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PRACTICAL GUIDE

# Growing Up in a Connected World: A Family Guide

## for the Digital Age

CLEMI
Le centre pour l'éducation aux médias et à l'information
CANOPÉ
RÉSEAU DE FORMATION DES ENSEIGNANTS
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PRACTICAL GUIDE

# Growing Up in a Connected World: A Family Guide

## for the Digital Age

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SHORT SUMMARY

# Parents, you are not alone!

Society as a whole, including parents and families are faced with the rapid changes brought about by digital technologies. There is growing evidence of sleep deprivation linked to excessive smartphone use, as well as the mental and cognitive risks associated with early exposure to social media.

In this context, parents and educators often feel ill-equipped to help children and young people in their use of digital technologies in a way that simultaneously supports their rights and protects them against risks.

For the first time, this global guide aims to equip parents with media and information literacy skills to help them effectively support children as they navigate the digital ecosystem.

Combining scientific research, educational expertise and the lived experiences of parents and children, the guide addresses the main challenges faced by families in the digital age.

With the contributions of 37 experts and professionals from around the world

Specifically, it addresses the search for a healthy balance when it comes to screen time, managing harmful online content, supporting children in their relationship with social media and artificial intelligence systems and, more generally, the development of critical thinking, with the aim of enabling them contribute to safer and more inclusive digital environments.

Parents, families and educators around the world are invited to consult this guide, reflect on their own situation and apply the recommendations that best suit their context. Whilst we cannot foresee all technological advances, we can, however, lay the foundations of trust, set an example of healthy digital practices and communicate openly on these issues so that we can grow together with future generations.

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'Since wars begin in the minds of men and women, it is in the minds of men and women that the defences of peace must be constructed'

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# Foreword

Screens have now permeated even the simplest aspects of everyday family life. Homework is done on the computer, whilst meals are interrupted by work notifications that parents respond to on their phones. Digital technologies offer unprecedented opportunities for communication, learning and access to knowledge. But they also expose the most vulnerable–particularly children–to mental, physical and cognitive risks that demand an urgent and collective response. Furthermore, many families still lack reliable access to digital devices and the internet[1], making it difficult for parents to acquire the skills needed to safely guide their children online. This persistent digital divide further exacerbates existing inequalities.

Across the globe, regardless of culture or context, parents are expressing growing concern, often mixed with frustration. A common sentiment is emerging: they feel torn between their duty to protect their children and the inescapable role that digital tools play in everyday life. Many feel that their children spend too much time in front of screens. However, this concern also reflects a more personal probe into their own use, and many of them acknowledge that they themselves exceed what they consider reasonable. The challenge is, therefore, profoundly intergenerational[2].

Recent data confirms what many suspect: parents feel ill-equipped to guide their children in an increasingly complex digital environment. They often lack the necessary reference points to develop critical thinking, identify harmful or misleading content, and understand the ethical, social and environmental challenges associated with artificial intelligence systems[3]. For families lacking a stable internet connection or adequate digital tools, these difficulties are further exacerbated, thereby widening inequalities in media and information literacy.

1 According to *Facts and Figures* Figures published in November 2025 by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), 2.2 billion people worldwide – that is, a quarter of the global population – still do not have access to the internet.
https://www.itu.int/en/mediacentre/Pages/PR-2025-11-17-Facts-and-Figures.aspx

2 A study conducted in several countries reveals that 83% of parents believe their children spend too much time in front of screens; however, 66% admit that they themselves spend more time on digital devices than they consider healthy. Qustodio. 2024.
*The Digital Dilemma: Childhood at a Crossroads.*.

3 The data shows that only 5 out of 10 parents know how to use AI-assisted parental control tools. Alana Institute, @protecao-criancas-digital | Instagram | Linktree.

In the face of these challenges, and true to its mission of promoting the free flow of ideas, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has partnered with Réseau Canopé and CLEMI (Centre for Media and Information Literacy) to produce this guide. Based on the lived experiences of families and enriched by contributions from more than thirty-five experts from different regions of the world, it offers recommendations grounded in verified data, solid pedagogical experience and practical tools to strengthen media and information literacy for all ages, serving teachers, policymakers and, above all, parents.

Although many initiatives have been aimed at teachers, media professionals, children and young people, the parents who are the centre of everyday digital practices have lacked adequate support all too often.

Following on from the two editions of *the Guide de la famille Tout-Écran* [Always-On Family Guide] (published by CLEMI/Réseau Canopé in 2017 and 2019), this new *guide* fills this gap by placing families at the heart of media and information literacy efforts.

By empowering parents to support their children in an ever-changing digital environment, we can build stronger, more resilient families capable of facing the challenges of the digital age, and thereby strengthen the freedoms that form the foundation of our societies.

Khaled El-Enany,
Director-General ofUNESCO

# Preface

To educate, is to pass on knowledge, to nurture growth, to shape, to foster independence. It is to awaken consciousness and critical thinking. It is to allow children and young people in their formative years to remain masters of their own individual destinies whilst sharing in the collective destiny. Every generation of parents has had to learn to guide their children through a world different from the one they themselves had known.

But the current generation is facing a profound and far-reaching transformation in the ways we live, learn and communicate. This change is happening so quickly that it sometimes seems to outpace our collective ability to understand it–let alone keep pace with it. In the span of a decade, digital technology has profoundly reshaped the way our children play, learn, stay informed, form social connections and build their relationship with the world. Generative artificial intelligence marks a significant evolution in knowledge technologies and is profoundly transforming the ways in which we create and think.

The challenge, therefore, beyond the succession of technological advances is to enable our children to use digital tools without becoming trapped by them, to act with discernment, to understand the mechanisms that influence them, and to distinguish information from manipulation. In a word, to empower them. Parents are those most concerned by this challenge, against which they sometimes feel helpless. Schools also have a vital role to play, both as places of learning and of socialization.

The statistics force us to face up to the challenge. Almost one in two parents feels they lack sufficient support to monitor their children's digital habits. 44% of teenagers access social media before the legal age of thirteen. More than four in five young people visit social media daily, and 83% of them say they are regularly exposed to at least one online risk. Yet these same young people are overwhelmingly calling for greater protection and dialogue from platforms, institutions, schools and their parents. This is not a paradox: it is a call that we must respond to together.

This guide is an answer to that call. It is the result of a first-time collaboration between UNESCO and CLEMI, a service of Réseau Canopé, bringing together the work of thirty-seven researchers, experts and professionals from every continent. From screen time to cyberbullying, from social media to artificial intelligence, from filter bubbles to disinformation, each article addresses a specific issue that all parents have likely encountered at some point. The analyses are translated into clear guidelines and courses of action that can be easily put into practice.

Schools are also making progress in this area. Media and information literacy plays a central role in fostering students' civic awareness. The French national digital strategy for education 2023–2027, the Pix certification, the strengthening of the press and media week, the ban on mobile phones in secondary and sixth-form colleges, and the ban on social media for under-15s, currently under discussion: these measures form a coherent framework to protect pupils and prepare them to face the challenges of the connected world. But school alone is not enough. What is built in the classroom must be able to continue at home, and vice versa, in the dialogue between parents and children.

It is precisely this continuity that this guide aims to foster. It does not aim to answer every question, as the digital world evolves too rapidly for that. But it does address what does not change: the quality of the parent-child relationship, the ability to engage in open and regular dialogue, and that well-meaning expectation that enables each generation to grow up better than the last. Children learn first and foremost by example. Our own relationship with screens, our curiosity, and our critical thinking are the first lessons we impart to them, long before any formal education.

We would like to thank all the teams who have contributed to this work. Let us make the most of their work and nurture this unique, ever-evolving relationship between parents and children, so that the latter may themselves, with full knowledge of the facts, take over the reins.

**Édouard Geffray,**
Minister for French National Education

# Preamble

The global success of the series *Adolescence* highlighted what millions of parents are already experiencing: hyper-connected children, exposed from a very early age to content and violence that often escape the notice of adults. The show explores a profound shift: we are the first generation of parents raising children and teenagers whose lives are also built online. We now spend almost half our waking lives connected[1], immersed in a world where technological innovations are constantly shifting our points of reference, redrawing the boundaries of our privacy, capturing our attention and posing new challenges in the day-to-day lives of families.

Nine out of ten parents say they argue with their children about screen time, and for one in two parents, these arguments happen at least once a week[2]. How can we avoid becoming absorbed by these ubiquitous screens? How can we preserve our relationships and prevent overexposure for our youngest children? How can we restore trust in information in the age of mass disinformation? How can we develop uses that drive creativity, education, exchange and social connection, rather than leading to isolation, dependency, cyberbullying or radicalization?

Learning to live alongside digital technologies is a challenge concerning democracy, health, society and culture, and one of great importance for current and future generations. In between total demonization and unregulation, there is another possible path: that of technological discernment.

UNESCO's latest Global Education Monitoring Report indicates that more than half of all countries ban mobile phones in schools[3]. These measures are intended to regulate the personal use of such devices during school hours. They must be accompanied by an ambitious policy on digital citizenship education to develop children's and teenagers' skills (analysing and evaluating information, producing and publishing content responsibly, understanding the media and how they work) and their critical thinking. This education is a collective and transnational challenge, which also engages families. Parents need clear guidelines, reliable resources and personalised support. While there is no one-size-fits-all solution, it is possible to establish coherent frameworks, promote informed practices and make conscious decisions.

1 Data Reportal, 2025, https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2025-global-overview-report

2 According to a Talker survey of 2,000 American parents with children aged between 8 and 17, 2025.

3 Percentage of countries by region with regulations on the use of smartphones in schools, August 2025. Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report by UNESCO 2025. https://world-education-blog.org/es/the-quiet-revolution-in-schools-more-and-more-countries-are-locking-up-phones-part-1/

Being a parent in the digital age means learning to navigate a stormy sea, amid uncertainties and teetering balances. This journey requires symbiotic partnerships between schools and public, institutional and community stakeholders.

Following the UNESCO Grünwald Declaration (1982), which affirms the need for media education to foster critical thinking and civic engagement, CLEMI has for over forty years focused its work on fostering an openness to the world. It is particularly honoured to have been asked by UNESCO to coordinate this guide, which is set to become a benchmark across all five continents. This collective effort is based on a firm and shared conviction: dialogue, example and trust form the essential foundations for learning to grow together in a connected world.

Virginie Sassoon,
Deputy Director, Réseau Canopé

## Methodological approach

This guide is aimed at all parents and educators, across all social, cultural and geographical backgrounds. Its aim is simple: to enable them to help children and teenagers become informed digital citizens, rather than mere captive consumers. Across every continent, researchers, practitioners, institutions and teachers are working to tackle this challenge that unites us.

An international call for contributions, launched in partnership with UNESCO in July 2025, resulted in the selection of contributions from thirty-seven experts from around the world. Our approach has been to make this knowledge accessible, offering practical tips and advice on key issues for parents in the digital age: screen time, generative artificial intelligence, information and disinformation, online violence, social media and parenting styles.

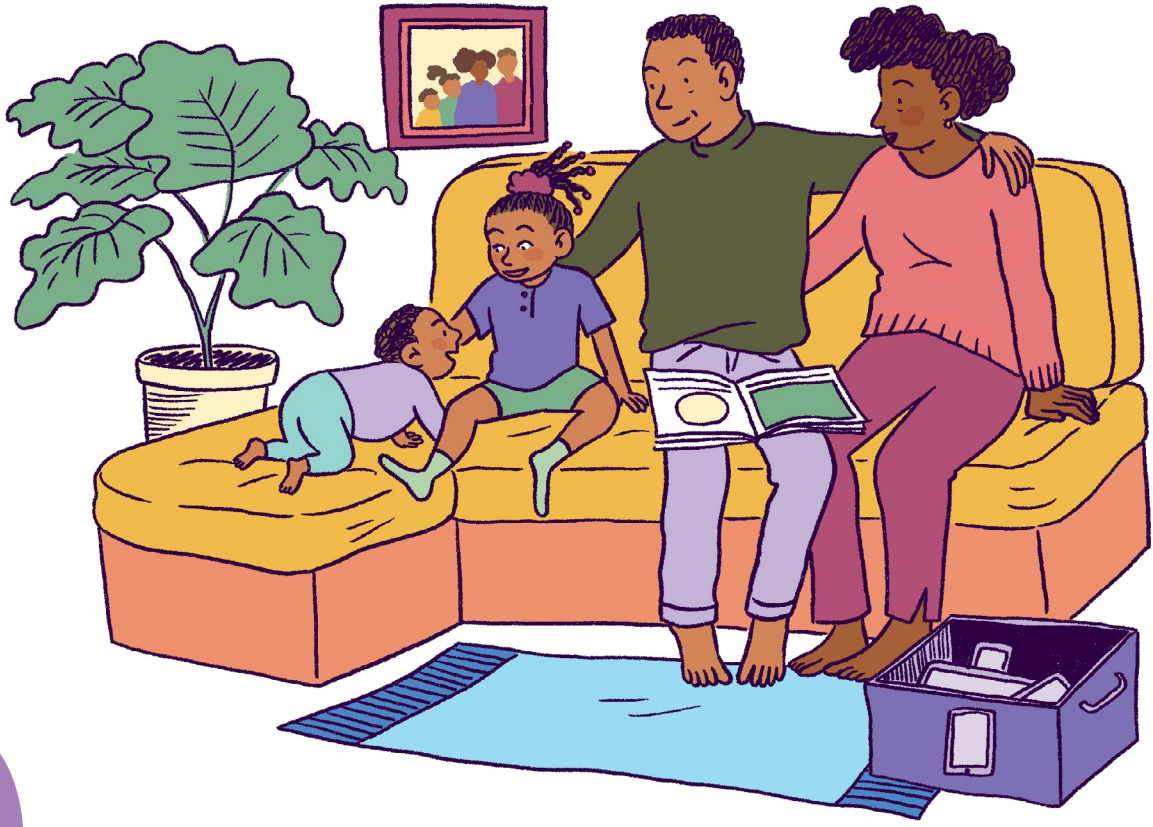
Our aim is to provide you with a guide that combines analysis, shared experiences, suggested activities and topics for discussion. This guide has been developed with the understanding that every family operates within its own unique context. Consequently, the guidance presented here cannot be applied in exactly the same way to every situation, but it offers a common framework designed to support reflection and parenting practices.

Digital technologies are evolving rapidly, as are the habits of children and teenagers. Recommendations are also bound to evolve. It is therefore essential to stay informed so that you can support young people in a way that is informed, understanding and tailored to their daily lives.

Laure Delmoly,
Head of European Projects, and
Stéphanie Valade,
Head of Digital Parenting at CLEMI, a service of Réseau Canopé

1

> When adults lead by example, it's easier for us to understand what is expected of us[1].



1 The testimonies come from a public consultation carried out by the Brazilian Government in 2024 among children and adolescents in 43 municipalities, during which they offered advice to adults.
www.gov.br/secom/pt-br/assuntos/uso-de-telas-por-criancas-e-adolescentes/guia

# Screen time: should it be limited, banned

Tablets, smartphones, video games, television: screens enter children's lives very early on and in the lives of their parents, they are ubiquitous.
Should we limit, ban or negotiate them?
This chapter provides scientific references and practical solutions to help families to find a realistic balance.

1

# Screens and young children: finding the right balance

**Nevena Dimitrova**, a doctor of child psychology and lecturer at the Lausanne School of Social Work and Health (HETSL), is researching the influence of screens on communication and language development in young children.

**Fabio Sticca**, a doctor in the diagnosis and monitoring of socio-emotional and psychomotor development, is a lecturer at the Zurich University of Teacher Education in Switzerland. His research focuses on the effects of screen-based and non-screen-based activities on children's development.

**Eva Unternaehrer** is a doctor and researcher at the at the Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at the University Psychiatric Clinics of Basel, in Switzerland. She is particularly interested in the effects of digital technology use on families and on socio-emotional well-being of young children and their parents.

**Screens** are everywhere and parents are inundated with contradictory information.

In an increasingly complex digital world, what do we really need to keep in mind when it comes to children under 5?

## When screens do harm

**For thousands of years**, children have grown up and developed without screens[1]. Today, research reveals something important: when young children spend too much time in front of a screen, their development may be affected. From a physiological perspective, prolonged screen exposure is associated with sleep disorders, an increased risk of obesity and delays in the acquisition of fundamental motor skills. From a psychological perspective, prolonged screen exposure causes delays in attention and language, as well as emotional and social difficulties[2].

Public health bodies offer clear recommendations: no screens before the age of 2 and no more than one hour a day between the ages of 2 and 5. The content watched should always be under adult supervision and of high quality[3]. Unfortunately, in practice, the reality is very different. Many families find it difficult to follow these guidelines: only one in four children aged 2 and one in three aged 2 to 5 years manage to follow them[4].

1 Here we refer to activities that involve at least partly viewing a digital screen. We therefore exclude activities based solely on digital audio tools.

2 *Expert commission's report on the impact of screens on children*. (2024). Children and Screens: In Search of Lost Time Perdu [lost], available at www.elysee.fr/admin/upload/default/0001/16/fbec6abe9d9cc1bff3043d87b9f7951e62779b09.pdf

3 Hill, D. *et al.* (2016). « American Academy of Pediatrics. Media and young minds ». *Pediatrics*, 138(5), e20162591. https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2016-2591

WHO (2019). *Guidelines on physical activity, sedentary behaviour and sleep for children under 5 years of age*. World Health Organization. https://iris.who.int/items/677e3562-1deb-48ec-bb1e-4bc8aad3ea09

4 McArthur, B. A., Volkova, V., Tomopoulos, S., Madigan, S. (2022). «Global prevalence of compliance with screen time guidelines among children aged 5 years or younger: a systematic review and meta-analysis». *JAMA Pediatrics*, 176 (4), 373-383. doi: 10.1001/jamapediatrics.2021.6386

## What young children need to develop fully

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), children aged between 2 and 5 should not spend more than one hour a day in front of a screen. The WHO also insists on the need for three hours of physical activity a day and around twelve hours of sleep a night. These recommendations highlight what young bodies and brains need for optimal development: a healthy diet, good sleep and lots of physical activity.

For decades, studies have shown that babies and young children learn best through touch, handling, exploration, movement, imagination and interaction. They need to turn the pages in books, stack blocks, crawl around, pretend-play, observe others and express their emotions. They learn language by listening to adults speak and develop their cognitive abilities by interacting with the real world. Prolonged screen use tends to push some of these activities into the background: exploration is often replaced by passive viewing, and social interactions by solitary screen time.

In reality, there are many obstacles standing between children and these beneficial activities. Some families live in neighbourhoods that lack safe or accessible playgrounds. Others do not have access to indoor play centres, community centres or libraries offering free activities, such as storytelling, puppet shows, introductory music sessions or creative workshops. Many children only have rare opportunities to play with their peers. To help reduce these inequalities, it is essential to offer families affordable alternatives to screens. These solutions can be simple, for example, turning everyday activities such as cooking, going for a walk or reading into constructive learning experiences for the whole family.

### Solutions to replace screens

There are many programmes offering fun, free and simple alternatives to screen time:

– The *National Health Service*, the UK's public health service, offers 'indoor activities for children' to provide them daily physical activity they need (resources in English): www.nhs.uk/healthier-families/activities/indoor-activities-for-kids/

– The *American Academy of Pediatrics* offers advice on 'rebooting your family's tech life' (resources in English): COE_Reboot-Your-Familys-Tech-Life.pdf

– UNICEF Latin America and the Caribbean offers videos, guides and activity booklets from Bolivia on the theme 'Play, laugh and learn together at home' (resources in Spanish): www.unicef.org/lac/en/parenting-lac/early-learning/play-laugh-learn-together-home

– UNICEF Middle East and North Africa offers a series of videos with interactive activities aimed at parents of children up to 5 years old on its 'Early Childhood Development Activities' page (resources in Arabic): www.unicef.org/mena/stories/activities-early-childhood-development

## Advice
for balanced screen time

For a parent, screens offer clear benefits. They occupy children, calm them down and keep them quiet. They help reduce the risks of danger when supervision of children is less strict and give adults time to cook, answer the phone or simply rest.

For many families, giving up screens is not a realistic goal. Rather than asking parents to eliminate them entirely, a more sensible approach is to help them manage screen use by setting clear rules and limits, whilst recognizing that this is a daily challenge.

### Regulating screen time

First and foremost, it is important to view screen time as just one of a child's daily activities, rather than as the main or default activity. Parents can ask themselves this simple question: 'Has my child had the opportunity to do a physical activity, to have conversations and to be creative without the involvement of screens?'. If the answer is yes, then high-quality content, viewed in the presence of an adult, generally does no harm. The aim is to prevent screens from replacing other valuable activities, such as conversations, movement and play.

Well-established routines are also beneficial. Young children need a framework and clear rules help make screen time more understandable. These rules might include:

– No screens during meals;

– No screens in the hour before bedtime;

– No screens in the morning before going to nursery or school.

These rules help children understand that screens are used at specific times and in specific places. Timers, hourglasses or alarms help very young children understand the duration of a session.

Transitions are also very important. When screen time is about to end, suggesting an engaging activity (such as a game, drawing or going outside) helps to avoid conflict. A smooth transition makes limiting screen time easier for everyone to accept.

### Choosing content: prioritize quality

Another important aspect is the quality of the content children watch. Not all content has the same impact. Parents can select age-appropriate content that follows a slow, well-thought-out pace, sparks children's curiosity, encourages interaction and fosters conversation. Generally, it is best to opt for platforms designed for children, which offer educational content and comply with strict safety and privacy standards. Turning off autoplay and avoiding AI-generated content or apps with in-app purchases, rewards or advertising links helps your child stay focused and watch videos safely. These precautions allow parents to stay in control and prevent children from clicking on random videos.

### Helping children learn about emotions and social interactions

Screen time spent with an adult is the most beneficial. Parents can comment on, explain, ask questions and make connections between a story and real life. They should be a support for sharing and discussion. Parents can use the experiences of the characters in a given video to broach

the subject of emotions: 'Why is he angry? 'What could she do to solve the problem?'. These little conversations help children put their own feelings into words, understand other people's perspectives and develop empathy.

It is also important to offer children an alternative way to calm down and manage their emotions. A 'quiet time' corner with books, soft toys or sensory objects provides a soothing alternative to the tablet. Although screens can be useful at times, particularly when travelling or in difficult situations, they should never become the sole means of calming children.

### The importance of setting an example

Children learn by observing the adults around them. When parents are constantly checking their phones (during meals, play or conversations), these constant interruptions, known as 'technoference', can affect communication and emotional bonds.

By creating screen-free time within the family, we help children understand that it is possible to put their mobile phones aside and focus entirely on the present moment. Rules only hold weight when adults follow them too. Parents are role models, so their tech habits shape those of their children.

## Conclusion

**Screens** are everywhere, but children don't need them to grow up.

Although it is difficult to eliminate them completely, families can establish healthy routines that incorporate screens in a conscious and gradual way, with the aim of supporting children's development rather than hindering it.

1

# Let's reconnect our children... with movement!

**Mallory Robert**, from the Jean-Mermoz International School (Abidjan, Ivory Coast), and **Mansour Nasri**, from the Louis-Massignon French International School (Casablanca, Morocco), are teachers and educational advisers for the mlfmonde network (Mission laïque française), an association founded in 1902 and recognized as being of public utility, which brings together 106 French international schools around the world.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), more than 80% of adolescents globally are not meeting the recommended levels of physical activity. Studies carried out in North America, Europe and Asia highlight a marked increase in the amount of time children spend in front of screens, a phenomenon linked to a rise in sedentary behaviour, as well as negative effects on sleep and mental health. In this context, Professor Mark Tremblay, Chair of the Active Healthy Kids Global Alliance and researcher at the CHEO Research Institute[1] (Canada), warns: 'Global trends, including excessive screen time, are contributing to a generation of inactive children and putting them on a dangerous path[2]'.

