TECHNOLOGY AND PARENTING- STAYING RELEVANT IN A DIGITAL WORLD

As technology continues to advance and our lives become more immersed in everything digital, the challenges faced by parents can often feel overwhelming.

We know that the technology is here to stay and we also know the many benefits that we can reap from the digital world. There are amazing ways we can connect and collaborate, raise awareness, create, learn and share. We are also frequently made well aware of the dangers and pitfalls of this connected world. We hear often about the predators, the pornography, the paedophiles, the gaming obsessions, the screen-time addictions and the cyberbullying.

So how do we ensure that our kids are getting the very best that the technology has to offer whilst avoiding those negative elements?

One of the best ways we can do this as parents is to remain relevant. But how do we stay relevant in a world that seems to move so fast? In a world where our kids already seem to know so much?

It starts by taking the time to get to know the world your children are growing up in and work to understand the challenges they face. Because kids do face challenges and they will make mistakes. We need to ensure that those mistakes are ones they can learn from and aren't life changing.

Be the Wise ones

Well they may well have a lot of knowledge when it comes to all things technical. But they are not necessarily wise like us. Now I use the word 'us' very loosely here in referring to the adult population, because anyone who has spent any time online knows there are many adults who are not wise. But generally speaking, adults have a lot more understanding of the intricacies of interactions, relationships and the complexities of human behaviours than kids do. Our kids are interacting and connecting with others in a world that is often beyond what they are developmentally and emotionally ready for. We need to help them with that.

Play and interact

Sure we all love the lure of an iPad to ensure we can finish our coffee whilst its hot or get the dinner cooked uninterrupted. But if we also take the time to play and interact with our kids and their devices, we get a different perspective about what they enjoy. We get the bonus of the interactive element as well as time to bond and enjoy something together. We also put ourselves in a much better position to set relevant boundaries and help them understand those boundaries.

Listen to others and listen to your child

If your friend's child is playing a game, has an account on social media or enjoys certain websites, then there is a good chance your child does too. Just as we would play at the park or hang out at the milk bar where our friends were when we were young, so too our kids will hang out where their mates are playing. So listen to those parents in the playground. Listen in to which popular apps and games are spoken about in the media. Listen to your child. Ask them what they like to do. Ask them about their concerns or their challenges. You may never keep up with every single app or site that your child visits, but if you have a good understanding of the ways kids are using technology and the sorts of things the technology is capable of, then you are in a much better position to help them use it safely and smartly.

Be open and honest about what is out there

Whilst there are times we certainly lament the passing of the good old days where screens, and social media were not such an integral part of our lives, we cannot afford to be in denial about the role technology is and will continue to play in the lives of our children. So rather than shut it down and try to avoid it, we need to be ready to have conversations that we may prefer not to have. We need to know that the average age a child first sees pornography is about 11, so we should

understand that this is a very real possibility for our children. So how are we going to prepare them for that? What conversations would we need to have if we suspect this has happened? Because we do want to make sure that the education they are getting comes from us and not from the online world itself.

So seek out knowledge, interact, talk to your kids and put yourself in the best position to remain relevant to your child's world. Be the one they come to should things go wrong. Be the one they come to share the positive experiences they have online.

Our role as parents is not to shut down the accounts and take away the screens, but rather to ensure we are giving them the skills, the understanding and the thinking to make the very best decisions every time they go online.

Parenting Ideas 2019, accessed 8th July 2019, https://www.parentingideas.com.au/