Guiding your child's tech journey with DigiTalks

Having conversations with your child is a good way to build a family culture of openness and sharing – ensuring that you have the 'DigiTalk', including discussions about technology and online safety, will help build your child's understanding and go a long way towards ensuring respect, kindness and positivity towards technology. It will also help to avoid unhealthy habits forming which can be harder to undo later.

When do I start?

Children live in the world that we live in and that is a world full of technology, so it's never too early to start talking about the online world and technology use. However, there are ways to make sure this is appropriate for each age group.

Ages 0-4

Young children use devices for entertainment, watching videos or calling family members. They may even know how to unlock your device and access the apps on their own!

This is a good time to start talking about things like security and privacy: you could try things like "I've put this passcode on so that people I don't know can't use my things. Why do you think that's a good idea?"

You could follow this with "Have you ever thought about what could happen if someone else did use my phone/tablet?". This can start a conversation about personal information and what is and isn't ok to share with other people.

Ages 4-8

Children may have discovered that the online environment is a great place to learn more about their current interests or hobbies. This might be in the form of videos, games or articles to read. This is a good time to begin conversations around keeping an eye out for things that could be untrue, or people who are pretending to be someone else.

You could start with something like "I got a request from someone who says they're an old friend, but I'm not sure. Do you think there's a good way to find out if they're real?"

It's also a chance to draw awareness to selecting reliable and appropriate content. You could ask them to watch some videos together and ask how they choose what they watch. Follow up with questions like "What other things do you like to watch or play online? What would you do if something came up that you think you shouldn't be seeing?"

Emphasise that you will always be there to help them handle things, just as you are in the offline world - they just need to ask.

Ages 8-12

At this age, children might be starting to focus more on their social circles and identity, and could be accessing online games that allow chat between players, or video calling each other. It's a good time to ensure they understand that whatever they say and do online is a reflection of their values, and will impact how other people see them.

You could ask them "What sort of behaviours do you like to see when you're talking to your friends? Is this different when you're talking to them online?"

This can then start a conversation about treating other people the way you would want to be treated – and in line with your family's values. Once again, ensure your child has thought about what to do if they make a mistake or post something they regret when they're online – you can also encourage them to think about how to respond if someone else isn't doing or saying respectful things.
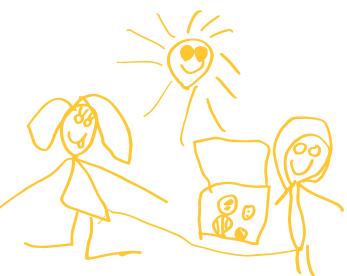
Be a listener, not just a talker.

If your child comes to you wanting to initiate the conversation or is curious about the topic you've raised with them, that is a great thing! Reassure them that you're happy they're coming to you, and invest the time to listen calmly. If they're sharing something that worries or angers you, do your best to not react in a way that might make them wish they hadn't said anything.

If you don't have the answers to their questions or problems right away, let them know that you are going to find out for them. Then make use of the resources at your disposal to find the answer and get back to them.

Key takeaways:

1. Open and regular conversations with your child about technology use help establish a family culture of respect, kindness, and positivity.

2. Start discussing the online world and technology at an early age, adapting the content to their developmental stage.

3. Teach critical thinking skills to your child – help them see the difference between reliable and unreliable information in the digital realm.

4. Shape your child's digital identity by discussing the values they should exhibit online and emphasising the importance of respectful communication.

5. Be a good listener when your child initiates conversations about technology, providing support and seeking resources to address their concerns.