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Creating healthy digital habits in kids

Surveys have consistently shown that children have been exposed to rising amounts of screen time in recent years, as well as parents struggling to manage the moods and time demands of children and young people.

As kids spend increasing amounts of time tethered to a digital device, it makes sense that the time they are online, is time well spent. As parents we're often concerned about the connections children and young people are making and the subsequent impact on their wellbeing. We're often concerned about the content they're consuming, and how helpful, relevant and safe it is for them. Rightfully, there's concern that the time spent online, scrolling, searching and swiping, may well be time better spent on other pursuits.

Obviously, these digital devices won't be going anywhere fast. So, we need to look at how we remain in control of our screen use, and ensure the time we're investing online is adding something helpful, positive and meaningful to our lives.

Here are a few tips to help you be more intentional with your scrolling. Being mindful of how time spent on devices, is certainly not just reserved for young people.

Encourage creation not just consumption

Here's a simple question. Are you more of a consumer or creator when you're online? When you spend your online time in creative mode such as making things, creating own videos, editing photos, writing blogs, coding a video game or composing a song you are getting something tangible in return for the time spent on a screen. You are achieving and creating something, rather than simply consuming the content made by others, which is generally far more satisfying as a user.

Look at who you are following

Consider the real purpose of the people on your feeds. Are you following celebrities you can never relate to, companies you would never buy from, or people who bring you down rather than teach or inspire you? Ideally, you'll follow people and companies that you can connect with and add positively to your life.

So what about your child? If they have a passion for something, help them find suitable people to follow. For instance, if they love space, search for NASA and related accounts. If they love photography, help them find great photographers sharing their work online. When they're following people that teach, inspire and ignite their passions, they're less likely to spend valuable time with energy zappers.

Do a digital declutter

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We all have so many apps on our devices and many are just clutter that we used once and no longer visit or don't add anything constructive to our day. Maybe you could try deleting all the apps on your phone and only put those back that you need to make your day easier, or that offer you something positive. This forces us to look at the real benefits, or not, of the apps and thus the time we are spending online. Could there be better games for your kids to play? Are there better videos for them to watch than the ones that the YouTube algorithm believes they want to see?

Role model good practises

Most kids learn much more from what they see and experience, rather than from what they are told. As a parent be sure to be intentional with your screentime. Do you:

- Follow people that support you, challenge you in helpful ways or inspire and lift you up?
- Interact in positive ways?
- Give people your attention rather than scroll whilst others are talking to you?
- Put your digital devices away in order to fit all the other important things into your day?

Setting your kids up with good online habits will help make these practises the norm. If you don't want your children falling prey to the harmful and unhelpful experiences online, you need to be sure that they are focusing on positive and helpful screentime pursuits.

Be intentional with your scrolling, and you'll ensure you're getting a much greater return on your online investment.

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Martine is a parent educator and a youth and family counsellor who speaks, writes and consults on the challenges faced by families in the modern world. Martine has a Masters in Counselling and a background in secondary education. Through her personal and professional work with families raising children, she recognises the important role technology plays in the social and emotional wellbeing of young people. Martine is an accredited speaker with the Office of the eSafety Commissioner.