

A portrait of Dr. Elizabeth Milovidov, a Black woman with long, wavy dark hair, smiling warmly at the camera. She is wearing a dark navy blue short-sleeved t-shirt and a chunky gold chain necklace. Her left hand is on her hip, and a colorful, patterned wristband is visible on her left wrist. The background is a blurred indoor setting with a brick wall and a circular object, possibly a clock or mirror, visible in the upper left.

DR. ELIZABETH MILOVIDOV

PANDEMIC PARENTING

IN A DIGITAL WORLD

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DR ELIZABETH MILOVIDOV, DIGITAL MOM, CONSULTANT, & COACH



Elizabeth Milovidov is an international speaker on Internet safety issues, leads parental workshops, writes on digital parenting, and coaches parents on best practices in the digital age. She is a consultant for the Council of Europe, UNICEF and e-Enfance, as well as a contributor to Internet Matters, UK Safer Internet Centre, Family Online Safety institute, and many other key actors in online child protection. She has several books on parenting in the digital age available on Amazon and she co-wrote several publications for the Council of Europe, including the Internet Literacy Handbook and the Digital Citizenship Education Handbook.

A graduate of UCLA and UC Davis, she practiced as a litigator in California for four years before moving to France to work as General Counsel in two Internet Technology companies. She earned a Ph.D. in International Relations and Diplomacy and is an Assistant Professor at AGS and a lecturer at several universities in France and Geneva.

<https://www.digitalparentingcoach.com/>

Welcome to **Pandemic Parenting in a Digital World!**

I'm so pleased that you've decided to join me for this program! If you're here, I'm guessing you have a lot of questions and maybe some concerns about online and digital safety.

It's hard to believe that what was already such a digital world has become even more so over the past year! I know for myself personally, it took a couple months before I realized "Wait a minute, I'm still treating this as a short disruption, but my family needs to settle in for the long haul."

The great news is that although it might feel complicated now, digital parenting is no different than the more analog sides of parenting, like helping your kids eat well, persevere in school or extracurriculars, or anything else. It's just that this space feels new and ever-changing, and that understandably makes it scary sometimes.

So let's embark on this journey together – I know you'll finish the program feeling more empowered and knowledgeable than ever before, and more confident in your ability to shepherd your young ones to positive digital experiences, even during the pandemic!

- Dr Elizabeth



WHAT IS DIGITAL PARENTING?

Since well before the pandemic, our children are growing up in an increasingly digital world, and parents are often grappling to keep up and find balance to raise responsible children who can use tech safely.

Simply put, **digital parenting is your parenting philosophy, just applied to online and digital activities.** Like all aspects of parenting, it's different for every family and a constant work in progress. There are dangers and unhealthy behaviors to help your children avoid, but there are also valuable opportunities for growth, learning, and creativity! You won't get it right from the beginning, and just when you think you've restored order amid chaos, something new will come up.

But that doesn't mean you should instigate a full-on tech shutdown and try to shield your kids from the digital world, nor does it mean throwing in the towel and letting your child do whatever they want for as long as they want online.

It just means you want to stay aware of the landscape, know how to communicate with your children about sometimes difficult issues, and stay engaged with their online lives – and that's exactly what we'll learn to do together in this program.

IT'S GOING TO BE OKAY!



LESSON 1

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDEBOOK

I recommend using this guidebook alongside the video program, although it can be used or referenced on its own. The program is designed for you to complete one topic a day, but if you want to move faster or slower through it, that's also fine. At the end of the guidebook you'll find a summary of the key learnings, which you can go back and review.

WHAT TO EXPECT

Over the next 9 days, we'll discuss a wide range of issues facing kids online, and strategies for communicating and engaging about them. I've organized this program in 3 steps that make a clear and actionable framework for parents to follow, called the A.C.E. framework:

- **AWARENESS:** Learn about the digital landscape that your kids are experiencing, from online learning to social media to tv and video games.
- **COMMUNICATION:** Learn strategies for talking about internet safety issues and rules around digital devices.
- **ENGAGEMENT:** Discover ways you can stay involved with your kids' digital experiences, to learn and have fun together and be there to guide them when they need help.



