

Navigating Your Child's First Online Device

Use the information below to provide structure for the safe and responsible use of online devices. Remember, there's no perfect way to parent when navigating your child's first online device. Every child and household are different, so do what's best for you and your family.

Taking responsibility

A study from the National Center for Biotechnology showed that frequent internet use can decrease verbal intelligence, attention span, and memory performance among adolescents. Too much use at an early age can also lead to problems like being less open to new experiences, feeling emotionally unstable, being impulsive, and other attention-related behaviors.

As an adult, you know about the positive and negative aspects of technology. Before giving your child(ren) a smart device, consider if they are ready, how it might affect their health, and how it might affect their relationships. Parents and guardians need to be careful when letting their child(ren) use the internet because it can cause problems, like becoming dependent on social media and using it in the wrong way.

Being a good digital citizen

Think about making a contract with your child(ren) for using online devices. Setting clear rules can teach them to use the internet safely, responsibly, and appropriately. If they are too young to understand a contract, they might be too young for social media and their own device. The contract could include things like:

- When and how to use a device
- Limits on data usage
- Responsibility for broken or lost devices
- Agreement on which apps or social media they can use.

Stick to the terms of the contract. Understand that mistakes might happen, but with clear rules, your child can learn from them and make better choices. For an example, check out the American Academy of Pediatrics *Family Media Plan* or go to [commonsense.org](https://www.commonsense.org) to see the *Family Media Agreement*.

Setting up for success

Consider devices made for kids, like the Gabb Phone or Vtech KidiBuzz. Look at the *Best Cell Phones for Kids* article on [verywellfamily.com](https://www.verywellfamily.com) for more options. Learn to use the parental controls on whatever device you chose and use them well.

Until they are ready, you should monitor their online activities. Check their messages, friend requests, who they talk to, and make sure their online friends are an appropriate age. As they get used to technology, give them more responsibilities. Expect them to follow the rules at home and school, and to act responsibly and respectfully both online and in person. Most importantly, teach them to stay safe:

- Only use accounts that belong to them.
- Protect their login information and passwords.
- Don't share personal information without permission.
- Don't download things without permission.
- If they find something wrong online, like bullying or threats, tell a responsible adult.

Working toward independence

Talk to your child(ren) about technology as they grow. Your goal is to help them learn to manage it on their own. Things to include in your conversations are:

- Explain that anything said or posted online never goes away.
- Ask them questions:
 - "What should you do if someone bullies you online?"
 - "What if you see something inappropriate?"
- Discuss what's acceptable and unacceptable online behavior.

Foster an environment where your child feels comfortable discussing their concerns with you and encourage them to come to you right away. Continue these conversations as your child develops.