

## **DIGITAL DISCIPLINE IS KEY TO SUCCESS TO DIGITAL AGE**

Parenting in the times of technology is a challenge because it plays such an important role in children's lives now that it encompasses everything from sleep to study kids do social media, the question is how well they do it?" So, it's difficult for parents to keep their kids away from these gadgets. Not to forget that the parents have provided these gadgets to their wards to save their own time in their own's hectic schedule. Nevertheless, children can be raised with a healthy attitude towards shiny screens, flashing buttons and social media.

The challenge today is that raising children in the digital age is forcing parents to deal with questions that can't be answered by a previous generation of parents as they never faced this dilemma. As with many other aspects of parenting, the answer to the very important question "when are they old enough to be on social media?" is going to be different for each child and every situation.

The child's maturity level along with parent's relationship with him/her should play a big role in making the decision. Starting this process off with a discussion about the pros and cons of engaging in social networks is a much better approach than just telling your child, "NO BECAUSE I SAID SO. Most popular social networks require that a child be at least 13 to sign up for an account but it's not necessarily a parental guide. Most networks are doing so to comply with the Federal Trade Commission's Children's Online Privacy Protection Act which was created to prevent companies from gathering certain types of information on minors. Also, experts believe that most children lack the cognitive ability to fully understand adult-oriented social situations until the age of 13. Keep in mind, this is a general guideline and not a line in the sand for all parents.

Waiting until a child is 13 years to engage in any type of social platform isn't necessarily the best approach in the digital age. Pretending that they won't be exposed to social networks until you decide it's time isn't very realistic, so it's best for you to be the one to introduce them to it. There are plenty of age-appropriate and COPPA-compliant platforms for children under the age of 13 such as *Lego Life* and *Kudos* or you can create your own private social network with options such as *Gecko Life*. Getting together with other parents to create a controlled network with only friends and family is another method of introducing the younger generation to social media.

The earlier you start setting up the guidelines for your child, the better. Making sure they have a grasp of things like privacy issues, mindful posting, identity theft, cyberbullying, it's important to have an open and ongoing dialogue with

the millennials. Also ensure parents have access to everything children use, following them on the same networks and limiting their connections to people they know in the real world. After all, Twitter, Facebook and other large social networks expose kids to important issues and people from all over the world. Kids realize they have a voice they didn't have before and are doing everything from crowdfunding, social justice projects and anonymously tweeting positive thoughts. Digital technology allows kids to share their work with a wider audience and even collaborate with far-flung partners (an essential 21<sup>st</sup> century skill). Social media provides essential feedback for kids to hone their talent and craft and helps teens make friends offering them a sense of belongingness. They feel less isolated and become more socially adept.

So, understanding the need of social media in today's world what do the parents do? One effective way is to make a "social media agreement" with kids — a real contract both can sign. In it, kids can agree to protect their own privacy, consider their reputation, and not give out personal information. Furthermore, they promise to never use technology to hurt anyone else (through bullying or gossip). In turn, parents can agree to respect teens' privacy while making a conscious effort to be part of their social media world (this means you can "friend" them and observe them, but don't post embarrassing comments or rants about their messy rooms or their haircut or according to you their weird fashion sense).

Parents also can help keep kids grounded in the real world by putting limits on media use. Keep computers in public areas in the house, avoid laptops and smartphones in bedrooms, and set some rules on the use of technology (such as no cellphones at the dinner table). And don't forget: your capability of convincing your wards and setting a good example through your own virtual behavior can go a long way towards helping your kids use social media safely.

So parents, be careful as “Social Media should improve their life and not become their life”.



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