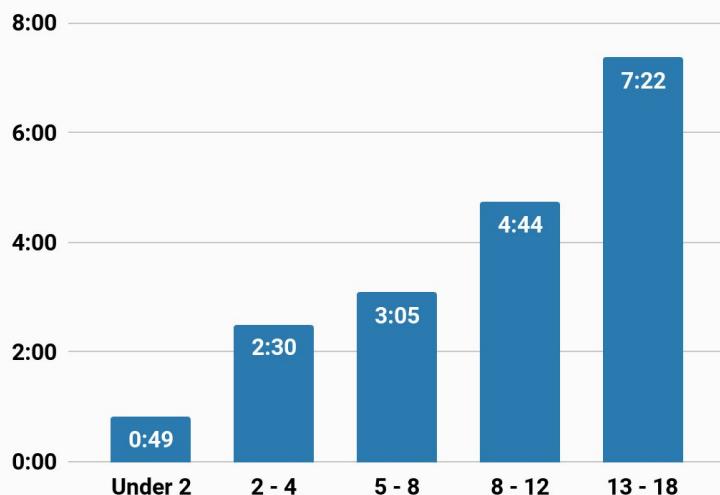
LESSON 1

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What are my main worries or concerns when it comes to my kids and their digital activities and experiences?
.....
.....
2. What are some of the *positive benefits* that come to mind when I think about my kids' digital experiences?
.....
.....
3. What do I hope to learn in this program?
.....
.....

DID YOU KNOW?

Average screen time according to *The Common Sense Media Census, 2019 Ages 8-18 and 2020 Ages 0-8*



Up to **40%**
of students have
experienced cyberbullying

16%
of students say they have
cyberbullied others

According to studies by
Cyberbullying Research Center

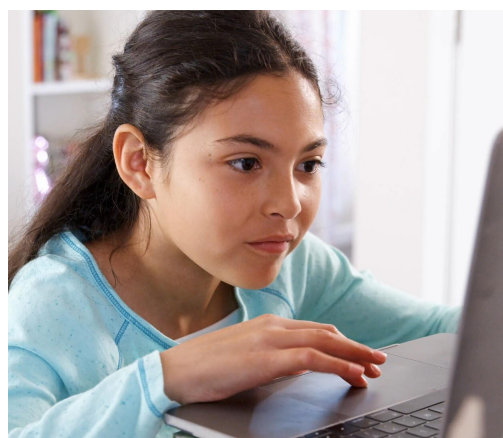
LESSON 2 – AWARENESS

SCREEN TIME

What works for your children, parenting style, and family schedule are unique, and there's no one-size-fits-all answer to how much screen time is healthy. During the pandemic, many families have been allowing more screen time because of limited offline activities, and that's not necessarily bad if it's done mindfully. After all, many opportunities for physical activities are curtailed!

Rules of thumb around screen time:

- Pay attention to body language to spot signs of too much screen time:
 - Rubbing eyes
 - Becoming frustrated or aggressive when you ask them to stop
- Opt for *quality* screen content every time.
- Babies under 2 should have very limited screen time.



LEARNING

Learning apps are one of the less worry-inducing online activities for parents, because we all want our kids to learn and be creative and curious. Many learning apps targeted to children are absolute gems, but others are less constructive, so take time to seek out apps that are truly educational – and I've provided a checklist and links to help you find the best ones on the next page.

When it comes to online school or “distance learning,” be aware that at this age your kids need a lot of support to be successful in this challenging situation. Make sure set set up a space conducive to learning, understand the software they're using, and create a healthy schedule so they're well-prepared to learn when the log in to their virtual classroom.

LESSON 2 – TOOLS

CHOOSING CONSTRUCTIVE LEARNING APPS

- Fosters understanding of the world and new ideas
- Helps children practice listening and attention
- Helps develop:
 - Reading skills
 - Writing skills
 - Speech

If an app checks most of these boxes and is fun for your child, let them have at it! If it doesn't... move on. There are lots of other great apps out there!

