

ABCs and Ds: nurturing digital and media literacy in children



Unlocking the power of literacy goes beyond reading and writing – it's also important to know how to think about this content, to make sense of the world. Digital literacy and media literacy are a big part of experiencing the world in a way that is safe and allows children to thrive, and it's never too early to start fostering these skills that will empower them for a lifetime.

Why digital and media literacy matter

You can't ignore the role of technology in your children's lives – even toddlers see devices being used and are trying to make sense of what they do. You can, however, build understanding from an early age about safe and responsible technology use. The following topics can help guide this understanding. To help you know when to introduce these ideas we have added age ranges for each of the following concepts.

Networks and connection (appropriate for preschool and early primary learners)

From a young age, children can grasp the concept of devices being connected through invisible networks. Messages, photos or videos can move so quickly from one device to another – and you cannot always control where things end up!

You can demonstrate this by sending something from your phone to a different device, such as

from your phone to your tablet, and then on to yet another person. If you are ordering takeaway or making an online purchase, demonstrate how the money is being taken from your account or card so your children can see in real-time how this exchange works.

The importance of privacy (appropriate for early primary learners)

As children understand how content spreads through networks, they'll start to grasp the significance of privacy. Teach them what information is appropriate to share and what should be kept private.

When you have done that, show them that you are making use of the privacy settings on their devices and all apps – explain that they are like a seat belt for your child, a safety precaution, in case they forget and share something they should not have.

Learning the value of consent (appropriate for preschool learners)

Model consent by seeking permission from your child before taking pictures or sharing content about them. Discuss where and why you'd like to share it. If they say no, respect their decision. This practice normalises the importance of consent and encourages other family members to follow suit.

Staying vigilant (appropriate for early primary learners)

Children can be quick to trust – and have often been told to follow instructions and do as they are told, especially when they come from an adult. Empower them to question things that seem suspicious online. Teach them to trust their instincts and approach trusted adults if they encounter anything that feels off. Encourage them to be cautious about enticing offers or deals that appear too good to be true.

Identifying trustworthy sources (appropriate for mid-primary learners)

The internet provides us with more information than ever before in human history. This can be really confusing, especially when things look official but turn out to be false.

Help your child decide on a few sites that have been shown to be accurate, particularly those designed for children, to ensure they access accurate information. For example, Behind the News from ABC TV presents the current news and stories of interest in an accessible manner for upper primary school-aged children, and YouTube Kids can prevent children from accessing inappropriate content which might appear as an auto-play video or in advertising.

Key takeaways:

1. Start early: Introduce digital literacy and media literacy concepts to children from a young age.
2. Networks and connection: Teach children about the invisible network that connects devices and demonstrate through practical examples.
3. Privacy matters: Help children understand the importance of privacy and utilise privacy settings on devices and apps.
4. Consent is key: Model consent by seeking permission from your child before sharing their content online.
5. Stay vigilant: Encourage children to be cautious online and trust their instincts.
6. Trustworthy sources: Guide children in identifying reliable and accurate sources of information online.

