

# DIGITAL PARENTING



An interesting magazine produced by Vodafone is 'Digital Parenting'. It covers a wide range of topics related to the digital world. Copies are available online at the following address:

<http://www.vodafone.com/content/digital-parenting>

## A sample page

Happy kids

### How to be a digital role model

Dr Fiona Pienaar, director of clinical services at children's mental health charity Place2Be, explains how to support your child in the digital age

As a parent, it's important to get to know the world your children are growing up in. Your openness, knowledge and attitude to all things digital will play a major role in maintaining your child's mental health and emotional wellbeing as they navigate an exciting but challenging new world.

#### Make time to talk to each other and, just as important, to listen to each other

If you want your child to have a balanced approach to the technology in their lives, set a good example. Eat meals together at a table without any technology turned on. Make time to talk to each other, and to listen to each other. Show interest in their daily lives and explain how you decide which TV programmes you watch. Equally, explain how you decide when not to engage in digital technology, how and why you turn your devices off, and how you can use time to engage with others.

Why not create family traditions early in life that become so well-established and loved that they will always want to do them? Get outside, play games, walk in your neighbourhood and take your child to a favourite cafe for a milkshake.

In these ways you can support your child to use digital technology in a safe and knowledgeable way – and try to have fun together doing it.

#### How do we ensure our children grow up emotionally and mentally healthy?

A lot has been written about the negative aspects of the digital world, particularly social media. Online bullying, children becoming addicted to gaming, and the potential consequences of trying to create a perfect online image are all well-documented. But the digital world has also had an enormously positive effect on society.

So how do we find a balance? How do we ensure that our children grow up with an objective, sensible and well-adjusted approach to life in the digital age?

As a society, we have fairly recently moved to acknowledge how important it is to protect our children and young people from the real and potential challenges associated with life in the digital world.

#### Children pick up habits and attitudes from the significant adults around them

Nothing is more important than the example we set for children from the start of their lives. Children pick up habits and attitudes from the significant adults around them. Thinking about what we, as adults, present as normal our homes and in society in general, is crucial. How we manage digital devices dictates how our children and young people absorb early learning and how they develop their personal attitudes, beliefs and values.

Young people today not only have to manage their lives in real-time, but also in a parallel digital-time. If we want them to navigate that parallel world from a strong base of emotional wellbeing and mental health, we have to provide them with the guidance, education, tools, skills and support to do so.

#### Is the internet having a negative effect on your child's mental health?

It's something we worry about as parents, but what do young people think? Parent Zone's Rachel Rosen asked hundreds of young people and teachers across the UK

Research shows that one child in 10 has a diagnosable mental health problem, and many experts say that number could be even higher.

Through Parent Zone's work with schools, health practitioners and parents, we know that they're worried about this trend, and some wonder if technology could be partly to blame.

In my report, *The Perfect Generation: Is the Internet Undermining Young People's Mental Health?* we set out to find out what young people really think about mental health and the internet. We talked to people aged 13 to 20 around the UK, as well as to teachers, deputy head teachers and school nurses.

#### What do young people think?

Is the internet bad for your mental health?

Agree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree
28%	32%	40%

Many comments highlighted how the internet can have both a negative and positive effect. "The internet definitely amplifies everything – the good and the bad. You just have to choose the right route" was one response.

Another made a similar point: "Harmful sites [...] are too easily accessible. These can either trigger the beginning of a mental illness, or exacerbate it. On the other hand, the internet can make it easier for some to reach out for help, and one can also find others online struggling with similar difficulties."

The study also revealed that just over a quarter of young people would turn to the internet first if they had a problem, but more than 60% would prefer to talk, in person, to someone they trust. The most common reason that children said they wouldn't reach out was because they were worried about disappointing their parents or feeling awkward around their friends.

**How can we help?**

Nearly three-quarters of schools have dealt with a pupil with a mental health problem that they think was made worse by the pupil's online activity. And lots of teens felt adults would be more able to help them with digital problems if they better understood a young person's perspective.

The internet is now where social dramas play out, and where teens experiment with relationships. It's a tool they use to study and discover the world. As parents, we need to do what we've always done: talk to our children, be there for them, and make sure they know we love them no matter what.

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