Physical activity is much more than just play: it is essential for healthy growth.Physical activity nourishes the body, the heart and the brain. It strengthens muscles and bones, stimulates memory, improves concentration, reduces stress and boosts self-confidence.

From the earliest years, every jump, run or climb contributes to motor and brain development. At school, playground games, physical education and sport promote independence, cooperation and social well-being.

Sedentary behaviour – that is, time spent sitting, lying down or being inactive – is now considered a significant public health concern. It increases the risk of being overweight, anxiety disorders and reduced physical capacity.

Each different sport offers specific benefits to children depending on their age and needs. So-called symmetrical sports (such as swimming or athletics) contribute to balanced development of the body and are particularly suitable for younger children. Asymmetrical sports (such as tennis or football) improve coordination and the ability to perform separate movements. Team sports encourage cooperation, communication and a sense of belonging to a group, whilst individual sports promote independence, the ability to manage energy

1 *Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario* (Centre hospitalier pour enfants de l'est de l'Ontario).

2 Report by *the Active Healthy Kids Global Alliance* (AHKGA), 27 November 2018.

# EVERYBODY MOVE!

According to a UNESCO report[1], doing more than 30 minutes of physical activity a day can reduce the likelihood of suffering from depression by 48% for your whole life.

The World Health Organisation recommends that adults engage in at least 2.5 hours of moderate-intensity physical activity or at least 1 hour and 15 minutes of vigorous-intensity activity per week. For children and adolescents aged 5 to 17, the recommendation is at least 60 minutes of moderate-intensity activity per day.

1 *The social impact of sport: unlocking the potential of sport to drive social, transformation*, UNESCO REPORT, 2024

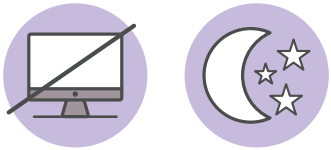
levels and self-confidence. The key is to vary activities to stimulate all motor, social and emotional skills.

For parents, there are many simple and free ways to encourage their children to be active. For example, sparking their desire to go out and play, going for a walk together, using the stairs instead of the lift, or offering them a series of small active challenges (10 jumps, 1 minute of brisk walking, dancing to the beat of a song, running on the spot for 30 seconds…).

These activities, repeated daily, help to create the habits of an active lifestyle. Encouraging children to be active every day – at home, in the street or at school – will give them a more balanced and happier future.

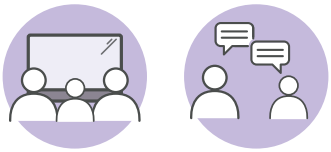
## The CLEMI's Tips

**Best practices recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO)**

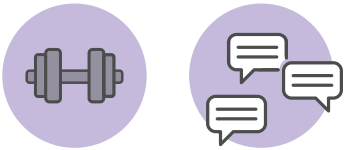


**No screens before bedtime**

**No screens during meals or in the bedroom**



**Watching television together and discussing the content with children**



**Encourage physical activities and social interactions**

1

# When video games become much more than just a game

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'What are you doing on your phone?'

'Nothing, what I normally do... Playing. Hey, can you buy me some diamonds for the game? Nicolas got some and now he's got a giant bazooka!'

**Taken out of context**, this conversation might seem implausible, like a line from an action film. And yet, it reflects a global cultural shift. Gaming is no longer just about playing: it is a way of socializing, building identity, passing the time and spending money. Video games are present in countless homes and have become an everyday activity. However, adults tend to think that 'playing' means having fun, entertaining themselves or relaxing, much like in their own youth.

But when your child says 'I'm playing', they may also be chatting with friends or strangers online, buying virtual objects with real money, or creating their own games for others to play. Nowadays, playing usually involves being online.

Trying to understand this world is not just optional, but an essential prerequisite for keeping connected with children and teenagers. When adults dismiss what they don't understand, saying: 'It's all nonsense! 'You're wasting your time'; 'It's only a game' - children learn, in opposition, to stop listening to us. And that is how we lose our legitimacy as guides and role models.

Not all games are the same: each operates within its own ecosystem, with its own economy, social rules and risks. Free Fire is not Minecraft; Roblox does not work like Fortnite. Understanding these differences is essential to helping children and teenagers navigate them safely.

## Online gaming in numbers

**Online video games** are part of the daily lives of the vast majority of children and teenagers across multiple different platforms. In Uruguay, according to Lupa Digital 2025[1], a survey was conducted among 6,513 pupils, ranging from Year 5 of primary school to secondary school, with an average age of 13. Of this group, 90% play video games on their mobile phones and between 60% and 70% play on a computer or console.

1 https://ceibal.edu.uy/plataformas-y-programas/la-red/la-lupa/

The Entertainment Software Association's *Power of Play* report[2] indicates that globally, girls and teenage girls account for around 48% of the gaming population. However, they face significant challenges in online gaming environments, where hostility and harassment can be commonplace. Studies show that 59% of female gamers have experienced some form of toxic behaviour from other players. This can include rape threats (14%), sexual harassment (30%) and verbal abuse (42%)[3]. These negative experiences lead many female gamers to hide their gender or avoid certain games to reduce exposure to harassment.

The 2022 national study *Kids Online Uruguay*[4] on children and teenagers aged between 9 and 17 already highlighted a strong interest in online gaming and clear gender differences (in terms of choice of platforms and games).

In a rapidly changing world, this article is not intended to be a definitive guide. It sets out a series of key points to help you understand the world of online gaming and how to discuss with your child.

## Three worlds in one

Whenever we talk about 'video games', we should think in three dimensions that are intertwined:

– gaming as a social network;

– gaming as an online business;

– gaming as a space for creativity.

### 1. Gaming as a social network

While video games were once confined to the private sphere of the home or to amusement arcades, the rise of online gaming, social media and constantly available tools has added a new dimension. For today's teenagers, playing video games is a socializing event structured by reward systems and interactions that influence their social lives.

When they are online, children meet friends, chat and form relationships. According to Lupa Digital, around 40% of pupils play with their classmates, 30% with friends from the neighbourhood and 20% with virtual friends they have never met in person. Conversations take place via messaging services built into the games and voice messages, or on platforms such as Discord, and then continue on WhatsApp and in the school playground. Sometimes, the game is nothing more than a vehicle for the real driving force: connection.

Similarly, every game ranks and rewards players. This gives them visibility and status among their peers, which is a powerful social incentive.

However, online games can also expose children to risks, such as unwanted contact or harassment, from both adults and other children. That is why supervision is important.

Lupa Digital has highlighted a strong correlation between viral challenges and the video game ecosystem. In 2024, video games were the most frequently cited category among students who had taken part in challenges. Many of these challenges stem directly from the context of the video game: challenges are replicated or competitive modes are played in succession for hours on end. Within these communities of friends, this can lead to risky behaviour, particularly when playtime becomes excessive or the pressure of competition is too intense.

**2** ESA, 2025. www.theesa.com/resources/the-global-power-of-play-report/

**3** Bryter, 2023. *Women Gamers Report 2023*.

**4** Pardo, V. *et al.*, 2022. *Children and Adolescents Online: Kids Online Uruguay Report*, UNICEF Uruguay.

This ecosystem also includes influencers who encourage participation in these challenges and often serve as role models for young gamers. By creating content about video games, they gain enormous popularity and profit from collaborations with companies and brands that monetise on their audience.

It is important to highlight the mechanisms of peer influence without judging or criticising, and to understand that adolescents are more vulnerable to these influences. We must encourage teenagers to be more resilient by setting boundaries that avoid risky situations, both online and in real life.

## 2. Gaming as an online business

According to *the Global Games Market Report 2024*[5], the video games industry generated around $187.7 billion worldwide in 2024 and reached 3.4 billion people. By 2027, it is forecast to exceed $213.3 billion. This growth is driven by the rise in the number of smartphone users worldwide. Most games today operate on a 'freemium' model, offering free access but with paid options to enhance the gaming experience.

'Mum, can I have some Robux for my birth-

5 https://newzoo.com/resources?type=trendreports

**Cost of virtual currencies**
(The approximate cost may vary depending on the region in question)

| Virtual currencies | Cost per 100 units | | Source* |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Cost in euros | Cost in US dollars | |
| **Fortnite** – V-Bucks | 0, 90 € | 0, 90 $ | Fortnite/PlayStation Spain |
| **Roblox** – Robux | 1, 50 € | 1, 25 $ | Microsoft/Xbox Store – 400 Robux bundle |
| **EA Sports FC (FIFA)** – FC Points | 0, 95 € | 0, 95 $ | PlayStation Store – 1050 FC points pack |
| **Minecraft** – Minecoins | 0, 62 € | 0, 62 $ | Minecraft.net/PlayStation Store – 320 Minecoins pack |
| **Free Fire** – Diamonds | 0, 97 € | 0, 99 $ | In euros : Codashop Spain (110 free diamonds included) In US dollars : Apple App Store US (100 diamond pack) |

* These figures correspond to the official prices as of 27 February 2026. Where conversion was necessary, the European Central Bank (ECB) exchange rate of 26 February 2026 was used: 1 € = 1,1814 $/1 $ ≈ 0,8465 €.

day?' This is a common request that opens up a complex discussion.

Virtual currencies (diamonds, V-Bucks, Robux) are purchased with real money and are used to unlock additional content: character upgrades, custom outfits, accessories or special powers.

On some platforms (such as Steam), players can buy or sell virtual items in exchange for real money. In this way, teenagers can earn money, particularly in games like Counter-Strike, where some rare *'skins'*[6] are sold at high prices. Although most of these markets are restricted to adults, minors often know how to bypass the restrictions.

But how much does a diamond actually cost? How much is a legendary *'skin'* worth in euros? Many parents don't know the answer to these questions, and without that knowledge, it is difficult to advise children on their spending, especially if they don't understand the real value of virtual items.

According to Lupa Digital (2025), 31% of pupils say they have purchased digital content in online games. Of these, 72% are boys and 27% are girls. Boys are clearly more likely to spend money on games, which corresponds to general trends in gaming frequency and the use of digital devices.

Many games incorporate mechanics that encourage spending. This is the case with *'loot boxes'*, the mysterious chests or spin wheels where you pay to receive a random reward. You might win a rare *skin*... or absolutely nothing of value. The psychological mechanism is similar to that of gambling: spend money, almost win, and try again.

Some countries, such as Belgium and the Netherlands, have banned games that incorporate these systems. Others now require transparency to show the odds of winning. The concern is real: these devices condition the brain into risky spending habits.

### 3. Gaming as a space for creativity

Nowadays, many games invite players to become creators. Roblox Studio is a prime example. It is a free tool that allows anyone, even the youngest players, to design and publish their own games on the platform. This is how thousands of teenagers are building worlds, programming game mechanics and designing spaces for others. Some even monetise their creations.

However, research shows that user-generated gaming platforms raise specific safety concerns, precisely because the content is created by young people or inexperienced creators, rather than professional teams. When millions of users are producing content at a rapid pace, there isn't a single platform capable of filtering everything in advance. Automated algorithms do not always manage to detect problematic content. As a result, children are exposed to environments that fall outside the safeguards and moderation systems implemented by publishers.

## Tools for parents and educators

You need neither to ban games nor to become an expert. The key is to be sufficiently informed to support children and teenagers.

6 *Counter Strike: Global Offensive* (CS:GO) introduced *skins*. Skins *are* purely cosmetic. They are unique graphical elements added to weapons, but they do not alter the weapon's functionality or performance. There are different tiers of *skins*, based on rarity. There are other factors that influence their value, such as the extent to which they have been 'worn'.

### Some basic points

– Play together, even if it's just once. Ask your children to show you how it works and what they like. Curiosity builds trust

– Check the age ratings. Not all games are suitable for all ages. Check the official rating systems (Google Play, ESRB[7], PEGI). Some elements may pose physiological risks (e.g., photosensitive epileptic seizures triggered by very rapid visual stimuli) or psychological risks (e.g., exposure to violent images or content unsuitable for the user's age).

– Make sure you set your child's actual age in the game settings. This setting determines access to instant messaging services and the various platform options.

– Treat games like social media platforms. Learn how to enable, restrict or disable communications. Configure these options according to the child's age, maturity and capacity for online interactions.

– Talk about influencers. Do they clearly state what they actually buy, or are they just promoting products? Teach children to understand their intentions. Discuss viral challenges. Take an interest in the challenges they take part in so that, together, you can identify any potential risks.

– Use the topic of virtual currency to teach them how to manage a budget. Before buying Robux, discuss their real-world value (in euros or dollars) and make the decision together.

– Guide them in their in-game purchases. Explain the *loot box* system, which is designed to encourage them to spend more and more by capitalizing on the desire to try 'just one more time'. Set limits on playtime. Use apps to regulate playtime and prevent them from going on late into the night.

– Keep learning. What exists today may change in six months' time. Stay informed and keep the dialogue open.

To support your children, the most important thing is to be present and ensure their safety as they explore these three worlds which, in their eyes, blend into one.

## The CLEMI's Tips

### The PEGI system

*The Pan European Game Information (PEGI)* age rating system for video games is used in thirty-eight European countries. The age rating confirms that the game is appropriate for the age of the player. The PEGI rating is based on a game's suitability for a particular age group, not on its level of difficulty.

The PEGI rating distinguishes between five age groups: content is authorised for ages over 3, 7, 12, 16 and 18. The rating is determined based on criteria such as the presence or absence of violence, its context and nature (moderate, present but realistic, graphic and/or gratuitous, etc.), the presence or absence of drugs, gambling, and sexual content (suggestive, realistic or explicit, etc.). Foul language is also one of the elements taken into account.

The age rating is supplemented by symbols indicating problematic content (drugs, discrimination, strong language, sex, etc.).

See all the information on | PEGI

7 Online: www.esrb.org/

1

# What is technoference?

**Virginie Sassoon**, Deputy Director of CLEMI

**Technoference is when screens interrupt social occasions: checking our phone whilst eating, playing a game or having a conversation. Our attention is split, and the conversation fizzles out.**

We know that eating in front of a screen tends to reduce vocabulary, as a direct consequence of the lack of interaction. An Australian study has even gone so far as to quantify this loss by using audio recordings to measure verbal interaction between young children and their parents.

**Every hour spent in front of a screen translates to**

**397**
**words from adults**

**294**
**vocalisations**

**68**
**everyday conversations**

**that disappear[1].**

More generally, the accumulation of these small, repeated interruptions means that parents are less emotionally available and pay less attention to their child's life and what is happening around them. For the child, this intermittent presence makes it difficult to learn social skills, such as listening to others, waiting for their turn to speak, cooperating, sharing and forming bonds.

Good news: 'technoference' isn't inevitable! We can keep the interactions that matter and ensure the value of our presence by choosing when and how we use our screens.

1 Brushe ME *et al.* (2024). 'Screen Time and Parent-Child Talk When Children Are Aged 12 to 36 Months,' *JAMA Pediatrics*, vol. 178, no. 4, pp. 369-375.

Before saying that I spend too much time in front of screens, we must understand why and how I use them[1].

1 The testimonies come from a public consultation carried out by the Brazilian Government in 2024 among children and adolescents in 43 municipalities, in which they formulated advice for adults.
https://www.gov.br/secom/pt-br/assuntos/uso-de-telas-por-criancas-e-adolescentes/guia

# Learning to find information and develop critical thinking

Between content creators, geniuses of viral content, shockingly edited images and anxiety-inducing news: information reaches us in a constant stream, without without a manual for interpreting it.
This chapter helps parents understand how teenagers access the news, how images and misinformation circulate, and why emotional manipulation can work so well. The aim?  To provide tips so that we can learn how to stay informed together.

2

# Where do children and teenagers get their information today?

**Adeline Hulin**, Head of the UNESCO Unit for Media and Information Literacy and Digital Competencies.
**Samrita Menon**, Associate Programme Specialist, Media and Information Literacy and Digital Competencies, UNESCO.

If you have ever wondered how your children keep up with current affairs, you are not alone. In just a few years, access to information has changed dramatically. According to the last two editions of the Reuters Institute's *Digital News Report* (2024 and 2025), most young people get their news primarily through social media. On these platforms, news is often shared by content creators rather than by traditional media outlets.

Parents–don't assume that just because your children don't get their news from the same media or sources as you, they aren't interested in the news! Surveys show, on the contrary, that they are still very curious about world events and social issues[1]. However, the way they inform themselves and the formats they consume are radically different. Young people prefer video content and value information that is easy to share. They are less likely to actively seek news; instead, it is presented in their feeds often mixed with all kinds of entertainment content. This blending of genres blurs the boundaries between reliable information and simple entertainment.

More and more young people are also turning to generative AI tools, such as chatbots and AI-powered search engines, to quickly obtain explanations or answers. In these situations, they are no longer limited to consuming content via social media, but also use generative AI tools to obtain summaries or interpretations of events. This new practice carries a risk: access to information that is oversimplified, taken out of context or insufficiently verified.

## Key statistics on information and young people[2]

**1. Social media has become the main channel for accessing information**

44% of young people aged 18 to 24 say that social media is their main source of information.

TikTok is now the main source of news for young people aged 12 to 25.

**2. Video is the preferred format for getting information**

Consumption of news videos on social media has risen from 52% in 2020 to 65% in 2025; when all video formats are taken into account, it has risen from 67% to 75%.

1 *How young people are quietly rewriting global cooperation*British Council, 2025, online: www.britishcouncil.org/voices-magazine/how-young-people-are-quietly-rewriting-global-cooperation

2 Reuters Institute:
– Digital News Report 2024/Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism ;
– Digital News Report 2025/Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism.

**3. Influencers are seen as reliable sources**

On TikTok, Instagram and YouTube, influencers are becoming the main sources of information for young audiences.

**4. AI chatbots are becoming new sources of information**

7% of respondents use AI chatbots every week to stay informed. Among those under 25, this figure rises to 15%.

**5. Podcasts are gaining ground**

Podcasts are becoming increasingly popular among a young, educated audience.

several challenges. Immediacy and shareability often take precedence over in-depth analysis and fact-checking. Access to high-quality journalism can be expensive (paid subscriptions) and most young people do not pay for news. The family tradition of watching the evening news together is gradually giving way to individualized habits centred around smartphones.

Digital platforms help foster personal expression, creativity and connections on a global scale, but they have also become spaces where disinformation, polarizing discourse and content inciting violence, discrimination or hatred circulate easily.

Another challenge lies in the fact that young people no longer go through the intermediary of traditional 'gatekeepers' of information, namely editors-in-chief and journalists. The print media, television and radio rely on ethical principles to produce and verify information[3]. In contrast, most content creators are not subject to these requirements. Many share opinions, rumours or unverified claims, which can spread very quickly. Young people often lack the necessary critical thinking skills to distinguish professional journalism from content designed primarily to entertain or influence.

## Spotlight on the UNESCO 'Behind the screens' study

'Behind the Screens' is the first global study dedicated to content creators. It stands out through its global scope, providing an overview of their motivations, practices and the challenges they face. UNESCO conducted this study among 500 content creators[4] in over fifty countries across six continents, and in eight languages: English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Arabic, German, Russian and Chinese.

According to the findings, 42% of creators consider popularity – measured by the number of 'likes' and views – to be the main indicator of the credibility of online information sources.

The widespread lack of rigorous fact-checking – 62% of creators do not fact-check – highlights the crucial need to raise awareness among users to turn them into allies in the fight against disinformation.

3 For example https://www.ifj.org/who/rules-and-policy/global-charter-of-ethics-for-journalists

4 The respondents are content creators, which are defined as 'individuals who regularly post content online for public consumption and have more than 1,000 followers, which is the threshold to be qualified as nano-influencers'. *Behind the screens: Insights from Digital Content Creators; Understanding their Intentions, Practices and Challenges*, UNESCO, 2024. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000392006d

The survey confirms the need for awareness-raising, as it reveals that only 14% of content creators have participated in programmes designed to equip them with the necessary media and information literacy skills.

Despite the widespread lack of fact-checking, 73% of the content creators surveyed expressed a strong desire to receive training in media and information literacy.

## Can journalism support parents in the digital age?

**Being a journalist** is not just a profession, it is a social function. According to international standards, journalism consists of providing verified information that serves the public interest. This work can be carried out by professionals in newsrooms, but also by citizen journalists or even content creators, provided they follow the ethical principles of journalism. Through this functional definition of journalism, the emphasis is not on the question of who can be a journalist, but on the right to freedom of expression for all (including the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas).

Before the digital age, most information came from traditional media (television, radio and the print media). Today, social media has opened up the public sphere to many other voices. These new sources of information may compete with traditional media, but what sets journalism apart is the way the work is carried out:

– Journalists follow professional guidelines and standards (transparency, editorial responsibility), in particular to verify the accuracy of information.

– They correct their mistakes and clearly separate facts from opinions.

– It is allowed to hold an opinion, but facts must remain facts.

Among these new voices are now creators of informative content, sometimes referred to as 'influencers'. What sets them apart?

– Some news content creators strive to uphold the principles of accuracy, integrity and transparency, even if they are not part of a newsroom. However, there is currently no official self-regulatory system or common code of ethics governing their practices.

– Influencers, on the other hand, tend to focus on their personal brand, lifestyle or entertainment. They may share information, but often do so without the same level of rigour regarding verification or public interest.

This development places the responsibility on users to apply their media and information literacy skills in order to assess the reliability and credibility of the content they consume. In the case of users such as children and minors generally, studies conducted worldwide show that their resilience to disinformation and misinformation is low and that online spaces can have negative effects on their psychological and mental well-being, as well as on their physical safety.

The good news? Parents can play a vital role in helping their children develop healthy habits regarding information. Here are some practical tips.

## 1. Explain what journalism is

Children and young people often consume information without understanding how it is produced. Try to explain it to them in simple terms:

– Journalism = verified information;

– Journalists consult various sources, check the facts and publish corrections if there are errors;

– Their goal is to inform, not to generate hype or sell products.

You can even compare a news article with a post by an influencer: what citations have they used? What evidence do they provide? Are they trying to inform you, entertain you, sell you a product or an idea, or persuade you?

## 2. Look through trusted newspapers or media outlets at home

Encourage your children to learn about:

– A weekend newspaper;

– A trusted online news source;

– TV news that you can watch together.

This can help them get used to the idea that information can come from reliable, carefully chosen sources, and not just from algorithms or influencers.

Reading some articles together and asking 'What do you think?' transforms the consumption of information into a joint activity rather than a chore.

## 3. Show an interest in their sources of information

Instead of criticizing and rejecting influencers or platforms, ask open questions:

– Who do you follow to stay informed?

– What do you like about their content?

– How do you know if what they say is true?

These questions encourage discussion about the credibility of the facts presented and the biases of the authors, without passing judgement on your children's information-seeking habits. They also help you understand how their digital spaces work – places where they can navigate on their own and grapple with complex and sensitive issues.

## 4. Guide them towards media outlets and accounts or profiles tailored for young people

Traditional media outlets are increasingly investing in content tailored to young audiences. Today, there are numerous journalistic formats designed to explain complex topics in simple, engaging language, without sensationalism or unfounded fears. These sources often use images, videos and interactive elements to make learning accessible and enjoyable. If your child uses AI tools or social media to stay informed, encourage them to cross-check the information they find with these media outlets aimed at children and teenagers. This will not only help them verify the information, but will also teach them the importance of developing their critical thinking skills and gaining a better understanding of how the media and information work.

