

Raising a digital

Bringing up children can be difficult at the best of times, but it seems that technological advances are adding to the pressures, writes *Dr Mike Ribble*.

It's hard to keep up with all that can be done with a computer and other digital devices, let alone how we should let our children use them. Parents and educators need to come together and agree on a message of appropriate use.

Technology provides many positive opportunities for our children, but if used inappropriately it can lead to depression, addiction and feelings of isolation.

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well as balance it with other skills such as interpersonal relations, self-confidence and exercise.

The need to support healthy use of technology is not limited to one country or culture. Users immersed in technology are beginning to organise themselves into their own society of 'digital citizens'. These people have their own language, methods of interaction and social structure. Some are heavily involved while others come and go as they wish, but it is becoming clearer that these users are creating the foundation of a new worldwide digital

economy. This new society is the one that children today are quickly looking to join.

Schools and parents need to be in agreement on the topics that will be discussed and addressed, then begin deciding on the core values that need to be stressed both in the home and at school. With these areas identified children can begin learning about appropriate technology use as digital citizens.

In this process of helping our children to become digital citizens it can be difficult for parents and schools to define what is appropriate or not. The focus should be on how the technology is used rather than the technology itself.

How can this be done? First digital citizenship must be defined. One broad definition is "the norms of appropriate, responsible behaviour with regard to technology use". Digital citizenship is not meant to be a set of rules. Its goal is to provide a framework to help parents and educators to define the issues concerning technology and how to help their children. This structure helps parents and teachers by dividing up technology use into nine elements. Within each of these elements there is support by defining digital technologies and their appropriate use.

Helping children understand the appropriate use of technology can be difficult even with those who use these tools every day, but it can seem overwhelming for parents and educators who feel that they cannot keep up with the rapid changes of a technological world. Hopefully by having a framework of nine themes, parents and educators can begin to provide appropriate direction and raise a generation of good digital citizens.



child



Dr Mike Ribble is a director of technology for a school district in the United States. He has also written two books on digital citizenship: 'Digital Citizenship in Schools' and 'Raising a Digital Child'.

For more information, please go to the website: www.digitalcitizenship.org



The nine themes and some topics for discussion:

1 Digital Access: *full electronic participation in society.*
Parents and educators need to identify if children and others have basic contact with technology as well as supporting those with "other abilities" (such as blindness) that may hinder the use of technology.

2 Digital Commerce: *electronic buying and selling of goods.*
Parents need to discuss when it is appropriate to buy or sell items online as well as the issues that can go with it (such as identity theft) when using non-secure sites.

3 Digital Communication: *electronic exchange of information.*
Parents and educators need to help children to identify the different digital communication methods (for example, cell phone, instant messaging, and blogging) and know when and where to use these communication technologies.

4 Digital Literacy: *process of teaching and learning about technology and the use of technology.*
Everyone needs to spend time learning about technology before using it. Parents and teachers need to lead their children by providing a good example of technology use.

5 Digital Etiquette: *electronic standards of conduct or procedure.*
Children need to become aware how others see their technology use. Use of mobile devices (for example mobile phones, MP3 players) can be annoying to others in public spaces.

6 Digital Law: *electronic responsibility for actions and deeds.*
Educators most often spend time teaching children about issues of plagiarism but everyone needs to know that this also applies to topics such as illegal downloading of music or movies.

7 Digital Rights and Responsibilities: *those freedoms extended to everyone in a digital world.*
There are many opportunities that come with using technology (for example, ease of communication) but children must also be attentive to issues when they are made to feel uncomfortable online and what to do when they feel this way (such as talking to parents or other authorities).

8 Digital Health and Wellness: *physical and psychological well being in a digital technology world.*
Parents and educators need to be aware of both the physical discomfort (for example, repetitive stress, eyestrain, etc.) as well as possible addiction to technology use.

9 Digital Security (self-protection): *electronic precautions to guarantee safety.*
It is important that every technology has protection (for example, virus protection and firewalls) and these protections are kept up to date.

