

PARENTING IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Positive parenting strategies
for different scenarios



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**Positive parenting strategies
for different scenarios**

Text prepared by Dr Elizabeth Milovidov, JD

Council of Europe

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Acknowledgements

The text for this brochure was prepared by **Dr Elizabeth Milovidov, JD**. Dr Milovidov is an e-safety consultant with more than 20 years of experience as an attorney law professor and child rights advocate. Her mission is to empower parents and children on Internet, technology and social media issues and she is the founder of DigitalParentingCoach.com.

Her video tutorials can be found via the Council of Europe YouTube channel under the Children's Rights playlist, or on www.coe.int/children.



INTRODUCTION

With the introduction of internet, new digital technologies and social media to families around the world, the fundamental role of parents and the goals of parenting remain unchanged: parents and caregivers are still required to nurture, to protect, to provide for, to love, to connect with and to guide their children. It also holds true that parenting practices in the past and today are most effective when grounded in values and principles of positive parenting that foster open communication and trust. These models and values need to be extended into the online world in order to establish the connection between traditional values and the online world, but also to contain the risks linked to it for children.

■ Like all parents, digital parents need to be responsible role models, and, more than ever before, they need to establish communication and trust so that children will discuss their autonomous online activities openly. Digital parents should understand what style of parenting works best for their families so that their children not only participate in the digital age, but actually thrive. Therefore, they need to ensure that they are acting as digital guardians, that they understand and use privacy settings on social media accounts, that they understand and monitor, where appropriate, their child's digital footprint and identity, and that they put appropriate limits to their child's online activities ideally in line with recommendations of the relevant national authorities. Parents and caregivers are also called upon to closely watch their own behaviours as

they share, for example images, online, as well as their use made of digital technologies throughout the day. Parents and caregivers are often the first providers of technology to their young children, and therefore need to fully understand what young children may encounter in the digital world.

■ Thus, the underlying goal of the approach of **positive digital parenting**, promoted through this guide, is to provide children with adequate resources to engage in the digital environment safely and responsibly and to foster communication and trust between children and parents. The aim of this guide is to provide a sustainable digital parenting model to be applied to different scenarios today, and in the future..

■ This guide is divided into five sections:

- ▶ Children in the digital environment: what are different age groups doing?
- ▶ Digital parenting: different styles and approaches
- ▶ Digital parenting strategies: a basic model
- ▶ Positive digital parenting scenarios: data protection, social media, smartphones, online games and screen time
- ▶ A final word: further guidance for positive digital parenting

■ The Council of Europe has provided additional resources related to digital parenting strategies, including video tutorials, and on positive parenting as such. Please check under “audiovisual material” and under “publications” on the website www.coe.int/children for updates. Numerous publications across Europe address the legal and public health implications of children’s use of digital technologies and provide further useful guidance; see for example the resources by UNICEF, the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) or the OECD.



CHILDREN IN THE DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT



Ages 0-3: how are they concerned by online activities?

Newborns and toddlers are obviously not directly engaged in the digital environment. Infants should even be protected from premature exposure to the digital environment or any screen at this low age, due to the limited benefits they gain from these with regard to the particular physical, psychological social and stimulation needs and the health risks that such exposure may cause.

For this age group, parents are therefore mostly invited to watch their own behaviour and discommended to give digital activities priority over face-to-face activities and real-world-play; according to WHO, physical activities should clearly outweigh sedentary activities until the age of 5. Parents and caregivers who post images and videos of baby establish their child's first digital footprints and should share elements in the most responsible manner.



Ages 4-8: what are they doing online?

From the age of four, children may already be exploring the digital world via apps and videos. Increasingly the television is being replaced by video streaming services, but parents and caregivers should not forget that both television and streamed content should be included in a child's total, daily screen time. Children at this age may not be computer-savvy, but they are usually very comfortable navigating through different screen interfaces.

Children aged 5 to 7 usually start appreciating games, reading and math apps and sharing technologies with other children on playdates. 8-year-olds are enjoying their time online whether they play games, watch tutorials, videoconferencing with family or any other online activity. Young children would normally not have their own social media accounts, but they may spend more time watching videos and learning new gaming strategies.