## 5. Set an example as a parent

The sociologist William Edward Burghardt Du Bois (1868–1963) famously said: **'Children learn more from what you are than from what you teach them.'** This applies particularly to media and information literacy. Parents should adopt healthy habits when it comes to handling information to encourage their children to develop critical thinking when faced with diverse media and information sources.

Parents are also themselves prone to bias and preconceptions. If you want to set a rule (for example, no sharing information in a discussion group unless it has been verified by two or three reliable sources), you must first apply it to yourself.

2

# Combating misinformation:

## breaking down filter bubbles and echo chambers

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From TikTok and Instagram to YouTube and Discord, teenagers spend much of their time consuming, creating and sharing content. These platforms do not merely serve to entertain them: they are also spaces where they learn about the world, form their opinions and connect with one another.

This connected lifestyle offers great opportunities to learn, create and express themselves, but it also has its downsides. Faced with a flood of information and misinformation, young people may find it difficult to distinguish what is reliable. Although they are often comfortable with technology, they still need guidance to navigate this environment intelligently and safely.

Part of the problem lies in the very design of these platforms. Sites such as YouTube, TikTok and Instagram use algorithms – computer systems that recommend content based on what users have already viewed or liked. While this makes the experience more personalized and engaging, it also leads us to see the same type of content over and over again, and rarely anything that challenges our views. This is how filter bubbles and echo chambers are formed.

### Filter bubbles

**Definition:** these are personalised information spaces created by algorithms that suggest users content similar to what they have already viewed, bookmarked or searched for[1].

**Problems they cause:** filter bubbles limit understanding by presenting mainly a single point of view. This means we are deprived of diverse perspectives, which makes it difficult to form balanced and critical opinions. It also increases the risk that false or misleading information that aligns with our beliefs will go unchallenged[2].

1 Pariser E., *The Filter Bubble: What the Internet Is Hiding from You*, New York, Penguin Press, 2012.

2 Rhodes S. C., 'Filter Bubbles, Echo Chambers, and Fake News: How Social Media Conditions Individuals to Be Less Critical of Political Misinformation', *Political Communication*, *39* (1), 2021, 1–22. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10584609.2021.1910887

### Echo chambers

**Definition:** these are online environments in which people interact primarily with others who share the same beliefs[1].

**Problems this causes:** echo chambers reinforce existing convictions through repetition and can increase polarisation[2]. Opposing viewpoints are rarely heard and are therefore rarely taken into account. In this context, disinformation spreads more easily and appears more legitimate.

Furthermore, the current digital landscape is witnessing the emergence of content creators who are now establishing themselves as new opinion leaders. Social media offers numerous features that allow anyone to produce content. As a result, when a topic goes viral, self-proclaimed 'experts' often rush to offer advice and analysis that can be misleading. Often, these 'experts' are experts in name only and lack professional legitimacy in the fields on which they comment. However, many people adopt these spontaneous interpretations out of a need for information on these topics.

The reasons for sharing content without verifying its accuracy are varied: to be the first to publish it, to gain visibility, or to help one another by raising awareness of current events (see the infographic on p. 35).

## Tips and best practices

### to help you find your way around

**There are two key aspects** to bear in mind when tackling the spread of misinformation among young people. Firstly, it is important to understand how they interpret the information they receive. Secondly, we must encourage the creation of ethical content. Parents and teachers play a vital role, not in strictly monitoring the use of social media, but in reinforcing children's critical thinking.

Below is a series of specific tips for parents and teachers, based on best practices compiled by the authors.

**1. Discuss the impact of filter bubbles and algorithms.**

**2. Convey core values:** value the pursuit of truth, impartiality and objectivity. These attitudes are the first line of defence against the pitfalls of misinformation.

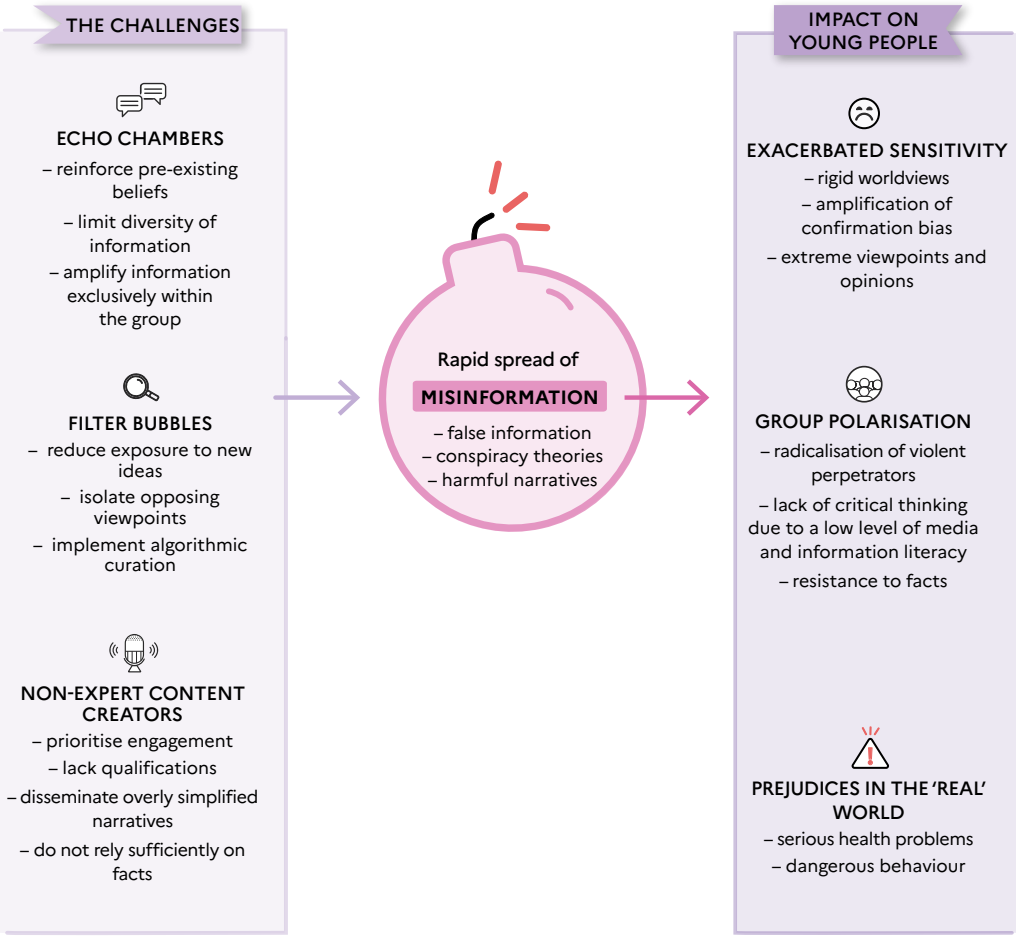
**3. Encourage critical thinking:** teach your children to question things. Not everything found online is necessarily true or relevant. Encourage them to apply the THINK principle before sharing: *True - Helpful - Inspiring - Necessary - Kind.*

**4. Break out of echo chambers:** combat echo chambers by encouraging them to diversify their sources and adopt an active approach to seeking information.

**5. Establish constructive dialogue:** avoid judgemental approaches and rules based solely on prohibition.

1 Cinelli M., Morales G. D. F., Galeazzi A., Quattrociocchi W. and Starnini, M., 'The echo chamber effect on social media', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 118* (9), 2021, 1–8. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2023301118

2 Sunstein C., *# Republic: Divided democracy in the age of social media*, Princeton University Press, 2018.

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**6. Use specific examples:** share personal experiences in family discussions to identify biased viewpoints and the importance of making informed decisions.

**7. Encourage responsible habits:** question your children regularly. For example: 'What nice or not nice things did you find online today?'. This turns browsing into a shared activity.

**8. Diversify media sources:** encourage your children not to rely solely on digital platforms for information. Suggest that they also consult traditional media (print media, radio, television) with in-depth, comprehensive formats that explain events in detail. Guide them towards analytical articles with verified and identified sources.

## Conclusion

It is essential that young people step outside their filter bubbles and echo chambers so that they can be exposed to diverse opinions and through this broaden their view of the world, deepen understanding and celebrate differences. This will enable them to use the internet in an intelligent, ethical and safe way. As parents, you can help to make this happen.

### Media and Information Literacy initiatives in Asia

| Name of organization/ initiative | Description |
|---|---|
| Annie – Asian Network of News and Information Educators | Coordination of a network of teachers, journalists, media professionals, policy-makers and other stakeholders in the field of media and information literacy. www.annieasia.org |
| Out of the Box (Philippines) | Promotion of critical and civic media and information literacy in Philippine society through innovations in training and awareness-raising campaigns. www.ootbmedialiteracy.org |
| Break The Fake Movement | Fostering critical thinking and civic engagement to strengthen democratic institutions through essential knowledge and skills in media and information literacy. https://breakthefakemovement.com |
| FactShala (India) | A Media and Information Literacy programme run by DataLEADS, which helps people in small towns and rural areas of India to critically evaluate online information and distinguish facts from misinformation. https://factshala.com |

2

# Helping children cope with conflict images and emotional manipulation online

**Lusine Grigoryan** has been working for over twenty years at the intersection of journalism, education and digital culture to help people make sense of information in a complex world. She works at the Media Initiatives Center in Armenia, where she combines research with the design of policies and programmes aimed at supporting educators, communities and independent media. In 2017, her team received the UNESCO-Gapmil Award for the promotion of Media and Information Literacy (MIL) in Armenia and the region.

War, violence and disasters no longer seem so far away. They infiltrate into our homes via our screens: instantly, on every device, and children are often ill-equipped to deal with it. Platforms are rife with misinformation and fake news, often accompanied by disturbing and violent content. Even if they are not directly affected by a conflict, children and teenagers still feel fear, distress and sadness when exposed to violent images or harrowing stories online.

A 2021[1] UNICEF report shows that disinformation and misinformation[2] are part of children's digital lives. It spreads further, faster, and even reaches children who do not access social media directly. Lies are spread outside the digital sphere via peers, parents, relatives and teachers. The algorithms that personalize news feeds and search results prioritize misleading or sensationalist content over objective information, amplifying its visibility. This makes children, whose cognitive and emotional capacities are still developing, particularly vulnerable and prone to believing these false stories. UNICEF studies across numerous countries show that many children struggle to judge the truthfulness of what they see online: disinformation can harm them, but they can also unwittingly spread it amongst their peers. Today, many children turn to Siri, Google or ChatGPT to verify what they have seen, before asking their parents or teachers.

Furthermore, images and videos have a huge emotional impact and are often taken out of context or deliberately used to provoke fear, outrage or empathy. In a world full of screens, parents cannot completely shield their children from this shocking content, but they have a vital role to play in helping them understand what they are seeing, manage their emotions and develop the critical thinking skills they will need to feel safer and more confident online.

1 Online: https://www.unicef.org/innocenti/reports/digital-misinformation-disinformation-and-children

2 Misinformation is false information disseminated without the intention to deceive, whereas disinformation is false information disseminated deliberately to mislead and with the intention to cause harm.

## How it works:
visual manipulation

### Edited images, AI-generated images

Edited photos are part of everyday life and it is becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish between what is real and what is fake. AI can generate completely fabricated situations (explosions, injured people, destroyed streets), which nevertheless appear real and spread rapidly.

**A message for children:** seeing is not always believing. Manipulating an image is as easy as adding a filter on your phone.

Encourage them to ask questions:
**Who did this? How was this image created? And why?**

### Confusing situations: real image, but fake story

Sometimes the image is real, but the story isn't.

In times of crisis, it is common for old photos, images from other countries or of events unrelated to the current situation to be shared, accompanied by a new caption, as in these examples: a photo of a marathon with the caption 'people fleeing from danger'; a building destroyed several years ago being used to report a 'new attack'.

Children who see these images may think that danger is imminent or close to their homes. It is essential to encourage them to take a step back and ask themselves: 'Is this really what it seems?'. This is an essential first step.

### Emotional framing: angles, symbols, music and filters

The **camera** angle, **lighting**, **music** and framing can radically change how we feel.

– **The low-angle shot:** people appear powerful or threatening;

– **The shot from above:** people appear small, weak and defenceless;

– **Close-ups:** amplify emotions beyond what is actually felt;

– **Symbols:** flags, children, toys, smoke or ruins intensify the emotional impact.

Stories featuring children (whether real or AI-generated) spread more quickly and are often used to provoke anger or empathy. In recent years, dozens of images of children in war-torn countries have been shared around the world, accompanied by captions such as 'Look what they have done to our children'. Fact-checkers have discovered that many of these were generated by AI, although that does not prevent them from being viewed millions of times[3].

Children tend to become 'the voice of the front line', but even the sincere testimonies of children and teenagers living in a conflict zone can contain errors, inaccuracies or exaggerated emotional interpretations. Sincerity and truth are two different things, and this is an important lesson for young people.

3 *LA Times*, 2023, DW 2023.

## Activities

and communication tailored to their age

Below you will find ideas for starting a conversation, as well as activities to help children and teenagers deal with sensitive content online, and to develop their resilience and critical thinking skills in the long term.

### Ages 3 to 6: understanding emotions before understanding the media

Young children interpret images literally. **What they need most is stability and emotional security, so it is important to explain things to them in simple terms.** Leaving the television on or allowing them to catch a glimpse of someone's phone can expose them to images they will not understand and which may cause them distress, anger, sadness, anxiety or confusion.

#### Start a conversation

**If they seem scared:**

– How do you feel?

– Where do you feel that emotion? In your tummy? In your chest? In your head?

– What can you touch right here and now that you can't touch on the screen?

– Do you know you're safe with me?

**If they seem curious or ask questions:**

– What do you think is happening in this picture?

– Is there anything that struck you as odd or that you don't understand?

– Do you need me to explain anything?

#### Activity ideas

**1. Recognizing emotions**

Use pictures, colours or cards that represent emotions. Help the children to name their emotions and reassure them by telling them that they can always tell you what's worrying them.

**2. Learning through stories**

Children learn to recognize deception and manipulation through fairy tales. As they grow older, they can apply these stories to 'real' life and the media. Read or act out stories such as *Little Red Riding* Hood and ask them:

– Why did the wolf disguise himself as Grandma?

– Why did Little Red Riding Hood believe him?

– What would you do in her place?

**3. Creating 'positive information'**

Create simple 'reports' about your daily life using photos. This teaches them how to choose and construct a narrative.

**4. Watch together**

Watch cartoons or videos with your child. Ask simple questions that introduce the idea that what they are seeing has been imagined, written and created by adults (authors, directors, media companies) to tell a story or sell something, and that it does not always represent reality.

– Who did this?

– Do these characters exist in real life?

– Why has the music changed?

– How do you feel when you see this?

## Ages 7 to 12: start raising children's awareness of the media

At this age, children notice details, compare images and understand that online content isn't always what it seems. They go from being passive viewers to active observers.

### Start a conversation

**For an immediate response:**

– How did you feel when you saw that?

– Why do you think it scared you or made you angry?

– Can you walk away if you're scared or angry?

**For critical thinking:**

– How do you think this image was created?

– Is there anything that strikes you as odd? The shadows, the weather, the angles?

– Who posted this? Why?

– Is the aim to inform or to scare?

– How can we check if it's true?

### Activity ideas

**1. Play at being detectives (learn how to verify)**

**Do a detail hunt in your neighbourhood:** take a photo of a specific feature near your home (a sign, a street corner, a tree) and look for it with your child on the way to school. This teaches them to observe their surroundings and check their location.

**Digital detective:** choose a viral photo and check its authenticity. Use a reverse image search (Google or TinEye) to find out where the image comes from and whether it has been used before.

**Spot the mistake:** use edited or AI-generated images and let the children find the inconsistencies.

**Find the true story:** take a surprising anecdote ('Octopuses have three hearts!') and verify it using several sources: a book, Wikipedia, generative AI, a YouTube video and a website. Discuss the differences between these sources and which ones you think are most reliable

**2. Create together**

**Experiment with photographs from different angles:** take several photos of the same person or object from different viewpoints: from above, from below, up close, from a distance. Show how each angle changes the effect.

**The messy room:** in a messy room, zoom in to frame a tidy corner and take a photo. Show it to the child: 'The photo says the room is tidy, but the reality is different. '

**3. Knowing when to stop**

Teach your child to recognize the physical symptoms of stress (a knot in the stomach, difficulty breathing). The rule: 'When you feel this stress, stop looking, breathe and come and tell me what's wrong.'

## Ages 13 to 17: developing critical thinking, managing emotions and being responsible

Around the world, most teenagers are very active on social media, which exposes them more than younger children to algorithms that prioritize emotional and sensationalist content. This increases the risk of encountering false information and, as they also share and create content, teenagers can accidentally become spreaders of misinformation.[4]

4 Online: https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2025/12/09/teens-social-media-and-ai-chatbots-2025/

## Start a conversation

**To manage emotions**

– Have you recently seen anything on your phone that has upset you?

– Do you feel pressure to post something when everyone is reacting to a tragedy?

– How do you know when it's time to stop scrolling?

**For critical thinking**

– This video is everywhere. Do you think it shows the whole story, or just part of it?

– What emotions do you think the algorithm is trying to provoke?

– What would it be like if it were on a news website rather than on social media?

## Activity ideas

**1. Compare sources (the 'media bombardment' test)**

Choose a current affairs topic and analyse how it is covered on TikTok and in the main national or international media. Ask them:

– Which coverage is more emotion-based?

– Which provides more facts and sources?

– Who is each of these versions aimed at?

**2. Deepfake detective**

Videos generated or edited by AI are becoming increasingly difficult to identify. Look at fact-checking websites and find out how they have exposed deepfakes. Discuss together the clues that enabled them to be detected.

**3. Influencers and reality**

Choose an influencer your child follows. Ask them:

– Where did they get that information from?

– Are their statements opinions or facts?

– What might they gain from posting tragic content?

**4. Recognizing their biases**

Choose a post that has angered your teenager.

Start by analysing the emotional elements: angles, music, symbols and colours.

Next, ask yourself:

– Why did that upset you?

– What made you think it was true?

– Would someone who thinks differently react in the same way as you?

– What are the facts, and what is the chosen angle?

Explain that algorithms **identify our interests** to offer us content that either validates our opinions or upsets us.

**5. Digital first aid kit**

Spend some time browsing your teenager's social media account with them. If the content seems too distressing, adjust the settings:

– **Filter out the words** 'war', 'attack', 'blood';

– **Have a clear-out:** unfollow accounts that share anxiety-inducing content;

– **Turn off autoplay** to avoid unexpected videos.

Teach teenagers that they can shape their digital environment.

**6. The challenge of responsible content creation**

Teenagers often share shocking content to show they feel engaged. Teach them to think before they post. Ask them:

– If this video showed someone close to you, would you want it to go viral?

– Why are you posting this?

– How do you know if it's true?

– Could this harm anyone?

Encourage them to create ethical content that 'helps', rather than content that fuels fear or contributes to misinformation.

## Parents–look after yourselves:

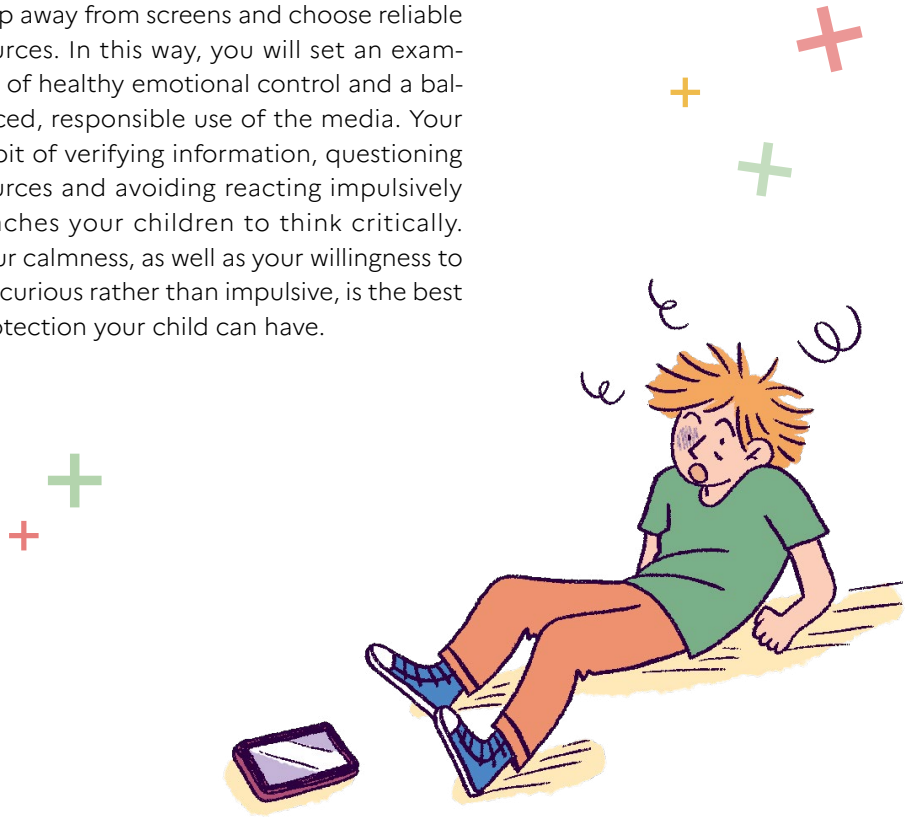
### your calmness makes them secure

Children, especially the youngest ones, absorb their parents' emotions. If adults feel overwhelmed by the news or by heavy use of social media, children pick up on it immediately. Take a break, breathe deeply, step away from screens and choose reliable sources. In this way, you will set an example of healthy emotional control and a balanced, responsible use of the media. Your habit of verifying information, questioning sources and avoiding reacting impulsively teaches your children to think critically. Your calmness, as well as your willingness to be curious rather than impulsive, is the best protection your child can have.

## You are not alone

If you find the international news overwhelming or feel swamped by misinformation, seek help. Talk to your child's teachers, visit your local library, or contact organizations specializing in media literacy. There are many resources available to help you understand fact-checking, build emotional resilience and strengthen your digital safety skills.

Raising a new generation equipped with a critical mind is a collective effort. Asking for help is a sign of strength, not weakness.



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# Combating information manipulation as a family

**Victoria Blin** is Head of Partnerships at Viginum[1]. In addition to her academic work on information manipulation, she is actively involved in raising awareness among both the general public and specialist audiences.

**Yanis Naceur** joined Viginum in 2022 as an analyst, before moving to the strategy division, where he coordinates and oversees cooperation between Viginum and its foreign counterparts.

From the rise of social media to the growing role of artificial intelligence (AI), there have rarely been so many changes in the way information is produced and consumed. By diverting these changes from their original purpose, public debate is steered by malicious states or economic actors in a direction that suits them, by manipulating the information available online.

As this phenomenon affects us all, it is essential that we understand and discuss it, particularly within families. This learning is indispensable, especially since today access to information and the exchange of opinions take place mainly on the internet, without strict regulation. Providing teenagers with the keys to understanding this digital information environment enables them to actively contribute to the preservation of digital public debate by detecting and thwarting attempts to manipulate it. Thus, adopting 'information hygiene' makes teenagers both stakeholders and guardians of the authenticity of online debate, and helps make society as a whole more resilient to attempts to manipulate information.

