



**PARENT SENSE** BY VICKI CURRAN, EDS, LPC, NCC

## The world our kids live in

As parents, it's fascinating to watch our children learn and grow. I am often amazed at some of the things my kids can do. Watching them learn to surf or seeing them in the school concert are great experiences. However, there is a part of our children's learning that can also be intimidating as a parent.

Surfing the internet on a phone, friending people half the globe away or playing a video game with peers without leaving the house are also things they are learning.

So how do we teach our kids to maneuver through the world of cyberspace while also preventing dangerous situations from happening? It can certainly seem intimidat-

ing and overwhelming to say the least.

Here are a few ideas to consider implementing:

### BE INVOLVED

Be aware and stay involved. Pay attention to what your kids are doing online. Know the sites they visit and use parental controls to monitor age appropriate content. Most technology has settings for parents to control sites kids can access, rating limits for content and even to set time frames that kids can be on their devices. Have them "friend" you on their social media sites so you can follow without taking an active role in their interactions. Talk to them about the hazards of

not "really" knowing who they might be talking to.

### EDUCATE AND EXPLAIN

Be honest with your kids about online dangers. Tell them why they shouldn't post personal information. Explain why they should only friend people they know firsthand. Teach them about cyberbullying and what to do if they are exposed to it [as the target of it or as someone peripherally involved]. Talk to them about how certain popular online games can expose them to people who may not be who they claim to be.

### DRAW CLEAR LINES

Set clear expectations. Explain the online behavior that

is acceptable for your family. Discuss what is not acceptable and the repercussions for breaking the rules your family sets. For some ideas, visit [www.safckids.com](http://www.safckids.com)

### SET LIMITS

Talk with your children about how much time online is reasonable. If possible, have computers in a room of the house where everyone congregates. Charge phones in the kitchen or in your bedroom rather than allowing kids to use them during night hours. Consider setting time limits on videogames [as well as having children complete a "to do list" before turning on a screen]. The above limits will help address technology overuse, teach healthy usage

habits, improve supervision, and encourage family interaction.

### KEEP AN OPEN MIND

We don't see the world the way our kids do. When we judge their lives through the lens of a non-digital world, we limit their ability to be connected in the 21st century.

It can be overwhelming trying to stay one step ahead of our kids in a realm that didn't even exist when we were growing up. Keeping our kids safe online requires some education on our part. But by taking time to actively participate in our children's online experience, we can encourage them to be responsi-

ble, independent users of technology.

Remember, they may be more savvy when it comes to their devices, but they still don't have the life experience or impulse control they need to make the best choices online. They still need our basic parenting wisdom in their digital world: "think before you speak, play nicely with others, and be respectful."

---

For more information or a list of local licensed professionals, contact Coastal Community Counseling Resources at 732-617-3148.