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Safe Space

وزارة المواصلات والاتصالات
MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS

Guide to Digital Parenting

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Contents

Introduction to digital parenting	4
Parenting in the digital age defined	6
Online vs offline digital parenting	8
Online vulnerabilities amongst children	10
Psychological, physiological & unknown risks of the tech world	11
What kind of a digital parent are you	12
Digital parenting skills you can use today	15
Digital parenting scenarios	16
FAQs	20
In conclusion	22
Further reading/resources for parents	23

Introduction to Digital Parenting

Technology is ubiquitous and technological advances have certainly made life easier. There are wonderful apps that can help you manage shopping lists and family schedules that can tell you exactly when the children have dentist's appointments, football matches, dance rehearsals and the like. There are even apps with advice on how to take care of a baby or how to calm an older child through meditation.

However, one area where technology has not made life easier, is parenting a child in the digital age.

Parents may second-guess their parenting skills or struggle with guilt as they allow more and more technology in their homes. Parents may have a hard time balancing how much time their children spend watching YouTube videos, playing online games or networking on social media. Parents may also feel like they are taking the easy way out when they handover a smartphone in order to sooth a fussy child in a restaurant or when they turn a blind eye to the amount of time their child is spending online.

Parents of older children may also have difficulties as their children try to self-regulate their technology and social media use. Older children also have to navigate a technological maze of social skills and behaviour where there is not a lot of room for error. Older children are faced with peer pressure and insecurities as they grow up in the digital age.

These challenges are not limited to children – parents themselves may struggle with their own overconsumption of internet, technology and social media and perhaps they may not realize that they need to be a role model for their children. Today, parents must choose between what is easy and available and what is the right balance for their family.

Parents have to know how to use technology to their benefit and for the benefit of their families. Parents have to know that these man-made innovative tools are here to make our lives easier, not enslave us to pocket-sized devices.

This publication is produced by the Digital Society Department of the Ministry of Transport and Communications in an effort to provide guidance and support to parents and caregivers of young children in the digital age.

Parents have to know when to step away and when to dive in

Parenting in the Digital Age Defined

Parenting in the digital age means raising children and young people in an environment filled with internet, technology and social media

Parenting in the digital age can be a daunting task, but successful digital parenting means:

1. Open communication with your child about internet risks and benefits.
2. Regular involvement in your child's internet activities.
3. Active protection of your child's digital reputation and digital identity.
4. Learning with your child the opportunities that internet can present.
5. Protecting your child from the dangers that internet may pose.
6. Bringing your offline parenting skills to the online world.

Despite a parent's level of technological knowledge and experience, the ability to listen to your child, help them steer clear of dangerous or threatening situations and make the right choices as they engage in online activities, are all aspects of Digital Parenting.

Online vs Offline Digital Parenting

As role models, digital parents have a key responsibility in shaping how their children use digital media. In a society where children are brought up to uphold religious and cultural values in their everyday lives, digital parenting can also be based on such values. Follow the same ethical principles online that you advocate offline.

e-Respect

e-Equality

If you see injustice online be an "upstander" and advocate for equality and fair treatment.

e-Courtesy

Demonstrate respect to others whether on social media networks, gaming chats or other chat services.

e-Patience

THINK before posting or commenting, as to whether your contribution will be "Truthful, Helpful, Informative, Necessary, Kind."

e-Honesty

e-Trustworthiness

Contribute to the digital environment in a positive manner by being a reliable and considerate member of the internet.

e-Authenticity

Disregard peer pressure or online tactics of viral influences: stay true to yourself.

e-Integrity

When gaming, chatting, sharing, posting, video-streaming, or engaging in other online activities, maintain a high moral standard.

e-Responsiblity

e-Dignity

When online exercise self-discipline and self-respect, be an online ambassador for Qatar.

e-Modesty

Exercise humility and lack of pretention in posts, comments, photos and online activities.

e-Privacy

Protect your own privacy and the privacy of others.

Parents in Qatar, whether expatriate or native, are fortunate to live in a country where the fundamental beliefs in justice, freedom, benevolence, equality and high morals are so readily apparent. It is the responsibility of parents and caregivers to extend those beliefs to the online environment.

Online Vulnerabilities amongst Children

Some facts and figures

Did you know the following about youth in Qatar...

