Raising Kids in a Digital World

By: Alisha Parker-Cummins

How do you teach your child to live in a digital world you didn't grow up in? Elementary, middle and high school students are of this digital-driven generation; they have been exposed to it their entire lives and do not remember a time without it. No one cares more about your child's well-being and safety more than you do. Guiding our kids not just in the real world applications but also in the virtual is just as important. While we know, technology is here to stay, as well as advance, it is better to arm our kids with the knowledge to navigate this digital world safely and responsibly.

Technology can be empowering for kids of all ages, it is not always a scary place. When we look at some of the positive ways that technology can affect our lives we can see the benefits it can provide. Social media has been a tool used to help keep us in touch with friends or family from a far, as well as, creating online identities, communicate with others and build social networks. These networks can provide our kids with valuable support, especially helping those who experience exclusion or have disabilities or chronic illnesses. However, social media use can also negatively affect our kids, distracting them, disrupting their sleep, and exposing them to bullying, rumor spreading, unrealistic views of other people's lives and peer pressure. Therefore, it is important that we encourage responsible usage. Some ways we can do this is by setting responsible limits of usage monitor and let your children know you will be monitoring their accounts, and explaining what is ok and what is not ok.

The worldwide web gives us a wealth of information at our fingertips. Start the safety conversation early and speak about it often. Remind kids that what goes online stays online and that they should never share personally identifiable or sensitive information. Children who are used to talking about what they do online are more likely to tell someone if they are worried or upset by something they experience.

At this age, your kids might be begging for a phone of their own, since it is likely some of their friends have them. Nevertheless, just because all the other kids have a phone does not mean your child is ready for one. Things you will want to consider before buying them phones:

- Are they responsible with their belongings?
- Will they follow your rules around phone use?
- Can they be trusted to use text, photos and video responsibly?

You will need to check your child's maturity level here and consider your family's values. There's no magic age number, but most experts recommend waiting as long as you can to delay kids' exposure to online bullies, child predators, sexting and the distractions of social media.

Understanding our kids and technology can seem a little overwhelming. Pyscamore is here to help. Call us or visit us online today for more information on ways we can help you and your family. 601-939-5993/ www.psycamore.com