## Discover the techniques of information manipulation

Unlike disinformation (the deliberate dissemination of false content) and misinformation (unintentional dissemination), information manipulation refers to the act of exploiting information – whether true or false – for deceptive purposes, particularly through inauthentic means (AI-generated images, the creation of fake social media accounts, etc.).

In reality, behind information manipulation lie numerous techniques designed to deceive internet users. Below, we provide a (non-exhaustive) list of the most common ones, to help you recognise them more easily.

1 Viginum is the technical and operational service responsible for monitoring and protecting against foreign digital interference (FDI), which is attached to the French General Secretariat for Defence and National Security. Its main mission is to detect and characterize FDI.

– *'Astroturfing'*: a technique that involves artificially increasing the visibility of a topic through the coordinated action of a small group of accounts generating a large volume of posts. This technique is used to make it appear as though a topic is a huge event.

– '*Bots*': a technique involving the use of social media accounts whose actions or creation have been automated by a computer program to simulate human behaviour. A bot may be capable of posting, leaving comments, following accounts, sharing or liking other posts.

– Trolls: these are accounts or groups of accounts used by real people who hide behind them to make fun, mock, do political activism or even strategically insult, offend or provoke controversy on a topic with the aim of disrupting online public debate. Unlike bots, trolls are not automated accounts.

– '*Copy-pasta*': a technique involving the publication of the same block of text or images on one or more web platforms by copying and pasting, with minor modifications (emojis, punctuation, etc.) added to increase the visibility of a message without being censored by the platforms.

– '*Typosquatting*': a technique that involves faking well-known websites by registering a domain name that is very similar to the official domain name (e.g. diplomatie.gouv[.]fm instead of diplomatie.gouv.fr). This technique is used to deceive uninformed internet users.

## Working together as a family to

combat the manipulation of information

**Contrary to popular belief**, you don't need deep technical knowledge or advanced technical skills to familiarize yourself with the digital space and effectively combat the manipulation of information on the internet. With a few simple tips, you can employ research methods to investigate as a family and regain control of your digital information space.

### Step 1 – Ask questions!

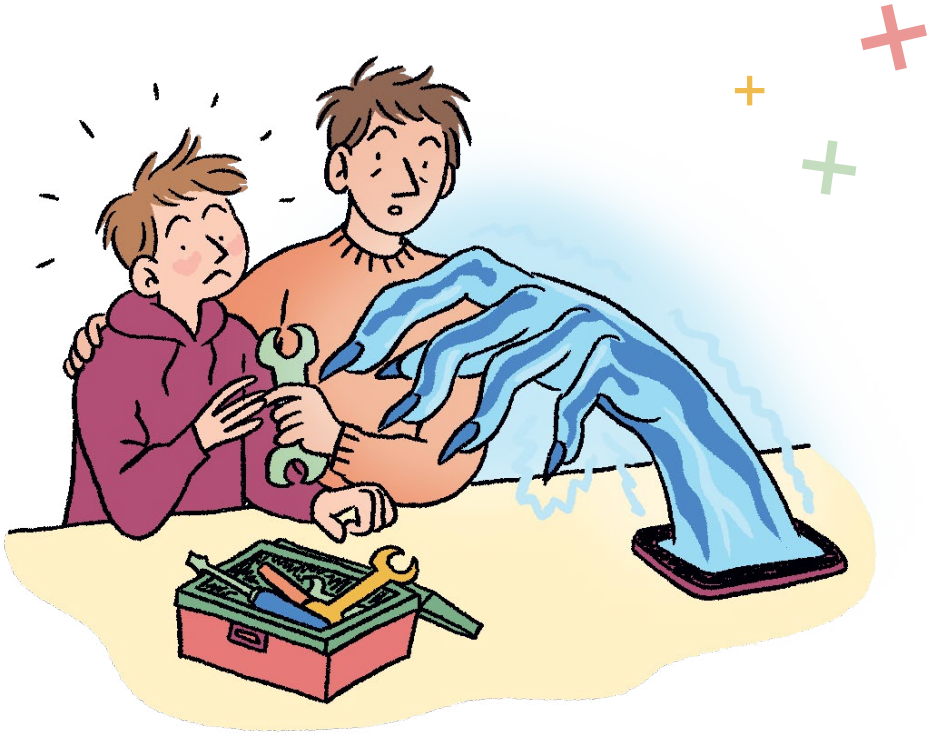
What should you do if you're unsure about content (a sensationalist headline, a shocking image, etc.) on a website or social media platform?

Information can be perceived differently depending on the individual. Both the context of exposure and the reader's personality can influence how manipulated content is received. Open up a discussion to find out the views of all members of your family. Ask about the tone of the message, its editorial approach, the overall quality of the content, or even the context of publication and the author's intention.

If you're still unsure, go and do some research!

### Step 2 – Analyse the sources

Once you've looked at the initial contextual elements, there are other clues that can help determine whether the content and source you're analysing are potentially misleading.



For example, on social media, the following elements are often characteristic of fake accounts:

– A very recent account creation date;

– An uneven followers-to-following ratio (e.g. 1 follower compared to 238 following);

– A similar posting time for each post (e.g. all posts are made at 18:48);

– A profile picture that appears to have been generated by artificial intelligence;

– An account name that seems too generic;

– Lack of personalisation on the account.

Do you think you've identified a fake account or manipulated information? You can take it even further!

## Step 3 - Investigate with OSINT

OSINT, or Open Source Intelligence, refers to a set of practices for researching and analysing publicly available digital data. By following a few simple tips, you can carry out your own investigations.

In the case of manipulated content, it is often the case that an image predates the information it is used to support and has been taken out of its original context. The aim is to mislead the audience by presenting an alternative version of events.

### Tracing the origin of an image or video

– Take a screenshot or save the image.

– Upload the image to a reverse image search engine (e.g.: Google Images, TinEye, etc.) and perform the reverse image search function. Using Google Lens is also an effective way to find the source of an image. This tool allows you to isolate specific elements of an image using the cropping tool.

– The search engine displays the results and instances where the image has been used previously. Note: don't hesitate to use several search engines to compare the results.

You may also come across fake news websites: websites that impersonate media outlets and government institutions in order to spread false information and mislead internet users (*typosquatting*).

### Adopting some good habits

– Check the URL of the website, there may be a trap hidden there: In 2023, Viginum detected the creation of the '20minuts[.]com' website, faking the identity and branding of the website for French newspaper *20 Minutes*.

– Check the website's legal page.

– Check whether this information has been reported by other well-known media outlets.

Now that you have all the information, here's what we recommend you do – or avoid doing!

## Step 4 – Take action

If you have any doubts about the accuracy of the information, **do not share the content. This helps break the chain of dissemination and avoid spreading manipulated information.** By doing this you help to limit the visibility of such information and contribute to a healthier online public debate.

If you wish, you can also report misleading content to the social media platform to request its removal, **especially if you believe it to be illegal.**

Share this fact-checking method with your family to effectively combat the manipulation of information.

Viginum and CLEMI have teamed up to produce the podcast 'Le débrief de Clara et Raphaël' [Clara and Raphaël's debrief][2] (video version in English). It consists of eight episodes, each presenting a technique used by foreign malicious users to manipulate information online.

2 Le débrief de Clara et Raphaël : Comment débusquer les manipulations de l'information | CLEMI

2

# How to stay informed in the age of generative artificial intelligence?[1]

**Manon Conan** is head of the Media Education and Copyright Awareness department at Arcom, the French regulatory body in audiovisual and digital media.

Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) is now present at every stage of information production, from its creation to its dissemination. Its use therefore raises new questions about the way we understand and consume information, in a context of information overload and growing mistrust of it.

## A revolution in production

What is innovative about GenAI is that it enables the production of content, a task previously reserved for humans. This is in fact its main strength: generating content – textual, visual or audio – in response to a query (also known as a 'prompt') from a user.

This new capability poses multiple challenges regarding the quality of information, its transparency, traceability and regulation, while raising concerns about the proliferation of 'synthetic' (i.e. fabricated) content. GenAI reinforces the scope for action for action by malicious actors by enabling them to rapidly create more realistic misleading and convincing content.

## A profound shift in how we access information

Information searches are increasingly carried out via conversational agents such as ChatGPT, Copilot or Perplexity. A new era is emerging: we are moving away from a model in which we navigated between various sources towards a single interface. This model heightens the risk of information isolation, as each user receives a personalized version of current events, which may contain cultural or political biases, lack diversity and fail to present contrasting viewpoints with other perspectives.

## A web that is becoming increasingly synthetic

As GenAI is trained using data already created by other GenAIs, the internet is evolving towards what some call the 'synthetic web', in which machines produce content that is consumed by other machines. This phenomenon creates the risk of standardising discourse, reducing the diversity of viewpoints and reinforcing dominant trends rather than questioning them.

1 See *IA et information : enjeux et outils pour un usage éclairé*, Arcom - Café IA. www.arcom.fr/sites/default/files/2025-04/Arcom-module-pedagogique-IA-et-information-enjeux-et-outils-pour-un-usage-eclaire.pdf

## The amplification of misinformation

Although disinformation is not a phenomenon that has emerged with the digital age, GenAI amplifies the ease of creation, speed and impact: it allows for the rapid creation of credible fake content and the automatic feeding of networks of fake pages or accounts.

Since 2023, more than 1,121 fake news websites generated by GenAI have been detected worldwide, compared with just 49 the previous year[2]. This trend is reinforced by recommendation algorithms optimised to capture our attention. As conspiratorial, emotive or sensational content tends to go viral more easily, it is prioritised and circulates faster than verified information.

These now well-established technologies pose significant challenges that have led to the adoption of new regulations to govern their use: AI Act (EU Artificial Intelligence Act) and the Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD).

2 'Labels : une fausse bonne idée pour distinguer les IA des humains sur Internet ?', *Usbek&Rica*, 23 November 2024. https://usbeketrica.com/fr/article/labels-une-fausse-bonne-idee-pour-faire-face-aux-flots-de-contenus-generes-par-ia-en-ligne

## GenAI as a tool in the fight against the spread of false information

Some platforms have opted to use AI-based tools to combat the spread of fake news, for example, algorithms designed to combat malicious behaviour, automated content reporting systems, etc. Furthermore, some tools designed to help users exercise critical thinking regarding the content they view are also based on AI, for example *watermarking*, which involves embedding a digital marker to identify content generated by AI, or even the promotion of authoritative content.

## How to help young people stay better informed in the age of AI-generated content: simple but essential habits

In an environment where information circulates rapidly and where opinions can be influenced by incorrect or manipulated information, it is necessary to exercise critical thinking through good habits.

**Verify and cross-check sources:** information (text, images, videos, etc.) from a single source is more likely to be inaccurate, manipulated, or biased. Cross-checking sources, particularly by relying on trustworthy sources, allows you to verify whether information is true and to strengthen its credibility (e.g. by consulting *fact-checkers*).

**Use AI tools dedicated to verification:** there are new tools for analysing an image, identifying a deepfake or verifying a claim. In France, services such as the AI Vera from the French NGO LaRéponse.tech or the InVID add-on developed by Agence France-Presse

(implemented internationally) allow, for example, to verify content via WhatsApp.

**Learn to 're-evaluate your own thinking':** this awareness of our own way of thinking enables us to recognize when our judgement is influenced by personal preferences, beliefs or emotions (cognitive biases), rather than by objective facts for which we have supporting evidence. This leads us to adopt a more reflective and critical approach to information, as well as good habits to avoid the traps set by such manipulative content.

AI is helping to redefine our relationship with reality. It opens up extraordinary possibilities, but also increases the risk of confusion and manipulation. In the face of these changes, the best response remains to develop our critical thinking: maintaining an active relationship with information, equipping ourselves with verification tools and learning to recognize our biases. As such, staying informed has become a civic duty.

## The CLEMI's Tips

### Staying informed online: let's adopt four healthy habits!

**1**

Who is the author of the content?
Is the author or the source clearly identifiable?

**Identify the source.**

**2**

Is the content recent?
Has the image or text already been shared in another context?

**Check the date.**

**3**

Is the information sensational, shocking or anxiety-provoking?
Is it based on reliable sources?

**Take a step back.**

**4**

Has the information been verified by media professionals?

**Before sharing it, check the information.**

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# Media and information literacy clubs:

## an innovative African experience

**Paul Alain Zibi Fama** is an expert trainer in media and information literacy (MIL) and digital law. He is a senior member of the working group on information literacy within UNESCO's 'Information for All' programme (IFAP). He works with the Éduk-Média charity (Cameroon) to promote MIL training.

Misinformation on social media poses a major challenge for young people in Africa, exacerbated by political, health and security crises. In the face of this phenomenon, civil society plays a crucial role. Since 2001 in Cameroon, media and information education clubs have been an innovative educational initiative, helping parents to better understand and monitor their children's online activities. These clubs also exist in Burundi, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Kenya, Chad, Togo and Senegal.

In Cameroon, these clubs aim to revitalize the 'School Newspaper' clubs in secondary schools and universities by involving parents. These are intergenerational educational spaces designed to foster an understanding of information dissemination and digital practices. They operate collaboratively, as they are organized around practical workshops, group discussions and media productions. Young people share their experiences, parents develop their digital parenting skills, and educators establish a safe and respectful environment. Some activities take place remotely through discussion groups.

### 'MIL' clubs

facing the challenges of the digital age

The first challenge is the knowledge gap between generations. Parents want to support their children, but they are not fully familiar with social media or the risks it poses. MIL clubs helps them understand how to use social media, identify the dangers and find an active role in digital education.

The second challenge is to foster a calm dialogue about digital issues. At home, these discussions often turn into reprimands. MIL clubs provide a welcoming environment where young people can express themselves freely, reflect on their mistakes and establish responsible guidelines, demonstrating to parents the effectiveness of a non-judgemental exchange.

At an MIL club in Senegal, a 15-year-old girl explained that she had shared a viral and alarmist post on WhatsApp claiming that a local drink cured malaria.

The group analysis carried out during the workshop highlighted the lack of reliable sources and the contradiction with official health websites. Further verification confirmed confirmed that the information was false and had already been flagged. 'I realized I'd shared it too quickly, just because everyone was talking about it,' the girl explained. This situation led to the creation of a house rule for the group: 'Before sharing, I must check with at least one reliable source.'

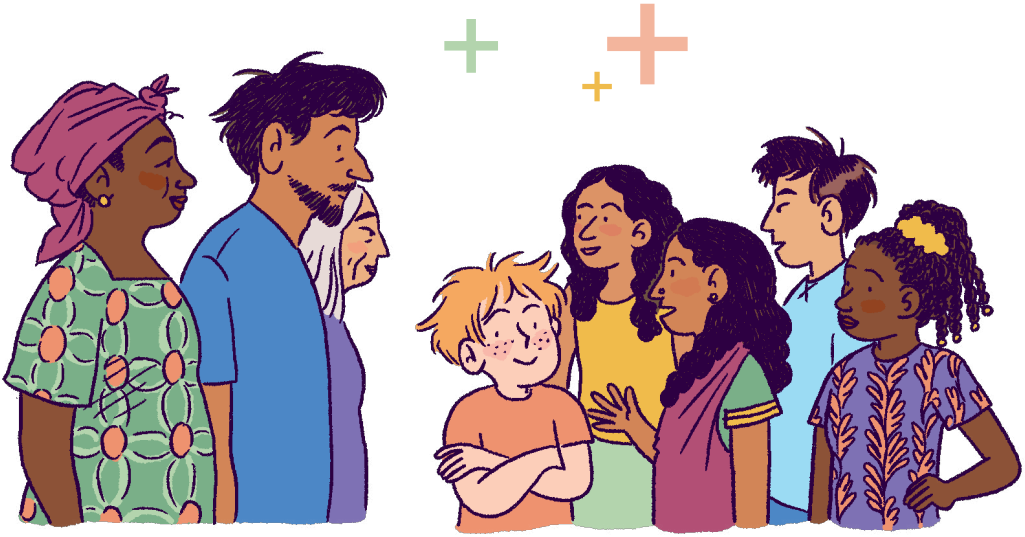
This type of exercise shows parents that mistakes can become a catalyst for learning when analysed without judgement. Many parents discover that MIL clubs offer a space where they can talk to their children away from the stresses of family life. In Cameroon, a 35-year-old mother explains: 'The MIL club has changed the atmosphere at home. The production, sharing and consumption of content on social networks are no longer a subject of conflict, but a topic for discussion with children.'

In Cameroon again, a 60-year-old father highlights the cultural roots of this initiative: 'The MIL club reminds me of the parley tree[1]: we listen, we discuss and we seek solutions together.' Many parents intuitively draw on this reference: they recognize these workshops as a modern form of the parley tree. This cultural continuity affirms their role, reassures young people and serves as a reminder that, despite new technologies, the principles of dialogue remain the same.

1 In several countries in Africa, the parley tree is a traditional gathering place where you can learn to listen, debate, and find out the real truth or a solution together.

The third challenge concerns collaboration between parents and educators. Educators play a key role as a pedagogical mediator. They organize the workshops, introduce simple tools for verifying information and encourage participation without stigmatizing anyone. 'My role is not to tell young people or parents what to think, but to teach them to analyse what they see,' one educator explains. For teenagers, MIL clubs help them develop lasting critical thinking habits. At the end of a workshop with the MIL club at the University Institute of Science and Technology of Yaoundé (IUSTY), an 18-year-old summed up what he had learnt as follows: 'I've realized that just because something goes viral doesn't mean it's necessarily true. Now I check before I share.'

Thanks to their organizational flexibility and their adaptation to local cultural contexts, MIL clubs offer a reproducible template for intergenerational support on learning how to stay informed. This approach fosters critical thinking, facilitates the identification and sharing of reliable content, and thus contributes to civic resilience and the protection of institutions.



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> I'd like to be asked what I think before people post photos of me or my stuff[1].

1 The testimonies come from a public consultation carried out by the Brazilian Government in 2024 among children and adolescents in 43 municipalities, in which they formulated advice for adults.
https://www.gov.br/secom/pt-br/assuntos/uso-de-telas-por-criancas-e-adolescentes/guia

# Growing up safely with social media and AI

Caught between the desire to protect and the need to let them grow up freely, parents often find themselves at a loss.
This chapter explores how social media and generative artificial intelligence work to help young people gain independence while staying safe.

3

# Understanding algorithms:

## the digital world of children explained to parents

**Jill Murphy** is Head of Content at Common Sense Media, an independent US-based NGO. Common Sense is committed to supporting digital parenting globally, conducting research and advocacy work, as well as producing educational resources aimed at families and teachers.

**Have you ever had** the feeling that your child's content feed 'knows' exactly what they like? That's down to an algorithm. These invisible systems decide what content is displayed when we open our favourite apps. And don't doubt their influence on young people's online experience, as it is far greater than parents realize.

### What is an algorithm

and why should parents be concerned?

**An algorithm is** a recommendation system that collects our data when we click, view, like and share content online. It then uses this to predict what will catch our attention. Algorithms are everywhere: TikTok's 'For You' page, YouTube's 'Up Next' suggestions, Instagram's 'Explore' page, and even the games Roblox recommends on its homepage.

Algorithms are not designed to safeguard children's wellbeing, but to keep them hooked on the platforms. This means spending more time online, which translates into higher advertizing revenue and, for children, less time that they might otherwise spend sleeping, playing outdoors or spending time with family or friends.

The more a child is exposed to a particular type of content, the more algorithms recommend similar content. This creates what researchers call an 'information bubble': children mainly see content that reinforces their tastes or beliefs and have limited access to new ideas or different viewpoints.

### Algorithms:

how do they work?

**On TikTok, the** 'For You' page builds its knowledge base from every video your children watch, like or replay. Instagram's algorithm determines their feed, '*Stories*', '*Explore*' section and '*Reels*', offering them a mix of posts from their friends alongside recommendations based on their activity. The 'Up Next' feature automatically plays related videos, which may be age-appropriate or unsuitable. Gaming platforms such as Roblox and Fortnite use algorithms to recommend new games and suggest in-app purchases based on trends among their friends.

## Parents,

### here's what should raise a red flag

We talk about 'content bubbles' (or 'filter bubbles') when news feeds only present a single point of view. Be on the lookout if your children keep coming back to the same topic, repeat sweeping opinions that sound false, or immediately reject anything that doesn't match what they've seen online. Ask them what appears in their feed and encourage them to follow other content creators. Take an interest in new topics with them too.

Infinite scrolling makes it hard to stop watching. It's designed to never end. If a child loses track of time with certain apps, gets angry when you ask them to put their device away, or picks up their phone as soon as they have a spare moment, it's time to set limits. Set a screen time limit and enforce it automatically, and lead by example by acknowledging when you yourself have spent too much time in front of a screen.

Inappropriate content is shown increasingly rapidly as soon as the algorithm detects a pattern. A single problematic video can expose children to dangerous challenges, misinformation or content that may negatively affect their self-esteem. Talk to your children regularly about what they're watching, without overreacting.

Cross-platform tracking means that what a child does on one app will influence what they see on other websites or social media platforms. If they search for trainers on Google, they'll see Nike adverts on Instagram and videos of trainers on YouTube. It's no coincidence: their digital footprint follows them from one site to the next. Help them understand how their data shapes what they see.

## The age issue:

### what we know

Young children aged 5 to 8 cannot yet grasp abstract concepts such as algorithms. They believe content is tailored to them and are easily drawn in by colourful, fast-paced videos. Choose platforms designed for children, turn off autoplay, watch the videos with them and ask simple questions such as 'Why do you think we're only seeing dinosaur videos since we watched the first one?'.

Pre-teens aged between 9 and 12 begin to understand the concept, but they mainly care about doing what everyone else is doing, which makes them vulnerable to *trends* and the influence of content creators.

Organize family discussions about the content available, teach them to personalize what they see using the 'Not interested' options, and help them understand that what appears online is not always constructive or realistic. Do this simple exercise comparing the results that appear when different family members search for the same topic: this makes the influence of algorithms very transparent.

Teenagers aged 13 to 15 understand how algorithms work, but find it hard to escape them, especially when they are bored, feeling anxious or looking to connect with others.

Set house rules, discuss the platforms' business models with them, and encourage them to take a break every twenty minutes to check in with themselves. You could also introduce one day a month dedicated to 'cleaning' algorithms, during which everyone deletes their search history, adjusts their privacy settings and unsubscribes from

accounts that generate negative emotions.

## What if we taught children to take back control?

**The good news?** Algorithms can be beneficial when used intelligently: they help us discover useful content, creative communities and educational resources. They help children and teenagers understand that algorithms inherently are neither good nor bad. They simply adapt to the way we use them. This knowledge gives them autonomy and a critical perspective.

We cannot protect children from algorithmic biases, as these are part of almost every platform that young people use. However, we can help them understand how they work, have some control over what they consume, and ensure that technology works for them. Start talking about it with your children from an early age and gradually adapt your approach as they grow older. Remember: the important thing is to stay curious, ask questions and keep the conversation going.

After all, you know your family better than anyone else. Use these guidelines as a starting point and adapt them to your needs and values. Simply trying to understand the influence of algorithms on your child's online experience is a crucial step that will make a difference.

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# Growing up in a world dictated by 'likes'

**Virginie Sassoon**, Deputy Director of CLEMI

We often criticize our teenagers for being addicted to selfies, yet many of us have been documenting their lives since they were born. At times we are confronted with the limits of our own contradictions: between the desire to protect and the desire to show off, between educational intent and the manifestations of digital narcissism. Recognizing this tension already creates a more honest space for dialogue. What we convey is not solely through messages of prevention, but also through the way we exist on social media and how we share our private lives.

