

Parenting in a Digital Age

Introduction

What Students Wish Their Parents Would...

The Goals of Parenting in the Digital Age

Framework to Establish Your Families Rules and Expectations

Terms of Service, COPPA, and Social Media Apps

Digital Citizenship at Quest

Additional Resources

Introduction

National Digital Citizenship week was celebrated this week, from October 21st through October 25th. Around the country, schools and a variety of web sites held events and provided resources designed to educate teachers, parents, and students around this important topic. As Common Sense Media shares on their website

(<http://www.commonsensemedia.org/digitalcitizenshipweek>):

Every day, your students (*including Quest Academy students*) are tested with each post, search, chat, text message, file download, and profile update. Do they connect with like minds or spill too much information? Do they behave creatively or borrow ideas recklessly? Do they respect relationships or inadvertently damage reputations?

School and the world that your students inhabit is different than the one you attended. Instead of living in an information desert, where access to information was limited, often gated (inside libraries or schools), with gatekeepers (teachers, parents, and librarians), today's students live in an information ocean. This is an "always on" world, where the information is readily available at our fingertips through a variety of communications tools, mobile phones, iPads, eReaders, and computers day and night. This exponential growth of both the types of devices and the ability to communicate has blurred the lines between Work or School Life and our Personal Lives. I know that I too, often feel the tension and stress around the need to check email in the evenings and weekends.

So how can we best support our children in this age, to maintain the balance between the advantages these new technologies provide and digital distractions?

What Students Wish Their Parents Would...

I have been fortunate to be invited to speak about both digital citizenship topics to parent groups and to work with schools to develop strategies to help educate their parents around the topic of digital citizenship at national and regional conferences and workshops. Last winter, I presented at the NAIS Conference, where one of my co-presenters, Marti Weston, shared these results gathered from her students at the Georgetown Day School about what they wish their parents would:

1. Try to learn a lot more about computers in particular and technology in general.
2. Stop saying they don't know much about technology (mom's especially)
3. Not use Blackberries and phones at sports games and school events.
4. Don't talk on the phone so much in the car.
5. Learn to play some of the kids' online games.
6. Understand more about helping with searches on the Internet.
7. Understand how hard it is to learn the technology rules and regulations and not always threaten to take away technology access when there's a problem.
8. Stop automatically saying that new things like Wikipedia are questionable.
9. Try not to act dumb about technology. Even if you don't understand something, please act like you want to learn new things.

(<http://mediatechparenting.net/2013/09/07/advice-from-digital-kids-to-parents/>)

These sentiments are being echoed by psychologist Catherine Steiner-Adar, in her new book *The Big Disconnect: Protecting Children and Families in the Digital Age*. Dr. Steiner-Adar warns parents about the pitfalls and dangers of parenting today, including

Parents have lost their job—**sometimes unwittingly abdicated it**—at a time when they are most desperately needed by kids who are not only growing up faster but growing into a world that no longer protects childhood.

In some ways, to our dismay, it (technology) **can replace us as the source of values, information, context, community, and coaching in our children's lives.**

The New Role of Parenting in the 21st Century

Both Dr. Steiner-Adar and I agree that the 21st Century parent has two goals as it relates to raising children in this digital age. They are:

To develop a healthy relationship with technology. This includes taking charge and unplugging from it, to model that for our children, and to find ways to use technology to our genuine advantage as families. Parents need to model the balanced use of technology, fully engaging with our children (while disengaging with technology, not even taking a quick peek at your email). Your children monitor what you are doing even when you think they are not looking.

To help students develop empathy, sort the social clues, and make sense of the conflicting messages that they are being bombarded by all around them.

Brain-research shows that students' prefrontal cortex, the areas used for executive functioning, making sense of the world, and developing empathy, is not fully developed until the mid-20s. So it is being proven that 25 is the new 18. Students, especially 5th - 8th graders, are going through rapid changes in their brains which prevents them from effectively making good decisions. While we may not know about the technologies specifically, we can help them make the best decisions and provide the wisdom and experience that they crave in using them.

