**Parenting in the Digital Age**

**Patti Agatston, PhD**

**CCSD Prevention/Intervention Center**

Parenting has changed in the last ten years as kids increasingly live out their lives online. Parenting in the digital age does require some new awareness, but it is not difficult to do.

**Begin by modeling positive behavior:** Take breaks from technology, establish no cell phone or other device time, collect phones or use docking stations at night, and model civility both online and offline.

**Talk to your kids about what sites are okay and what sites are off-limits:**  Don’t just tell kids not to go to inappropriate websites, help them understand why these sites are against your personal values, morals, or ethics.

**Talk to your kids in a developmentally appropriate manner about the “grooming” techniques that are used by online predators.** Kids should know that individuals might hide their true identity online. They should avoid responding to individuals who request personal information or photos. Teens should understand how nude photo sharing could lead to exploitation and extortion.

**Discuss behaviors you want them to embrace and what behaviors you want them to avoid:**

Online learning, research, creating, communicating and sharing ideas and projects are positive behaviors. Yet there are negative behaviors to avoid such as online gossip, cyber bullying, visiting inappropriate websites, inappropriate photo or video sharing, plagiarizing and cheating. Remind your kids that anything shared digitally can potentially be public and permanent.

**Educate yourself about appropriate ways to monitor your child’s digital world.** Use monitoring to encourage conversations and “course corrections” when necessary. Be careful not to over-react, but use this information to ask questions and have teachable moments.

**The following are tools and practices that can assist you:**

* **Set up agreements on what sites and behaviors are okay, but let your children know you will be monitoring to ensure their safety and to make sure they remember your family guidelines**. Do spot checks, review or follow/friend their social networking sites, or use parental control apps that send monitoring reports to you on a regular basis. There are a variety of parental monitoring apps available (some are free, some charge) that can be used across platforms and allow you to monitor screen time and content remotely.
* **Content controls are available under the General/Restrictions settings on Iphone**. You can allow or restrict access to Safari, the camera, Facetime, and the iTunes store, among others. You will need to set up a restrictions passcode (and remember it!)
* **Google allows you to set up separate accounts for children under 13** which allows parents some control over how they use their compatible Android devices. On the device you want parental controls on, open the Play store app. In the top left corner, touch Menu Settings Parental Controls and then turn parental controls on. You will need to create a PIN. Then tap the type of content you want to filter and how you want to filter or restrict access.
* **Consider setting up filtering at the wireless router level.** This will assist you in screening out inappropriate sites regardless of what device is used. But recognize that kids may have access at other public Wi-Fi sites or their friend’s homes. Check with your service provider about this option or try OpenDNS. You may also like Circle with Disney, which can be added to your network to manage content and time on all of your devices, including gaming devices, Netflix, tablets etc. There is a 99.00 fee for Circle.
* **Keep in mind that communication is more useful than solutions based on technology.** As children get older and demonstrate responsible use, parents should rely more on conversation and less on monitoring, particularly as your child moves into the teen years.

**The following websites offer great tips for parents and teens:**

**Commonsensemedia.org (they have an app now!)**

**Connectsafely.org**

**Fosi.org**

**Stopbullying.gov**

**Ibpaworld.org**