# Teach and Practice Digital Citizenship

- Monitor early and often

- Wean supervision with age

- Set and enforce expectations

- Provide screen-free moments and experiences

- Provide opportunities for independence on and offline

- Hold kids responsible for actions on and offline - learn the difference between discipline and punishment

- Be thoughtful about screen time

- Let them hurt

- Listen and let them talk - learn how to coach problem solving without giving solutions

- Step back

- Embrace the adventure in it

Red Flags - Sudden shifts in:

- Behavior

- Diet

- Sleep

- Socializing

- School performance

- Extracurricular interests

- Family dynamics
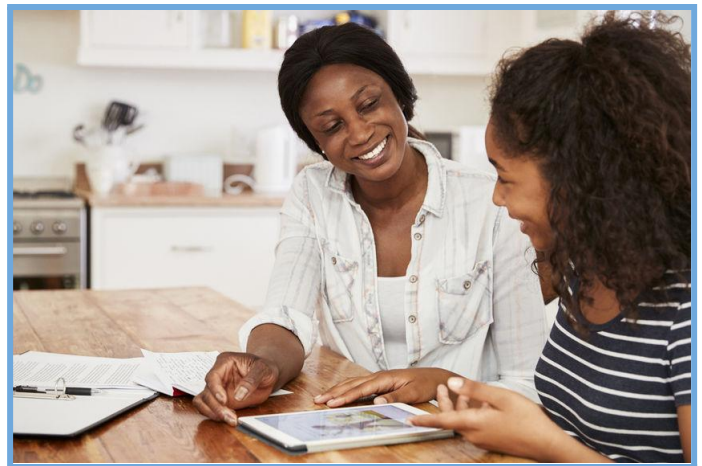
Parenting Digital Natives

Parenting is vastly different today and challenging in new ways in great part due to social media. Our children, having grown up with technology, are digital natives, often more comfortable texting than talking, playing video games than playing sports. However, despite the focus on non-personal communications, we must continue to strive to raise kids with character who can sustain intimate personal relationships with family and friends.

Socializing is as crucial in early childhood and adolescent development for digital natives as it was for us but now there are new, ubiquitous distractions that serve to remove our kids (and many of us) from invaluable face-to-face interactions. The social landscape has changed dramatically with many interactions taking place in short snippets, and with emoticons rather than voiced emotions.

Social nuances can be difficult to manage even in ideal situations. Now, with the constant presence of social media in our kids' lives, we find we need to monitor more of their communications. It can be daunting, when after a seemingly minor disagreement with friends, kids can share news of the confrontation within minutes in texts, on Snapchat, Instagram posts, or whatever the social media channel of choice.

When we ask parents what they want for their kids as young adults, we most often hear that they simply want their kids to be happy, independent and able to engage in strong relationships. And, importantly, we want to parent with hope, not fear. It's easy to be wary of technology - but if we arm ourselves with just a little information and a lot of common sense, we can approach our parenting with confidence. Digital citizenship, determining how to be civil in this world of 24/7 technology, is the best preparation for you and your child.

Practicing Digital Citizenship, especially with regard to character, requires constant monitoring for young children. This means they must ask for permission before using a digital device, with the understanding that you will review their email, text, messaging, Snapchat, Instagram, Twitter, games – any social media your child is using. Explain why you're monitoring: to make sure that your child is safe and interacting in appropriate ways with appropriate people. With this approach, by the time you wean from constant monitoring they will understand what is acceptable and have a self-filter in

mind. While it's important to understand technology and the role it

plays in your child's development, your primary focus should be on nurturing character and promoting independence with and without technology. Ultimately, character is who your child is when you're NOT there. YOu do not have to do this forever, but it's a good start to help kids understand the importance of the digital footprint they are leaving in the world. Some guidelines for parents include:

- Monitor young children's use of social media and digital devices very closely and model appropriate language, helping them to form what they write
- Explain why monitoring is so important and talk about what you might be looking for
- Ease up on monitoring tween children - spot check what they write and read, and still require permission to use digital devices, chime in constructively and firmly when you see something that gives you pause. Learn to inquire first, listen carefully and reflect before any judgment.
- Give your adolescent children even more independence on social media
- Keep the conversation at all ages going about what you're seeing and what you're concerned about
- Highlight the positives - help your child understand how social media can support their emerging social and academic life - whenever possible be proactive and reserve judgment
- Make sure your child knows who they can go to if they are bullied or scared by what they see in cases where they feel they cannot go to you
- Ask questions before jumping to conclusions
- Discipline when necessary - it's part of parenting and it's a learning experience! Learn the important difference between discipline and punishment.

In terms of limitations, be thoughtful about screen time - rather than simply dictating time constraints, determine a set of realistic expectations, ideally in collaboration with your child. Limit access to devices for good reasons, such as to ensure a full-night's sleep and for developing interpersonal relationships. Kids (and adults) cannot truly multitask while thinking critically. Make sure your child is not connected to social media while doing homework or serious tasks (like driving). Sure, sometimes the homework requires interaction with others or hours on the computer. But, notifications can be turned off, and buzzing can be muted.

Most importantly, while you work with your child to address screen time, multitasking, or potential video game addiction, be sure to look for areas of true concern. Here are some red flags that might be clues to bigger problems:

- Are homework or grades suffering?
- How is your kid's social life? Is it active? Has it changed recently?
- Does your child have alternative interests and activities (other than social media)?
- Is your child sleeping regularly?
- Is your child's diet changing?

It's normal for kids to have a social life outside of their family. It's also normal for them not to share every detail. Concerns over stalkers and cyberbullies are very real, but the idea is not to try and protect your children from everything, but to teach them to manage and cope on their own. You want your children to try to advocate for themselves and of course, come to you (or others) when they have a problem they cannot handle. Most issues that arise are normal and can be handled by your kid. Resist the temptation to fix every little thing. If you can, let your children fend for themselves - and trust them. If you've worked with them to understand and navigate the digital landscape, they should be ready and able to take charge of this brave new technological world.

Parenting Digital Natives with Character: A Framework

Consider these important goals -

Develop Character: Acceptance, empathy, forgiveness, gratitude, integrity, patience and perspective
Helpful strategies -

- Encourage more play and socialization
- Support a practice of gratitude
- Focus on character and not accomplishment
- Prompt more conversation

Promote Independence: Confidence, exploration, moderation, perseverance, resilience and responsibility
Helpful strategies -

- Let homework be individual
- Let my child hurt

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- Care of self, home and others
- Hold my child responsible

Nurture Well-Being: Balance, care, education, health, play, transitions
Helpful strategies -
- Make space for family time
- Make space for down time
- Prioritize sleep
- Focus on nutrition and physical health

Foster Community: Collaboration, competition, relating, socializing
Helpful strategies -
- Set up playdates and other social opportunities
- Encourage care of home and community
- Support sibling relationships
- Identify go-to people
- Create an emotionally safe space to talk

And please keep in mind that modeling is our most powerful teaching tool as parents and caregivers. This works best when you are willing to be a lifelong learner and get support for developing these capacities in yourself as well.

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As children learn to navigate the world, online and offline, it's vitally important for parents to have regular conversations with them about significant life issues. Conversation is the best tool to help parents develop deep and long-lasting relationships with their kids. However, It's also true that talking to teens and tweens, and getting them to participate in those conversations, can be a real challenge. It's never too late to begin, and in **The Parenting Project: Build Extraordinary Relationships With Your Kids Through Daily Conversation** (Fair Winds Press), Dr. Amy Alamar, working with Dr. Kristine Schlichting, provides a wealth of parental guidance developed specifically to help parents begin and sustain these important dialogues with their kids. Dr. Alamar is married and the mother of three children whom she learns from and enjoys each and every day. She is a resident of Austin, TX, where she is a Student Success Facilitator for Leander Independent School District and serves on the board of the Watkinson School. You can learn more about her at www.amyalamar.com.