Framework to Establish Your Families Rules and Expectations

In my work in educational technology over the past 25 years, I have found that children crave structure and consistency. When asking students about their families rules and expectations for technology use, they will often reply that their family's rules and expectations don't exist, are unclear, or are applied inconsistently. As a parent, I realize that while I think that I am clearly communicating, that my children did not or were not ready to hear what I said.

Over the years, I have developed the following guidelines for parents as they establish their family's rules. Each family is going to need to develop their own rules which reflect the values of that family and no two families will have the same set of rules. Additionally, since each child is different, families may need to modify the expectations and guidelines for each child. The major topics include:

Create, Communicate, and Post Rules and Expectations

- Set time limits for screen time. The American Pediatric Association's recommendations is no screen time before the age of two and a limit of three hours total screen time for 8th graders
- Make sure that technology remains in public areas, adopt open door policies for the use of laptops and Internet connected devices in the home
- Set up filtering where appropriate. Parents may want to install filters, like OpenDNS to provide network level filtering on their home networks for all devices.
- Establish consequences for non-compliance of household rules and expectations and be consistent with application of the consequences.
- Learn about the technologies yourself
- Make a decision based on what is right for your family for when they should start using email, cell phones, etc. "Everyone" will not always have device A and sometimes, your child is not ready for devices they desire.

Establish the Expectation for Open Communication

- Monitor your child's moods and feelings
- Communicate with your child online.
- Peruse the history on your web browser – no history should raise a yellow flag
- Have your children teach you about what they are doing
- Don't be afraid to parent and be the bad guy
- As your child gets older and has built trust, require that your child place their passwords for their social networking sites and email in a sealed envelope, to be used in the case of an emergency

Know What Content Your Children Are Accessing

- Learn about online places your kids are visiting - i.e. can they chat freely with others? Are chats moderated?
- Learn about the online capabilities of video game devices
- Learn about the rating systems used for games and software. Content guides are available, as with traditional media, to help you make choices
- Use an extended network, other friend's parents and relatives to help monitor what your child is doing online.

Model the Safe and Appropriate Use of Social Networks and Devices

- Follow the law and use hands free headsets when possible
- Do not text and drive
- Think about what you post. Realize that everything you post, no matter how much you try, is public.
- Be open and transparent in your use of social technologies and text messaging

Terms of Service, COPPA, and Social Media Apps

When I listen to Quest students in the hallway, I often hear them talking about uploading photos to Instagram or posting various different social media sites, even from our lower school students. However, many of the sites and apps that these students are using clearly state in their terms of service, all of the fine print that most of us ignore before accepting or loading the application, that users of the service need to be over the age of 13. The reason that these services and apps have this limitation is to comply with the Child Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA). COPPA was established by the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) to protect our children from predatory practices by businesses to share data and information about the users of its service.

When students create these accounts with or without the consent of their parents, they expose themselves to becoming known. Moreso, danah boyd, a Microsoft Principle Researcher and Fellow at Harvard's Berkman Center for the Internet and Society, suggests that if parent's consent to lying about a child's age to use a social media site, it sets the precedent to lie about one's age later in a child's life, when the stakes and dangers may be higher.

(<http://journals.uic.edu/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/3850/3075>) Parents need to carefully consider the implications of their decisions and model appropriate behaviours about the responsible use of technology for their families.

danah also explains that social media has replaced the street corner and parks of our childhood. They have become the spaces where children go to hang out, with multiple aged children, learning about themselves alongside their peers. When I was growing up, this included the mall, roller rinks, parks, and the neighborhood. They need these spaces to grow and develop in an age where playdates are scheduled and most activities are organized by adults. As a result, children seek to occupy spaces where adults are not. This has lead to adolescents moving in and out of spaces. Eight years ago, MySpace was all the rage and many adolescents are abandoning Facebook as more adults begin to create and share in those spaces.

Listed below are some of the spaces that students currently are moving to and some information for parents to consider when deciding whether this is an appropriate tool for their children.