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

National Literacy Trust App Reviews

<http://literacyapps.literacytrust.org.uk/category/all-apps/>

Common Sense Media App Reviews

<https://www.commonsensemedia.org/app-reviews>

Digital Family Wellness Guide

<https://digitalwellnesslab.org/parents/family-digital-wellness-guide/>

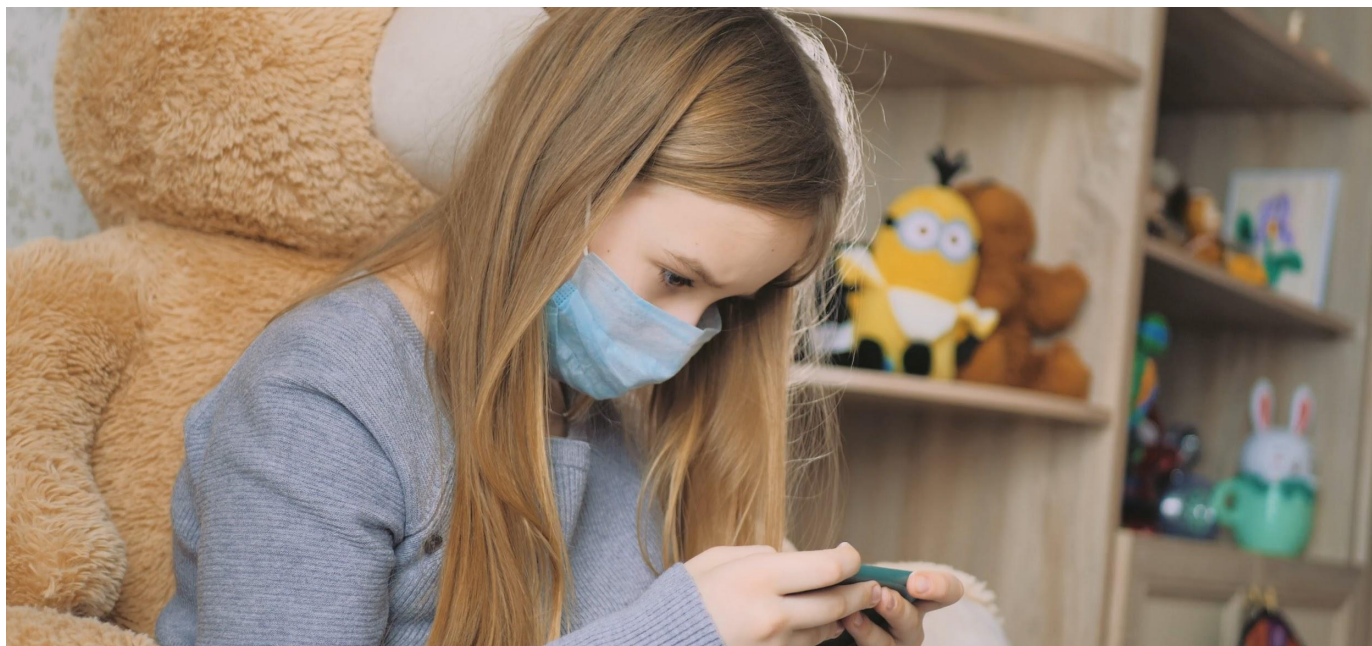
DISTANCE LEARNING CHECKLIST

- Physical space conducive to learning:
 - A quiet room
 - A desk that fits your child
 - A chair that fits your child
 - Good lighting
 - A monitor that is not too close and at their eye level
- I understand the software my child is using and can troubleshoot if needed.
- My child and I both understand the rules for webcams and microphones during class.
- Healthy schedule before and after online school:
 - Healthy nutrition before learning to fuel that little brain
 - Class breaks free from overstimulation or stress



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How do I want to determine when my child has had enough or too much screen time?
.....
.....
2. Do I feel differently about screen time when my child is learning vs. being entertained?
.....
.....
3. Do I notice a difference in my child's attitude or mood towards distance learning when they have the right support and habits in place vs. "bad days"?
.....
.....



75%**of 0-8-year-olds' screen time is spent watching online videos or TV***Common Sense Media Census, 2020, Ages 0-8*

WATCHING

With three quarters of young children's screen time spent watching online videos or TV, it's truly worth taking the time to figure out what you want your kids watching, and what you don't. Streaming platforms give you lots of parental control options these days, and give you the power to help your kids discover real gems that will broaden their world and stimulate curiosity!

Here are a few pro tips to get you started curating what they're watching:

- Turn on parental controls to only allow content for their age, or only content you specifically approve.
- Turn off autoplay wherever possible.
- Find the best shows and movies [selected by Common Sense Media](#) for your kids, by age and platform.

