

Supporting Children with Social Media

How do you avoid children spending endless hours in front of a screen, on their smart phones, computers and iPads and using Facebook, Instagram and other social media?

How do you strike the balance between supporting children to access the means of communication that are so much a part of growing up in today's society and ensuring that they learn that social and emotional contact is very much still part of spending real time, not just virtual time together?

The experiences of many parents is quite frightening, with young teenagers spending hours each night, even after everyone else is asleep, texting and on Facebook.

The issues of cyber bullying, "selfy" photos that once posted never go away, and lack of maturity mean it is often harder for young, inexperienced children and teenagers to self regulate, to think before acting or reacting, to think before posting something, to not act impulsively. Social media is often addictive and some children become obsessed with it. Rather than living in moments, they become addicted to documenting every moment instead.

Here are some tips to proactively help support children as they grow up in a world where social media surrounds their every moment.

- Don't be afraid of technology use and don't just ban all types of technology or screen time.
- Monitor the use of screen time including TV and gaming from when children are very young.
- Children under the age of around 8 years don't need their own personal iPad for games and certainly don't need a phone or iPod.
- Never put a TV or computer into a child's bedroom. This can establish a pattern of children hiding away without others knowing what they are doing or watching.
- Ensure that children have the balance of imaginative play and outdoor activities rather than just wanting to play screen games.
- Ensure that once children are older and have a phone or device for games that there are rules such as:
 - A common docking station where all devices are placed communally before bed
 - Designated times when the devices can be used
 - Devices that cannot be used in bedrooms or in isolation.



- Remember the rules of Facebook about needing to be 13 years of age and with adult supervision.
- If your child is really keen to have a Facebook account, set up a family one and model the types of appropriate things that can go onto it.

It is really important not to fall into the trap of thinking; “every other child has one so our child will be the odd one out”. Trust your own values and beliefs and remember that usually, the best way to manage and make choices about technology is to parent in these areas the way you parent in other areas. Trust yourself and feel free to say “NO”.