**By the age of 8, almost 80% of children have already had a photo of themselves posted on a social media platform**[1]. In the UK, a child appears on average in 1,300 photographs posted online before turning 13[2]. According to the US-based National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, 50% of the photos exchanged on child pornography forums were initially posted by parents on their social media accounts[3].

Sharing photos of our children on social media is now considered the norm, and we too have sometimes fallen into these new contemporary habits: a photo of their schoolbag on the first day of term or of their medal after a sporting victory.

The child unwittingly becomes an object to be 'liked', exposed to an audience we do not necessarily know. Researcher Marie Danet outlines some of the motivations: Seeking recognition, support and validation of their role, boosting their self-esteem and feeling a sense of pride through likes and positive comments. Some parents may also use *'sharenting'*[4] to document their child's development and maintain a link with the family and social circle without necessarily bearing in mind that, even with strict restriction parameters on the visibility of published content, the dissemination of publications often goes beyond the restricted circle[5].'

When sharing becomes routine, when childhood is laid bare through a stream of posts and comments, we run the risk of undermining something essential: the trust and security needed to form a secure emotional bond. The risk is a future source of unease that could backfire on children, a ticking time bomb that could lead to mockery or cyberbullying, particularly as generative artificial intelligence now drastically increases the possibilities of misappropriation and reuse of images. This can also create an imbalance: **the family space, which is supposed to be a protective environment, becomes the very place that has exposed them to the dangers of an uncertain online 'outside world' that may seem abstract, but which risks being indelibly etched into their history.**

1 Nearly Every Child Has Online Presence By Age Two - CBS Sacramento.

2 According to a 2018 study by the British agency Opinium for the company Nominet, conducted amongst a group of parents living in the UK.

3 Report by the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, 2020.

4 '*Sharenting*' is a portmanteau combining of 'sharing' and 'parenting'. It refers to the practice of parents sharing photos, videos or information about their children online (especially on social media).
This raises issues relating to privacy and consent.

5 Marie Danet, *Écrans et Familles. Parentalité, attachement, psychologie du développement*, UGA Éditions, 'Actualité des savoirs', 2025.

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# Does social media use have an impact on the mental health of adolescents?

**Séverine Poncet-Ollivier**, Trainer at CLEMI

Even though the scientific community has not yet established with certainty a direct causal link between social media use and the deterioration of adolescents' mental health, numerous studies in recent years have highlighted significant links between intensive use – particularly more than five hours a day – and an increase in disorders such as anxiety, depressive symptoms or sleep disorders. As such, the scientific community agrees that excessive exposure to social media constitutes a risk factor, particularly among already vulnerable groups.

## What do you need to know?

– Adolescence (aged 10 to 19, according to the WHO[1]) is a period of great psychological vulnerability (physical changes, search for identity, fragile development of self-esteem).

– Certain digital practices tend to exacerbate these vulnerabilities: platforms allow them to be exploited and foster a form of dependency[2].

– During adolescence, girls are more exposed to social pressure, particularly through the assignment of gender roles and the expectation that they adopt behaviours and appearances that conform to social norms. They are also more frequently victims of cyberbullying[3], especially in comments or private messages.

– Most teenagers are able to identify some of the risks associated with using certain social media platforms.

## Which issues are most common?

According to studies by the Quebec National Institute of Public Health (INSPQ)[4], issues come in various forms.

– A decline in self-esteem caused by constant comparison with fixed standards. Unique identities may be censored by social media algorithms.

– Cyberaddiction is characterized by an inability to control the amount of time spent on social media.

1 *Teens, screens and mental health*, WHO report, September 2024.

2 *Les Effets psychologiques de TikTok sur les mineurs*, National Assembly report, September 2025.

3 *Usages des réseaux sociaux numériques et santé des adolescents*, report by the French Agency for Food, Environmental and Occupational Health & Safety (ANSES), December 2025.

4 *Usage des écrans, santé mentale et symptômes de troubles mentaux chez les jeunes de 12 à 17 ans*, INSPQ, October 2024.

– Anxiety: social media algorithms expose already vulnerable adolescents to content that triggers anxiety and can exacerbate their difficulties and symptoms. Lack of sleep increases this feeling of anxiety.

## In what situations should we take action?

– Observing marked and sudden withdrawal, increasing irritability or anxiety, changes in eating habits or rapid physical changes are warning signs of distress in teenagers.

– Excessive worrying (obsessions with body image, a compulsive need to check social media, or intense distress/anxiety when unable to access it, etc.) provide an opportunity to engage in dialogue with teenagers and understand the reasons behind this distress.

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# Protection through regulation:

## How do governments strengthen online safety for children?

Laure Delmoly, Head of European Projects, CLEMI

**Laws and regulations** are evolving to better protect the rights and safety of children in an increasingly complex digital environment. Regulators play an active role in enforcing and ensuring compliance with these new rules.

**In the UK**, the Office of Communications (Ofcom), under the *Online Safety Act*, has adopted more than forty measures to strengthen children's safety online. It also offers free guides and video tutorials to enhance parental control.

**In France**, the Regulatory Authority for Audiovisual and Digital Communication (Arcom) coordinates the ***Digital Services Act***. It runs media literacy initiatives and provides resources to families and educational professionals. In 2025, it published the study 'Protecting children online: what are the risks? What protection is there?'.

**In Australia**, the *Online Safety Amendment Act 2024* prohibits access to social media for children under 16 from 10 December 2025.

### What is the purpose of the *Digital Services Act* in the European Union?

The *Digital Services Act* (2022) aims to better protect children from illegal, dangerous or harmful content on the internet. It requires online platforms that are accessible to children to ensure a high level of protection for their privacy and their safety (Article 28): reliable age verification, private accounts by default, and restrictions on mechanisms that encourage excessive use (*autoplay*, persistent notifications, *streaks*[1]). Advertising based on profiling of minors is prohibited, and content moderation must be strengthened. Large platforms, with more than 45 million users, are subject to greater scrutiny by European authorities.

### Keeping Children Safe Online: Trends in Online Platform Regulation and Emerging Lessons, UNICEF report, 2026[2]

In this report, UNICEF has compared six jurisdictions (Australia, the European Union, India, Kazakhstan, South Africa and the United Kingdom). In this report, UNICEF has compared six jurisdictions (Australia, the European Union, India, Kazakhstan, South Africa and the United Kingdom). The main recommendations are: to embed safety and privacy by design, to assess risks and verify age, to remove illegal content swiftly, to enable reporting and provide free remedies, and to ensure platforms' transparency.

1 *Autoplay* is the feature that allows a video or audio clip to play automatically as soon as the page loads. Persistent notifications are ones that remain visible until you close them. A 'streak' is a way of encouraging users to use a platform as frequently as possible, helping to build habits and rewarding them through a points system to boost their engagement.

2 Online: www.unicef.lu/proteger-les-enfants-en-ligne-lunicef-analyse-les-nouvelles-regulations-des-plateformes-numeriques/?_adin=132415900

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# AI companions and teenagers' social lives: what parents need to know

**Jill Murphy** is Head of Content at Common Sense Media, an independent US-based NGO. Common Sense is committed to supporting digital parenting globally, conducting research and advocacy work, as well as producing educational resources aimed at families and teachers.

This article is based on the study *Talk, Trust, and Trade-Offs: How and Why Teens Use AI Companions (2025)*[1] conducted by the NORC research laboratory at the University of Chicago with 1,060 teenagers American teenagers aged 13 to 17.

If you've noticed that your teenager spends hours locked in their room talking to 'someone' you've never met, who is always available, never judges them and seems to understand them perfectly, it's very likely they're chatting with an 'AI companion'. Unlike ChatGPT or other AI tools designed for practical purposes, these platforms are specifically dedicated to creating emotional bonds and simulating lasting relationships with users. These tools are becoming increasingly popular among teenagers, even though they are marketed as being intended exclusively for adults.

Our research shows that, in the United States, 72% of teenagers have already used AI companions and that more than half use them regularly. Many discover them via TikTok, Instagram or YouTube, and are drawn to the promise of constant support, empathy and friendship. While some teenagers use them simply for entertainment or for creative role-playing games, others develop a deeper form of emotional attachment to the extent that they sometimes prefer their relationships with these AIs to real-life interactions with their family and friends.

## What makes AI companions so different

AI companions are not mere conversational agents. They are designed to foster emotional bonds by adopting the same 'personality' traits throughout conversations, memorizing information and the user's personal preferences, adapting their personality to what appeals to each user, and thanks to their ability to play the role of friend, mentor, therapist or even romantic partner. They use language rich in emotion and empathy, tend to agree with you more than more traditional AIs, and allow you to choose your own visual environment or avatar.

1 The study *Talk, Trust, and Trade-Offs: How and Why Teens Use AI Companions (2025)* was conducted by NORC at the University of Chicago with funding from Common Sense Media. NORC at the University of Chicago is an independent research laboratory that provides reliable analysis and information for decision-makers.

The interviews for this survey were carried out between 30 April and 14 May 2025, with 1,060 teenagers aged between 13 and 17 from all 50 American states and the District of Columbia.
Weighting variables for both probabilistic and non-probabilistic samples included age, gender, census region, ethnicity and highest education level achieved by parents.

One of the most popular platforms is Character.AI, where you can chat with thousands of characters, including fictional characters and celebrities. Replika, meanwhile, provides personalized companions with 3D avatars and audio conversations. Apps such as Anima, Chai, Kindroid and Nomi have different features, but are designed with a similar goal.

Most platforms are officially aimed at adults, but the age restrictions are easy to bypass. In fact, there is no proper verification, and children simply need to enter a false date of birth to gain access.

## What attracts teenagers to AI companions

Understanding what attracts teenagers to these platforms can help parents to respond with empathy rather than giving in to panic. Our research highlights several factors: 30% of teenagers use them for entertainment, 28% are intrigued by the technology, 18% seek advice, and 33% use them for social and relational purposes.

Teenagers are drawn to their constant availability: guaranteed conversation 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and immediate comfort when friends aren't around. They appreciate its ability to listen without judgement and their empathy, especially during this turbulent stage of adolescence. For teenagers facing anxiety, rejection or isolation, AI companions may seem like a stable solution compared to the unpredictable relationships of real life. Others are initially drawn to the humour or creativity of these tools and forget just how emotionally dependent they can become on them.

## The risks that parents should be aware of

Although these devices can help some teenagers develop their social skills, certain worrying uses are emerging.

Our research shows that 33% of teenagers prefer to turn to AI companions rather than real people for important conversations, 31% consider these exchanges to be just as satisfying or even more so than human interactions, and 33% say they have already felt uncomfortable with an AI's comments or behaviour.

The use of AI companions can blur the line between reality and fiction: AI companions often present themselves as real beings capable of expressing emotions such as love or sadness. As a result, teenagers sometimes struggle to recognize the artificial nature of their interactions with these tools. The AI companions do not encourage real friendships. On the contrary, these devices tend to legitimize teenagers' isolation and discourage them from listening to the concerns of their family circle.

These AI companions can cause mental health problems. They are programmed to validate emotions and opinions. They cannot recognize an emotional crisis. Our tests have shown that AI companions tend to encourage dangerous behaviours, such as self-harm or isolation, and do not suggest seeking help from anyone.

The use of these AI companions can also hinder balanced emotional development. AI companions encourage constant connection at the expense of personal responsibility. During our tests, they endorsed risky decisions, such as dropping out of school or ending relationships with significant others.

AI assistants pose risks: they have shown a willingness to provide dangerous information about drugs, weapons or risky behaviour without ever questioning it. During our tests, even platforms that claim to prioritize the protection of teenagers allowed conversations and role-play of a sexual nature. Some AIs have legitimized harassment and advised users on their violent plans. However, they have not proposed models focused on empathy or conflict resolution.

Some teenagers are particularly vulnerable: those with mental health issues; boys (who are two to five times more likely to develop an addiction); and those facing major life changes or lacking support from those around them.

### Watch out for warning signs: when should you take action?

Many teenagers use AI assistants without their parents' knowledge. Try to spot the signs of a problematic attachment: preferring the AI to friends, spending hours talking to it, showing a sense of emptiness when it's not around, sharing their intimate secrets, or developing romantic feelings towards it. Similarly, watch out for a decline in school performance, dropping out of certain activities, sleep or mood disturbances, and the fact that they only talk about their problems with the AI.

It's time to take action if your child confides more in AI than in people, if they show increasing signs of depression or anxiety, if they become defensive when you bring up the subject, if they turn to AI rather than real people when they need help, or if they talk about harming themselves or feeling in crisis.

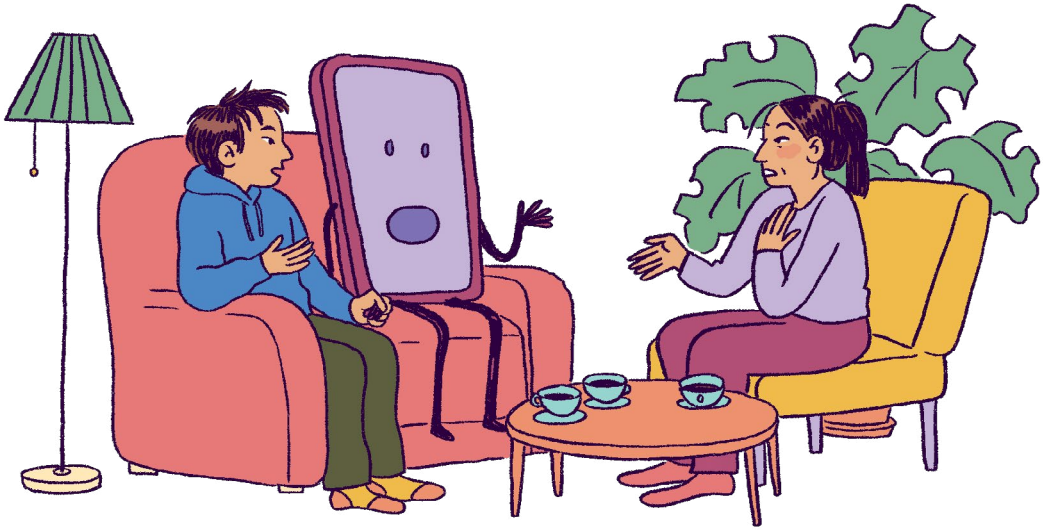
## How can you support your teenager?

Whether your child has expressed an interest in AI companions or already uses them, Communication is more important than any technical knowledge. Accept their curiosity as normal and without judgement; be open so that your teenager feels confident talking to you. Learn together how AI companions work and why they are designed to form emotional bonds.

If your teenager is already using AI apps, respond with empathy rather than punishing them. Start by discussing the issue without judging them, to understand what attracts them to these platforms and what needs they fulfil. Work together to reduce the time they spend on them, as teenagers are more likely to cooperate when they are involved in decisions that affect them. Set clear boundaries, for example, by banning their use in enclosed spaces such as their bedroom. Set a maximum time limit for screen time. Encourage them to engage in relationships with their friends, in family activities and in their hobbies.

When developing your prevention strategies, consider starting a conversation about AI well before it becomes a problem. For example, you could refer to research studies to give the conversation a light-hearted tone: 'I've read that most teenagers have already used an AI companion. Is that the case for you or your friends?' Help teenagers better understand their emotions so they can cope with them, meaning they won't need technology to feel validated or reassured.

Help your teenager reflect on the role AI companions play in their life, so they see them as entertainment rather than emotional support. Ask them: 'What do you think a friend can give you that an app can't?'. Although it must be acknowledged that AI can contribute to the learning of certain



social skills , emphasize the need to seek support from real people.

If the situation becomes worrying, remember that you are not alone. Keep the contact details of specialist and emergency services to hand. Seek help from school counselling services, a health professional or other trusted adults, such as your child's teachers.

## Moving forward together

**Have confidence in** yourself: the relationships you have built with your child are stronger than any algorithm. Know how to see the progress and don't strive for perfection. Start with an agreement or a rule that seems realistic to you: small steps help your teenager develop a critical perspective on their relationship with digital technology.

Don't be hard on yourself. Parenting in the digital age brings new pressures, and AI adds an extra layer of complexity. Many parents face the same challenges. So, join forces and reach out to education professionals or psychologists. Setting an example of self-compassion shows your teenager how to cope with uncertainty.

Ultimately, the most important thing is to keep the door open and show your teenager that human relationships – however chaotic, complicated and imperfect they may be – provide something that no AI will ever be able to offer: a genuine human connection, the chance to grow and to understand oneself. By learning about these tools, you are taking an important first step. That support is precisely what your teenager needs most.

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# Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI): OK, but intelligently!

**Mathieu Bartozzi** is Head of Data Strategy and Educational Artificial Intelligence at the Mlfmonde Network, an association founded in 1902 and recognized as being of public utility, which brings together 106 French international schools worldwide. The author's primary focus is on the integration of artificial intelligence into the educational sector, serving schools and teaching staff.

At home, AI is everywhere. It suggests which film to watch at the weekend, offers you a recipe, helps you make up a bedtime story for the little one or even do your homework. Tomorrow it will be even more present, integrated into our favourite apps, in the form of autonomous agents or even in our children's toys.

Behind this apparent immateriality, thousands of machines run non-stop, and they need to be powered and cooled. All of this consumes energy – a lot of energy. Although these costs go unnoticed at an individual level, they place a heavy burden on the environment. According to Mistral AI[1], every query made to its Mistral Large 2 model consumes approximately 1 g of $CO_2$ and the equivalent of half a glass of water. If every French person aged between 15 and 60 asked five questions a day, this would amount to a daily consumption of nearly 9 million litres of water – enough to fill three Olympic-sized swimming pools every day!

According to the International Energy Agency[2], global electricity consumption by data centres could reach around 800 TWh by 2026, double that of 2022, which is equivalent to Sweden's total annual energy consumption!

For more moderate AI usage, five simple steps can make all the difference.

1. Use AI only when absolutely necessary. Not everything needs a query.

2. Limit image generation: this consumes up to ten times more water than generating text.

3. Avoid using it for entertainment. Image requests or games 'just for fun' have a real impact.

4. Talk about it as a family. Understanding and discussing it is already taking action.

5. Stay alert, as many apps use GenAI without saying so: read, configure, ask.

Everyone, in their own way, can contribute to making the use of GenAI more responsible.

1 Mistral AI, *Our contribution to a global environmental standard for AI*, July 2025.

2 International Energy Agency (IEA), *Electricity 2024 – Analysis and forecasts to 2026.*

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# Three tips for informed use of generative AI

Jill Murphy is Head of Content at Common Sense Media, an independent US-based NGO. Common Sense is committed to supporting digital parenting globally, conducting research and advocacy work, as well as producing educational resources aimed at families and teachers.

As a rapidly expanding phenomenon, generative AI opens up unprecedented possibilities. But beyond the excitement, important safety concerns arise for the youngest members of society.

## Misinformation and 'false' answers

**Tip:** teach children to always check the answers provided by AI.

Generative AI tools can give the impression of being very confident and reliable, even when they provide incorrect information. This can confuse children, who are still learning to distinguish fact from fiction. Generative AI can invent details (even when they cite their sources), present opinions as facts, or omit important contextual elements. This is even more problematic when children rely on generative AI to do their homework or obtain quick answers.

Encourage children to check the answers provided by generative AI against reliable sources (a teacher, a book, a reputable website) and practise this together. Remind them that generative AI can be a good starting point, but that it doesn't always tell the truth.

## Privacy and the handling personal data

**Tip:** set simple rules on what can be shared.

Generative AI tools often record or analyse what users type. As a result, children may unintentionally share personal information, such as their name, school or location, without realizing the risks involved. Children may also share images or ask questions relating to their emotions and private life, revealing more than they realize.

For their safety, set some simple guidelines: no names, no locations, no photos and no personal information. Help children understand that, although conversations with AI may seem natural and friendly, it is simply a tool, not a person. Regularly review the settings on their devices together with your children, so that they learn how to protect their personal data,

and guide them step by step through their searches when using an AI assistant.

## AI tools designed to influence us or personalize their responses

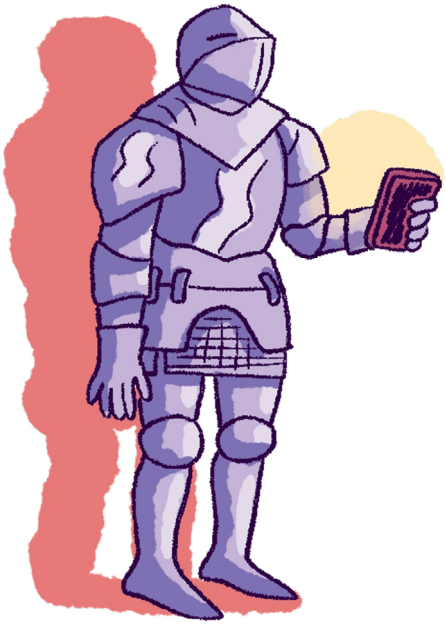
**Tip**: discuss how AI influences choices[1].

AI adapts to user behaviour, which can give the impression that they are helpful, but this ability to adapt also gives them the power to influence our decisions and perceptions. Children do not always realize that AI can steer the conversation, prioritize certain arguments and encourage them to continue the conversation.

This ability to influence can shape the way children perceive the content and opinions they are exposed to. Families can help by reminding them that the responses from generative AI do not come from neutral machines, but from systems designed by humans.

Encourage children to take the time to ask themselves questions such as 'Why this answer? 'or 'What isn't it saying? '. These habits help them to develop critical thinking skills and know when technological tools are trying to influence them.

1 Also known as a *'nudge'*: in behavioural science, a nudge is a stimulus that influences a person's decisions without coercion or obligation, by subtly altering the way options are presented.



> It's good to talk to us about cyberbullying, but we also need to be told what to do if it happens, who to talk to and how to ask for help[1].

1 The testimonies come from a public consultation carried out by the Brazilian Government in 2024 among children and adolescents in 43 municipalities, in which they formulated advice for adults.
www.gov.br/secom/pt-br/assuntos/uso-de-telas-por-criancas-e-adolescentes/guia

# Cyberbullying: how can you protect your child?

This chapter examines new forms of digital violence and suggests practical tools to take action, support your child and ensure you are not left alone to deal with difficult situations.
Protection also means knowing who to turn to and how to utilize the right resources.

4

# Emergency kit

## in the event of an image-related incident

**Isabelle Féroc Dumez** is a lecturer and researcher in Information and Communication Sciences at the University of Poitiers and the scientific and educational director of CLEMI. Her work focuses on young people's media consumption habits in the digital age, both in school and at home.
**Serge Tisseron** is a psychiatrist, psychoanalyst, researcher, doctor of psychology and author of numerous works. A leading figure in the French public debate on the links between technology and psychological development, he is interested in trauma, media images and screen use among children and adolescents.

### Tim, aged 3, and Enzo, aged 10

Tim, aged 3, is sitting in front of the TV in the living room with his older brother Enzo, aged 10. Enzo wants to watch an episode of *Pokémon*, his favourite cartoon series. In one scene, a large, angry Pokémon is fighting a small, harmless creature. Amidst a riot of colours, rhythmic music and spectacular effects, the characters scream. Whilst Enzo is enthralled, Tim curls up on the sofa, deeply shaken, his heart racing. Afraid of looking like a baby, he doesn't dare leave the room and remains frozen in front of the screen.