PLAYING

While you can also help your kids discover the best age-appropriate games by using [Common Sense Media's app and game reviews](#), one difference between watching and playing is that many games are appropriate for young kids in some ways, and too grown-up for them in others. So here are a few things to be aware of:

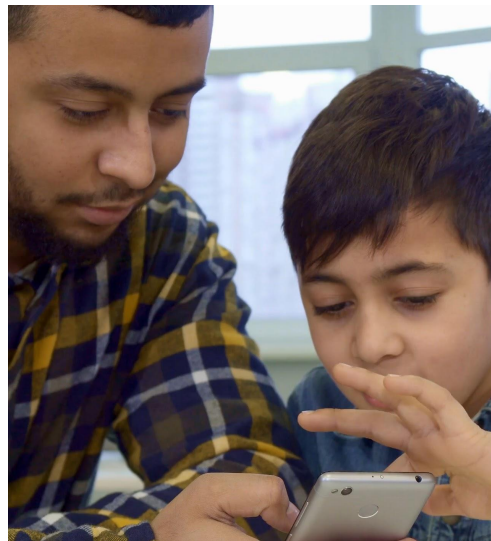
- Pay special attention to games with chat - turn it off for young kids, or supervise them to ensure inappropriate conversations are not happening in chats.
- Games promote creativity and exploration, but can also be vehicles for cyberbullying. Keep an eye on the tone and content of what's going on within a game.
- Teach your child early on how to ignore, block, or report inappropriate behavior or content online.

LESSON 3 – AWARENESS

SHARING

At this age, kids aren't ready for their own social media accounts, but social media is such a big part of our world now. It's natural and healthy to include your kids in it, but it's important to take certain precautions to safeguard their privacy:

- Turn off geotagging on your phone camera.
- Don't post pictures of children not fully clothed, even if it feels harmless like at the beach.
- Don't post recognizable pictures of other people's children to protect their privacy.
- Don't post your children's names, addresses, or any other identifiable information.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. For my parenting style, what makes a good video/character/show?

.....

.....

2. For me, what makes a game fun & constructive?

.....

.....

3. What kind of sharing do I feel safe with as a parent?

.....

.....

TALKING ABOUT DIGITAL DEVICES

The specific rules and boundaries that are right for your family are unique, but there are a few common and effective ways to communicate them to your young kids in a way that doesn't set up a battle.

Step 1: Reflect on your child's favorite digital activities, and work backwards to how much time is okay, rather than starting with the time limit. Remember that quality is more important than limiting quantity.

Step 2: Use the [Screen Time Chart](#) on the next page to help you organize and take stock of the habits or limits you want to put in place.

Step 3: Talk to your child using the [Conversation Starters](#), to understand what they like about their favorite online activities, especially the ones you don't understand or don't like. Rather than outright bans, try to channel what they like about it into something more constructive.

Step 4: If it's helpful, cut out and use the [Screen Time Tickets](#). This strategy makes rules around screen time super clear to young kids, and takes some onus off you to negotiate “just one more episode” – no more tickets, no more screens!



