

Digital Parenting: How to Nurture and Safeguard Children in an Age of Excessive Media Use

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Abstract

This article discusses the prevalence of touchscreens among children, the concept of digital parenting, parental beliefs and attitudes towards technology, parental self-efficacy in managing children's digital use, different parenting styles, the role of parents in supervising children's online activity, concerns raised by parents regarding children's internet behavior, and strategies for mitigating risks associated with excessive internet use. It also touches on the impact of COVID-19 on children's digital activities and the importance of consistent effort and research in understanding digital parenting.

Keywords: Digital parenting, Parenting Beliefs, Parenting style, Concerns and Risks.

Introduction

Because touchscreens are so common among kids these days, "digital natives" start using computers and smartphones at an early age. The rapid adoption of touchscreen devices among younger generations has resulted in one-third of the population being considered digital natives. Minors make about one-third of the user base. Kids use electronic devices on a weekly basis in class and at least once on weekends at home.

Parents are the first to expose their children to digital technologies; they incorporate them into daily life and teach their children how to use them responsibly and positively. The term "digital parenting" refers to the practice of observing, assisting, and supervising children while they use technology. Using Vygotsky's proximal development zone theory and the idea of child development, we may better understand how children utilize new media.

Parents face the challenge of reverse socialization when their children understand or perform better than adults. Many parents are well-versed in technology and can teach their

children how to use it, so they can both benefit from and comprehend the web and all its intricacies. Children utilize portable technology as early as infancy, which is a problem for parents. Many parents report feeling less informed and less able to regulate their children's online behaviour after four years. Instead of banning the internet, parents who are now more conscious of the risks have decided to have conversations with their children about how to be safe while using it. Depending on the pros and cons, parents may choose to encourage or discourage their children's use of digital technology.

The way parents consume media may have an effect on their children's actions and choices. Culture, social status, education, and history all have a role in moulding these concepts. Some parents worry that their elementary school-aged children spend too much time online, which might have negative consequences on their health, academic performance, physical development, social skills, and overall happiness. Positive perspectives on digital technologies' effects on children's entertainment, communication, learning, information access, and skill development.

Parental Beliefs

Although parental opinions may influence their children's media consumption, they do not constitute the "cause" of their actions. According to study, having a positive outlook is associated with constructive attitudes, a cooperative approach, effective communication, and suggestions for improving children's online behaviour. If parents have an unfavourable impression of digital media, they may limit their children's access to these devices. Parents' acts and other factors, such as their level of education and the usage of mobile devices, influence the relationship between parental attitudes and children's conduct.

Confidence and skill in parenting via media

A parent's belief in their own digital skills and ability to handle technology is known as parental self-efficacy, and it is associated with active parenting. More likely to keep tabs on their kids' screen time are parents who are comfortable with technology. Perceptions of technology and discussions with children are influenced by parental self-efficacy. Parents exert less control

over their children's digital use when their preteens demonstrate more self-regulation and resistance to monitoring.

Parenting Style

Conventional parenting strategies, or how parents nurture and socialize their children, were assumed in early research on parental engagement in children's media. Based on responsiveness/warmth and demanding/control, these styles span from authoritarian to laissez-faire. Trying to modify these techniques for the way kids act on social media and other current forms of electronic communication failed. Findings related to parental warmth and control over children's usage of the Internet and other modern media were the focus of the study. It is expected that school-aged children's internet usage would rise with less parental supervision, suggesting that online parenting practices are increasingly relevant to children's digital technology use.

Family dynamics are shaped by parents' gender, upbringing, worldview, and level of familiarity with digital technologies. Researchers have shown that moms are naturally warmer and more controlling than dads, but that younger dads and those who spend more time online with their adolescents tend to be more authoritative. Parents with higher levels of education are more active and assertive. When it comes to digital parenting, children's mobile device usage improves when parents are more permissive, authoritative, and less authoritarian. These methods evolve in response to children's developmental stage, level of self-confidence, proficiency in managing their emotions, and behavioral challenges.

The Role of Parents in Supervising Children's Online Activity

Ways for Parents to Act as Mediators

Parental mediation is keeping an eye on and controlling what kids do online.

There are primarily two approaches to mediation: enabling (or instructive) and restricting. Parents may facilitate mediation by guiding their children in the appropriate use of technology. In restrictive mediation, the child's use of the internet is closely monitored and limited. When it

comes to technical limitations, software or other forms of technology are used to control what a youngster can do.

Methods for Parents to Act as Mediators

The majority of ongoing mediation cases involve European families with children aged 9 to 16. Restrictive mediation is more often used by younger children. Parents adapt their methods of mediation to their child's interests and activities.

- Parental familiarity with and skill with contemporary digital media is essential for effective mediation.
- Parents can lack basic computer skills or knowledge of the rapid changes occurring in virtual reality.
- New technology may be a challenge for parents who are low-income, have little education, or are raising children alone.

Methods for Parents to Act as Mediators

- Young children's internet competence and age dictate the best methods of parental mediation.
- Younger children are more likely to engage in active mediation, whereas older children and adolescents exhibit less limited mediation.
- Self-regulation, critical thinking, and understanding the pros and cons of digital technology are skills that parents hope their children will acquire.
- In terms of risk reduction, restricted mediation is less effective than parent-active mediation.
- Although it may have unintended consequences, restrictive mediation is sometimes used with children who are less proficient with technology.