Twitter

What parents need to know

Public tweets are the norm for teens. Though you can choose to keep your tweets private, most teens report having public accounts ([Pew Internet & American Life Project](#), 2013). Talk to your kids about what they post and how a post can spread far and fast.

Updates appear immediately. Even though you can remove tweets, your followers can still read what you wrote until it's gone. This can get kids in trouble if they say something in the heat of the moment.

It's a promotional tool for celebs. Twitter reels teens in with behind-the-scenes access to celebrities' lives, adding a whole new dimension to celebrity worship. You may want to point out how much marketing strategy goes into the tweets of those they admire.



Instagram

Why it's popular

Instagram unites the most popular features of social media sites: sharing, seeing, and commenting on photos. Instagram also lets you apply fun filters and effects to your photos, making them look high quality and artistic.

What parents need to know

Teens are on the lookout for "Likes." Similar to Facebook, teens may measure the "success" of their photos -- even their self-worth -- by the number of likes or comments they receive. Posting a photo or video can be problematic if teens post it to validate their popularity.

Public photos are the default. Photos and videos shared on Instagram are public and may have location information unless privacy settings are adjusted. Hashtags can make photos even more visible to communities beyond a teen's followers.

Mature content can slip in. The terms of service specify that users should be at least 13 years old and shouldn't post partially nude or sexually suggestive photos -- but they don't address violence, swear words, or drugs.



SnapChat

Why it's popular

Snapchat's creators intended the app's fleeting images to be a way for teens to share fun, light moments without the risk of having them go public. And that's what most teens use it for: sending goofy or embarrassing photos to one another. Snapchats also seem to send and load much "faster" than email or text.

What parents need to know

Many schools have yet to block it, which is one reason why teens like it so much ([Pew Internet & American Life Project](#), 2013).

It's a myth that Snapchats go away forever. Data is data: Whenever an image is sent, it never truly goes away. (For example, the person on the receiving end can take a screenshot of the image before it disappears.) Snapchats can even be recovered.

It can make sexting seem OK. The seemingly risk-free messaging might encourage users to share pictures containing inappropriate content.



Tumblr

Why it's popular

Many teens have tumblrs for personal use -- sharing photos, videos, musings, and things they find funny with their friends. Tumblelogs with funny memes and gifs often go viral online, as well (case in point: "[Texts from Hillary](#)").

What parents need to know

Porn is easy to find. This online hangout is hip and creative but sometimes raunchy. Pornographic images and videos, depictions of violence, self-harm, drug use, and offensive language are easily searchable.

Privacy can be guarded, but only through an awkward workaround. The first profile a member creates is public and viewable by anyone on the Internet. Members who desire full privacy have to create a *second* profile, which they're able to password protect.

Posts are often copied and shared. Reblogging on Tumblr is similar to re-tweeting: A post that's reblogged from one tumblelog then appears on another. Many teens like -- and in fact, want -- their posts reblogged. But do you really want your kids' words and photos on someone else's page?



Google+

Why it's popular

Teens aren't wild about Google+ yet. But many feel that their parents are more accepting of it because they associate it with schoolwork. One popular aspect of Google+ is the addition of real-time [video chats in Hangouts](#) (virtual gatherings with approved friends).

What parents need to know

Teens can limit who sees certain posts by using "circles." Friends, acquaintances, and the general public can all be placed in different circles. If you're friends with your kid on Google+, know that you may be in a different "circle" than their friends (and therefore seeing different information).

Google+ takes teens' safety seriously. Google+ created age-appropriate privacy default settings for any users whose registration information shows them to be teens. It also automatically reminds them about who may be seeing their posts (if they're posting on public or extended circles).

Data tracking and targeting are concerns. Google+ activity (what you post and search for and who you connect with) is shared across Google services including Gmail and YouTube. This information is used for targeting ads to the user. Users can't opt out of this type of sharing across Google services.



Why it's popular

Videos run the gamut from stop-motion clips of puzzles doing and undoing themselves to six-second skits showing how a teen wakes up on a school day vs. a day during summer. Teens usually use Vine to create and share silly videos of themselves and/or their friends and family.