At this age, technology that encourages children to play more complex games, to begin reading and writing, to listen to stories, songs and rhymes, or to develop listening and speaking skills can be educational, as well as entertaining. Parents and caregivers should actively support their children, guide them in positive choices, clearly limit the time spent online, and, once again, propose alternative options of play and discovery which may involve real-life and shared "adventures".



Ages 9-12: how do their online activities evolve?

Children aged 9-12 are in the stage of pre-adolescence where they transition from shyness to independence. Many parents struggle to understand their child at this age and adding digital devices and technology may make things even more difficult, including because parents and caregivers are not always aware of their children's online activities. Children may also be using tablets, smartphones and computers for school assignments, and schools may not always provide guidance on the use of those devices, so here, attention and interest from parents is necessary.

At this age, children may already be tempted to join social media networking sites, which generally have age restrictions at 13 – for a good reason. Companies are allowed to advertise to children 13 and above and children’s data may be used for marketing purposes. Parents should teach their children, from the very start, to be critical of any information provided through the internet and functions where personal information is asked of them.

The good news is that children of this age have the skills needed to understand the challenges of digital citizenship and can help you create your family media agreements. Parents and caregivers of children aged 9-12 should recognise that this is the time to set-up and reinforce healthy habits and critical thinking; they should generally observe their children’s activities and accompany them on digital devices to know when to step in for support.



Ages 13-18: how do they develop their online potential?

Parents and caregivers should acknowledge that this age range is a time of growing autonomy, but not forget that many of the risks encountered by younger children remain valid for teenagers. Teenagers have access to many opportunities online, and teen online exploration and experimenting can help them build necessary skills in using information and communication technologies, but also develop other capacities like critical thinking. Older children could be encouraged to co-create information and training for younger children, both in family and educational settings.

Teenagers strive for more independence and privacy and often turn to social media as a means of expression and for their own social connections. Social media and online gaming can provide many benefits to teenagers, including support networks or shared interests, although they may also bring along external social pressure which can be perceived as a burden for teenagers (for example in cases of cyber-bullying).

Parenting a teen in the digital age may be the biggest digital parenting challenge of all, as teenagers can take more advantage of the benefits of digital media but are also increasingly faced with potentially harmful content and activities, such as grooming, sexting, hook-up apps, pornography and more.

First and foremost, parents and caregivers of teenagers need to maintain a positive and trustful relationship with their children. By remaining attentive to their teens' online lives (as much as they allow), parents and caregivers will be able to understand how teens use technology, provide guidance when things happen (as they inevitably will) and help teens maintain a healthy relationship with the technologies surrounding them.



DIGITAL PARENTING STYLES

Parents and caregivers should regularly reflect on their own behaviour: What type of digital parent am I? What example do I give my children through my own use of digital technologies? How do I respond to the challenges encountered in the digital age? Do I accompany my children on their journeys, or do I prefer to allow them to make discoveries on their own?

■ Whatever type of style adults opt for, the end result should be the same: raising children to become critical thinkers and users of digital technologies, and to communicate with and trust their parents and other caregivers in a positive and nurturing environment that empowers their full development. While the following chart does not present any specific order or preferred type of parenting style, it can be helpful for parents and caregivers to position themselves:



Traditional and Digital Parenting Styles

	Traditional parenting style	Digital parenting style
<i>Authoritarian parents</i>	Parents make high demands of their children yet provide very little feedback or nurturance.	Parents may provide the latest technology and apps for their child with strict rules to follow, but not provide later support or guidance.
<i>Authoritative parents</i>	Parents make high demands of their children but are very responsive and nurturing.	Parents will have high expectations and explain (as best as they can) online safety and screen limits, but they will allow their child to surf the net and use technology.
<i>Permissive parents</i>	Parents are very responsive but not very demanding of their children.	Parents will encourage their child in internet and technology use as the child wants and will advise their child to check-in if they want.
<i>Helicopter parents</i>	Parents hover over their children to protect them from any dangers.	Parents will have extensive rules and perhaps parental control software and close monitoring to protect their child from online dangers.
<i>Lawnmower/snow-plough parents</i>	Parents clear any potential obstacles in their child's way.	Parents will be very involved in trying to remove any online discomfort, rather than focusing on resilience-building.