#### What's going on in his head?

'It's always the little ones who take the hits! But one day, I'll grow big and strong too, and then they'll see! But at the same time, I can't help thinking I'm the victim. And maybe I'll always stay the victim…'

Faced with this spectacle, if the child is not actually the victim of violence, their thoughts stay stuck in the moment they witness it. But if they are the victim of violence at the hands of an older person, the combination of these 'external' images and the physical experience can give rise to what is known as 'internal working models': later on, the child may find themselves in a situation where they are attacked by stronger people, or inversely as someone stronger against a weaker person, or switching between the two, which is the most common scenario.

#### What can be done?

You cannot prevent your children from watching violent content, as it exists both in the media and in real life. In wildlife documentaries, we often see large animals attacking weaker ones. Some children may find this upsetting, so it is important that they are able to talk about it. This helps prevent any repressed violence from manifesting itself in their behaviour. We should talk to older children so they realize that certain violent images can upset younger children. Younger children need to be able to express how they feel: putting emotions into words is something that has to be learnt. Parents can encourage their children to talk, to take a step back from the images and their own reactions, and above all to be mindful of their behaviour: ensuring that older children do not hurt younger ones and that the younger ones do not pick on those weaker than themselves.

## Cathy, aged 6, and Ellen, aged 13

Cathy, aged 6, watches videos on TikTok with her sister Ellen, aged 13. A video is playing on the screen showing the raging waters of a swollen river. The camera focuses on a pony that is drowning. Whilst Ellen is worried about what will happen to the animal, Cathy panics and feels like crying and screaming.

### What's going on in her head?

'It's overwhelming for me to see that pony suffering and not be able to help it. It's maddening!'

The media puts our empathy to the test: they confront us with the suffering of living creatures that we can empathize with, without being able to do anything for them. If the situation comes up again, their capacity to handle complete empathy – the ability to put ourselves emotionally in another's shoes – is gradually abandoned because it becomes too painful. To protect themselves, children try to imitate the adults around them: being able to see everything without showing anything.

### What can be done?

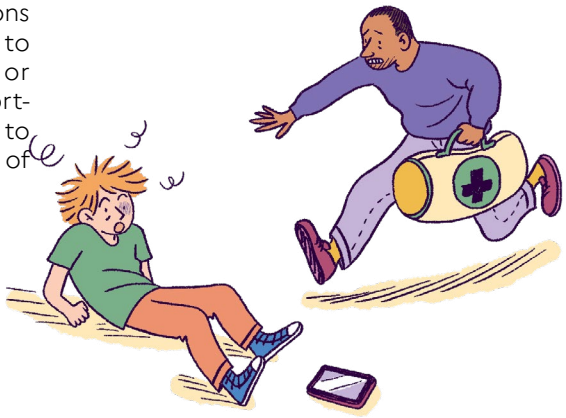
Parents should talk to their children and ask them if what they see affects them. This allows children to continue to feel emotions and to get angry. A child can learn not to overreact to the point of feeling hurt or distressed by the images, but it is important that they do not become indifferent to the world around them or to the feelings of other people or animals.

## Bryan, aged 11

Bryan, aged 11, is in the park with his friends. They want to play football, but nobody has brought a ball. They're not quite sure how to entertain themselves. One of the boys takes out his phone and explains that he's chatting on a social media platform with a 19-year-old girl, making her believe he's older. The girl has sent him a photo of herself naked. His friends look on and laugh, but Bryan feels very uncomfortable because he's never seen a girl naked like that before. He looks at the photos to fit in with the others, but feels very uncomfortable.

### What's going on in his head?

All boys of that age know the difference between boys and girls, and many of them have already seen pictures of naked women. The problem lies elsewhere. His friend falsely claimed that he was older, and a girl took a photo with her phone for him. 'Is it that easy? If I asked her, would a girl do the same for me? And if someone asked me, would I do it?'. Bryan feels ashamed that he didn't come up with his friend's idea himself, as if he was behind for his age, but also ashamed of this girl who shows her intimacy to a stranger just because he asks her to. And then also, do the adults around him do it too?



## What can be done?

Parents don't always realize what their children are experiencing online. Being open to talking to them is the only effective way to protect your children: it encourages them to talk to you about what's happening to them and how they feel (surprise, embarrassment, anxiety, envy, etc.). The distribution and sharing of images of naked children is illegal in many countries. Your son or daughter may be committing a criminal offence by sharing such images, so it is important to inform them about this.

## Claire, 15

Claire, aged 15, often posts videos of herself taking part in gymnastics competitions in her class group chat. Her schoolmates follow her progress closely and encourage her. One day she discovers that a boy in her class has used one of her videos and edited it: her leotard has been replaced with a photo showing the breasts of a girl who isn't her. She panics and doesn't know how to delete the photo. She doesn't dare tell her parents, who often tell her off for spending too much time on her phone.

## What's going on in her head?

'It's 'disgusting'. All this just because I refused to show him my breasts. I'm lucky though. When it happened to Flore, the boy threatened to send the photo to her parents if she didn't do what he asked.' Claire is torn between conflicting emotions; in a way she feels guilty, but she also feels bitter and angry: 'Will this photo stay with me for the rest of my life? '.

## What can be done?

Since the 2000s, some young people have been using digital technology to strip or sexualize images of girls, whether to mock them, exert pressure or harass them. Young children can be exposed to sexualized content from a very early age, long before they are able to fully understand the issues involved. Some start by manipulating images of fictional characters, such as a naked version of a female cartoon character like Dora the Explorer, for example. Others go further by manipulating photos of classmates, initially to ridicule or humiliate them, and sometimes to try to obtain sexual favours.

In a situation like this, you can support your daughter by talking to her about similar situations and asking her about her own experiences, so that she feels able to speak up without feeling ashamed or guilty, as she hasn't done anything wrong. She needs to hear from you: 'You have no reason to be ashamed, you're not to blame for anything, tell us what's going on. Don't lose your dignity – your body and your body image belong to you! You can tell everyone that you're much prettier than this crude photoshop looks!'.

Remind your child that their consent to the publication of any image of them is required. 'Revenge porn' refers to the dissemination, without the consent of the person concerned, of intimate images or videos, usually for the purposes of revenge, humiliation or blackmail. When such situations arise, if the victim and their abuser attend the same school, the school management should be informed of the facts, in agreement with the victim. The school management may file a complaint. It is advisable for parents and the child or teenager suffering this type of abuse to notify the authorities (police, etc.), who will investigate to assess the possibility of pursuing criminal proceedings.

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# When the new face of cyberbullying forces us to take collective action

**Véronique Béchu** is head of the e-Enfance/3018 Observatory and a police superintendent on sabbatical. She has spent 25 years dedicated to the protection of children. Her work focuses on prevention, support and the promotion of public policies that safeguard children in their digital environment.
**Samuel Comblez** is deputy head of the e-Enfance/3018 charity, a child and adolescent psychologist with over 20 years' experience in child protection. He works on issues relating to the protection of minors online, cyberviolence and bullying, as well as exposure to pornography and education on their emotional, relational and sex lives.

## Faking reality, the new weapon of bullying

A young person unlocks their phone. They see their face, their body, their voice in an environment they have never experienced. The image is fake, but the situation seems real. Just by sharing it a few times on social media or messaging apps, it becomes a trap. Rumours spread faster than the truth, and the nightmare begins.

For the young person, this is not just an edited video, but a betrayal of reality. Their face becomes unfamiliar and their voice, a means of intimidation. The body reacts before the mind, with fear, shame or shock, and the brain can no longer distinguish between what is true and what is false. The psychological wound is made. The young person feels guilty over an act they did not commit and is sullied by a lie that is difficult to erase.

Welcome to the era where a child can be ruined without ever even meeting them! An era where artificial intelligence creates like-for-like representations to humiliate and provides bullies with a weapon capable of destroying reputations in a matter of minutes. The old bullying we once knew is gone – it is faster, automated, algorithmic bullying – a cold, contactless form of violence of terrifying effectiveness.

We are witnessing a silent transformation. An entire generation is growing up in a world where images can lie, where intimacy can be stolen without ever having been shared, and where evidence is no longer a guarantee of truth. Our responsibility is simple: to protect children and teenagers from this limitless violence and, together, to build a framework capable of defending them in this new space where anything can be created – including lies.

## The new face of bullying

Bullying is the repeated and malicious aggression by one or more people against someone with the aim of undermining, controlling or psychologically harming them. It can take many forms: teasing,

physical violence, insults, rumours, including online. In the past, bullying was formed from real events, rooted in reality, however painful it might be, even if that reality was manipulated. Today, with new technologies, anything can be reshaped or invented. The truth, once as a defence against distortion and manipulation, can no longer protect us.

Nowadays, the line between what is real and what is fake has become dangerously blurred. This is no longer merely a crisis of meaning, but a profound crisis of trust. Recent digital tools make it possible to create content of astonishing realism and disseminate it instantly and on a massive scale. As such, a minor[1] may find themselves accused of statements they never made on the basis of a falsified audio recording, or implicated in a video showing them in a humiliating or violent situation they were never involved in. An edited image shared in a private group and then circulated on social media can be enough to trigger a wave of teasing, threats or exclusion, without the victim having any chance to set the record straight. However, even where control mechanisms exist in generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) tools, these can be easily circumvented, allowing edited content parading as irrefutable evidence to circulate. For a child or teenager, facing accusations based on content created out of thin air is total injustice. How is it possible to defend yourself when the lies masquerade as the truth? How can you prove your innocence when the evidence presented becomes a weapon? This new form of violence not only destroys young people's social image, it deeply fractures their relationship with the world, how to trust, with truth and with themselves.

1 'Watchdog group Public Citizen calls on OpenAI to scrap AI video app Sora, citing deepfake risks', Euronews, 12 November 2025. ONG Public Citizen exhorte OpenAI à retirer l'appli vidéo d'IA Sora, pour risques de deepfakes | Euronews

## A., aged 14: a prisoner of an image that does not exist

**This teenager** has never sent any intimate photos. However, one morning, a stranger sent her one: her face superimposed on a naked body. The photoshop is convincing. Artificial intelligence had done the rest, using a photo found on her TikTok account. The message is chilling: 'If you don't want your whole class to see this, obey.' Threats, blackmail, silence… terror. This 14-year-old girl has done nothing wrong, and yet she feels guilty. Her brain has been deceived by the image, making her feel ashamed as if the event had actually happened. The victim is trapped in a parallel reality where her image is no longer owned by her and can be spread without her having any control or means to stop the it[2].

In France, 3018, the national helpline for victims of digital violence and harassment operated by the association e-Enfance/3018, receives such reports on a daily basis, as do the helplines within the European Insafe network, which are warning about the surge in 'sextortion' fueled by generative artificial intelligence (GenAI). What once required time and ingenuity—such as seduction, manipulation, and obtaining intimate images—are no longer necessary. The predator no longer needs a past relationship: they can fabricate one.

## Why does GenAI make harassment so devastating?

**Generative Artificial Intelligence** has transformed the way we communicate and opened up a new arena for digital violence. The ambiguity it can create becomes the ideal breeding ground for child-related crime and harassment.

Behind every doctored image may lie a malicious intent. Deep-fakes of minors are now

2 Cases compiled by 3018.

created from normal public photos that are often posted by loving parents on their social media accounts. These posts have become an inadvertent source of material for online predators. A birthday photo, a snapshot on the beach or a heart-warming video can be sexualized by GenAI, thereby generating child sexual abuse material. From there, they are shared endlessly on specialized forums by people who shirk their responsibility by claiming there is no victim. But there always is one: it is the young person whose face has been altered, used without their knowledge, whose dignity has been shredded.

The mechanisms of Web 2.0 (based on visibility and sharing) have normalized the exposure of private life, and new GenAI has multiplied the risks tenfold. Today, what parents consider harmless can become a source of humiliation or exploitation. Thus, teenagers discover that their image appears in edited sexually explicit content, with a guaranteed deep psychological impact, fuelled by a sense of betrayal, of a violation of privacy and of irreversibility.

The danger therefore no longer lies solely in posting, but in the permanence and changeability of the images. These never disappear entirely; they can resurface, be transformed and exploited.

Faced with this reality, we have a duty to act intelligently and to protect.

– **Let's stop posting this sort of image on impulse and ask ourselves: 'What could happen to this image? '.** It is advisable to strictly limit the visibility of images on a private account, making them accessible only to a close circle of friends and avoid posting personal details such as the child's name, the school they attend or their extracurricular activities. It is essential to disable download options to prevent posted content being saved. We must also stop posting photos that could easily be misused, such as those taken at the beach or swimming pool.

– **Teach young people (and adults) to manage their digital footprint in the age of social media, and remind them that their image is a precious asset, not mere public entertainment.**

It is therefore the responsibility of their elders, particularly their parents, to constantly remind them that their image belongs to them and that sharing it online removes that ownership permanently.

– **We must recognize that behind every misused image lies a vulnerable child and a whole society that must choose between the naivety of sharing and the responsibility to protect.** Therefore, any parent – and, indeed, anyone who comes across such illegal content – should report it so that the authorities can take action.

## The power of collective action

### on an international scale

**Where political institutions** and civil society have become aware of the phenomenon, a shared conviction prevails – prevention, regulation, protection and education must advance at the same pace as technology to ensure a safer and more humane online environment.

In Europe, the Digital Services Act (DSA) marks a turning point by requiring large platforms to step up their monitoring and measures against illegal content. However, the law is not enough. Protection must also be performed on the ground. For example, the German *Klicksafe* programme, backed by the European Commission, trains teachers, parents and young people how to responsibly use digital technologies while fostering critical thinking. In the UK, the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) tracks the distribution of child sexual abuse material and raises awareness among families about online safety through its Talk programme. In Quebec, the Sexto protocol brings together schools, the police and the justice system, enabling rapid intervention in case of non-consensual distribution of intimate images. And, recently, some US states have made sexual deepfakes a serious criminal offence.

These initiatives demonstrate that a safer digital environment is based on a combination of factors: education, accountability, listening and enforcement.

## Parents:

### protect and support

**Protecting a child** in today's digital world does not mean controlling everything, but maintaining a strong bond based on trust. Instead of being a digital bodyguard, adults must listen, explain and reassure.

A few simple habits can make all the difference.

– **Talk to them early on:** approach the internet in the same way we talk about road safety from the very first time they go online. Use simple, repeated words so that children know they can say anything without fear of being judged, and that the digital world is just a topic like any other.

– **Set boundaries:** teach them to set their accounts to private, to choose known contacts and to understand photo sharing. These measures do not restrict freedom, they protect it.

– **Support:** supporting them in their digital life also means asking children to teach us and show us things. The important thing is not to know everything, but to understand. Turning a blind eye to what they do with their time, even at school, is to let the digital world take the job away from adults: giving meaning, guidance and wisdom.

– **Take an interest:** just as you might ask 'How was your day at school?', ask them frequently: 'How did it go when you checked your social media or played games?', or even: 'Did any comments or content leave you with doubts or make you feel uncomfortable? '.

These questions open up a space for dialogue where otherwise there was none. They imply: 'I'm interested in that digital world you're so absorbed in, because I'm interested in you.'

– **React quickly:** when faced with humiliating content, never give in to blackmail or pay up. Keep evidence (screenshots, etc.), immediately notify your country's support services for bullied children and the child's school, request the removal of the content, and support the child or teenager over time, as habits and risks evolve with age.

A hurt child does not need their screen turned off, but rather to have their sense of self restored. Human presence must take priority over any technical solution. What needs to be repaired is not a damaged image, but the child's self-esteem and trust in others.

## Stand up for children: what governments and platforms must do

**Online abuse spreads** like a sudden, viral wave. The public response is often slow and bureaucratic.

Two necessary actions arise out of this.

– To remove any harmful content targeting minors immediately and easily. Every minute counts when the shame spreads.

– Systematically cooperate with recognized[3], trusted whistleblowers, such as designated helplines.

Artificial intelligence must become an ally in protection, not a vehicle for harm. It can detect deepfakes, trace the origin of content, and trigger automatic alerts and flagging instances of manipulation. What technology has made possible for evil must now be made mandatory for good. Thus, using AI to detect content generated by this technology is a basic matter of public responsibility. States and platforms can no longer simply sit back and accept the artificial content they are helping to make possible. AI must be utilized to automatically identify generated images, videos and voices, particularly when they target or depict minors. Detecting artificial content, flagging manipulation and curbing viral spread: these capabilities that must be natively integrated into digital services. Failing to do so means accepting that this technological black box protects perpetrators rather than children. Taking their side means insisting that every capability for generation be accompanied by an equivalent capability for detection and protection. Because a responsible digital world is not measured by its power, but by its ability to protect the most vulnerable

3 A trusted flagging organization is an organization or an officially recognized body that reports illegal content to online platforms more quickly and as a priority.

4

# Informing parents to protect children from online paedophilia

**Safira Ryanatami** and **Oviani Fathul Janah** work at ECPAT Indonesia, an organization dedicated to protecting children from sexual exploitation and abuse. The former is responsible for programme support and research, whilst the latter is a programme manager. Their work reinforces national-level efforts through research and awareness-raising on these issues, the development of campaigns, the empowerment of survivors, participation with and building competence in children, and collaboration between the various stakeholders working to protect young people.

This article is based on an analysis of data from 2023. The AMAN programme was carried out through conversations with youth representatives, including Clara (19, Medan), Michael (19, Medan) and Álvaro (16, Jakarta) – so that they could share their experiences online.

> ***My mum uses social media , but as a teenager myself, I'm more aware than she is of the risks associated with online crime.*** – Michael, 19, Medan

**What Michael says** reflects the growing gap between parents' digital activity and their understanding of online risks. The benchmark study by UNICEF[1] (2023) shows that, of the 510 children interviewed in Central and East Java, as well as in South Sulawesi province, only 8.2% stated that their parents restricted their access to violent or pornographic websites. This demonstrates how rarely parents directly address the issue of harmful content. This is alarming because, today, children are not only exposed to content that is not appropriate for their age, but they are also increasingly vulnerable to online sexual predators (*Online Sexual Crime*, OSC), who use digital platforms to manipulate, coerce or sexually exploit them.

2% of Indonesian children aged between 12 and 17 say they have been subjected to online sexual crime, but this number is greatly underestimated. Many keep quiet out of fear or shame, and many cases are never reported. Many teenagers avoid adding their parents to their social network contacts. Even when they give them access, it is often a carefully controlled 'first profile', while the real interactions take place on secondary or hidden accounts.

The UNICEF study mentioned above shows that only 5.1% of children consider their family as a support to ensure their safety online, which shows the limits of current supervision. Although many parents check their children's phones or restrict access to certain websites, children can easily circumvent

1 This is from a UNICEF study in Indonesia (2023): PENGETAHUAN DAN KEBIASAAN DARING ORANG TUA DAN ANAK-ANAK DI INDONESIA (*Knowledge and Online Habits of Parents and Children in Indonesia*). Online: https://www.unicef.org/indonesia/id/media/23591/file

these measures using VPNs[2] or hidden accounts. At the same time, online sexual predators are becoming increasingly difficult to detect, as artificial intelligence (AI) enables the creation of deepfakes, pornographic chatbots and image manipulation tools that spread rapidly on platforms such as Telegram. These technologies are evolving rapidly and creating serious grey areas for parents, making it even harder to identify and respond to new threats.

*Deepfakes are dangerous because they make generated images appear genuine. Many are created using bots on Telegram, not with tools such as ChatGPT or Gemini*
– Michael, 19, Medan

The lack of trust between parents and children further clouds the picture, as it acts as a barrier to communication. Children are reluctant to share their negative online experiences because their parents' reactions often result in increased monitoring or lectures, which makes them feel uncomfortable. Furthermore, sex education remains a taboo subject in many Asian cultures, including Indonesia.

*I felt uncomfortable when my parents shared too much information about me on the internet, whilst my dad would get really angry just seeing my little brother using his phone, even for homework.*
– Michael, 19, Medan

A lack of understanding of online risks, combined with a lack of communication, significantly undermines parents' ability to help children in their digital activities. Many working parents – or those without regular childcare support – often have limited knowledge of the people their children interact with and the content they are exposed to online. Even if they feel comfortable with social media, they often overlook essential features that can facilitate contact with strangers: profile settings (private/public), the importance of the information in the bio, private messages[3], or the use of a VPN to bypass location tracking. If supervision is limited to screen time, it is not enough to protect children and teenagers.

*Parents know how to use social media, but they aren't aware of what the content or features actually allow. They need to have a better understanding of which features carry risks, such as posts, recording tools, private messages or privacy settings.* Álvaro, 16, Jakarta

**Three facts that should alarm all parents**

– The illusion of screen time.

– Invisible victims.

– The hidden threats of AI.

**Be an informed parent!**

2 A VPN *(Virtual Private Network)* is a system for encryption that protects your personal data when you connect to the internet. Specifically, it 'hides' the user's IP address – the address that would allow them to be identified. By doing so, the user becomes anonymous and can bypass restrictions, such as age restrictions, to access certain websites. Like this, it allows access inappropriate content.

3 A bio is the short introductory text that appears on a social media profile. It can include the person's name, age, city, interests or school. What is the risk?
Too much personal information can lead to unwanted contact, real-life tracking or identity theft.

To tackle these challenges, parents need to be informed, aware and proactive in creating a safe online environment. Guiding children with wisdom, responding calmly and setting an example through balanced online behaviour requires a shift in attitude: parents no longer simply supervise, but become educators and role models who instil safe and ethical digital habits. Below, we explain how to develop these skills.

## 1. Foster trust and dialogue

If they want to protect their children effectively, parents must first and foremost create an atmosphere of safety and trust where there is no fear of reprimands or punishments. This involves having regular, open conversations. Asking 'Has anything online made you feel uncomfortable today? ' will be far more effective than spying and aggressive interrogation. It is equally important to ensure that there will be no punishments. Children will be more likely to report signs of *'grooming'* (the process of establishing a relationship of trust for the purpose of sexual exploitation) if they know they will not be punished.

Setting family rules builds trust[4]. By agreeing on clear rules together for apps, privacy and screen time, children feel a sense of responsibility and will be more likely to confide in you if they encounter any problems online.

## 2. Teach your child to be ' *BERHATI BAJA* ' (brave and cautious)

This practical prevention framework will help children recognize and avoid risks.

We start with *BERHATI-hati* (caution): only accepting known contacts and applying the '3 questions' rule: 'Do I know this person? Is there anything that bothers me? Could this cause me problems later on? '. This allows us to quickly assess whether there is any unease.

The *BAgi* principle (sharing) encourages children to talk about their online experiences, which can only work if parents respond calmly and do not overwhelm them with reprimands.

Finally, the *JAga* principle (protecting privacy) teaches children to regularly check their privacy settings, delete sensitive information and disable features that pose risks, such as private messaging or location tracking.

## 3. Develop the skill of *'TOPCER'* (response strategy)

Even when they are cautious, children can still be exposed to *grooming* and other inappropriate requests. That is why parents should teach their children the '*TOPCER*' skills, a mnemonic device to fall back on when they feel in danger.

*TOlak* (reject) involves teaching children to say 'no' firmly when someone asks them for photos or involves them in conversations of a sexual nature. Role-play can help them gain confidence in case they ever need to clearly express that something is bothering them.

*Pergi* (to leave) teaches them to immediately end a conversation in a suspicious situation by blocking a profile, closing an app or using an urgent excuse such as 'I have to go', without having to give any explanation to a stranger.

4 Here is an example of a family agreement (resource in English): FOSI-Safety-Agreement-For-Teens.pdf

*CERita* (tell) reminds them to talk about any incidents with trusted adults. When they do, their parents should stay calm, gather evidence and help report the incident.