SCREEN TIME CHART

	FAVORITE ACTIVITIES	HOW MUCH IS OK?
LEARNING		
WATCHING		
PLAYING		
SHARING		

CONVERSATION STARTERS

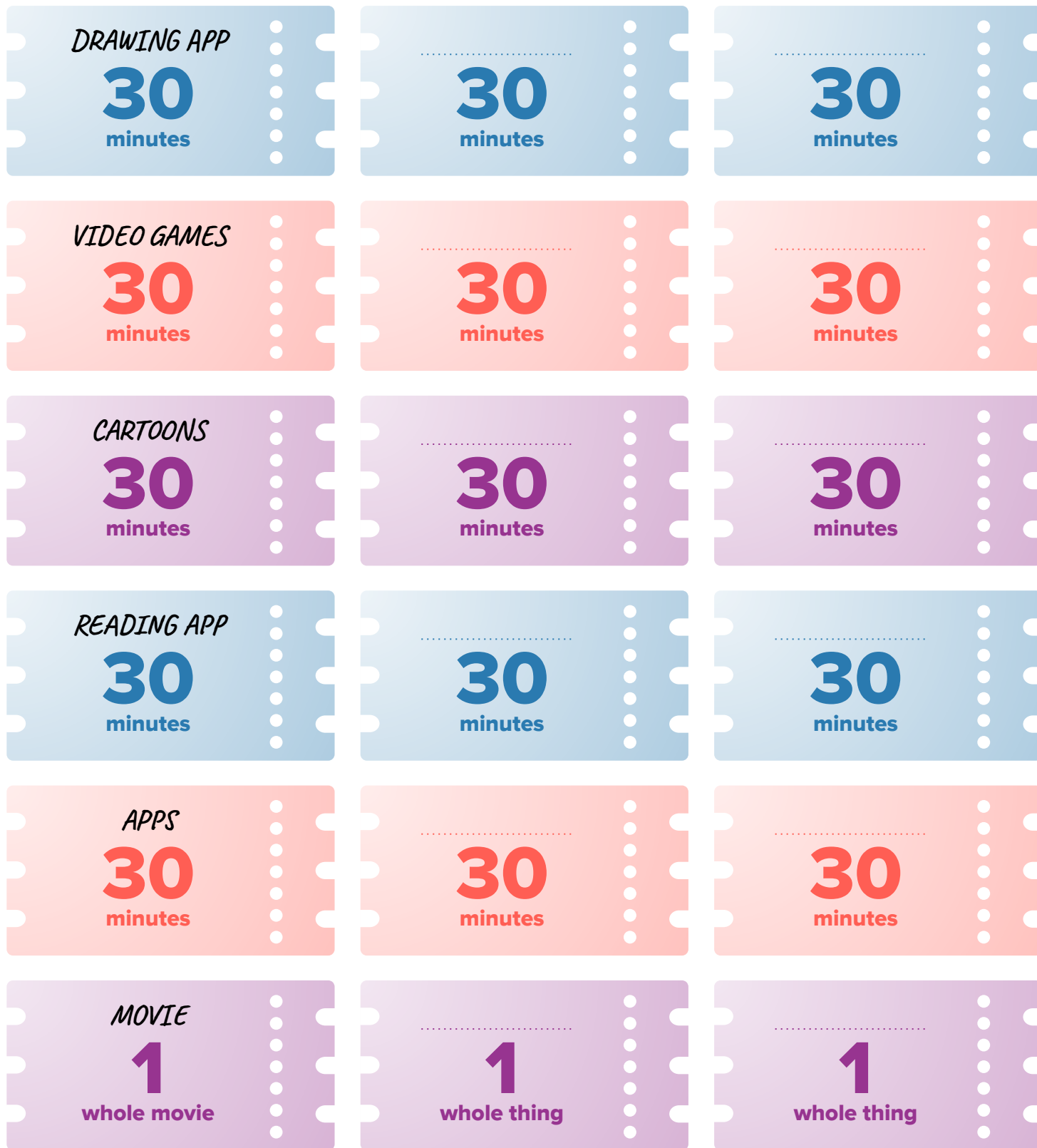
- **What's your favorite app?**
(or Show / Movie / Game / Website / Music Video)
- **What do you like about your favorite app?**
- **Do your friends or kids at school also like your app?**

When your child responds to these questions, reflect on:

- What does my child say? What does my child think?
- What ideas can I put into action to help us better connect? To help me inspire my child? To help me protect my child?

SCREEN TIME TICKETS

Some suggestions to get you started, and you can create your own for your child's favorite activities!



LESSON 5 – ENGAGEMENT

When you engage in positive digital experiences together with your kids, it makes the experience so much better for both you and them, and helps you to stay aware of what they're experiencing so you can guide them.

Here are a few key learnings and tips for staying engaged:

LEARNING

- Your kids need you close by to help, but give them enough **space to be independent learners**.
- **Play learning games with them**, but strike a balance between helping and not giving them all the answers.

WATCHING

- Make scheduled **time for family watching**, and as a bonus you might find it easier to say no to TV other times.
- **Ask them what they think** a character is feeling, or why the character is doing something, to help them think more actively about what they're watching.

PLAYING

- **Playing games together** can allow you to spot features of the game you might want to turn off or deemphasize, like chat in Minecraft and Roblox.

SHARING

- Let them participate in your social media sharing, so **they can learn from what you share**, with whom, and why.
- **Talk to them** about why you might share more with family and close friends than with casual acquaintances.



LESSON 5 - TOOLS

ENGAGEMENT IDEAS

Using a similar format we used to think about screen time, jot down ideas for engaging with your child's digital activities more deeply, and try it out!

	FAVORITE ACTIVITIES	HOW CAN WE ENGAGE IN IT TOGETHER?
LEARNING		
WATCHING		
PLAYING		
SHARING		

When you play, watch, learn, or share together what is the experience like?

- Did anything about the experience make me uncomfortable or feel unsafe for my child?
- What about the experience felt positive, and makes me feel better about my child's digital activities?
- How does my child communicate and think about their experiences when we do them together?