Source for *Traditional Parenting Styles*: OECD, *Educating 21st Century Children: Emotional Well-Being in the Digital Age* 2019, <http://www.oecd.org/education/ceri/21st-century-children.htm>; *Digital Parenting Styles* adapted on this basis.



Positive parenting: finding the right balance

There are many different styles of parenting, and over the past few years, we have seen new styles develop as parents try to overcome today's online challenges. While these different styles may have their respective merits and drawbacks, parents can take a blend of the characteristics best shown to bring results and create their own positive digital parenting style that finds the right balance to mentor, empower and guide their children in the digital age.

In its Recommendation CM/Rec(2006)19 on policy to support positive parenting, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe defined positive parenting as "... nurturing, empowering, nonviolent..." and which "provides recognition and guidance which involves setting of boundaries to enable the full development of the child."

Positive parenting refers to parental behaviour that respects children's best interests and their rights, as set forth in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) – a convention which also takes into account parents' needs and resources. The positive parent nurtures, empowers, guides and recognises children as individuals in their own right. Positive parenting sets the boundaries that children need to help them develop their potential to the fullest.



Positive parenting: the basic principles

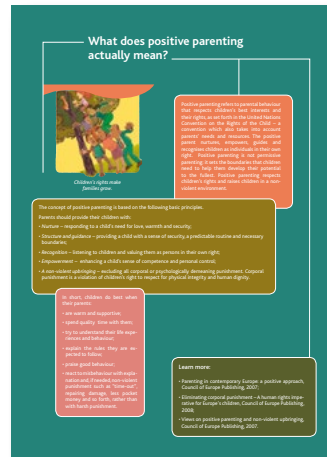
As highlighted by the Council of Europe, positive parenting respects children's rights, including:

- ▶ the right to non-discrimination;
- ▶ the best interests of the child;
- ▶ the child's right to life and development;
- ▶ the child's right to participation (e.g. to express her/his views, to be heard and to receive information);
- ▶ the right to protection and care.

... and is based on the following basic principles and support:

- ▶ Nurturing care – responding to a child’s need for love, warmth and security;
- ▶ Structure and guidance – providing a child with a sense of security, a predictable routine and necessary boundaries;
- ▶ Recognition – listening to children and valuing them as persons in their own right;
- ▶ Empowerment – enhancing a child’s sense of competence and personal control;
- ▶ A non-violent upbringing – excluding all corporal or psychologically demeaning punishment; corporal punishment is a violation of children’s right to respect for physical integrity and human dignity.

■ The Council of Europe has developed numerous practical resources on children’s rights and positive parenting which are freely available, including for children and adolescents.





Positive digital parenting

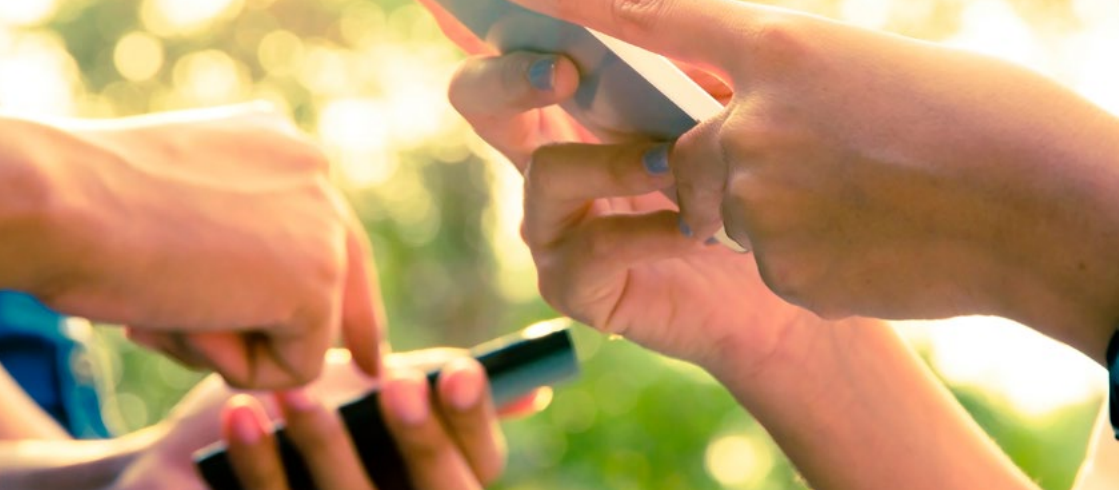
The principles of positive parenting recommended by the Council of Europe should be expanded into the digital environment in order to help parents and other caregivers continue respecting children's rights in this (relatively) new context. This is the concept behind "positive digital parenting". According to this new concept, positive digital parents and caregivers should provide their children with:

- ▶ Nurturing care and involvement in their child's digital development – responding to a child's need for love, warmth and security, as well as understanding, as they explore the online world;
- ▶ Structure and guidance regarding access to the internet, technology and social media – providing a child with a sense of security, a predictable routine and necessary boundaries for the online world which are appropriate to a child's age;
- ▶ Recognition of a child's rights in the digital environment – listening to children and valuing them as persons in their own right as they exert their independence in the online world;
- ▶ Empowerment as a digital citizen in the 21st century – enhancing a child's capacities and personal control of their identity, data, privacy and security in the online world;
- ▶ A non-violent upbringing offline and online – reducing, if not excluding, all demeaning and inappropriate content that children may encounter in the online world; and communicating and handling any difficulties concerning online activities in a non-violent and non-demeaning manner.

Positive digital parenting means for parents:

- ▶ open communication with children about the use of Internet, risks and benefits
- ▶ regular interest for and involvement in children's internet activities
- ▶ active protection of your children's digital reputation and digital identity
- ▶ learning with children about the opportunities that the digital age can present
- ▶ guiding your children and protecting them from the dangers that the Internet may pose
- ▶ bringing offline parenting skills already acquired to the online world

Source: Internet Literacy Handbook (2017); factsheet on positive parenting



DIGITAL PARENTING STRATEGIES

A checklist for parents and caregivers

Positive digital parenting respects children’s rights online and empowers children to thrive in the digital environment as parents nurture and guide their children through conversations and trust, and regularly offers them real-life alternatives to digital activities. Gathering resources and evidence-based practices from child online protection experts, **positive digital parenting** engages five essential tools in order to effectively support their digital families: **communication, critical thinking, citizenship, continuity** and **community**. These five tools are presented here to include practical “quick tips” for parents and caregivers:



Communication

Communication is the cornerstone of positive digital parenting and the WWW approach developed by The Parent Zone provides a blueprint for parents to start a conversation with their child. As parents and caregivers, you could ask your children:

“Who are you talking to online (classmates, friends in town/abroad, strangers)?”

“What are you doing online?”

“Where are you going online (type of websites, platforms, etc.)?”

And a 4th can be “When are you going online (for how long and at what time of the day)?”

By using this approach, you will find have a simple guide to what types of questions your children can be asked that can then be extended into an in-depth conversation with them.



One of the easiest ways to keep up communication with your child is to make small adjustments to your existing routines. In addition to asking your child “How was your day today?”, you could ask “How was your online day today?” The basic goal, of course, is to invite your child to open up about and share their experiences and activities online, rather than to appear as interrogating them.

You can also take advantage of regular moments with your children to show your interest in their online activities and provide your children with a relaxed setting to share and engage with you. Regular parenting moments such as driving to school, washing dishes, cooking dinner or any other activity that brings you and your child together can provide a great opportunity for an open, unhurried conversation. And why not spend some time with them on their favourite platforms or games, if they are ready to share?



Critical thinking

Critical thinking is the ability to analyse and reflect upon what to do (before acting) and it is an invaluable skill for parents and children alike. Parents can use this deeper reflection to decide whether their family needs that new device, game, app, robot or technology. Once parents decide affirmatively to purchase a new technology or device, they can think of ways to use it safely and responsibly, seeking ways to maximise privacy and data protection settings, and defining when and for how long digital technologies may be used

Technology, including artificial intelligence, and the internet can be used positively, for example to help develop certain skills and knowledge, connect to others, or for entertainment. But like all good things, technology and the internet should not be overused, and may also pose risks to people's health, safety, autonomy (towards possible harmful influences) or privacy. Thinking critically is important to ensure a safe and healthy online development for children, and it is an essential skill that parents and other caregivers can also pass down to their children, through leading by example.