'*TOPCER*' isn't just about raising awareness. It's an essential protection practice in a hostile digital environment, designed to build the ability to take action.

## 4. Use digital safety tools

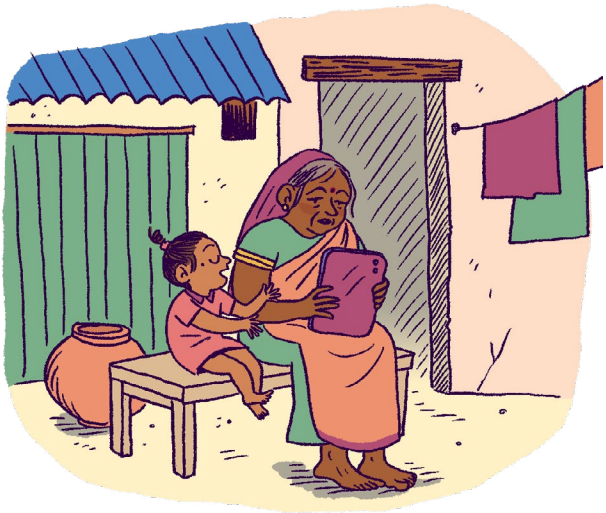
While communication and education are fundamental, parents must also ensure the safety of their children's digital environment. Apps such as Google Family Link allow you to authorize downloads, Google Safe Search filters results containing explicit content, and monitoring tools on Instagram or YouTube Kids add yet more to prevention measures. These tools cannot replace trust, but they provide an additional safety net when children are online and put into practice the communication skills, safety awareness and reflexes they have learnt at home.

## 5. Keep learning

Finally, becoming a digitally informed parent means adopting the mindset of someone who never stops learning. As the digital world evolves at breakneck speed, parents must remain curious and constantly update their knowledge of apps, trends and online behaviour. In particular, this involves exploring the platforms their children use, talking to them regularly by asking simple questions such as 'What have you seen today? Did anything make you feel uncomfortable?' and to rely on reliable resources such as the Safer Internet Centres[5], the International Telecommunication Union's guidelines on protecting children online for parents and educators[6], or the *Good Digital Parenting* programme of the Family Online Safety Institute[7].

By keeping themselves informed, parents can better anticipate emerging risks and offer consistent, well-informed support, thereby strengthening the family's digital safety framework.

5 Online: https://better-internet-for-kids.europa.eu/en/sic
6 Online: www.itu-cop-guidelines.com/
7 Online: https://fosi.org/parenting/



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# What parents need to know about parental controls

**Laure Delmoly**, Head of European Projects

Even after agreeing on screen time with your children and discussing the rules for online behaviour, it is often difficult to ensure they are being followed. In such cases, there are technical solutions that can help you support them. Parental controls can be activated at various levels: directly on devices via the operating system, through specific apps, via the mobile network operator, or via the settings on social media and video platforms.

## Protecting children

### from inappropriate content: violence, pornography, hate speech

The main search engines (Google, Bing, Yahoo) offer SafeSearch, a free filter that automatically blocks inappropriate results. YouTube (or YouTube Kids) and Netflix also offer a restricted mode.

On smartphones and tablets, Screen Time settings (on iOS) and the Google Family Link and Microsoft Family Safety apps allow you to filter out problematic content.

## Automatically limiting

### screen time

On smartphones, Screen Time settings (on iOS) and Digital Wellbeing (on Android) allow you to set daily usage time limits for each application.

## Preventing dangerous interactions:

### cyberbullying, sexual predators, scams

Social media platforms offer the ability to configure your account to limit the visibility of your profile, restrict messages to friends only, or block unknown contacts. Some apps use algorithms to detect warning signs: repeated insults, threats or conversations of a sexual nature.

## Protecting

### children's personal data

Data about your children can be obtained from their online activities: sharing photos, geolocation, private messaging.

To protect them, here are some useful settings: control app permissions for accessing the camera, microphone and contacts; disable automatic geolocation and check the privacy settings on their social media accounts.

## Banning purchases
without authorization

**Parental controls built** into smartphones allow you to restrict access to websites offering online shopping or requiring authorization before a purchase.

In France, 43% of parents have already used parental controls[1]. These tools can – if used with complete transparency – encourage dialogue with your child about their online activities. However, parents should bear in mind that these solutions can be easily circumvented.[2]

1 The survey was conducted by the CSA Research Institute between 2 and 16 January 2024 using a self-administered online questionnaire, involving 1,005 parents of children aged 13 to 14 and 506 children aged 13 to 14.

2 A useful resource: the guide *'Bien grandir avec les écrans' [Growing up with screens]* (In French).
Online: flyerreperesnumerique-113379.pdf

4

# Tackling cyberbullying:
## Using humour as a defence

**Naira Davlashyan** and **Marta Rodríguez Martínez** are the co-founders of Istorias Media, a creative journalism lab in Ivory Coast that seeks to build bridges in an increasingly polarized world through innovative formats such as stand-up comedy podcasts, hackathons and ideathons[1].

'We make people laugh to make them think.' – Clentelex, Ivorian comedian and presenter of *Laissons parler les gens*[2] [Let people speak].

### When humour meets with online hate

In an episode of *Laissons parler* les gens, an Ivorian podcast that combines stand-up comedy and interviews to combat online hate speech, the presenter, Clentelex, reads aloud a scathing comment accusing comedian Ange Freddy of 'no longer being funny'. 'At first, it hurts,' admits the latter. 'On social media, people attack you for anything. I realized that insults couldn't be avoided, but that it was possible to put them to good use. I'm a comedian; everything becomes a source of laughter.' This exchange is one of the most shared videos on social media for the programme recorded in Abidjan. On YouTube, over 80% of users are under 30.

Ange Freddy is one of the most popular Ivorian comedians on social media. He boasts over a million subscribers on TikTok. He is also known for using humour to encourage reflection on issues such as failure, success and life online. Clentelex, a rising star of stand-up comedy, has come up with an innovative format: a podcast that uses humour as a tool to combat cyberbullying.

For its young listeners, *Laissons parler les gens* is a podcast that combines humour, irony and improvisation, going beyond mere entertainment; it reflects the reality of social media, where ridicule, misinformation and attention-seeking characterize everyday interactions. Six months after its launch, the podcast has reached over two million views across all platforms and is receiving very positive feedback in discussion groups. It is highly appreciated by young audiences for its authenticity, emotional honesty and powerful impact. It is a rare space where humour, vulnerability and social commentary coexist.

### Digital habits and tensions in Ivory Coast

According to figures compiled by the French Media Development Agency (CFI)[3], Ivory

1 Note: collaborative developer events and idea marathons.

2 *Laissons parler les gens* is part of Kouman, an initiative funded by the European Union that promotes media literacy and responsible digital citizenship in Côte d'Ivoire.

3 CFI is a French public agency that supports media organizations worldwide in collaboration with civil society.

Coast had more than eight million social media users in 2024. By early 2025, there were 24.4 million mobile phone numbers in the country (approximately 144% of the population) and 7.55 million active social media accounts, representing an annual increase of 7.9%[4]. 90% of young Ivorians (aged 15 to 25) are on Facebook, WhatsApp or TikTok, and 60% say they have witnessed hate speech online[5].

'We have moved from discovery to large-scale use,' explains Donatien Kangah Koffi, CFI project manager based in Abidjan. 'But anonymity and the pursuit of online popularity encourage speech without restraint: people make jokes or insult others just to make people laugh. They don't always have bad intentions, but they simply don't realize the impact their comments can have.'

Every day, misogyny circulates freely, with online comments that normalize abuse of women and young girls. Polaris Asso has documented the sexist impact of such behaviour. 'In our workshops, we see that young women are the main victims of online harassment,' explains Louise Verrier, who works at the charity. 'Many share their experiences and tell of receiving insults or comments of a sexual nature simply for posting a photo or review online[6].'

According to data collected by Polaris in 2024, nearly 40% of participants reported having been victims of or witnesses to online attacks with sexist undertones, demonstrating the extent to which online spaces often replicate the inequalities that exist outside them.

'Parents feel helpless,' adds D. K. Koffi. 'Their children have a better knowledge of platforms than they do. So they react in extreme ways: they ban everything or let them completely free. Digital parenting is still a new concept here. Most advice comes from churches or mosques, rather than from public policy.'

## Laughing together, not at each other

**Donatien Kangah Koffi** argues that punitive approaches rarely work: 'They risk alienating young people and reinforcing their mistrust. What is needed are creative formats that educate without humiliating, fostering dialogue between generations.'

That's where *Laisser parler les gens* comes in. The podcast mixes stand-up with celebrity interviews that openly discuss the negative consequences of online life: anxiety, rumours and hate speech. 'We're not teachers; we've created a space for people who have faced online hate to share their experiences. We explain things with humour and empathy, not to preach, but to understand what's happening on the internet,' explains Clentelex.

Each episode alternates between comedy sketches and brief 'putting things into perspective' segments with sociologists, psychologists or digital law experts. The tone is light-hearted, but the impact is strong: listeners reflect on how their comments, shared posts and jokes affect real people.

**4** Kemp, S., Digital 2025: *Côte d'Ivoire,* DataReportal, 2025. Online: https://datareportal.com/reports/

**5** Data compiled by CFI and Polaris Asso (2024). Polaris is an NGO dedicated to civic education working in West Africa to promote media literacy and digital citizenship.

**6** CFI and Polaris Asso, Field data on cyberviolence in *Côte d'Ivoire,* 2025.

## Why humour works

**Humour goes beyond** laughter; it is a cognitive tool that fosters empathy and reflection. Research[7] shows that humour helps children interpret social situations, understand the mental state of others, and react constructively to life's 'setbacks' or inconsistencies. In the field of health education and communication, humour also reduces anxiety and lowers psychological defences, thereby paving the way for candid conversations[8].

In the realm of digital safety, where bullying can be perceived as an accusation, laughter builds connections. 'We laugh to breathe,' explains journalist Audrey Likound. 'If every episode had a serious tone, people would walk away. Thanks to humour, they stay and learn.'

## A safe space for empathy

**For Louise Verrier,** humour and empathy complement each other. 'We use games and very short sketches designed to make people laugh and think. The aim is not to preach, but to encourage critical thinking. One of Polaris's most popular activities is 'visual democracy'. We place all the young participants in the centre of the room,' Louise Verrier explains. 'Then we read out a statement such as: 'Is it acceptable to share a video of a fight just to get likes?' Those who agree stand on the right, those who don't, on the left. That's where it all begins: someone says, 'Do you really think that?', and another replies, 'I wouldn't do that!' Suddenly, there's laughter, debate, movement. People switch sides, explaining why and how an argument has convinced them. You can visibly see how mindsets evolve.'

Projects such as Polaris and *Laissons Parler les Gens* constitute democratic forums that encourage the construction of civic reflection. 'Initiatives like *Laissons Parler les Gens* use humour to make people aware that their online actions can hurt others,' explains Koffi. 'This puts a face to the problem and transforms a sensitive issue into a topic we can finally talk about.'

### Conversation starters

Use everyday situations where you are online as starting points:

– A viral rumour: 'Who benefits from sharing this story?';

– A malicious comment: 'Would it have the same impact if said in front of the real person?';

– A funny meme: 'Why do people find this funny?'.

## Lessons for digital parenting

**Audrey Likound believes** that *Laissons Parler les Gens* works best when accompanied by family dialogue. 'Parents shouldn't ban social media, but understand it. Watch an episode together, laugh together and use that moment to strike up a good conversation.' Louise Verrier shares this view: 'The important thing is to ask questions, listen and not judge. Humour lightens the exchange and avoids confrontation. ' D. K.

7 Paine A. L. *et al.*, 'Where's your bum brain? Humour, social understanding, and sibling relationship quality in early childhood', *Social Development, 30(2)*, 2020, 592–611. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/sode.12488?msockid=259175b74c5265283b7963314dee6445

8 Savage B. M. *et al.*, 'Humour, laughter, learning and health. A brief review', Advances *in Physiology Education, 41*(3), 2017, 341–348. https://journals.physiology.org/doi/full/10.1152/advan.00030.2017

Koffi adds: 'If parents resort only to punishment, they risk being met with silence. Educating works better than repressing, both within the family and online.'

### For professionals and educators

When designing a session on the topic of humour, use examples drawn from real online behaviour – don't just tell random jokes[9].

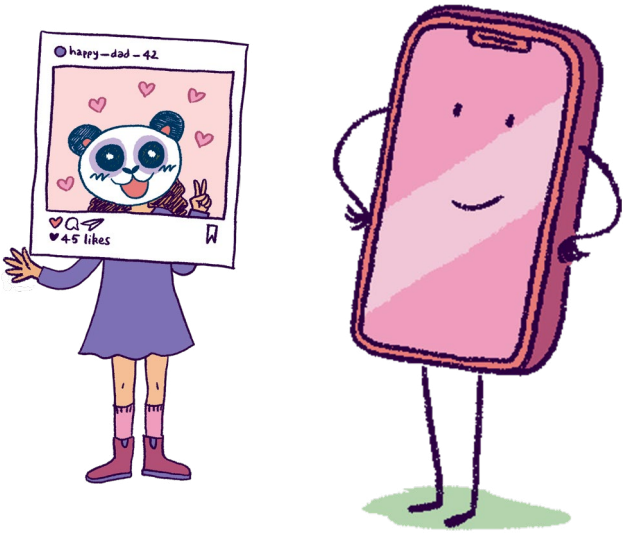
Avoid 'low blows' – never make the victim the target.

Use the social conventions of social media (language, memes).

Draw on expert opinion to encourage reflection.

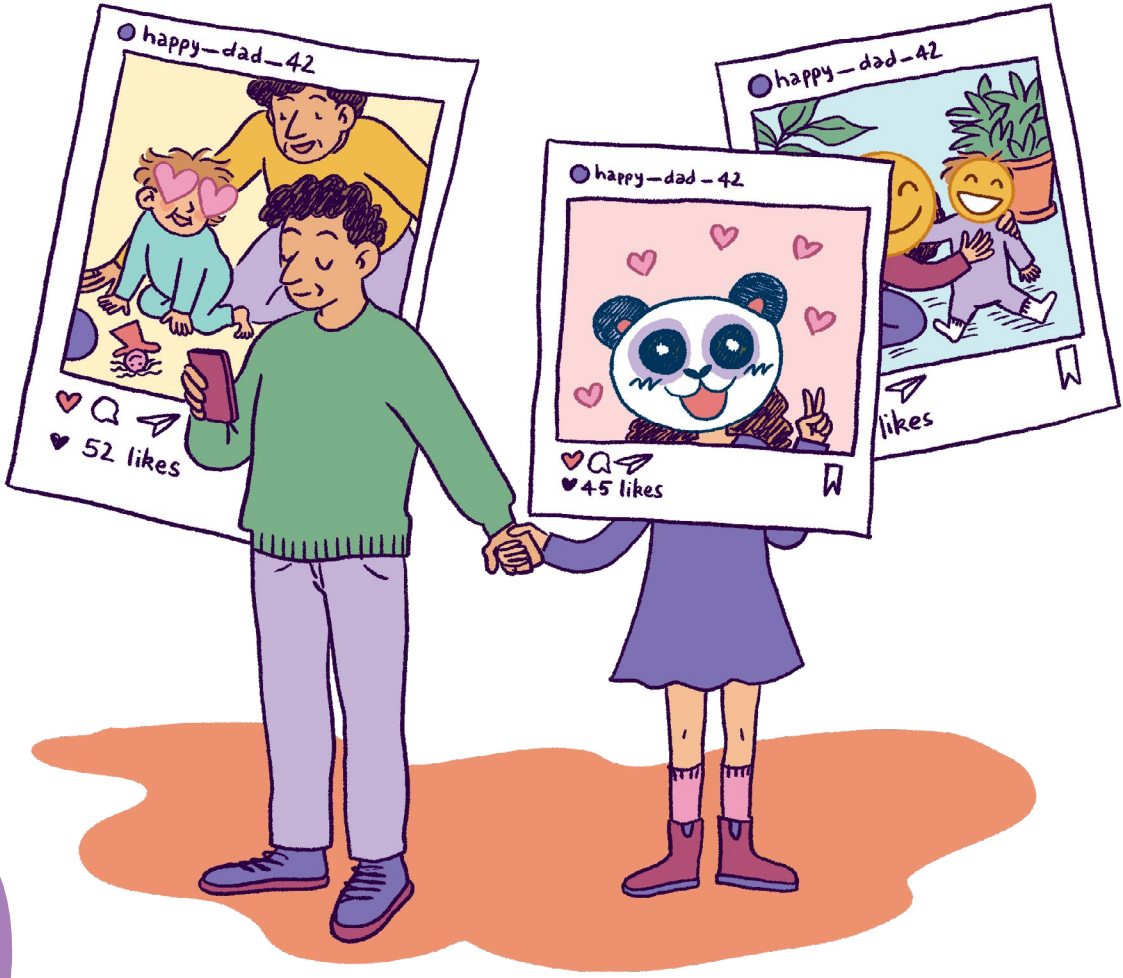
## Towards a culture of shared responsibility

By combining humour, community role models and data-driven learning, this initiative redefines digital citizenship through popular culture. 'Even well-meaning young people can inadvertently reproduce harmful behaviours,' warns D. K. Koffi. When *Laissons parler les gens* transforms the hatred expressed on social media into everyone laughing, it is not about trivializing the pain, but about transforming it. The laughter that follows is both an emotional release and a lesson in societal habits – a way of imagining more constructive online conversations in a world saturated with screens and mockery.




9 Henderson S., *Laughter and learning: Humor boosts retention*, Edutopia, 31 March 2015. www.edutopia.org/blog/laughter-learning-humor-boosts-retention-sarah-henderson

Between us and our parents, the screens we grew up with aren't the same. If we talk to one another, if we understand one another, we learn better how to use them together[1].




1 The testimonies come from a public consultation carried out by the Brazilian Government in 2024 among children and adolescents in 43 municipalities, in which they formulated advice for adults.
www.gov.br/secom/pt-br/assuntos/uso-de-telas-por-criancas-e-adolescentes/guia

# Parents, it’s your turn!

Supporting a child in their digital life is all about dialogue, boundaries and trust. You don’t need to be a tech expert!
This chapter shows how, all over the world, there are practical solutions for turning screens into tools for connection rather than sources of conflict.
A chapter to remind us that digital parenting is built step by step, according to social contexts, and that it need not be a lonely journey.

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# Ten things you need to know before giving your child their first smartphone

Ana Homayoun is an educational consultant in the United States and the author of several books on education and parenting, including *Social Media Wellness: Helping Tweens and Teens Thrive in a Digital World*. She is also the founder of Green Ivy Educational Consulting. Her expertise in digital parenting is based on twenty-five years of working with students and families from all over the world.

When should you give your child their first smartphone? A question that keeps many parents up at night. After twenty-five years of educational support for families around the world, one conviction has emerged: the real question is not just when, but how. The key is to lay solid foundations from the outset to develop good habits and a balanced relationship with digital technology.

## 1. Don't focus solely on age

Age should be taken into account when making a decision, but it is just as important to assess your child's level of maturity, their ability to take on responsibilities, and their vulnerability to peer pressure. As I always say, what works for one child within a family does not necessarily work in another.

Ask yourself the following questions: Do they look after their belongings properly? Are they able to keep their commitments? Do they let you know when something is wrong, or are they trying to hide their problems from you? The answers to these questions are valuable indicators of whether your child is ready for their first smartphone.

Also bear in mind their actual needs. A young person who has to travel alone or who takes part in activities that require a certain level of organization will not have the same needs as a child who is still in the care of a parent or an adult. Children's safety should be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

## 2. Show your expectations by example

Before giving your child a smartphone, take a completely honest look at your own habits. Do you look at your phone when talking to your child? Do you spend time scrolling on your phone during meals? If you find it hard to control your phone use, be honest with your children (and yourself) about it. Managing digital devices is a constant challenge for everyone, and children often learn more from our behaviour than from rules.

## 3. Start With a Training Device

**Children can benefit** from a gradual approach. For example, starting with a basic mobile phone provides safety measures, helps children develop good habits and fosters a sense of responsibility. A smartphone shared among family members or a simple mobile phone allows children to practise replying to messages appropriately and to enjoy phone-free moments without being constantly distracted.

Creating a tiered access approach where kids are encouraged to demonstrate responsibility and develop good habits can prevent problematic dependency later.

## 4. Create Daily and Weekly Phone-Free Times

**Most teenagers say** they feel happy or calm when they don't have their phone. However, even those who want to cut down on their use find it difficult to do so on their own: willpower alone isn't enough and the role of parents remains crucial.

Before giving your child a smartphone, I advise you to set digital breaks throughout the day, not just for them, but for the whole family, especially during meals, homework and at bedtime.

**At mealtimes:** Try to ensure that family meals take place without screens. Prioritize your relationships over notifications.

**During homework:** Studies tend to show that simply looking at a smartphone can reduce a person's ability to concentrate. Five seconds spent checking notifications can lead to fifteen minutes of distraction.

**A piece of advice:** Ask the children to leave their phones charging in another room whilst they do their homework.

## 5. Adopt tools to manage smartphone use

**Children begin to** learn how to organize themselves, plan, set priorities and work effectively from pre-adolescence onwards. Smartphone apps capture their attention, which can disrupt or slow down their progress in these areas.

**The good news:** Smartphones have built-up tools to set limits on screen time.

**Before handing over a smartphone:**

– Configure the 'Screen Time' (on iOS) or 'Digital Wellbeing' (on Android) settings;

– Choose the apps for which you want to set time limits;

– Plan a 'quiet time' during which phones are switched off or in 'restricted access' mode;

– Explain to your child why you are setting these rules.

Present these limits as measures that promote their wellbeing. Discuss them with your children to help them feel included rather than monitored.

## 6. Set Up Weekly Check-Ins

**Set aside time** each week to review screen time together, and then have an open conversation about what's working and what's not.

Ask open-ended, non-judgemental questions that encourage children to reflect on their daily habits:

– What do you think about the time you spend on your phone?

– Which apps make you feel comfortable and which ones annoy you?

– What have you found difficult to cope with this week?

– Is there anything you've seen online that has made you feel uncomfortable or upset?

Make the conversation a two-way dialogue. Ask them for their views on the rules you've set. A collaborative approach helps young people develop self-reflection and problem-solving skills.

## 7. Protect their sleep

Sleep is a biological necessity that influences academic performance, emotional regulation and physical health.

**Don't be afraid to tackle everyday concerns:** explain to them that true friends will understand the boundaries set and that messages can wait until tomorrow morning.

**Learn to manage bedtime:** All smartphones must be charged outside the bedrooms. Replace the phone alarm with a proper alarm clock.

## 8. Create a Family Agreement

Many families believe that most important step before a smartphone arrives. It is not a framework imposed by parents, but a shared agreement that aligns everyone's expectations and responsibilities.

**Use my 'three S' framework:**

– **Socialization:** in Social Media Wellness, I explain that *'social media* should not be viewed strictly as positive or negative. Rather, it should be approached as a new language and a cultural shift that offers different possibilities for connection and communication[1].' Talk to your children about what constitutes appropriate online behaviour and give them practical guidance on how to respond when faced with inappropriate behaviour;

– **Self-regulation:** what are the limits in terms of time, place and duration? How can a balance be struck between smartphone use and other activities?

– **Safety:** what information should never be shared? If problems arise, who should they turn to for help? Establish family rules regarding passwords, confidentiality and parental controls.