LESSON 6 – AWARENESS

LEARNING

At this age your kids might already be more tech-savvy than you, but that doesn't mean they'll excel in **distance learning** totally independently. Making sure that your tweens and teens stick to healthy eating and sleeping routines will help them concentrate and allow them to excel.

You also want to be aware that just as in-person bullying pre- and post-pandemic can be a problem at these ages, **cyberbullying** can still take place, even in online classrooms. Teachers are stretched thin and kids are tech-savvy enough to find creative ways to cyberbully. Classroom chats and even Google Docs have been used for cyberbullying, so stay aware of the tone and tenor of your kids' virtual classroom interactions.

SOCIAL MEDIA

During the pandemic, social media has been an important way for teens to have social interaction with their friends in lieu of being able to gather in person. Most teens report that social media makes them feel more positively about themselves and more confident.



However, social media also has a wide range of problematic aspects, ranging from **privacy issues to bullying to sexual exploitation**. We could really do an entire program on teens and social media, but the bottom line is that social media is a shared space between teens and adults, and because of that there are more risks.

On the next page we'll break down some of the key points to be aware of.



SOCIAL MEDIA (continued)

Cyberbullying is more common than you think

- Up to 40% of kids have been the victim of cyberbullying, according to the Cyberbullying Research Center
- Because it's virtual, what feels like playful teasing to someone can be experienced as traumatic bullying by their victim

Sexting is sending sexually explicit images, videos, or messages

- Teens often don't recognize the dangers of sexting until it's too late
- Even when it's to a significant other they feel they trust and love, it's all too common for images to be shared and never a good idea

Grooming is when bad actors use social media to gain the trust of kids with the aim of sexually exploiting them

- It may feel like a harmless friendship to a kid, so parents need to have a more critical eye
- They may even think it's someone their age, because it's easy to set up fake social media accounts

These topics around bullying and sexuality and sexual exploitation online are some of the most serious and scary issues for parents, so I don't blame you if you feel about ready to just up and delete all your kids' accounts!

But just remember that besides the risks, which you can prepare for and protect against, social media can also be a force for good. And **banning social media can be counterproductive** and cause teens to hide their social media use from you, which is exactly what you don't want should they experience one of these issues.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What are the situations, activities, or apps where my child might experience cyberbullying? Is it possible they have but I don't know?

2. If my child is a victim of cyberbullying, how would they react and deal with it? Would they ask me for help?

3. How aware am I of my child's social media habits and experiences?

4. What guardrails, boundaries, or rules are in place to protect their online safety? Are they adequate?

5. If my child is a victim of sexual exploitation or gets into trouble with sexuality on social media, how do I think they would handle it? Would they ask me for help?

WATCHING & GAMING

When it comes to **watching movies, tv, and videos**, one of the main concerns for kids as they grow closer to adulthood is casual or desensitizing exposure to sexual and violent content.

It's not that we want to protect them from the very idea of sex or the existence of violence in the world, but at this age the line between kid-friendly and adult content can get blurry. Your kids are also old enough to easily turn off parental controls themselves, so you have to establish trust and communicate rules.

Violence and sexuality can be problems in **video games** as well. Again, at this age kids are playing online games that adults also play. It's estimated that as much as 85% of games have some form of violence, so it might feel next to impossible to avoid.

You can find great recommendations for video games and things to watch by age all the way up to 18 on Common Sense Media:

<https://www.commonsensemedia.org/tv-reviews>

<https://www.commonsensemedia.org/game-reviews>



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How do I feel about my child experiencing violence and sexuality in movies, tv, online video, and video games?

2. Does my partner feel the same way? Where do we agree or disagree?

3. Do I feel differently about violence than sexuality in digital media?

4. How much does the context and message that's sent influence how I feel about violence and sexuality? Or is it simply the imagery?



LESSON 8 – COMMUNICATION

TALKING ABOUT DIFFICULT SUBJECTS

Regular conversations about cyberbullying and sexuality issues can help kids to be aware of the risks and **practice the language to talk about it** if they experience it themselves. Use TV, news, and social media as opportunities to talk about it, and signal that you are engaged and concerned. This will make them more likely to come to you if they experience cyberbullying themselves than if you shrug it off when it comes up.

If your child experiences cyberbullying or sexual exploitation and comes to you for help, **always start these difficult conversations from a place of love and support**, and not from a place of punishment or shame. You know this as a parent, but it can be difficult to remember in a charged emotional moment.



