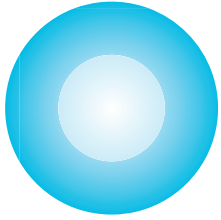


The Digital Living Project: Handbook
Introduction
Volume 1 | 2005 Edition

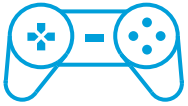


The Digital Living Project is an alliance, bringing together three leading youth-serving non-profit organizations, and a digital media consortium to help America's families learn to live in the digital age. We are committed to the cause of lessening the burden of today's families by making it as easy as possible for you to learn, educate and pass along the valuable information vital to your family in today's digital world.

The Digital Living Project understands the challenges that come along with trying to stay on top of the many emerging technologies that kids today seem to take for granted. We also understand how hard it can be to take a leadership role in communicating with your web savvy kids who seem to be running circles around you.

But things are not nearly as complicated as they appear. It's really just a matter of having the right information at your fingertips and applying some old fashioned common sense.





Remember when your mom used to limit your viewing of certain movies and TV shows? Well, substitute laptop, email, MP3 player, and X-Box for “movies” or “TV” and the point still holds true. And just as it is dishonest to copy a book report for school straight from an encyclopedia, it’s also wrong to “cut & paste” it from the web.

America’s children are such savvy multitaskers that they pack 8 1/2 hours of media exposure into 6 1/2 hours of each day, seven days a week.

(Kaiser Family Foundation Study, 2005)



What is ethical in one situation tends to be ethical in similar situations regardless of technology. All the things your parents did to shape you into the responsible adult you are today can be applied to today’s child. You just need to know the lingo, and what tools are available to assist you in your most important responsibility-raising your family.

Nine out of 10 children aged between eight and 16 have viewed pornography on the Internet. In most cases, the sex sites were accessed unintentionally when a child, often in the process of doing homework, used a seemingly innocent sounding word to search for information or pictures.

(London School of Economics January 2002)



The answer of course is not to ban your child from using the Internet or listening to his or her MP3 player. The benefits of new technologies far outweigh the drawbacks.

Since 1999, the time kids spend on video games and computers has more than doubled.

(Kaiser Family Foundation Study, 2005)



However, new technology brings with it new dangers and new ethical boundaries which need to be understood, appreciated, and respected. Focusing on kids and the Internet, the following is some basic information to get you started. Please continue to check back with www.DigitalLivingProject.com for up-to-the-minute information, downloadable guides and more.

There are no hard statistics in the United States, but a study done in England found that one in four children have been bullied or threatened through their mobile phone or computer.

(CBS News, May 11, 2004)

In a study by the Girl Scout Research Institute, 30% of girls ages 13-18 reported having been sexually harassed in a chat room. Only 7% told their mothers or fathers about the harassment.

(“The Net Effect: Girls and New Media” study by the Girl Scout Research Institute, 2002).



Topics for family discussion should include:

Time Online

Discuss how much time they are allowed to spend online, and whether their computer use is dependent on conditions such as finishing their homework, doing chores, etc.

Location/Supervision

Decide whether there are restrictions or guidelines on the physical location where the kids can go online. Can they go online at school? In the library? At a friend's house? Are they allowed to be online when no adult is around? Is the screen positioned in the room so that an adult can observe?

Personal Information

Kids should never give out personal information, such as their full name, address, phone number, school, or picture, to anyone they meet online.

Websites

Talk about which kinds of web sites are okay, and which ones are off-limits. Are they limited to sites related to their school-work? Sites that are designed especially for kids?

Meeting Online Friends

Kids should never arrange to meet an online friend in person without an adult present.

Chat Rooms

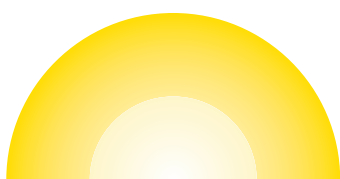
Younger children should steer clear of chat rooms altogether. But you should explore a few chat rooms with your older children while discussing your guidelines. What is your comfort level with this method of communication? Do you want your older children to chat in monitored chat rooms only? Are your older children allowed to send personal messages to people they've only met online?

Inappropriate Material

Kids should never respond online when they feel uncomfortable or scared by something they've seen or read. If they have any doubts, they should find an adult immediately and show them the inappropriate material.

The Golden Rule

Remind your kids to behave towards other kids as they would like people to behave towards them. Something that could hurt another child's feelings on the playground will still hurt when received by email or in a public chat.





A Plan against Inappropriate Material

What should you do if your children encounter material online that makes them feel scared or uncomfortable?

Even if your children follow all of the guidelines you've established, it's still possible that they might encounter inappropriate material online. Your kids should always feel comfortable about telling you what they've seen. Try not to respond in a way that blames them. They should understand that encountering this kind of material is not their fault.

What to do with inappropriate online material depends in large part on its delivery format

Web sites

Remind your child of the use of the "back" button. If they come upon a site that isn't what they'd expected, he/she should click "back" immediately and then come tell you what happened. If a web site is misrepresenting itself, complain to the site's creator.

Email

If your child receives an email message from an unfamiliar address, they shouldn't read it and should tell you about it. If it's something inappropriate and unsolicited, request of the message's source that they delete your child's email address from their database. If this becomes an ongoing problem, complain to your Internet service provider.

Chat Rooms

We strongly recommend that you actively monitor your children while they participate in online chats (more so than any other online activity). Most chat rooms have the ability to ignore specific chatters, which helps to prevent any single chatter from becoming an ongoing problem for your child. Additionally, you may be able control the language your child sees with the Language Filter.



Ways to Keep Your Child Safe Online

1. Place the computer in the most public room in your home.

2. Establish ground rules for Internet usage.

3. Share time online by surfing on the Internet with your child.

4. Instruct your child not to give out information without your permission.

5. Read the privacy policy of any site that asks for personal information before you allow your child to respond.

6. If your child wants to meet in person someone they've met online, make sure a parent is present.

7. Instruct your child never to respond to email or chat messages that make them feel uncomfortable.
(And ensure that your child reports such messages to you when/if they occur.)

8. Inform your ISP (Internet Service Provider) of any inappropriate uses of the Internet encountered by you or your child.

9. Encourage your child to share online their experiences with you.

10. Know exactly what various parental control tools can and cannot do and how they work.