



Helping our kids
navigate our digital world.
A TELUS Wise® parent's guide.

Created in
partnership with:



Today's kids are born into a digital world.

More than a third of Canadian kids under the age of four have their own tablet, and more than a third of Canadian tweens have their own smartphone.¹ Sometimes it can seem as though their whole lives revolve around activities like video games, social networking, or watching online videos.

It's not surprising, then, that two-thirds of Canadian parents say that digital devices and online activities sometimes cause conflict between them and their children.² What might surprise you, though, is that kids actually want their parents to be a part of their online lives — even teens. In fact, after friends, parents and family members are some of the people they most want to be in touch with online.

With technology and kids' culture changing constantly, it's not realistic for parents to try to know everything about the latest apps, games and social networks kids are using. What we can do, though, is teach them things that will keep them safe and on the right track through a lifetime in the digital world.

¹ Brisson-Boivin, Kara (2018). The Digital Well-being of Canadian Families. Ottawa. MediaSmarts.

² Brisson-Boivin, Kara (2018). The Digital Well-being of Canadian Families. Ottawa. MediaSmarts.



General Guidelines

Kids may be avid users of technology and may even know more than you do when it comes to the latest apps and social media platforms, but they still need the same things they have always needed from parents:

Modeling of good habits.

What we do sends a louder message than what we say. Put your phone and other screen devices away at mealtimes, when playing or doing activities with your kids, at bedtime and (especially) when you're driving.

Guidance, so they're prepared to deal with problems before they happen.

It may seem like what you say goes in one ear and out the other, but kids are less likely to engage in cyberbullying or look at pornography if there are rules in their homes about responsible technology use and what it means. Set rules about how you expect your kids to behave online and let them know that Internet access, tablets and smartphones are an earned privilege, not a right. Use your rules to reinforce your family values, so that your kids keep living by them even when they're grown up and out on their own.

Support when things go wrong.

A lot of the time, kids don't want to come to us when things go wrong because they're afraid they'll get in trouble and lose Internet, social media or phone privileges. Make sure your kids know they can come to you if something happens, and that you won't "freak out". If our kids are in the habit of coming to us about the little things, they'll be a lot more likely to talk to us about bigger issues that may also arise.

Ongoing dialogue and reminders.

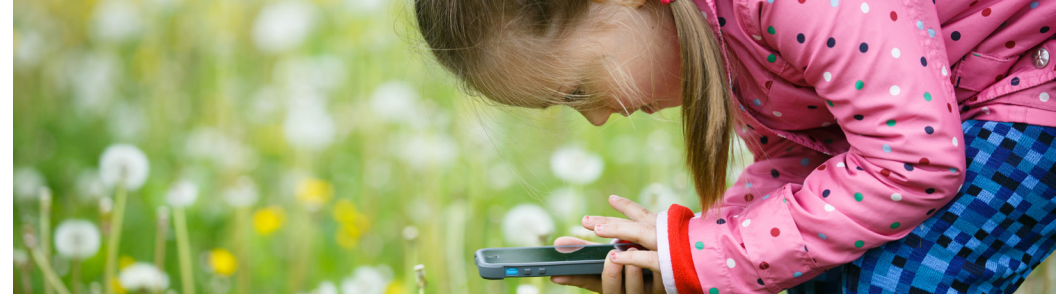
Reinforce these messages by continuing to talk about your kids' online lives as they get older, gain independence and begin making more decisions for themselves.



You should know that most young Canadians aren't engaging in risky or unethical behaviour such as cyberbullying, sharing others' intimate images or making their own personal information public.

Make sure your kids know this too: if they think that something is normal or common, they're a lot more likely to do it themselves.

Tips for parents of young children



How much screen time is OK for my kids?

The [Canadian Paediatric Society](#) does not recommend screen time for children under two, and suggests limiting screen time to a maximum of an hour per day for children aged two to five. This is for good reason: kids need human interaction as well as physical and creative play for their brains to develop, and when they are young, they're not yet able to get any of those from digital devices. (The one exception is live video-chatting with people they already know, such as parents or grandparents.)

While it's important to keep a handle on screen time, especially with younger children, managing it shouldn't be all about counting minutes. We also need to help kids understand that using digital tech is something you choose to do, not something you do all the time.

Set rules.

Let kids know when screens are allowed and when they aren't. For instance, different times of day can be screen-free (mealtimes, the hour leading up to bedtime, etc.), and you may even want to make certain days (e.g. school days) screen-free, only allowing screens on the weekend. You might also decide to have one day as a "digital Sabbath" where all devices in the house stay off.

Don't allow multi-screening.

Have your kids do one thing at a time: using two or more screens at a time makes it harder to keep track of how much time they're spending with them. If two or more kids want to do different screen activities, have them do them in different rooms (unless they're doing the same activity on different screens, such as playing online games together). Be sure to turn off any screens that aren't actively in use, including background TV.