What parents need to know

It's full of inappropriate videos. In three minutes of random searching, we came across a clip full of full-frontal male nudity, a woman in a fishnet shirt with her breasts exposed, and people blowing marijuana smoke into each other's mouths. There's a lot of funny, clever expression on Vine, but much of it isn't appropriate for kids.

There are significant privacy concerns. The videos you post, the accounts you follow, and the comments you make on videos are all public by default. But you *can* adjust your settings to protect your posts; only followers will see them, and you have to approve new followers.

Parents can be star performers (without knowing). If your teens film you being goofy or silly, you may want to talk about whether they plan to share it.



Ask.fm

Why it's popular

Although there are some friendly interactions on Ask.fm -- Q&As about favorite foods or crushes, for example -- there are lots of mean comments and some creepy sexual posts. This iffy content is part of the site's appeal for teens.

What parents need to know

Bullying is a major concern. [The British news website MailOnline reported that the site has been linked to the suicides of several teens.](#) [Talk to your teens about cyberbullying](#) and how anonymity can encourage mean behavior.

Anonymous answers are optional. Users can decide whether to allow anonymous posts and can remove their answers from streaming to decrease their profile's visibility. If your teens do use the site, they'd be best turning off anonymous answers and keeping themselves out of the live stream.

Q&As can appear on Facebook. Syncing with Facebook means that a much wider audience can see those Q&As.

Digital Citizenship at Quest

At Quest, we are taking new strides to teach digital citizenship within the school. We are not simply talking about digital citizenship, but instead are building upon the 12 pillars of character which are a hallmark of our character education which is taught throughout the school.

An integral component of our new STEAM curriculum in the middle school is an exploration of these topics in each of the middle school grades. Students study what it means to be a citizen in these digital spaces, rather than focusing on negative behaviours and bullying. We have created our curriculum from combining Common Sense Media's Digital Literacy and Citizenship curriculum (<http://www.commonsensemedia.org/educators/curriculum>) and the principles laid out in Howard Rheingold's book, *Net Smart: How to Thrive Online*. The topics are students study are:

Paying attention to what we are working on, identify when we are multitasking, being mindful when are working, and metacognition

Infotension - Asking how we are spending our time so students are focused on completing a task rather than serendipitously browsing and exploring

Evaluate Sources for Bias and Authenticity

Power Law of Participation - How to use social media and communication ideas to spread ideas

Curation of tools, information, and what we have created.

Additionally, we have begun our discussions with lower school students and will continue to raise these topics and issues when appropriate within a variety of curricular activities.

Additional Resources

The technology, applications, and communications technologies are rapidly changing. How can one keep up with all of the latest changes?

Here are some sites to assist you in that challenge

Common Sense Media - <http://www.commonsensemedia.org/>

A great site on all types of media

Graphite - <http://www.graphite.org/>

A web site from the editors at Common Sense Media which rates apps and web sites, allowing parents to make informed decisions about which tools their families can use.

Media! Tech! Parenting! - <http://mediatechparenting.net/>

A great blog from a long-time friend, educator, and co-presenter, Marti Weston at Georgetown Day School.

Still Learning - <http://jaymelinnjohnson.wordpress.com/>

This is a great blog written by Jayme Johnson, an educator and friend of mine at the Village School in California

Learning Online: Real Answers to Real Questions -

<http://www.aplatformforgood.org/blog/entry/learning-online-real-answers-to-real-questions>

A brilliant blog post written by another long-time friend, Susan Davis, an educator in Houston Texas. This post is full of additional resources from Joyce Valenza about research and a way to create an email account for your children's social media accounts that you can monitor using Gmail.

11 Sites and Apps Teens are Heading to After Facebook -

http://www.commonsensemedia.org/blog/11-sites-and-apps-kids-are-heading-to-after-facebook?utm_source=092313_Parent+Default&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=weekly

Additional apps and sites other than those listed in the document.