



Rules of the Road for Parents in a Digital Age

Common Sense Rules of the Road for Parents

Just a few short years ago, there was no such thing as Facebook, cyber bullying, iPhones, YouTube or texting. But we now live in a rapidly changing media and tech world where our kids are far more plugged in digitally than we are. In fact, according to a 2010 study conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation, kids are spending nearly 7.5 hours per day interacting with media.

It can be incredibly tough to keep up with all this technology. But as all parents know, our kids learn from us — and not just from what we say, but more importantly from what we do. Even if we're a bit clueless about our kids' online and cell phone lives, we can still help them learn to use technology wisely.

The Kaiser study also found that children whose parents make an effort to curb media use — either through setting up time limits or by limiting access itself — spend less time with media. The bottom line? Good, safe online and cell phone behaviour begins at home.

Some facts

- ◆ Even if you think you're clueless, you're still your kid's teacher.
- ◆ Our children learn from us — not from what we say, but from what we do.
- ◆ Good, safe online behaviour begins at home.

Here's what you can do:

1. **Model good behaviour.** If we're on our Blackberries or iPhones at dinner, why will our kids listen to us when we tell them to turn theirs off?
2. **Pay attention.** We have to know where our kids are going online — and what they're doing there.
3. **Impart our values.** Cheating, lying, being cruel — they're just not OK. Right and wrong extends to online and mobile life.
4. **Establish limits.** Phone time, video download time, destinations. There really is a right time and place for everything.
5. **Encourage balance.** Get kids involved in offline activities, especially activities that don't require or allow cell service.
6. **Make kids accountable.** Using digital media is a privilege. Make sure your kids earn it.
7. **Explain what's at stake.** Remind your kids that what they do today can be abused by someone tomorrow.
8. **Find ways to say "yes."** This means that you have to do some homework and know the sites your children visit, the songs they download, etc. — and find ways to use technology that lets us say "yes" more often than we say "no."
9. **It's not rocket science.** Learn to text, send a mobile photo, set up a Facebook page, upload a video. Or have your kids show you how. It's impossible to guide what you don't understand. Not only that, but think of all the anxiety you can avoid by knowing how things work.
10. **Lighten up, embrace their world, and enjoy the possibilities together.** None of us want digital divides in our relationships with our kids. It's up to us to learn something new, join the fun, and help our kids make the most of digital technologies.