



MANAGING MEDIA IN MIDDLE CHILDHOOD (6-9 YEARS OLD)

Kids this age are already active users of digital technologies. This stage is about exploration and learning: with guidance, kids can use media to discover interests, learn new skills, and express creativity. By the end they typically are highly active in games and virtual environments. Parents can use their curiosity to introduce age-appropriate lessons about online safety and privacy.

Helping Kids Build Safe and Smart Digital Habits

Parents can focus on helping kids this age explore safely by choosing high-quality experiences, setting clear boundaries, and teaching them how to recognize when something feels off.

There are four main strategies to help kids become resilient to online risks. We can:

Curate our kids' media experiences;

Control who can access our kids and their data;

Co-view media with our kids;

and be our kids' media **Coaches**.

CURATE

Good quality media can build knowledge and literacy. Help them find appropriate media for school and personal needs and use tools like bookmarks, playlists, and custom search engines to limit unwanted exposure to inappropriate content. Based on the content level selected on platforms like YouTube, kids see channels and videos appropriate for that age group.

During this time, children generally narrow their interests and enjoy getting better at different skills and topics. Two-thirds use the internet to learn more about their hobbies. (MediaSmarts. (2022). "Young Canadians in a Wireless World, Phase IV: Life Online." MediaSmarts.) This may lead them to a broader range of content as they look for trivia or expert instruction. Parents can encourage curiosity while using tools like watch history and playlists to monitor what their kids enjoy. Let them have more time for online activities that are educational, creative, active or genuinely social.

Some media can feel intense for kids this age. Use built-in tools like YouTube Kids profiles, supervised experiences, playlists and parental controls to shape what your child sees. You can also make sure Autoplay is turned off so they have to choose each video they watch. (To do this on a computer or TV, look for Autoplay at the bottom of the watch page and select Autoplay OFF. On a mobile device, tap the three horizontal dots and tap Autoplay OFF.)

CONTROL

Many kids this age enjoy connecting with friends through online games or video platforms. Parents can guide them to use platforms that allow safe

communication. For example, supervised experiences on YouTube limit social features and provide age-appropriate recommendations.

They are considerably more likely to share personal content with their friends, but less likely to share it with people in general. While this makes them more protective of their privacy overall, it also means that they may share personal information with an online contact they see as a friend. They are less likely to use privacy settings than older youth. (MediaSmarts. (2022). “Young Canadians in a Wireless World, Phase IV: Life Online.” MediaSmarts.) It’s important to investigate the privacy controls of any apps or other tools they use, to start these off at the strictest levels, and to start to teach them how to manage their own privacy. Use messaging or video-chat apps so that your kids can talk to their friends when gaming, without having to use the game’s chat system.

If they ever see or receive something that makes them uncomfortable, the best response is to tell a parent right away. Reassure them that they won’t be in trouble for speaking up. Parents should refer to the community guidelines of online platforms for how to navigate challenges around this.

At this age kids are able to begin to understand that apps, websites, games, etc. are all connected. While they are starting to understand the risks of sharing information online, they still mostly trust others - including apps and websites - to respect their privacy. “Privacy” is still thought of in very concrete terms like phone number, address, and so on. They don’t understand that things like their searches or that what they do online can be seen by others and influence what content they see. You can help them understand this by talking about private spaces (like the bathroom) or things they would not want anyone to know about (such as times they were mean to someone or told a lie).

You can also choose platforms such as YouTube Kids that do not use personalized advertising or allow data collection for targeted ads. On YouTube, you can turn things like watch and search history or personalized ads off or on from the Your Data in YouTube page (<https://myaccount.google.com/yourdata/youtube>).

CO-VIEW

Co-viewing (and co-playing) with family members and friends can be a positive social experience, but kids this age still need prompting and encouragement to critically engage with media content. When you’re watching or playing with kids, don’t be afraid to use the Pause button so you can talk about anything that makes you uncomfortable – or to point out positive examples. Try exploring topics your child loves from nature to art to science and talk about what they notice.

It can be an eye-opener for children to realize that all media are written and created by people with their own biases and experiences, as well as the media the creators themselves have seen. Understanding that media are not “windows on reality” but instead the result of choices that media creators made has a big effect on media’s impact on kids. You can point out the people who were involved in making a media work that you’re co-viewing: How did their choices — about what was included, what was left out, and how things were presented — affect its impact? Making media can be a great activity to do together, too, and helps them understand that all media were made by people.