Source: Qatar's Digital Natives: A deeper look in the everyday use of technology by youth in Qatar.

Psychological, Physiological & Unknown Risks of the Tech World

Internet, technology and social media present many opportunities for children and young people today, and at the same time, children and young people are exposed to many risks that are linked to social media sites, online gaming platforms and technology.

Other risks from being online range from the physiological (i.e., eye strain, headaches, neck pains, tendency towards obesity), or the psychological (addictions, problematic use).

One certainty for all child protection experts is that with the advent of artificial intelligence, virtual reality, augmented reality, home devices, robots and virtual assistants, our children will be growing up in a digital environment where the risks are unknown and unproven.

What Kind of Digital Parent Are You?

You are a Digital Enabler if you give complete freedom to your children when it comes to access to devices and the internet. You are mostly hands-off and you trust your child to make their own choices.

Children of Digital Enablers explore the online world with no/limited guidance and they most often do not develop the appropriate netiquette.

You are a Digital Limiter if you severely limit screen time and closely monitor the content that your children are exposed to.

Children of Digital Limiters fail to develop the skills for online communication and the necessary critical thinking to keep themselves out of trouble. As a result, the children of Limiters, once they get online, are much more likely to engage with inappropriate material or to behave inappropriately.

You are a Digital Mentor if you play an active role in shaping your child to be a digital citizen. You use digital media with your child and you guide them in the use of digital media. You help your child develop critical thinking about what they see online and you also coach them on how to behave online.

Children of Digital Mentor: thrive online because they have inherited their
parents' know-how and engagement.

Source: www.alexandrasamuel.com

Digital Parenting Skills You Can Use Today

Awareness

Stay updated on trends and issues by consulting the Safespace.qa website on a regular basis.

Speak with parents in your extended family and community about online safety topics and challenges.

Share lessons and tips that work with your family.

Have discussions with your child's school officials regarding the use of technology in the classrooms and lessons on digital citizenship and digital literacy.

Conversations

Stay involved in your child's online activities by talking with them and showing interest in their online world.

Reinforce your views on honesty, respect and responsibility as you converse with your children.

Ask your children to show you their favorite websites or the latest app or online game.

Use the WWWW approach as a guide when communicating with your children.

Who are they talking to? What are they doing online?
Where are they going online? When are they going online?

Listen and respond when your children and young people share their concerns or ask difficult questions.

Engagement

Have a continuous dialogue with your children about the benefits and risks of technology.

Research devices, apps, websites, programs to be used by your children and teenagers.

Show your children and teenagers, articles, videos and other concrete examples of using technology well.

Show them how to use a new app, game or device.

Play video games with your children and enjoy the online world together.

Enrol your children in workshops so they can explore technology and internet further.

Digital Parenting Scenarios

Now that you have been introduced to the concept of digital parenting, please take a moment to reflect upon how you would act, react or intervene in each of the following scenarios:

Your child gets frantically upset when she can't get online.

Is your child communicating with someone that she shouldn't be?

Is your child irritated because she's been working on a school project and it's due?

Talk to your child, help her deal with her emotions.

As always, watch how your child interacts with internet or tech and adapt your strategy accordingly.

Your child is fascinated by bizarre videos on YouTube where cartoon characters are depicted in inappropriate settings.

Even though you may be certain that he doesn't really understand what he is watching, you do not want him to be exposed to this material.

Subscribe to a YouTube channel where you know the content is appropriate.

Try YouTube Kids.

Find YouTube alternatives.

Your teenaged daughter seems terribly secretive of her social media.

Is she doing something embarrassing, or something innocent, like preparing a gift for you?

Is she doing something that she should not be doing?

Is she watching or posting inappropriate content?

Start a conversation.

Another parent tells you that your child has sent mean messages.

Have you seen the message?

Is your child the true author of the message?

Did you child loan her device to someone else?

What has your child said about the message?

Can you use this moment to teach your e-Values?

Your child seems distressed after receiving a text message or going online.

Do you think your child is being bullied, trolled or harassed?

Have you reminded your child what to do if they are being bullied: ignore, block and report?

Do you know how to save messages and images with screenshots?

Do you know of any resources or services that will provide support for your child?

Your teen has over 500 friends on his social media account.