Along with critical thinking before and after digital purchases, it is important to come up with digital guidelines that work best for your family, and to communicate those to your children on a regular basis. It is also important that your children feel comfortable coming to speak to you when/if anything goes wrong, or even if they are just confused about something they have read online.

Critical thinking is an indispensable tool that your children can apply to many different situations throughout their lives and it is also essential for healthy, responsible internet and technology use.



Citizenship

As defined by the Digital Citizenship Education Working Group of the Council of Europe, digital citizenship may be said to refer to: competent and positive engagement with digital technologies (creating, working, sharing, socialising, investigating, playing, communicating and learning); participating actively and responsibly (values, attitudes, skills, knowledge) in communities at all levels (local, national, European, global) and in different contexts (political, economic, social, cultural and intercultural); being involved in a double process of life-long learning (in formal, informal, non-formal settings); and continuously defending human dignity and rights.

Source: Council of Europe Digital Citizenship Education Handbook (2019)



The concept of digital citizenship is an extension of what you as a parent or caregiver and your children's schools are already doing: preparing children to become literate, informed and engaged citizens in the worlds around them. The digital component brings those same notions of citizenship to the online environment.

As parents and caregivers, you can support digital citizenship education for your children: by getting involved in an internet and citizenship dialogue; by helping your children balance the social and interpersonal implication of using online technology (within certain limits); and by communicating regularly with them and their educators, in order to help develop their skills as involved and informed digital citizens, appropriate to their respective ages.



Continuity

Once parents have begun to have those conversations with children, it is necessary to continue the communication, even when the subject matter is uncomfortable. Advice from Better Internet for Kids stresses that continued involvement, support and dialogue can help children thrive online.



Family conversation leads to an exchange of ideas and understanding. Parents and family members who have regular, open conversations are able to learn about each other and learn from each other. Continuing the conversation with your children on online issues and topics allows the digital parenting relationship to build and strengthen. Your children should know that they can rely on you for support, for listening, for exchanging viewpoints and opinions. You may use any kind of informal family time (in the car, while cleaning up, prepping for dinner or just taking a walk) to engage in conversations about your children's online world.



Community

Communities provide support to families by allowing parents and caregivers to interact and share their experiences. In family life, being able to turn to a family member or community member may be helpful in resolving an issue. And with the evolving online world, a community that follows the trends and gathers collective knowledge, may be vital in sharing pertinent and timely information with community members.



Communities of individuals connected for the purpose of improving children's rights in the digital environment can provide resources to respond to a broad range of issues. You can find your community of support in your town or neighbourhood, among parents of school mates or even online parenting communities. The only requirement is that whatever community you join, it should provide you with opportunities to connect on a regular basis, to reach for shared goals, to share best practices and overall to feel secure and confident in the approaches created collectively or the solutions found for your individual problem.



DIGITAL PARENTING SCENARIOS FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

This guide has provided information on what your children and young people may be doing online, on what type of digital parent you might be and on different strategies that you can employ as you engage in **positive digital parenting**. But how, exactly, does this work? Let's briefly take a look at some common challenges in the digital environment and apply **positive digital parenting** strategies to different issues, applications or technologies. The objects of our scenarios are **online sharing, social media, tablets and smartphones, online video games and screen time**.

— This following list of scenarios is by no means exhaustive, but it should provide you with an opportunity to see how **positive digital parenting** can guide parents in a very practical way and in different settings. Please take a moment to reflect upon how you would act, react or intervene in each of the scenarios.

Online sharing and data protection/privacy

■ In order to engage in online activities, users may be required to share some of their personal information to have access to online platforms. At other times, users may share information in the form of images, videos and more, as they connect, play and learn together online. Many children feel comforted and validated when sharing online because other children may feel the same way, may like the content they share or may want to engage with them in conversations.

■ Many users, children and adults alike, do not always consider the risks of over-sharing information or how best to protect their privacy. Today, data protection and privacy laws are growing in importance in many countries, especially as we protect the data and privacy of users under the age of 18.