Start by acknowledging that you want the same thing as they do – that the bullying or abuse needs to stop. Ask lots of questions, document anything you can, and ask for your child's perspective on what should be done to put an end to it. Sometimes kids simply don't know what to do, but other times they know and it's just that it's difficult to do without your help.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

CYBERBULLYING

- Do you think teasing counts as bullying? What does count as bullying?
- Do you have friends who have been teased or bullied online?
- Have you ever been bullied online?
- If you or a friend is bullied, how do you think you should handle it?

ONLINE SEXUALITY

- Do you think a picture of a shirtless boy counts as a “sexy” photo?
- Do you think a picture of a girl in revealing clothes or a bathing suit counts as a “sexy” photo?
- Do you know what “sexting” is?
- When do you think a message, photo, or video is “too sexy”?

HEALTHY HABITS

- What are your favorite things to do online?
- What do you like about them?
- Are there things you do online that you don’t really like, but that you do because your friends are?
- For the things you like to do, is such a thing as too much of it? How much feels healthy?



LESSON 8 - EXERCISE

SCREEN TIME CHART

You can use the same screen time rubric that we used for young children, but **involve your older kids in filing it out with you.**

Start by asking them what their favorite online activities are for each category, and how much time they think is appropriate to spend doing them.



	FAVORITE ACTIVITIES	HOW MUCH IS OKAY?
LEARNING		
SHARING		
WATCHING		
PLAYING		

LESSON 9 – ENGAGEMENT

When you engage in positive digital experiences together with your kids, it makes the experience so much better for both you and them, and helps you to stay aware of what they're experiencing so you can guide them.

Here are a few key learnings and tips for staying engaged:

LEARNING

- **Check in without interrogating** by asking open-ended questions rather than “yes/no” or “good/bad” questions.
- This signals that you care about their learning experience while giving them space to own their learning independently.

SHARING

- **Don't be the embarrassing parent** who comments on all their kids' social media posts!
- **Do find non embarrassing ways to engage**, like tagging them in your posts occasionally.
- **Help your child identify a trusted adult** besides you, who they might feel more comfortable sharing their feelings and experiences about social media with, like a cool aunt or uncle or older cousin.
- **When you give them a new device**, like their first cell phone, use the opportunity to talk about rules and healthy habits.

WATCHING

- Make scheduled **time for family watching** – whether it's reality TV, a movie, or just funny youtube videos, this is one of the easiest ways to share online time with tweens and teens, so take advantage of it.
- **Use opportunities that arise to talk** to them about the characters, situations, and any examples of the online risks from the previous lessons.

PLAYING

- **Playing games together** is another easy and natural way to engage together, so even if you're not an avid gamer yourself, take the opportunity.

LESSON 9 – TOOLS

ENGAGEMENT IDEAS

Using a similar format we used to think about screen time, jot down ideas for engaging with your child's digital activities more deeply, and try them out!

	FAVORITE ACTIVITIES	HOW CAN WE ENGAGE IN IT TOGETHER?
LEARNING		
SHARING		
WATCHING		
PLAYING		

When you learn, share, play, or watch together what is the experience like?

- Did anything about the experience make me uncomfortable or feel unsafe for my child?
- What about the experience felt positive, and makes me feel better about my child's digital activities?
- How does my child communicate and think about their experiences when we do them together?

Well done for completing this series!

Every family and parent-child relationship is unique, so if some things you try to talk about or engage in don't work, don't sweat it. Even small acts of engagement make a big difference by opening the door for communication if problems arise. And by taking the time to broaden your awareness of the digital landscape and learn how to communicate and engage with your kids about online safety and healthy digital habits, you're making a huge difference already.

Digital Parenting is a work in progress, just like any other aspect of parenting. Remember that you're trying your best – especially amid this crazy pandemic – and it's going to be okay because your kids need to see you trying much more than they need to see you being perfect.

I hope that you'll revisit this program and guidebook any time you feel like you need a refresher or enter new unknown territory, and lean on me and the Grokker community with questions, comments, and sharing experiences. You can also stay involved in my parenting community by checking out my [Digital Parenting Facebook group](#).

I'm so glad that you joined me for this series, and hope that you learned a lot of useful tools and are seeing results as you put them into practice. Take care and I'll see you again soon in my next series!

- Dr Elizabeth

