

If your child said I want to swim, would you buy him a pair of water wings and say -have fun honey, I love you? NO! We get him swimming lessons, we get in the pool with her. We learn to play water sports and games, while showing them how to be safe in the water and actually LEARN how to swim. Technology is no different, we have to show our kids the way to use technology safely and we have to do it with them! First of all – no preaching here – we’re all in this together but here are some tips to get you started:

Be Involved and Intentional

- technology safety HAS to be an ongoing conversation because it changes daily
- use current events to talk about the role technology played and how people’s lives were effected
- ASK questions, what apps are you downloading, play me your new favorite song, what makes you laugh on YouTube, show me your friends on Instagram
- Be their “friend” or follower on whatever social media they’re using and know their passwords

Stay Current

- Too many parents say “my kid knows more than I do, I can’t keep up.”
- That may be true, but it’s not okay – have the kids teach you.
- Use those moments to talk about safety – you may not “get” the game, but you do know what’s right and wrong
- See the resources list for some great sites to help you stay up to date

Don’t Spy

- Privacy is important to kids, Spying creates distrust and will encourage them to figure out how to hide things
- Filtering software is great for young kids, but the older they get, the more they’ll know how to get around them

Be real or they’ll see through you

- Sometimes these conversations are tricky, but no subject should be off-limits
- Use real stories of real kids, some of that subject matter may feel too advanced, but if you don’t talk about it, how will they know? Use those stories as a way to say – you might be tempted to do this, but look what happened, I bet this girl/boy didn’t think it would happen to them either.
- There are bad people in the world and they are good at tricks – talk about those tricks and scams
- Share your own fears – here’s what I’m doing to protect my identity online, here’s why we buy insurance for our house, here’s how we have to protect our digital footprint.

Make rules

- When you do start? The minute you hand them a device that connects to the outside world
- They know the rules – don’t give out personal information, don’t share passwords, don’t talk to strangers – do you really think that matters when they’re online? The rules have to be practical and apply to their lives and are there until they instinctively know how to do the right thing.
- Rules are the same no matter what device or platform and no matter where they are (friend’s house, etc.)
- Talk about the rules, let the kids be part of making them and coming up with consequences
- When they show signs of responsibility – you can discuss easing up on the rules

Don’t over-react

- They’re going to make mistakes, screaming, hollering and taking away their devices will alienate you.
- Losing their technology is their biggest fear, so they will be hesitant to tell you if they’ve gotten in over their heads or just made a dumb mistake
- Make it safe for them to tell you they messed up, or their friends are messing up – help them fix it.

Have fun and be a good role model

- Technology makes our lives easier and more fun -Enjoy it with them; they’ll be more apt to be open with you
- But if you text and drive or talk on the phone and drive, don’t try to tell them it’s not okay. Or if your husband can’t put down his cell at the dinner table because of “work”, don’t expect your kids to get that they can’t have their device out – social media and games are their “work”
- If you’re not providing a good role model, be prepared for them to take their cues from pop culture and emulate life as if they were on a Reality Show with no consequences.
- Look at your own “footprint” – if a stranger read your social media posts – would they get a picture of the real you – the good person just trying to get it right? Or someone else? Can your words and pictures be misinterpreted?
- Remind them they are the most important thing in the world and what you’re doing is just to keep them safe.