

DIGITAL PARENTING

Life in the digital age comes with both opportunities and threats. Technology is influencing parenting like never before, and many families say it makes it more challenging than ever.

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But it doesn't have to be that way, says Dr. Matt Harris, Ed.D., Deputy Head for Learning Technology at British School Jakarta (BSJ). Used with good intentions, technology can play an extremely positive role.

At BSJ, teachers and students incorporate technology into their daily teaching and learning. Dr. Harris and his team also actively engage with parents, to emphasise the importance of their presence in their children's lives online.

We sat down with the father of two, who hails from California, to learn how technology can offer unlimited learning possibilities, and help children gain a broader understanding of the world.

What's your view on children's use of technology today?

Every one of us has a different approach to using technology, and children are no exception. Some use it for entertainment and educational activities, while others use it mainly to interact with

others. Technology is very powerful in helping kids to understand themselves and the world around them. These days, even the very youngest know how to look for information on the Internet, and use social media to connect with people all around the globe. Not only do they understand how to use the medium, they've also learned how to be articulate, how to get their message across platforms, and how to correct any communication errors that arise.

At what age should a kid be introduced to technology?

It varies between families and cultures. Because I come from the US, my views about appropriate parenting may be different from someone who grew up in Jakarta. My children were introduced to technology at the age of two, but other parents may prefer to wait until their children are older. There is no single answer to this question, but the bottom line is: discuss the matter openly as a family. Talk about the purpose of technology, the amount of time to spend on it, and what sorts of activities are allowed to take place online. If you're not sure what's right for you, discuss it with your children's school or with others in your community.

How can we prevent our kids from becoming over-dependent on technology?

Developing kids' comfort with technology is very important, since they are part of a world in which it's pervasive. But it's all about balance. Using a screen as the singular source of entertainment or education is not good, for anyone, so we should always combine it with other things offline. And technology use should always be intentional - be it for recreation, education, or communicating with others. Finally, parents and educators must be a part of kids' digital world. Send your children Snapchats, friend them on facebook: whatever they're using, you should be doing it too. They need to feel your presence, just as they do offline.

What is the impact of technology on child psychology?

It would be irresponsible to ignore its impact on students' social development. To help students define and adhere to appropriate technology use, we run a Digital Citizenship programme that covers topics such as Internet safety, relationships and cyberbullying. This programme also encourages students to develop a positive online identity, in the same ways as they establish an equivalent reputation offline. Critically, we make sure that parents are part of that discussion too.



Dr. Matt Harris, Ed.D., Deputy Head of School for Learning Technology at the British School Jakarta

What are some of the challenges that kids face online?

Some children can become over-reliant on technology, especially for entertainment. Poor practice tends to occur when kids are left alone to use the Internet without parental input. Computers shouldn't reside in a study or spare bedroom; today's mobile devices mean that families can use them together, in communal areas of the home, as a shared experience. Again, balance is the key, and we support parents and students in achieving that at home. As long as we all work together, as a strong community, we'll be able to make sure the benefits of technology far outweigh any possible challenges.

What kind of advice would you give parents out there?

It is essential for parents to talk with their children about technology use. Communicate openly about everyone's expectations and responsibilities, and the consequences of appropriate and inappropriate use. Provide a safe space for discussion, set the boundaries, and then come to an agreement, making sure that everyone (including you!) can stick to it. Make sure your kids know that they can always come to you if they wish to discuss something, or if problems arise. Kids will make mistakes; that is okay. You and your children can learn from them.