Children at this age have the ability to understand the difference between fantasy and reality. They generally accurately identify clearly unreal texts like cartoons and texts that are meant to be taken as real, like news. However, they are less sure about more realistic works. Anything that blurs the line between fact and fiction, like reality TV, will probably be taken as real. Watching

together and talking about how stories are made helps them distinguish between real and what isn't.

This is the age to start explaining that some online content is made to inform, some to entertain, and some to sell. Kids can learn to identify sponsored content or unboxing and understand that creators sometimes receive free products. Ask kids whether they think their favourite creator was paid to promote a particular game, toy or other product: "Do you think she was paid to unbox that? If not, do you think the company gave it to her for free? Would that change what you think about it?"

It's easy for parents to overestimate the ability of children this age to deal with frightening or disturbing content. Be particularly careful when they are sharing media with older siblings. Children this age still benefit from physical reassurance after seeing something frightening. If something feels scary, pause and talk about it. Help kids learn to recognize music, editing, visual effects, and other media techniques that make a scene feel intense.

COACH

Kids this age may seem tech-savvy, but eight in ten still think their parents know more about tech than they do. (MediaSmarts. (2022). "Young Canadians in a Wireless World, Phase IV: Life Online." MediaSmarts.)

This is the age where habits around screen use are established. Children of all ages can discover new interests, learn from diverse perspectives and foster a sense of belonging when they explore the world of online video. It is much easier to set good habits at this age than later on: establish and clearly communicate rules about using devices and about what kids can, should, and should not do online. They understand the reasons behind rules but, at the same time, are more likely than younger children to push back against

rules they don't think are reasonable, so make sure the rules are practical and reflect values instead of being arbitrary. At this stage, kids can help co-create the family's digital rules, giving them ownership while reinforcing boundaries. It's also important to revisit rules you established earlier on and remind them to come to you if anything unpleasant happens to them online.

This is also a stage where children begin communicating more with offline friends through digital means such as instant messaging, but they need to learn coping mechanisms and explicitly learn and practice how to deal with the absence of emotional cues in that medium. They are gaining in their ability to manage their thinking and their emotions and to navigate more complex relationships. However, the need to fit in with the group is also becoming stronger.

One-third of children this age have been targets of cyberbullying. Half of those said it happened in an online game, while a quarter said it happened by text or message and a fifth said it happened on a social network. A third said they turn to their parents for help when that happens. One in five say they do nothing, to show the bully they aren't hurt. Another fifth say they just hope it will stop. (MediaSmarts. (2022). "Young Canadians in a Wireless World, Phase IV: Online Meanness and Cruelty." MediaSmarts.)

Remind them to pay attention to what they're feeling when using media. Help them develop conscious strategies for avoiding, minimizing, and resolving conflict online like assuming the best about the other person, talking things out in person and taking a break before responding. Encourage kids to tell you if something online feels unkind or confusing. Kids this age typically care strongly about fairness and equality and can develop empathy over this period if it is fostered and encouraged.

One in six kids this age have cyberbullied someone else. By far the most common way of doing this (71%) is calling someone a name. (MediaSmarts. (2022). “Young Canadians in a Wireless World, Phase IV: Online Meanness and Cruelty.” MediaSmarts.) On platforms like YouTube, comments on “made for kids” content are disabled to protect younger audiences. Parents should reinforce that if they see or experience something upsetting online, they should talk to them or another trusted adult.

Digital parenting expert Devorah Heitner suggests helping kids prepare for challenging situations by asking these questions:

- What would you do if you're on a group text and someone says they want to restart the group text without you?
- What will you do if someone says something mean about a teacher or another friend?
- What could you say to a friend who is texting you too much, and you need a break?

Additional Resources

FOR PARENTS

[Co-Viewing With Your Kids](#)

[Dealing with Fear and Media](#)

[Family Guidelines for New Tech Devices](#)

[Four Tips for Managing Your Kids' Screen Time](#)

[Helping Kids Get a Healthy Start with Phones](#)

[Protecting Your Privacy on Commercial Apps and Websites](#)

[Talking to Kids About Advertising](#)

[Understanding the Rating Systems](#)

[Using Parental Controls](#)

FOR KIDS

[Break the Fake: How to Tell What's True Online](#)

[Digital Citizenship: Building Empathy and Dealing with Conflict Online](#)

[How to Search the Internet Effectively](#)

[How to Be an Active Witness](#)

[What to Do If Someone is Mean to You Online](#)

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