Encourage positive screen activities.

You can let kids have more time for activities that are creative, educational or social (like video-chatting with relatives or playing math-based games) as opposed to activities that are just entertainment. You can also encourage mixed online/offline activities, like making stop-motion animation, finding and printing out colouring pages or playing along to online music lessons.

Encourage offline activities.

It's not enough to just say, "turn it off," — make sure that there are plenty of fun things to do offline as well. Use the things your kids like to do online as a jumping-off point for games or trips to the library.

Watch and play with your kids.

Talk to your kids about their favourite games and videos. They love to be "experts," and it gets them used to talking to you about their online lives. When you can, play or watch along with them, and ask them questions about what you see and do. (See the MediaSmarts tip sheet [Co-Viewing With Your Kids](#) for tips on this.) Watching and playing along with your kids also gives you a chance to have a conversation about any questionable or inappropriate content or behaviour you may come across.

Set an example.

If you're using a digital device while you're with your kids, say out loud what you're doing with it ("I'm checking the weather before we decide what to wear.") This reinforces the idea that devices are tools we use for a specific purpose, and might help you pay more attention to your own technology use habits too!



How can I protect my kids when they go online?

At this age it's important to actively manage what your kids are seeing online and to make sure they understand how easy it is to see something they didn't mean to.

Use parental controls.

Nearly all devices, browsers (e.g. Chrome, Internet Explorer, Safari, Firefox), apps, search engines and video sites have parental controls that let you limit what your child sees. None of these are perfect, and they certainly don't negate the need for establishing rules for technology use and engaging in an ongoing discussion with your child, but they're an important first step. See MediaSmarts' tip sheet [Using Parental Controls](#) for detailed info on setting them up.

- Look for apps that promote imagination or creative play instead of repetition.
- Avoid apps that have advertising or in-game purchases, or that have lots of sound effects, animation and extra buttons that will distract from learning.
- Be aware that many popular games have Chat functions that let you talk to other players. Find out if a game has this before allowing your child to play, and see if it's possible to disable it (or at a minimum, that the Chat feature is monitored and that the gaming platform attempts to filter out any inappropriate content). If you do let your child play the game, make a clear rule about who they can and cannot connect with via the Chat function. The next section has some tips on how to do this.

Choose quality content.

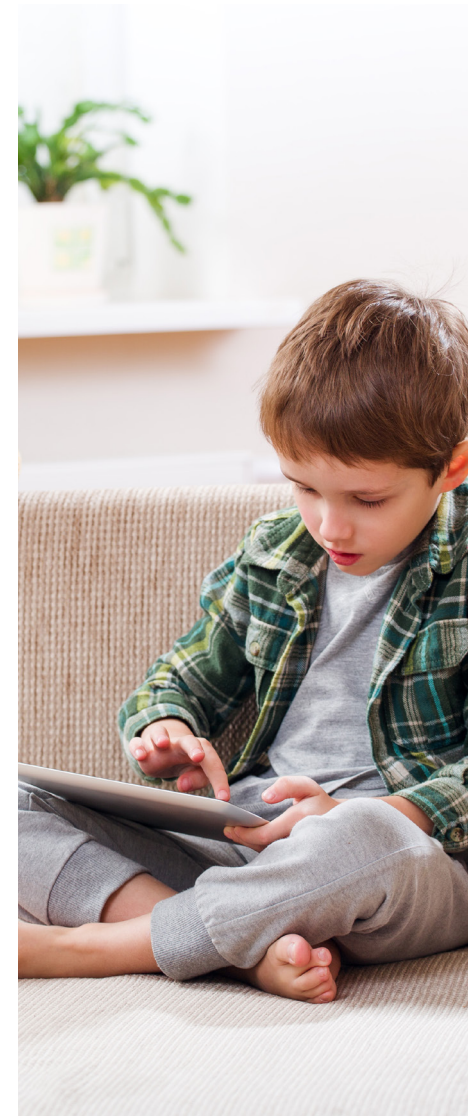
Whether you're making a playlist or choosing an app, make sure that what you're getting is good for your kids:

- Look for content and/or games that you and your kids can watch or play together and talk about afterwards.

Create playlists.

YouTube is one of the most popular sites for kids, but it's also a place where they are likely to see inappropriate content. As well as setting your parental controls, it's a good idea to [create a playlist](#) of pre-approved content that you watch ahead of time instead of letting them find videos themselves. You should [turn off comments](#) and [autoplay](#) as well. If your children watch streamed content on Twitch (e.g. live streaming of someone playing video games), spend time researching the streamers that your children wish to follow and make sure the content is age appropriate. You can find some additional good advice on Twitch [here](#).

You may wish to bookmark child-friendly and approved websites that your child can use, and ask that they seek permission for anything outside of the list.



