



## Internet and . . .

# School Age Children

School-age children are establishing their identities as individuals and becoming socialized with their peers. They are venturing into the world without a parent by their side; personal roles need to be explored and relationships created. Many school-age children are using the Internet for the first time, and they need as much guidance in growing up online as offline. While schools may teach them the mechanics of using this powerful information tool to communicate with teachers, research subjects of interest, or visit specific websites as part of their homework, it is often up to parents to help school-age kids grow up to be responsible online citizens.

### ***What is your role?***

You can support and encourage school-aged children in their independent learning, partly by helping them navigate new situations and environments, partly by being the safe place to which they can return. As they begin to use the Internet on their own, you can model focused and safe Internet use, provide guidelines and expectations for navigating it safely and effectively, and provide an open avenue of communication and support if they venture into content for which they aren't ready.



- **Have a shared family computer located in a public space.** This allows you to supervise school-age kids' online time without hovering. You can help enforce previously agreed upon time limits, help her navigate the Web, and give her a chance to teach you what she has learned. It also means that you are always present while she is online to guide her if she discovers something troubling or problematic.
- **The length of an online session should match his natural attention span.** School-age kids' brains can focus for about 30 minutes at a time, so she won't really get much more from sessions longer than that. You want her to have many kinds of experiences, so switch activities frequently, mixing up strenuous physical activity, reading, and free play.
- **Use technological controls thoughtfully to help avoid accidental exposure to content for which they aren't ready.** These tools can search and filter certain types of information. However, no tool is perfect, and there is no control that a determined child can't get around. The best way to prevent exposure is to be present with school-age kids when they use the Internet.
- **When they do see something you'd prefer she didn't see, help her process it.** Ask how she feels ("How does that make you feel?"), validate what she says ("Yes, that *is* confusing"), and let her know that she is safe ("I know that was scary, but I'm glad you told me about it. Here's how we can stay away from things like that."). Approaching it in this way will teach your child to take care of herself online and encourage her to come to you when she sees something confusing or scary.

## What can you say?

- **“What is the Internet good at?”** Just as a hammer is a tool that’s good for driving nails and not for hitting others, the Internet is a tool that’s great for finding information and connecting—but it shouldn’t be used to harm. Brainstorm with your child about how to use the Internet, discuss her ideas of what may be good for him and for others, and together develop specific strategies to use the Internet effectively.
- **“How will you use today’s media time?”** One way to set time limits is to budget a certain amount of time for screen media, including TV and video games as well as Internet. Your child can choose from among age-optimal choices once homework, physical activity, a family meal, and adequate sleep are accounted for. Once the time is up, encourage her to move on to another activity.
- **“What do you think of this? How does it make you feel?”** Deconstruct the experience with her. If on a site advertising a violent video game, what’s going on there? What do you think happens if you get hit by a bullet? Ground virtual experiences in reality. Hear from her how he feels about it, then offer your perspective, not a lecture. Seek out resources on how to do this.
- **“Who made this? Why do you think they made it?”** Help your child to understand that media are created by someone for a certain reason. Thus, she should know that it belongs to whoever created it and that it may or may not be trustworthy. Thus, if she chooses to share it with others, it’s important to say who made it. Even if it is unclear who created it, to copy rather than create work is both dishonest and denies them a chance to learn.
- **Respect yourself and others.** The Internet is part of the world that school-age children are learning to navigate and take care of themselves and others in. Teach her that no personal information of any kind should be shared with anyone online, that she cannot really know with whom she may be communicating, and that she should never post any text or images without your knowledge. Make it clear that her privilege of using the Internet is dependent on never saying threatening or hurtful things to or about others, which can have extremely serious outcomes, from personal harm to legal consequences.

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