore these 6 E's of parenting in the digital age to empower you and give you the skills you need to level up your parenting skills for today's world.

For Parents of Teens

Exemplify

Well, parents, it's on you. Whether you have a two year old or a twelve year old, your child is watching you probably more than they are listening to you. If you want your kids to have a healthy relationship with media and technology, then you need to show them how to do it! Be a role model. Reflect on your media use. What is your relationship with media and technology? If there are things you are seeing that concern you about your child and their media use, reflect on how your behaviors might be impacting them.

FOR EXAMPLE

You might be super frustrated with how distracted your teens seem when their phone is in their hands. Try finding times where you can go device free to show them how it's done. Next time you are walking the dog? Let the family know you aren't bringing your phone. Getting a quick bite with them after a school event? Make a point of putting your phone on "do not disturb" and not having it on the table. And the next time you are distracted by your phone when your teen needs you, show them how to set it aside and be fully present with them.

Explain

It's really important that your family is clear about the rules and expectations around media and technology use. Conflict can arise when there is lack of clarity around the guidelines. Some basic ones might be "technology free dinners" or "homework before Roblox". There may be more significant ones, too, like "you need to wait for social media until high school." Consider writing a family contract that outlines basic rules for everyone. The important thing is that everyone knows what the rules are and what happens if they are broken.

FOR EXAMPLE

Teens have been interacting with technology for their entire lives, so at this point they probably know some of the basic rules of the road. This is a good time to dive in deeper with them and talk with them about broader issues with topics such as mental health, body image, and well-being. You may have rules about making sure they turn notifications off at night for the sake of a good night's rest. Or, better yet, buy them an actual alarm clock so their phone can charge outside their bedroom and they can focus on sleep.

Engage

We spend a lot of time talking to our kids about what *not* to do when it comes to media and technology. It's important to find moments where you can engage with them around their interests and likes. Just like you head outside to kick the ball around with a child that likes soccer, you need to be willing to engage in their online interests, too. Ask them questions about why they like the apps, games, and platforms they use. Ask them to teach you how to play a Roblox game they love and play with them. Share funny videos you see online with them. Watch some together! Find moments when you can enjoy the positive aspects of technology.

Educate

You may feel like your child is growing up in a world you don't understand. Technology changes quickly, and for some, that change can be overwhelming. It's important that parents learn about the digital world but also remember that many of the experiences that teens have today are grounded in social issues. You have life experience to navigate social situations, awkward interactions, tough personalities, disappointments, and challenges. You have a lot to teach your child even if you might not know all the technology. Use your life skills to educate your child and prepare them for the road ahead.

Empower

If your child loves to sing and dance, you might find yourself looking for voice lessons or dance classes to nurture those interests. What if they love video games? Or taking pictures on their phone? Or Roblox? Embrace your child's interests and passion when it comes to technology. Encourage their curiosity and skill building. Kids today are growing up in a world where they will need to be adept at technology. Find them opportunities for learning. There are so many new skills young people need to navigate the world. Do your best to ensure they are empowered to learn them.

Empathize

When you were growing up, odds are you had more privacy than youth do today. It's important that we empathize with our children about the challenges of growing up in public - where there is not only very little privacy but also an expectation to share about yourself. Your child knows the digital world is complicated and has concerns and worries about navigating it just like you have for them. Listen to them. Be there for them and support them through the ups and downs.

FOR EXAMPLE

You may find that your teenager knows A LOT about technology and far surpasses your tech savviness. You may notice they love to film and edit videos with their friends while you are struggling to figure out how to add more than one picture at a time to a social media post. Engage with your teen by asking them for guidance. As they teach you new skills, ask them about their interest in creating videos.

FOR EXAMPLE

Your teen might be struggling at school and they need to talk to their teacher about it. They are nervous to do it face to face so they decide to write an email. Offer to help your teen draft the email, educating them on what is the best way to communicate, show respect, and suggest solutions.

FOR EXAMPLE

You may notice that the pictures your teen is posting on social media are really great, and they seem to enjoy photography. If their school doesn't offer a photography class, look for some in your community that might be available after school or on weekends. You may also find great summer programs at local universities for high school students.

FOR EXAMPLE

First heartbreaks were always tough, but in the past you didn't have to see the person on social media the next day. You didn't have to decide to stop following them or take down the public pictures. These nuances of relationships in the digital world can be hard. Make sure you express to your teen that you know it's hard to navigate these situations and that you are there for them if they need to talk.