■ **Case Study:** Your teenage son posts images and content that you find inappropriate. You ask him to delete the images and comments, but you are worried because he may have done this before and could reproduce it in the future.

■ **Parental reflections:** Ask him to perform a search on his own name. Is he proud of the content that is displayed? Would he be comfortable if family members saw this content? Would he be comfortable if a university, future employer or future spouse saw this content? Ask him what type of positive content he can post rather than items that may reflect poorly on his digital identity or may create serious difficulties for him.



Positive digital parenting goal

Parents can begin a **conversation** about the issue and engage in a dialogue. The dialogue will help parents and caregivers raise children to **critically think** about the content they share online and to be confident in bringing any issues, concerns or challenges to their parents' attention.



Positive digital parenting tips

- ▶ When sharing photos or videos on social media sites, be sure to set the strictest privacy settings to share only with friends and family, both for yourself and your children.
- ▶ Speak with your children about what is personal information, both concerning them individually and other family members.
- ▶ Review the data protection and privacy information available on social media and gaming platforms.
- ▶ Discuss your family expectations and values about online sharing.
- ▶ Perform regular name searches to verify the online content related to your family.

Social media

■ Social media platforms are connecting children and young people in unprecedented numbers and ways: users can share videos, images, and other creative content; users can make connections with others over shared interests, values and ideals; users can have interactive dialogues and enhance friendships and relationships. In these ways, social media can play a vital role in children’s social and creative lives and can be a positive complementary extension to their face-to-face interactions.

■ However, social media sites can also pose risks to children, such as oversharing, seeing or sharing inappropriate images, cyberbullying, grooming, sexting and more. Parents and other caregivers can guide children in the responsible use of social media so that children can learn how to recognise and navigate the risks and how they want to be treated and treat others online.

■ **Case study:** Your teenage daughter has over 500 friends on her social media account and she seems terribly secretive about her social media activity.

■ **Parental reflections:** Does she personally know every single friend? Is it best for her to remove the unknown friends? Are the unknown friends of friends that can be verified? Is she gaming or chatting with those “friends?”

■ Is she doing something embarrassing, or something innocent, like preparing a gift for you? Is she doing something that she should not be doing? Is she watching or posting inappropriate content? How can you start a conversation while respecting her privacy?



Positive digital parenting action

Parents and caregivers can teach children how to manage their online reputations and digital identities by using **critical thinking** skills. By having continued conversations, parents can teach their children to act as responsible **digital citizens**, behave respectfully on social media and learn to make the difference between online friends and real-life friends.



Positive digital parenting tips

- ▶ Determine whether the social media platform is appropriate for your child's age.
- ▶ Consider guiding your child in proper usage, rather than outright restriction, so that they can learn from you.
- ▶ Check privacy and location settings and make sure that the settings are not allowing for access to personal images and videos.
- ▶ Make your child understand that people encountered exclusively online cannot always be trusted in the same way as real-life friends.
- ▶ Reinforce the notion of not sharing personally identifiable information.
- ▶ Consider opening an account on the same social media platform and 'friending' your child.
- ▶ Make sure that your teenager has other trusted adults to speak to (e.g. a relative or teacher) with in the event that she does not want to share with you.

Tablets and smartphones

Smartphones are mobile phones (which text and make phone calls) that can connect to the internet and can contain online apps such as WhatsApp, Google maps, Instagram, TikTok and more. Tablets are portable computers that use a touchscreen: they are larger than smartphones, yet smaller than laptop computers. Both tablets and smartphones can bring many educational and entertainment opportunities to users.

■ Many children use tablets and smartphones on a daily basis, and unfortunately there are many things that can go wrong. Risks include excessive exposure and time spent on digital devices and screens, involvement in cyberbullying, sexting, grooming, excessive gaming, and more.

■ **Case study:** Your child seems distressed after receiving a text message on their smartphone or going online on their tablet.

■ **Parental reflections:** Do you think your child is being bullied, trolled (e.g. insulted by someone on purpose) or harassed? What can you do to make sure that your child feels safe and supported? Have you reminded your child what to do if they are being bullied: namely, to ignore or block and report? Do you know how to save messages and images with screenshots, which can be used as evidence for these reports? Do you know of any resources or services that will provide support for your child and you as a parent?