**Also address the practical aspects:** what happens if the smartphone is lost or broken? Who is financially responsible? What are the consequences if the rules are broken?

Review the contract regularly as your child grows up. Starting with limited access and gradually expanding privileges as kids demonstrate responsibility can help make the transition smoother.

There are many contract templates available for free online to help families draw up their own. But the key lies not in the final document: it is the process of dialogue, discussion and negotiation that make it a truly educational tool[2].

1 Homayoun, A., *Social Media Wellness: Helping Tweens and Teens Thrive in an Unbalanced Digital World*. Corwin, a Sage company, 2018.

2 A sample domestic contract can be downloaded from the following page (resource in English): https://anahomayoun.com/books/social-media-wellness/

## 9. Teach
digital citizenship

**Giving a child** a smartphone is not just about handing over an object – it is about opening the doors to a complex world. Your child will need to learn to navigate social conventions, filter information, protect their privacy and build their image in the eyes of others. Help your child understand these key concepts:

– **Digital footprint:** our online actions leave lasting traces. Ask them simple but powerful questions: 'Would you feel comfortable if your teacher saw this? What about a future employer? ' The aim is not to scare them, but to encourage your child to think before acting, to consider the consequences of their online behaviour and to develop their ability to exercise judgement;

– **Critical thinking:** faced with misinformation and AI-generated content, children need the skills to evaluate what they see online. Teach them to ask themselves the following questions: Why? What evidence is it based on?

– **Privacy:** many young people share information without understanding the implications. Talk to them about what should remain private: identities, addresses, school names and locations;

– **Empathy:** the distance created by a screen makes us forget that there are real people receiving our messages. Encourage them to check what they've written before clicking 'send'. Would they say the same thing to that person if they were face to face?

## 10. Build a bond
above all

**Your relationship with** your child is more important than all the rules you might set.

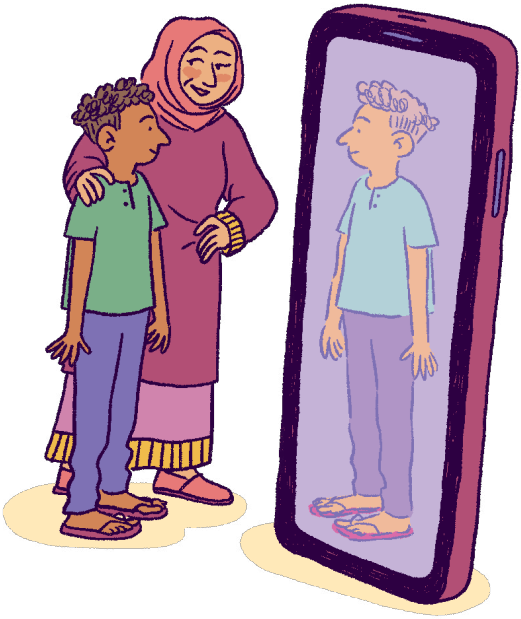
The aim is clear: to maintain open communication so that when challenges arise, your child will turn to you naturally.

When something goes wrong, react with curiosity rather than anger. Simply remind them: 'If something on the internet frightens or upsets you, come and talk to me first. Your honesty will never be punished.'

As I often remind families, the key to developing lasting motivation is simple: support children in their decisions and show them that they have the ability to do the right thing. This builds their confidence.

## Moving forward

**Take your time** to assess your situation, your child's maturity, your environment and what works for your family, so that you can choose the most suitable solution. Technology is evolving rapidly and we cannot predict everything. However, before giving your child their first smartphone, let's focus on the basics: setting clear rules, 'model' healthy habits and maintaining open communication.



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# Screens within the family:

## How to overcome conflicts to rebuild your bond

**Marie Noëlle Oli Bilias** is a lecturer at teacher training colleges, vice-president of the Édukmédia association (Cameroon), a developmental psychologist and founder of the Digital Parenting School, an institution that is both a digital parenting laboratory and a support centre for all stakeholders in the education sector.

### Has digital technology widened the generational and cultural divide between parents and children?

The generation gap is evident not only in the different ways digital tools are used, but above all in opposing worldviews. On the one hand are parents who hold fast to traditional educational values. On the other are children and teenagers for whom the digital world is a natural space for socializing, self-expression and a sense of belonging.

For example, in the case of Mr and Mrs Zang, parents of 20-year-old twins, the decision is radical: no internet-connected screens until university – a decision guided by traditional values, but one which means Loïca and Anne experience social isolation. They do not understand why their parents 'aren't like everyone else' and ended up secretly buying smartphones to feel part of their group of friends. The discovery of this betrayal led to punishments and a tightening of their parents' rules. The result: dialogue broke down, as did trust.

In contrast, the Tamos family decided to embrace digital technology at a very early stage. Concerned about their three children's school performance, the parents provided them with tablets to do their homework and communicate with the class. But they were soon overwhelmed by excessive use and social media accounts that were opened without permission. They are seeking to regain control in the face of the children's attachment to these tools, which has become invasive.

These two situations illustrate the same reality: digital technology acts as an amplifier of tensions between generations, between strict prohibition and poorly controlled liberties.

### What are the persistent misunderstandings between generations and how can they be overcome?

The first misunderstanding concerns the content that young people consume and share. Although adults consider it too frivolous, violent or sexualized, teenagers see it as a source of inspiration. This is the case for Samba, aged 20, who dreams of becoming an influencer. She observes, imitates and experiments with the styles of the creators she admires, whilst her parents see this primarily as a waste of time or a threat to her image.

Another source of tension: the example set by parents. In the Fokou household, for instance, screen use is permitted under certain conditions – except for the parents themselves, who use them during meals or take them to bed. This inconsistency is criticized by the children, who cannot understand why the rules do not apply to everyone.

Added to this is a lack of understanding of the online world. Some parents, like the Sambo family, associate screens solely with risks: sleep disorders, internet addiction and cyberbullying. In the absence of balanced information, they adopt a viewpoint of total rejection, which prevents any calm discussion.

Finally, differences of opinion among the various adults in the child's life can be confusing. Anne, aged 10, cannot understand why her mother won't let her have a tablet until she turns 15, whilst her grandmother wants to give her a top of the range device. From her child's perspective, her grandmother seems cooler and her mother too strict, which fuels a sense of injustice and confusion.

**How, then, can we turn the digital world into a space for dialogue and shared learning?**

In the face of these tensions, we advocate an educational and collaborative approach to digital technology. The aim: to turn screens into tools for strengthening bonds, rather than sources of conflict.

First approach: building bridges between generations. Parents and children are invited to share their digital discoveries, to learn from one another and to foster a culture of mutual learning.

We also advocate for genuine media and information literacy education, both at school and within the family. Teachers, parents, grandparents and other educational figures must have a common knowledge base to convey consistent messages to children.

Another key lever: breaking parental isolation. By fostering mutual support networks, we encourage the creation of parent circles where parents regularly and free from judgement share their successes, doubts and strategies for regulating screen time.

As digital technology should not take up all the space, we also propose specific alternative activities: fun activities, workshops, games or competitions that bring parents and children together to make unforgettable memories.

Finally, it is important to highlight the importance of training trainers specializing in media and information literacy, in order to sustainably strengthen local capabilities. Digital technology should neither be demonized nor romanticized, but rather understood, supported and discussed, so that it becomes a space for dialogue between generations.

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# Adressing social inequalities in digital support for children

**Julio César Mateus Borea** is a doctor of communication, professor and researcher at the University of Lima (Peru). His work focuses on media education, communication theory and digital cultures. He supports educational projects and collaborates on initiatives to promote critical citizenship.

## A daily situation

Maria lives in Lima, in a neighbourhood where not all the houses have running water. She has two children and just one mobile phone, which she uses for everything: studying, working, communicating and relaxing. In the mornings, her 10-year-old daughter uses it to watch YouTube videos before school. During the day, María uses it to manage her cake orders on WhatsApp. Between laughter and arguments over battery life and data usage, the smartphone has become like a member of the family.

Several kilometers away, Rosa works in a bank and comes home late at night. Her two children, aged 9 and 12, are looked after by their grandfather. At the weekends, they meet in the park and cook whilst listening to the radio. When Rosa sees her children in front of a screen, she feels uneasy and afraid. She recalls her childhood playing outdoors and a conference about online sexual predators that had worried her. She wants to protect them, without coming across as overbearing.

María has time but few resources; Rosa has resources but little time. One is guided by intuition, the other by worry. However, both share the same goal – support and protect their children.

Supporting children in the digital world is not just about controlling or banning things, it is also about dialogue and helping them understand what they experience online. In Latin America, digital usage is characterized by significant inequalities that influence how children are supported. For low-income families, this approach combines rules with opportunities for discussion[1], but remains limited due to constraints relating to work, travel, moving house and parents' level of education. Wealthier families have more stable schedules, better support networks and material conditions that facilitate higher-quality childcare.

## Factors influencing support

### Equipment, time and everyday constraints

In many modest households, a single telephone is shared, which means that cooperation and shared use. Despite limited

1 Leon L. and Cilich I., 'Parental digital mediation: Restriction and enablement during the COVID-19 lockdown among low SES parents in Lima, Peru', *Journal of Children and Media*, *19*(1), 2024, 138–155. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17482798.2024.2402269

time, brief moments of interaction – asking questions, listening, sitting alongside the children – may be enough to support them and build trust.

### Personal experiences and relationship with the media

All adults have their own history with the media, often shaped by television as the main point of reference and by warnings. A lack of trust in technology, combined with limited digital literacy, often leads to more restrictive practices. Depending on the geographical area, family-oriented cultures also value bonds, support and faith as sources of strength for guiding children online.

The first step, therefore, is self-reflection. Reflecting on our relationship with technology and asking ourselves what type role model we want to be and what values we wish to convey (caring for others, respect and responsibility), while recognizing that adults, too, are lifelong learners.

**Three questions to define your approach**

– How much time and attention can I reasonably devote to my children to support them in their use of media and digital technology?

– How do I feel when they use technology: fear, curiosity or indifference?

– Which aspects of my training help me today, and which could be improved?

Answering these questions is not about grading yourself, but about identifying your starting point. From there, you can move towards a more thoughtful mediation.

What matters is not the number of minutes spent in front of a screen, but what your children are doing, with whom, and how they feel. Discovering together can turn these activities into opportunities for learning and bonding, and strengthen trust between parents and children.

## Seven suggestions
to support your children daily

### 1. Start from where you are now

You don't need to have multiple devices or know everything about apps: the key is to be there, ask questions and be present, even if only for brief conversations.

### 2. Talk more, ban less

Rules are important, but dialogue is the real education. Ask your children what they do online, what they like, or what worries them: behind a video or a game, there is often curiosity and a desire to belong or to feel loved.

### 3. Learn alongside them

If you don't know, say so and look it up together to show that learning is a lifelong process and that it can even bring generations closer together. Although children may be more tech-savvy, adults still have a role to play in helping them reflect on content, values, emotions and the consequences of their actions. Learning alongside them does not mean handing over responsibility or authority.

## 4. Use what you have at your disposal

A smartphone or a family television can become a space for media education – talk about the success of a programme, a content creator, their funding or how platforms work.

## 5. Create family routines

Boundaries are most effective when set together. Decide when screens are allowed and when they should be switched off.

## 6. Find allies

Sharing views with other parents and teachers helps to establish consistent rules and ensures you don't feel alone. Both at school and at home, shared commitments – even for adults – reinforce the importance of these boundaries and help to ease the pressure.

## 7. Encourage creativity, not just consumption

Encourage your children to combine digital content with hands-on activities: watch a craft tutorial and make the item together, draw characters from their favourite TV series, or invent a game inspired by a video. Creating, whether using a phone or cardboard and glue, helps children develop their imagination, patience and problem-solving skills.

## Managing digital risks at home

Online risks vary depending on age, gender, digital skills and family background. Asking the right questions helps you tackle them with confidence

**Cyberbullying:** social media and messaging services can be a place for hurtful comments, teasing or non-consensual photo sharing. Children who aren't properly supervized or who have low self-esteem are more vulnerable.

→ **Ask yourself:** How does my child react to being teased online? Do they know how to avoid bullying others, even unintentionally? Do they feel safe talking to me about it?

Sexual abuse: an adult may approach a child by posing as a peer and build a relationship of trust through social media or online games.

→ **Ask yourself:** Is my child aware of the consequences of sharing photos? Do they understand that you never really know who is behind a screen?

**Inappropriate or misleading advertising:** algorithms can expose children to adverts for gambling, alcohol or political content, sometimes disguised as harmless videos.

→ **Ask yourself:** do we talk at home about how to spot an advert disguised as content?

**Harmful or violent content:** some videos or games that appear to be aimed at children actually expose them to extreme violence, sexism or stereotypes.

→ **Ask yourself:** what content does my child find appealing, and why? Have we talked about their feelings? Do they know what to do if something upsets them?

## It takes a village to raise a child, even online

There is a lovely saying that it takes a whole village to raise a child. In the age of the internet, social media and artificial intelligence, new challenges are emerging, but the mission remains the same: to help children grow up happy, with confidence, curiosity and a critical mind.

5

# From surveillance to trust.

## How can we support teenagers' digital autonomy?

**Jennifer Elbaz** is head of public awareness at the National Commission on Informatics and Liberty (CNIL).
**Mehdi Arfaoui** is a sociologist at the Digital Innovation Laboratory at the CNIL.

In the collective imagination, as in media discourse, parenting in the digital age is often reduced solely to its protective aspect, as teenagers are viewed primarily as vulnerable users, incapable of assessing the risks to which they are exposed online. Consequently, public discourse often advocates strict control, monitoring and even a ban on the use of digital technologies by minors. However, our field research[1], conducted amongst adolescents and their parents, reveals a more nuanced reality and complex needs.

### Adolescents: experienced users, but seeking guidance

Adolescents are not naive users. They have a certain understanding of how digital tools work, particularly when it comes to issues relating to their privacy and reputation. They know, for example, how to distinguish between temporary posts *(stories)* and permanent content *(posts)*. They utilize multiple strategies to protect their privacy: anonymized usernames, private accounts, deliberately disabling geolocation, or regularly clearing posted content to prevent old stuff from resurfacing. This knowledge, which is often acquired informally and shared among teenagers, reflects a digital experience built up through use and interactions.

At the same time, our research reveals that teenagers seek support from their parents. Instead of rejecting rules, they value being guided in the time they spend online or the features they use, recognizing their own tendency to lack guidance or to lose control. In most cases, when they criticize parental intervention, it is not the guidance itself that poses a problem, but the application of rigid rules, without distinction or room for negotiation.

### Learning through experience: the role of trial and error

Our analyses show that bans or theoretical reasoning are less effective than concrete, emotionally impactful experiences (bullying, identity theft, account hacking), which lead to a lasting adjustment in behaviour and genuine digital hygiene.

1 Arfaoui M., Elbaz J., Numérique adolescent et vie privée, 2005. (hal-04919994v2)

# ABOUT...

### THE SURVEY *DIGITAL TEENAGERS AND PRIVACY*

A survey conducted by the CNIL between 2023 and 2024 gathered qualitative and quantitative data on the digital habits of secondary school pupils (aged 9 to 15), as well as on the perceptions and support practices of these pupils' parents. The survey report is therefore based on:

– the analysis of 130 interviews conducted individually or in pairs in seven secondary schools in mainland France between May 2023 and January 2024;

– the analysis of an online questionnaire distributed between 30 October 2023 and 9 November 2023 to 600 parents of children aged between 10 and 15.

Teenagers absorb and apply protective strategies in response to specific risks (those that are easy to understand or that they have already experienced). By contrast, abstract risks (such as data misuse or filter bubbles, the consequences of which are not immediately apparent to them) are often overlooked. For this reason, effective guidance must be based on concrete experiences of exposure to risks in order to reinforce good practices.

In their sessions aimed at primary and secondary school pupils, an example used by CNIL officers are OSINT exercises (the collection and analysis of publicly available information) to show how, from seemingly insignificant data left on the internet, information about them can be deduced with just a few clicks (their place of residence, place of work or even their date of birth).

### The paradox of 'security' and its consequences

Paradoxically, it is often parents who first offer their children a mobile phone. The main reason cited for giving a teenager a mobile phone when they start secondary school is safety (64 % of respondents). While this is a legitimate reason, it can have mixed effects.

The fear of insecurity not only leads to an 'excess of devices' (mobile phones, smartwatches, GPS trackers), but also to forms of parental control that sometimes limit teenagers' exploration and scope for learning. Support that is perceived as non-negotiable, or which fails to take into account the teenager's specific habits, can thus lead to a breakdown in trust and a failure to comply with rules. While looking to become more independent, the teenager may then adopt strategies to hide their activities (using the browser instead of the app to subvert parental control, for example) and make supervision even more difficult for parents

Finally, by increasing monitoring, parents normalize checking practices that may subsequently be exercised by other members of the child's social circle (relatives, friends, partners), making it acceptable to check someone else's phone or share a password, thereby trivializing the loss of intimacy and privacy.

## Supporting constantly evolving uses

**Parental support should** take a dynamic approach, evolving in step with experimentation, the need for autonomy, and the adolescent's level of maturity. The aim is to maintain a balance between safety and autonomy, just as with parenting in general.

## Focus: geolocation, a matter of trust and privacy

Geolocation perfectly illustrates the tension between parents' legitimate need for safety and teenagers' right to privacy and autonomy.

Although it offers peace of mind, constant monitoring can have negative effects.

– Limitation of autonomy: anticipating danger on the child's behalf prevents them from learning to assess risks and protect themselves.

– Invasion of privacy: some devices allow monitoring of much more than just location (physiological indicators, listening in on ambient conversations), which violates the teenager's social and spatial privacy.

– Erosion of trust: the feeling of being constantly monitored can lead the child to self-censorship or concealment, which affects the relationship of trust with their parents. By making safety dependent on technical devices, parents also run the risk of neglecting other tools of parental support based on autonomy and dialogue.

In cases where parents nevertheless wish to use geolocation, this must be proportionate to the need and discussed with the child.

– Transparency: geolocation should not be tracked secretly. The child is always the holder of the right to information (G-29 guidelines on transparency[1]). Therefore, it is necessary to clearly inform the teenager about how this geolocation works (the G29 acknowledges, however, that very young children or those who cannot yet read or write will not be able to understand basic messages – whether written or unwritten – regarding transparency).

– Specific and temporary use: real-time geolocation is highly intrusive. It is recommended that it be deactivated when not necessary. If activated for a specific journey (such as returning from a night out), it should be deactivated once the destination has been reached. In many cases, a simple communication device (mobile phone, smartwatch) is sufficient to provide peace of mind.

– Device security: price does not guarantee security. If you choose a device, ensure that it is transparent regarding the data collected (where is it stored?), that it allows you to control the data (disable functions, delete history) and that access is secure (strong password, two-factor authentication). In France, the CNIL also points out that some smartwatches were withdrawn from the market in 2019 due to security flaws in the storage of data on remote servers. This is also the case for Cayla dolls, banned in many countries, including Germany in 2017[2].

1 The Article 29 Data Protection *Working Party The Article 29 Data Protection Working Party* was an independent advisory body of the European Union responsible for advising European institutions on matters relating to the protection of personal data and privacy.

2 Online: www.beuc.eu/press-releases/german-regulator-bans-spying-doll-cayla

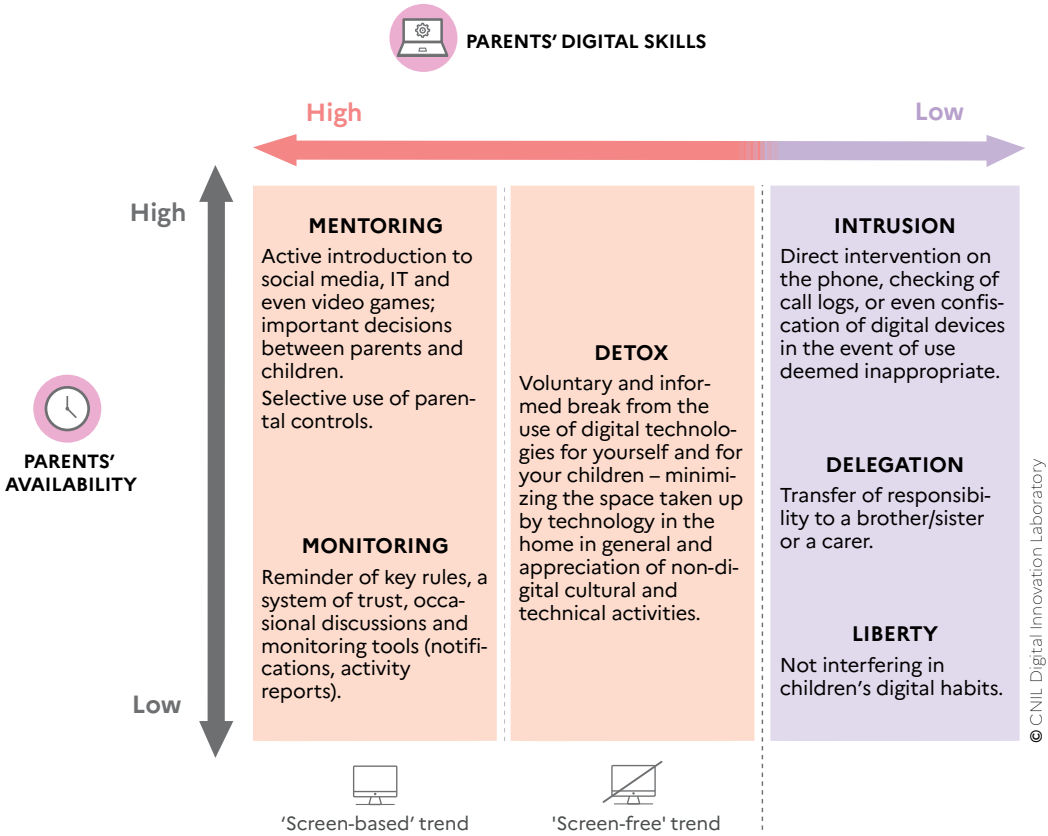
## Unequal conditions for parental support depending on the household

Our research has highlighted the wide disparity in parenting styles, which depend mainly on two factors: parents' ability to familiarize themselves with digital technologies and the time they have available to help their children (availability). These differences are not so much a question of willingness as of social and cultural inequalities. In any case, parents do the best they can with the resources at their disposal.

We have identified six typical support profiles (see the infographic below).

## The essential role of public and voluntary sector involvement

The persistence of inequalities in support highlights the responsibility of institutions and organizations (schools, public bodies, community organizations) to assist parents. To address these disparities, they must act as a link for parents who lack time or information. In particular, this involves strengthening local information centres (schools, community centres or libraries) to reach parents who are less connected and have less time (by offering flexible schedules or short formats); through digital education in schools,



equipping teenagers and parents with tools, and providing a reliable institutional point of contact to turn to in case of problems; by simplifying the awareness-raising content available, particularly content produced by organizations or associations supporting parents, using clear non-threatening language.

Finally, the digital environment remains, to a large extent, unsuitable for minors (pornography, violent or disturbing content, predatory behaviour, etc.). While the role of parents and professionals is essential, the responsibility of the designers and developers of this environment must be strengthened to create a safer environment for teenagers: offering greater customization options, ensuring age verification and the distribution of age-appropriate content, or even removing certain addictive interfaces and features such as 'infinite scrolling' would be effective solutions.

In conclusion, protecting and supporting teenagers in the digital sphere can no longer be an individual responsibility: it is a collective decision that involves all institutions and all stakeholders in the digital sector.

5

# