

# Embrace Your Fear of Tech

by Pam Simon, MSW

I recently had a great chat with a parent that highlighted a prevalent fear among parents everywhere: parents fear technology. They don't know how to embrace the technology their kids are using AND keep them safe in the process!

We sometimes fear what we haven't experienced. As parents we didn't have the technology experience our kids are having today. Many parents perceive the world as more dangerous than it was 25 years ago, and that is scary. As we head into summer break and lots of downtime (which parents know means "up-time" at home or traveling), kids will be using technology more frequently. The good news is there are safeguards that make the digital playground a safer one. These involve **connectivity, engagement and balance**.

## Connectivity builds security

Your children are online at school, at home, on the playground and on the sidelines. They're constantly connected, so teach them to be good "digital citizens." Giving kids a solid understanding of what is expected starts them off on the right foot. In fact it's so important, we have an entire week in October called Digital Citizen Week devoted to it.

Kids as early as five can be shown how to use a moral code when playing online. This moral code is founded on values cultivated before bad things set in, including cyberbullying, identity fraud, security breaches and cyber predators.

Teach your kids to treat others online as they would like to be treated, and to pause before hitting the post or send button. Tell them what's OK to share outside your family and what's not. Show them how to distinguish truth on the Internet and how to spot red flags. Above all, make sure your kids know they can come to you for help and support when they need it.

## Engage and be all the rage

Carving out time to engage with your kids online helps them feel supported. Check in with what games they're playing and who they're chatting with. Mark on your bi-weekly calendar to ask but not sneak info. Play video games with them, learn the lingo. Learn what a Creeper is, teleport with them on Periscope, and know what VR stands for. Skype alongside them with relatives. Know the difference between Dub Step, House and EDM (it's in the beats per minute), watch or make YouTube videos with your kids.

## Know when to unplug

Finally, give balance by unplugging at home. While many studies show that interactive screen time is better than passive screen time, we need to keep an eye on balancing how much that is in our families, and whether that includes TV time.

The National Institute of Health encourages balancing "on-screen time" with "off-screen time." Taking frequent breaks to exercise, drink water and connect with the world "off-screen" is good. Making screen time "bad" can create a "forbidden fruit" aspect to technology. Having healthy attitudes about screen time, exercise, homework and family connections is key. Incentivize what you value and everyone will thrive!

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