Positive digital parenting goal

Parents can have open, continued communication in order to set digital limits and guidelines that work best for their family. Parents will be able to support their child to use tablets and smartphones responsibly and to reduce the likelihood of the risky situations listed above. Parents can ensure that their child knows how to respond in negative situations so that they are empowered as **digital citizens**.



Positive digital parenting tips

- ▶ Discussions with your children on how or how often they use tablets and smartphones, even if uncomfortable at times, are necessary in order to provide guidance.
- ▶ Make sure that your children feel confident to speak to you or another trusted adult when/if anything serious happens or simply makes them feel uncomfortable while they are using their smartphones or tablets.

- ▶ If you have not yet given your child a smartphone or tablet, use your **critical thinking** skills to consider whether the device is necessary at their age and their level of responsibility.
- ▶ If you have given a smartphone or tablet to your child, make sure that you investigate the parental settings and other features of the device so that you can guide your child in responsible use.

Online video games

■ Online video games can be exciting and educational. There is a wide range of games to entice younger children to learn the alphabet or colours, or teenage users with brain teasers. The benefits to playing online video games include critical thinking, collaboration, strategy formulation, creativity and more.

■ On the other hand, the risks of online gaming include excessive screen time (and in certain exacerbating circumstances online addiction), safety issues (foul language, cyberbullying and the potential to befriend a dangerous person) brought about by the chat feature, expensive in-app purchases (while the game is free, special accessories, etc. can often be purchased), and increased anxiety levels due to the competitive nature of the game. Predators also use games to lure children into dangerous situations.

■ **Case study:** Your child is spending excessive time online playing the latest video games, while neglecting his school duties, and when he is not playing, he acts aggressively with others.

■ **Parental reflections:** How can I help my child create healthy gaming habits and find the right balance with other activities and duties? How can I find games that are age-appropriate and content-appropriate for my child? What can I do to ensure that my child is being respectful when gaming with others?



Positive digital parenting goal

Parents can support their children in the use of online video games that are age-appropriate, creative and fun. Parents can allow their children to discover online video games and enjoy them with moderation.



Positive digital parenting tips

- ▶ Educate yourself about the game and play with your children, so that you can form your own opinions and decisions about the game.
- ▶ Research the games by looking at reputable resources for app reviews or ask other parents in your community.
- ▶ Communicate with your children about risks associated with online games.
- ▶ Make sure you know what and when your children are playing online.
- ▶ Set ground rules, such as never share any personal information, only play/communicate with people that they actually know in the real world whenever possible, and only play where parents can listen and hear what is happening.
- ▶ Depending upon the age and maturity of your child, disable the chat feature and use, age-appropriate, parental controls to make sure your children are not spending too much time (especially unsupervised) playing.

Screen Time

■ Screen time is defined as any time your child is in front of a screen, whether that be on a smartphone, tablet, gaming console, television, computer or movie screen. The amount spent in front of a screen can steadily rise, as children spend time on tablets at home, watch videos in school, with the sitter, with a relative or with friends.

■ While children are certainly entertained and attracted by screens, the notion of screen time is problematic, as doctors, academics and other experts try to understand what is in fact happening to children when they are on screens. The research is not conclusive on the effects of screens upon child development – physically, emotionally, and psychologically. The definition of what is “too much” will depend on different determinants, such as the age group, purpose of use and the sensitivity of the individual child and will therefore vary from one situation to another.

■ **Case Study:** You have heard conflicting comments about screen time and have considered parental controls to limit your child’s use of online technologies and activities to the strictest minimum.

■ **Parental reflections:** How can I determine the appropriate screen time and screen balance for my child? How can I find good content for my child, so that the limited time they spend with a screen is high-quality? How can I offer my child alternative activities not involving any digital technologies?



Positive digital parenting goal

Parents can support their children to use devices responsibly and find quality content online. Digital parenting involves on the one hand looking at screen content and on the other maintaining a healthy balance between digital activities and real-life activities, such as reading traditional books, exercising sport or enjoying nature together as a family.