How can I help my kids develop good online habits?

Your kids won't stay small forever! What you do now will have an impact on how they use tech for the rest of their lives. Resist the temptation to keep them away from technology; it is central to how we operate as a society and if they don't develop good habits at home with your guidance, they will struggle to figure things out on their own when they access technology at school, or at the library, or at a friend's house. Take a few steps to start them off right:

Step 1: Set clear rules and procedures.

For younger kids it's good to have a small number of clear rules, such as:

- Don't click on a link without checking with you or another adult first.
- Don't go to a new website or download a new app without asking.
- Don't change any settings (like turning Autoplay or Chat mode on) without permission.
- Don't use the "chat" function in games or virtual worlds (for older kids, the rule can evolve to not sharing any personal information online, either on a form or in a conversation with someone).
- Tell me right away if anything goes wrong or doesn't seem right.

See MediaSmarts' tip sheet, [Family Online Rules](#), for advice on how to create rules that work for your family.

Step 2: Foster empathy.

Look for chances to help your kids become aware of their own feelings and those of others:

- Talk to them when they get frustrated by a game or when a video makes them sad and explore why they feel the way they do.
- Help them think about the perspective of others, and remind them to be extra careful when they're talking to people online because online communication doesn't provide the same clues that face to face communication does (e.g. body language, facial expressions, tone etc.).
- Discuss the fact that different people feel differently in different situations – for example, some people may enjoy some online activities that others may not. (Learning to imagine other people's perspectives is an important first step in developing empathy, online or offline. Check out MediaSmarts' tip sheet, [Building Empathy in Children and Teens](#), for more advice on this topic.)



Step 3: Model the behaviour you want to see.

Even if your kids aren't interacting with anyone online yet, what you do should show them how you expect them to behave. For example, you can model the idea of consent by asking if it's okay for you to share a photo you took of them online – even if only their grandparents are going to see it. If you are talking to digital home assistants be sure to use 'please' and 'thank you' in your communication.

Tips for parents of tweens and young teens:



Look for teachable moments.

It's a lot easier to talk to your tween or teen if a subject comes up naturally. Here are a few good milestones to plan for:

- **First email account.** Yes, kids still use email! A lot of schools give students email accounts to help with their classwork, and it's a good time to talk about the importance of using good passwords (and keeping them secret) and the fact that anything they send can be saved and shared by the person who gets it.
- **First social network account.** Though almost all social networks require users to be thirteen or older to create an account, many children do start using them earlier. When you decide to let your child get an account, begin by letting them be the experts: have them show you all the cool things they want to do. Then go through the network's privacy and permission settings and help your child understand how they can limit who sees what, and remind them to be respectful of other users' privacy. Talk about the ways that social networks can make you feel stressed, inadequate or envious and brainstorm ways to deal with them. (Most social networks have safety centres you can refer to for basic tips on how to manage risks when using the social network.) Remind them that what they say and do on social media makes up their digital footprint, which can have real-life implications for themselves and others.
- **First phone.** Make sure your child understands that all of the rules you've already set up for going online apply to their phones, and that there may be new ones as well (no phones in their bedrooms, for example). Review their school's rules about phones. Turn off Bluetooth, GPS and Wi-Fi and talk about times when it makes sense to turn them back on briefly. (See the TELUS Wise guide, [Helping Our Kids Use Their Smartphones Safely](#), for more details.)

Move from a list of rules to a contract.

Kids this age need rules just as much as when they were younger, but they're old enough to have a discussion with you about what these rules should be. When appropriate, the rules should apply to you, too, so your kids know you take them seriously (no phones in the bedroom at night, for example). See the [TELUS Wise Smartphone contract](#) for a sample contract you may wish to co-sign with your child. You can create a similar contract for social media usage as well.

Set boundaries and rules.

This includes boundaries that respect your children's privacy: if your kids think you're spying on them, they're less likely to talk to you about what they're doing online, so it's better to have an open and ongoing conversation about their digital lives than to spy on their devices or use monitoring software. Talk regularly about what they're doing online and what constitutes acceptable behaviour, on and offline.

Connect.

It's okay to "friend" or follow your kids once they're on social networks, but don't stalk them all the time or get in the middle of their conversations with their friends. When your kids get a phone or a social network account, tell them that you reserve the right to access it but will only do so if you think there's a good reason. Keep in mind that children are creative and can come up with ways to hide their online activities from their parents. For instance they may create multiple social media accounts but only connect with you on one of them; reduce the likelihood of situations like this by having open and honest conversations about their online activities.

When should you step in?

Ask yourself these questions:

- Is digital tech interfering with my child's sleep or keeping them from eating well?
- Is digital tech keeping my child from connecting with family and friends?
- Is digital tech getting in the way of my child's schoolwork?
- Is my child using digital tech in ways that seem more stressful than rewarding?
- Is my child engaging in inappropriate or risky behaviours that may impact them and their well-being?