Concerns raised by parents over their children's internet behaviour

Concerns about loneliness and intimacy are common among children who use the internet. Research has shown that spending a lot of time online is associated with less social contacts, more loneliness, and fewer friends overall. One theory proposes that children are more likely to have issues with social interaction, loneliness, and problematic Internet usage if they

suffer from low self-esteem, lack social skills, social anxiety, and have frequent arguments with their parents. Isolation and a lack of face-to-face interaction are the results of excessive internet usage, according to the alternative theory.

Teens' propensity for excessive Internet use, preferred online activities, and feelings of isolation were the subjects of a secret study. Less time spent online was associated with improved parent-child communication and more emotional availability on the part of parents. Isolated youths spent more time listening to music and less time interacting with others. Loneliness, according to an alternate theory, promotes isolation because it reduces opportunities for social contact.

Preventing risks via family communication and consistent parenting

Parental emotional availability, positive internet use, and high-quality family communication go hand in hand. In order to prevent children from engaging in harmful online behaviour, studies have shown that regular one-on-one time between parents and children is crucial. There is a correlation between family communication issues and excessive internet usage. Communicating well and openly is crucial to family dynamics and atmosphere. Parental monitoring may become less effective if children are more likely to provide personal information and engage in open dialogue. Limiting adolescent internet use, on the other hand, may lead to strained relationships between parents and children as well as obstacles to their perceived autonomy and privacy.

According to **Van den Eijnden *et al.* (2012)** there are two aspects to parent-child communication on children's digital behaviours: the frequency and the quality. Teens are less likely to develop CIU if their communication skills are high, according to their longitudinal study. As teens became more reliant on the Internet, they reduced the amount of time they spent interacting with their parents.

The efficacy of parental controls implemented in the digital realm varies. Parents that strictly enforce internet use regulations tend to have less troubled adolescents. Parental standards and behaviours are the only predictors of children's excessive Internet use in cases when there is

a conflict between the two.

In order for young children to learn to self-regulate and be safe while using technology, social learning theory suggests that parents must agree and provide a good example.

The daily lives of both parents and children have been disrupted by the COVID-19 lockdown and restrictions at home, which have had an impact on the mental and physical well-being of children. Screen time has increasing because parents may continue their education and mingle online. Concerns about teenage digital escape, sleep disorders, loneliness, and sedentary lifestyles have also arisen in response to these activities.

The negative effects of house arrest may be mitigated by enrolling in one of the many online courses offered by wealthy countries. While decreasing the negative effects of home confinement, these online alternatives safeguard children's right to education. It takes consistent effort and research to understand digital parenting and help parents.

The psychological needs of children for socialisation and emotional support from loved ones are met via digital activities during lockdown. Social media is a safe space for teens to talk about themselves, their emotions, and even romance. Video calling and smartphone connection could provide solace to relatives and carers who are isolated as a result of COVID-19 infection or recovery.

Conclusion

In order to achieve a healthy balance between screen time and other family activities, routines will need to be rethought. The World Health Organisation suggests that parents keep their children on a regular schedule and try new things together. Parental practices such as using self-limits on screen time for smart working, chatting, or gaming have a greater impact than strict mediation or child restrictions. Kids must learn to use technology safely so they can stay safe while they're online. When mediating conflicts with their children, parents' levels of engagement, technical competence, and attitude all play a role. Parents seldom seek professional advice, but when they feel inadequate or fear unknown dangers, they may restrict their children's internet access. According to research on families with children younger than seven, parents choose their



children's support network based on the child's digital activities and challenges. This network might include professionals, friends, and relatives.

Children between the ages of 0 and 5 should use the internet with caution, and those under the age of 2 should not use touchscreen devices, according to the American Academy of Paediatrics. Infants' screen time increases as a result of parents' frequent introduction to media. Obesity, developmental delays, and bad behaviours in children have been associated to screen usage in excess, according to many research. Some effective parental mediation strategies for children's digital activities include limiting their use to no more than an hour a day, not pressuring their use until they are 18 to 24 months old, encouraging them to make connections between what they learn in the virtual world and the real world, and understanding the importance of direct experiences, manipulation, and unstructured play for their social, cognitive, and language development.

Experts should guide parents in refining their guidance based on their children's developmental stage and abilities. Their digital skills and knowledge might be enhanced via media literacy classes. Parents with less skill can simply restrict their children's online activities, while those with more skill can help their children thrive in an increasingly digital world. Professionals should assist parents improve and adapt their counsel to their children's age and ability. Media literacy programmes may improve their digital abilities and knowledge. Less competent parents can only control or ban children's activities, whereas more proficient children and parents may enjoy online possibilities and develop resilience. Digital technologies evolve quickly and give children many experiences, making digital parenting hard. Digital natives may discover reality and themselves without parental or educational supervision. More study is required, especially longitudinal studies on parents and children's digital experiences, possibilities, and hazards, to determine digital technologies' pros and cons.

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