Does he personally know every single friend?

Is it best for him to remove the unknown friends?

Are the unknowns, friends of friends that can be verified?

Is he gaming with these "friends?"

Is he chatting with those "friends?"

Your teenaged son posts things you find inappropriate.

You get him to delete them but you worry his online reputation is already damaged.

Ask him to perform a search on his own name. Is he proud of the content that is displayed?

Would he be comfortable if family members saw this content?

Would he be comfortable if a university, future employer or future wife saw this content?

Ask him what type of positive content can he post.

You set parental controls and time limits but have trouble enforcing them when life gets too busy.

Do you have a family media agreement?

Remember that being consistent will provide it's rewards in the long-term.

Even when things get busy, opt for less screen time, rather more.

Involve your children in the discussion – how they can help re-install the media rules?

FAQs

? What age should my child get a cellphone?

There is no magical or automatic age for receiving a cellphone. It really depends on your child's maturity and the ability to be responsible.

If you decide on a phone, then you have the debate of standard cellphone or a smartphone with internet capability.

Consider whether it would be appropriate to buy your child a basic phone model, set phone limits, agree on phone use, how apps and music will be purchased and downloaded etc., and be a good role model yourself.

? How can I set limits for screen time that will work?

Set and maintain screen limits that work for your family, your schedule.

Understand that not all screen time is equal: creative uses of apps and tech win out over mindless violent video games, every time.

Be flexible and be realistic in setting balance and boundaries for your family.

Talk with your children about the physical signs of spending too much time online: headaches, eye strain, neck or back aches.

? How do I talk to my tween about online bullying?

Bullying is any action that hurts somebody physically, psychologically or emotionally. It is repetitive, intentional and there is usually an imbalance of power.

Online bullying takes place virtually via phones, tablets, gaming sites, chat messaging, etc. and can be very public and very isolating.

Whether your child is being bullied or is the bully, you will still need to foster an open and trusting conversation and encourage your child to build resilience and social and emotional skills such as empathy and self-awareness.

? How do I understand what my teen is doing on social networking sites?

Research from the Ministry of Transport & Communication has demonstrated that teenagers are going online daily, use more than one social network, have seen inappropriate content, and have had contact with someone they have not met face-to-face before.

Parents have to talk, engage, get creative, negotiate, be flexible and employ a host of other "tactics" with their teens. The best way to understand what your teen is doing is to get informed, do your research and keep the conversations going with your children.

? I feel so outdated in the digital environment and I'm sure my child knows more than I do.

Given the speed with which our children can pick up a tablet or smartphone and "seem" to intuitively know what to do, how to swipe, pinch, or swirl items, our children still need us as mentors and guides.

Parents learn how to keep their children safe in the physical environment with experience, aid from family members, research and more. And that same learning capacity applies to the digital environment.

Parents can also keep in mind that many of the rules for the physical environment, such as finding a trusted adult or sharing with you immediately, also apply in the digital environment.

In Conclusion

Just as learning how to parent a newly born child does not happen overnight, learning how to parent in the digital environment also takes time. Navigating the issues and challenges that the internet, technology and social media present can seem like an impossible task, but parents are advised to remember that they already possess a solid foundation for honest, respectful and responsible behaviour in the physical world.

By extending those tenets to the digital world and by ensuring that their children and young adults act with the same characteristics, parents can rest assured that they are raising responsible digital citizens who will be able to benefit from the opportunities that the digital environment offers, while minimizing the risks and harmful effects.

Further Reading/Resources for Parents

Safespace:

http://safespace.qa

Qatar's Centre for cyber safety information. Resources and information for teachers, parents and students.

A Guide to Ethical Responsibility in a Digital World

https://bit.ly/2pK6mGY

A guide reflecting online behavior from an ethics and values perspective prepared by Ministry of Transport and communications, Qatar.

Digital Natives

https://bit.ly/2pMM8fX

Primary research studying the online behavior of young people in Qatar, conducted by Ministry of Transport and Communications.

Vodafone AmanTECH

https://www.vodafone.qa/en/better-world/aman-tech

Resources for parents and caregivers with age-appropriate checklists, tips and guides.

Please consult www.Safespace.qa to access a listing of other resources for parents in Canada, United States, United Kingdom, Australia, and Europe.