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# I N S I G H T S

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FOR FAMILIES

## □ Kids and technology



- ❖ **INSIGHTS FOR FAMILIES** is provided by your child's school in recognition of your role as a partner in education. Adapted by Judy McDaniel, communications consultant, from an Internet article on Earthlink Security Center.

Today's young people are inundated with technology and many parents are concerned about age-appropriate technology for their children. As the age levels at which kids want to acquire and use new technologies drop, the worries increase.

In an article for Earthlink Security Center, Kim Boatman, a California journalist, offers advice that may help parents set safe guidelines for kids and technology.

- ❖ "Evaluate your children's maturity. Will your children be able to handle situations that might arise with the use of a cell phone or MySpace or other social-networking site? How would they handle contact from a stranger? Peer bullying?"
- ❖ "Understand their world. If your children tell you all their friends have cell phones, don't dismiss the social pressure they are feeling, says Dr. Larry Rosen, a psychology professor at California State University. In an era where kids don't hang out in parks or malls as much because of time restraints and safety concerns, technology provides a social connection, says Rosen. If your children are lagging behind their peers in use of technology, it can mean social isolation.
- ❖ "Talk to other parents. You can work as a group to establish guidelines about the acquisition and use of technology. Make sure at least one parent in your circle is well-versed in the latest technological applications, says Rosen."

Boatman also quotes Dr. Paul Donahue, a Scarsdale, N.Y., clinical psychologist and author of *Parenting Without Fear: Letting Go of Worry and Focusing on What Really Matters* (St. Martin's Griffin 2007) who says that "Educating yourself and then discussing the use of technology with your child is critical. Much like we wouldn't give the 12-year-old the keys to the car, these (using various technologies to communicate) are fairly sophisticated privileges that kids need to show they have the responsibility to handle."

Boatman's article offers general age guidelines for allowing kids to use technologies:

- ❖ **The Internet:** Children 12 and under shouldn't access the Internet without a parent's permission. And you'll want to use parental control software to limit your child's access to inappropriate material. Keep the computer in a public space in your home. It's reasonable to allow high school age kids computer access in their rooms, but you'll want to impose clear limits related to pornography, violent web sites and other off limits material.

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- ❖ **“Social networking:** MySpace itself says participants should be at least 14, but Rosen estimates that 15 percent of kids under 14 are using a social network. Young kids can be exposed to inappropriate material and cliquish or harassing behavior.
- ❖ **“Texting or instant messaging:** Seventh and eighth graders who’ve demonstrated some maturity should be able to handle texting and instant messaging, Donahue says. Bullying behaviors are an issue, he says.
- ❖ **“Cell phones:** Generally, says Donahue, a kid can likely handle the responsibility of a phone in middle school or junior high. It’s important to spell out how you want your child to use the phone. Make sure you’re aware of the phone’s many functions and how your child might use them. Kids get into trouble taking indiscreet photos of peers with cell phone cameras. Some schools ban phones because of cheating. And GPS features can pose problems if they allow, for instance, a boyfriend or girlfriend to track your child at all times.”