Electronic Screen Cautions

In a world where children are "growing up digital," it's important to help them learn healthy concepts of digital use and

citizenship. Parents play an important role in teaching these skills.

Here are a few tips from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) to help parents manage the digital landscape they're exploring with their children.

1) Treat media as you would any other environment in your child's life. The same parenting guidelines apply in both real and virtual environments. Set limits;

kids need and expect them. Know your children's friends, both online and off. Know what platforms, software, and apps your children are using, where they

are going on the web, and what they are doing online.

2) Set limits and encourage playtime. Tech use, like all other activities, should have reasonable limits. Unstructured and offline play stimulates creativity. Make unplugged playtime a daily priority, especially for very young children. And—don't forget to join your children in unplugged play whenever you're able.

3) Families who play together, learn together. Family participation is also great for media activities—it encourages social interactions, bonding, and learning. Play a video game with your kids. It's a good way to demonstrate good sportsmanship and gaming etiquette. And, you can introduce and share your own life experiences and perspectives—and guidance—as you play the game.

4) Be a good role model. Teach and model kindness and good manners online. And, because children are great mimics, limit your own media use. In fact,

you'll be more available for and connected with your children if you're interacting, hugging and playing with them rather than simply staring at a screen.

5) Know the value of face-to-face communication. Very young children learn best through two-way communication. Engaging in back-and-forth "talk time" is critical for language development. Conversations can be face-to-face or, if necessary, by video chat, with a traveling parent or far-away grandparent.

Research has shown that it's that "back-and-forth conversation" that improves language skills—much more so than "passive" listening or one-way interaction with a screen.

6) Create tech-free zones. Keep family mealtimes and other family and social gatherings tech-free. Recharge devices overnight—outside your child's bedroom

to help children avoid the temptation to use them when they should be sleeping. These changes encourage more family time, healthier eating habits, and

better sleep, all critical for children's wellness.

7) Don't use technology as an emotional pacifier. Media can be very effective in keeping kids calm and quiet, but it should not be the only way they learn to

calm down. Children need to be taught how to identify and handle strong emotions, come up with activities to manage boredom, or calm down through breathing, talking about ways to solve the problem, and finding other strategies for channeling emotions.

8) Apps for kids – do your homework. More than 80,000 apps are labeled as educational, but little research has demonstrated their actual quality. Products pitched as "interactive" should require more than "pushing and swiping." Look to organizations like Common Sense Media for reviews about age-appropriate apps, games, and programs to guide you in making the best choices for your children.

9) It's OK for your teen to be online. Online relationships are part of typical adolescent development. Social media can support teens as they explore and discover more about themselves and their place in the grown-up world. Just be sure your teen is behaving appropriately in both the real and online worlds.

Many teens need to be reminded that a platform's privacy settings do not make things actually "private" and that images, thoughts, and behaviors teens share online will instantly become a part of their digital footprint indefinitely. Keep lines of communication open and let them know you're there if they have

questions or concerns.

10) Remember: Kids will be kids. Kids will make mistakes using media. Try to handle errors with empathy and turn a mistake into a teachable moment. But some indiscretions, such as sexting, bullying, or posting self-harm images, may be a red flag that hints at trouble ahead. Parents should take a closer look at your child's behaviors and, if needed, enlist supportive professional help, including from your pediatrician. Media and digital devices are an integral part of our world today. The benefits of these devices, if used moderately and appropriately, can be great. But, research has shown that face-to-face time with family, friends, and teachers, plays a pivotal and even more important role in promoting children's learning and healthy development. Keep the face-to-face up front, and don't let it get lost behind a stream of media and tech.