Positive digital parenting tips

- ▶ Find quality content for your children so that they can learn, play and discover with online resources.
- ▶ Design the rules for your family – which includes parents and other caregivers, for example through a “family media agreement”? Remember that being consistent will provide its rewards in the long-term.
- ▶ Explain your expectations for your child’s screen time and any consequences for non-respect of screen time limits, opt for less screen time, rather than more and involve your children in alternative activities.
- ▶ Use parental controls, as appropriate, to help you establish rules for screen time
- ▶ Be flexible as children grow and learn online – online time required for school should not prevent children from also having time for online social and leisure activities; consider keeping a screen log to chart downtime, study time, online time.
- ▶ Involve your children in the discussion – how they can help with your family media guidelines?

A FINAL WORD

As we have seen, positive parenting is the philosophy of parents and caregivers raising children by caring, guiding and providing for the children consistently and unreservedly. Positive parenting is the continual nurturing of a child in order to build a child's self-esteem. Positive parenting is thoughtful and loving and raises children who are resilient and display positive behaviours and well-being. Digital parenting means supporting your children to thrive in the digital environment and outside of it, and to find the right balance between both.



With **positive digital parenting**, children do best in the digital age when their parents:

- ▶ are warm and supportive of their online activities;
- ▶ spend quality time with them learning what their children do and engage in when online;
- ▶ try to understand their life experiences and behaviour and how they carry that behaviour online;
- ▶ explain the online rules they are expected to follow;
- ▶ praise good online behaviour, but also engagement in offline activities (e.g. in sports or nature);
- ▶ react to online misbehaviour with explanation and non-violent and non-demeaning punishment, such as less screen time or repairing damage. Overly harsh punishments, such as prohibiting access to all devices, are to be avoided as they can be counterproductive and push children into secret activities.

Council of Europe legal instruments and publications

The European Convention on Human Rights and the respective case law of the European Court of Human Rights guarantee to everyone the right to respect for private and family life.

The European Social Charter and the revised European Social Charter, while fully respecting the autonomy of the private sphere, describe the family as a fundamental unit of society, with the right to appropriate social, legal and economic protection.

The European Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (Lanzarote Convention) is the first international treaty that identifies and criminalises sexual abuse of children.

The European Convention for the Protection of Individuals with regard to Automatic Processing of Personal Data is the first international instrument which protects the individual against abuses related to the collection and processing of personal data, including through transborder flows.

The Convention on Cybercrime is the first international treaty on crimes committed via the Internet and other computer networks, dealing particularly with violations relating to copyright, computer-related fraud, child pornography and network security.

Committee of Ministers recommendations

Recommendation (2006)19 on policy to support positive parenting encourages states to recognise the importance of parental responsibilities and the need to provide parents with sufficient support in bringing up their children. Member states are recommended to take all appropriate legislative, administrative and financial measures to create the best possible conditions for positive parenting.

Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)7 on guidelines to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of the child in the digital environment. Member states are recommended to take the legislative, administrative and policy action to ensure a balance between providing children with the best opportunities and the highest level of protection in the digital environment, including by reaching out to the business companies providing digital technologies and access to them.

The leaflet “Learn about your rights in the digital environment” represents a child-friendly and appealing presentation of Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)7 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on Guidelines to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of the child in the digital environment.

For a complete list of Council of Europe legal instruments and publications on positive parenting and children’s rights, including in the digital environment, see: www.coe.int/children (“Publications/Children and the Internet”).

“Digital parents” need to be responsible role models, and to establish communication and trust so that children will discuss their autonomous online activities openly. Digital parents should also understand what style of parenting works best for their families so that their children not only participate in the digital age, but actually thrive, while being protected from any risks posed by this new environment. Finally, parents and caregivers are called upon to closely watch their own behaviours, for example as they share online content, as they use digital technologies throughout the day, or as they allow their children to access these technologies.

The underlying goal of the approach of “positive digital parenting”, promoted through this guide, is to provide children with adequate resources to engage in the digital environment safely and responsibly. The aim of the guide is also to propose a sustainable digital parenting model to be applied to different scenarios, today and in the future.

www.coe.int

The Council of Europe is the continent’s leading human rights organisation. It comprises 47 member states, including all members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.

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