Manage screen time.

One rule you should be strict about at this age is where and when it's not okay to use their devices: make sure screens stay out of their bedrooms and away from the dinner table, and have them turn everything off at least an hour before they go to bed (given the potential for [melatonin-suppressing effects](#)).

- To prepare your children for when they'll be managing their own screen time, get them thinking about it from now. Pick a week and ask your children to keep a "screen diary." Go through it with them and have a conversation about how much time they spent online. Talk about other fun things they might have done with that time. (You can do this too – you might be surprised by what you see!)
- You can also pick one day (or part of a day) each week to be a "digital Sabbath" for the whole family, but make sure it doesn't result in pushing screen time from weekends to weekdays – screen time has a greater impact on kids on weekdays than on weekends.³

Teach your teen or tween to use tech effectively and responsibly.

Filters and parental controls may still have a role to play at this age, but as kids start to explore more widely – and get involved in social networks and multiplayer games – these should be a smaller part of your strategy. The best way to keep tweens and teens safe online is to teach them critical thinking skills to use digital tools effectively and responsibly.

- Show them how to find good content. As your kids start looking for their own content online, help them learn how to sift the good from the bad. Make sure they understand that content that is "recommended" to them through top search results on Google, or recommended videos on YouTube, isn't necessarily the best or most reliable.
- The MediaSmarts tip sheet [Teaching Your Children Safe Surfing Habits](#) has info for parents and kids on how to find the things you want (and avoid the things you don't).



³ Przybylski, Andrew K., and Netta Weinstein. "A Large-Scale Test of the Goldilocks Hypothesis." *Psychological Science*, vol. 28, no. 2, 2017, pp. 204–215. doi:10.1177/0956797616678438.



Prepare your kids to make mistakes.

Tell your kids that they will make mistakes online, and when it happens, focus on the learning experience that results from the mistakes. (You can tell them about mistakes you've made, too, so they know it happens to everybody.) Kids that can bounce back from mistakes are going to be a lot safer when they're on their own than kids that were never allowed to make any.

- Tell them that it's important to fix their mistakes, if they can. For instance, if something they did online made a friend mad at them, they should approach their friend and offer an apology. It might be a good idea to wait a while until they've both cooled off before trying to work things out.
- Tell them that it's okay to get help. Kids this age may not want to reach out, but some things are too serious for them to handle themselves. Your child may not want to ask you for help because they're afraid you'll take their devices away, that you'll punish them, or that you'll be disappointed in them. Reinforcing that everyone makes mistakes and that you will not overreact can help encourage them to come to you.
- Keep talking about their everyday online lives, and make sure they know you'll always be there if they need you.
- Ask them: "If something happened that you couldn't talk to me about, who would you talk to?" Ensure they know about the [Kids Help Phone](#) — a free and anonymous support line for children, which they can connect with by phone or online chat.

Foster empathy and respect online.

The rules you negotiate with your kids should include treating people with respect online and not causing trouble or starting drama on purpose. The MediaSmarts tip sheet [Be Respectful, Patient and Kind](#) has practical tips for kids on this topic.

- Make sure your kids understand the ways that digital tech can keep us from feeling empathy for other people because we can't see their faces or hear their voices. Remind them that sometimes it can be hard to tell how we are feeling when we're using tech to communicate, and to watch for signs that they're angry or upset and always take time to cool down before responding. The TELUS Wise guide, [Helping Kids Deal with Cyberbullying](#), and the MediaSmarts tip sheet [Building Empathy in Children and Teens](#) have advice on how to do this.
- Talk to your kids about the messages they may be getting from media about girls, boys, romance and relationships. These may push them to do things like flirt online, send or share intimate pictures, or look at pornography. Make sure they know they never have to do anything that feels wrong or makes them uncomfortable, and that nothing ever makes it okay to be mean or cruel to someone or to disrespect their privacy. Here are two tip sheets that can help with that conversation:
 - [Talking to Your Kids about Sexting](#)
 - [Help! Someone Shared a Photo of Me Without My Consent](#)



Did you know cyberbullying affects
one million Canadian kids every month?

Together, we can create a positive,
friendlier world online.

Stand with us to help make our digital space safer by taking
the TELUS Wise Digital Pledge at telus.com/digitalpledge.



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How you can participate in TELUS Wise.

- Visit telus.com/wise to learn more, or book a free in-person TELUS Wise workshop for your child's school and/or parent group.
- Take the TELUS Wise Digital Pledge at telus.com/digitalpledge.
- Contact us at wise@telus.com.
- Join the conversation online with [@TELUS](https://twitter.com/TELUS) on Twitter and using [#TELUSWise](https://twitter.com/TELUSWise).

