



THE 6E'S

OF PARENTING IN THE DIGITAL AGE

- EXEMPLIFY
- EXPLAIN
- ENGAGE
- EDUCATE
- EMPOWER
- EMPATHIZE

Today's youth are growing up surrounded by technology and media. The world is at their fingertips and that comes with incredible opportunities but also difficult challenges. Many parents are overwhelmed by the ins and outs of parenting in the digital age. They are worried for their children's safety, well-being, and health. They are also worried about their ability to help their kids' navigate the complicated digital landscape when it's all new to them, too. Don't fret! Creating a healthy relationship with media and technology in your home is not only possible but can also bring you and your child closer. Explore these 6 E's of parenting in the digital age to empower you and give you the skills you need to level up your parenting skills for today's world.

For Parents of Tweens

Exemplify

Well, parents, it's on you. Whether you have a two year old or a twelve year old, your child is watching you probably more than they are listening to you. If you want your kids to have a healthy relationship with media and technology, then you need to show them how to do it! Be a role model. Reflect on your media use. What is your relationship with media and technology? If there are things you are seeing that concern you about your child and their media use, reflect on how your behaviors might be impacting them.

FOR EXAMPLE

You may be concerned about how much your 11 year old is sharing with their friends over text. You might stress to them that they need to be careful with their private information and about sharing pictures of themselves or personal details. Then you post a picture of them without their permission from their recent sporting event that tags the location. It will confuse them if your rules are different from theirs! Keep an eye out for ways you might be adding to their digital footprint and impacting their privacy.

Explain

It's really important that your family is clear about the rules and expectations around media and technology use. Conflict can arise when there is lack of clarity around the guidelines. Some basic ones might be "technology free dinners" or "homework before Roblox". There may be more significant ones, too, like "you need to wait for social media until high school." Consider writing a family contract that outlines basic rules for everyone. The important thing is that everyone knows what the rules are and what happens if they are broken.

FOR EXAMPLE

Consider creating a road map. Tell them at what age they will have their own phone or their first social media account. Outline a plan that is clear and gradual. They don't need access to all social media platforms at once! Pace yourself and them. Technology is a privilege that comes with responsibility. Make sure they are comfortable and acting appropriately every step of the way. You reserve the right to change the road map, but having a starting point gives everyone clarity and can limit arguments and confusion.

Engage

We spend a lot of time talking to our kids about what *not* to do when it comes to media and technology. It's important to find moments where you can engage with them around their interests and likes. Just like you head outside to kick the ball around with a child that likes soccer, you need to be willing to engage in their online interests, too. Ask them questions about why they like the apps, games, and platforms they use. Ask them to teach you how to play a Roblox game they love and play with them. Share funny videos you see online with them. Watch some together! Find moments when you can enjoy the positive aspects of technology.

FOR EXAMPLE

Consider adding a family game night to the schedule and let your tween choose a video game they love. Have them explain how to play and take that opportunity to find out why they enjoy it so much. Make sure to keep a positive attitude, make an effort to really play, and continue a conversation.

Educate

You may feel like your child is growing up in a world you don't understand. Technology changes quickly, and for some, that change can be overwhelming. It's important that parents learn about the digital world but also remember that many of the experiences that tweens have today are grounded in social issues. You have life experience to navigate social situations, awkward interactions, tough personalities, disappointments, and challenges. You have a lot to teach your child even if you might not know all the technology. Use your life skills to educate your child and prepare them for the road ahead.

FOR EXAMPLE

You might find out that your tween saw a picture on social media of all their friends hanging out together without them. They tell you they weren't even invited to go. While this may seem like social media problem, it's not. It's about feeling left out. Take this moment to share with them a story from your past when you felt similar. Guide them in strategies they can use to feel better if it happens again. Remind them, too, that social media often makes things look better than they really are.

Empower

If your child loves to sing and dance, you might find yourself looking for voice lessons or dance classes to nurture those interests. What if they love video games? Or taking pictures on their phone? Or Roblox? Embrace your child's interests and passion when it comes to technology. Encourage their curiosity and skill building. Kids today are growing up in a world where they will need to be adept at technology. Find them opportunities for learning. There are so many new skills young people need to navigate the world. Do your best to ensure they are empowered to learn them.

FOR EXAMPLE

You find that your tween loves video games a lot, enjoys playing them, talking about them, and strategizing on how to play and improve their game. Explore opportunities for them to learn more about video game design and coding. These skills won't only be useful in the future. They may be necessary!

Empathize

When you were growing up, odds are you had more privacy than youth do today. It's important that we empathize with our children about the challenges of growing up in public - where there is not only very little privacy but also an expectation to share about yourself. Your child knows the digital world is complicated and has concerns and worries about navigating it just like you have for them. Listen to them. Be there for them and support them through the ups and downs.

FOR EXAMPLE

There are lots of images online of beautiful people having amazing experiences and looking fantastic. Your tween may find themselves feeling a bit low after scrolling online and coming across too many examples of what appears to be picture perfect lives. We all have a hard time not comparing ourselves! Your tween needs you to be there for them; to listen and to empathize.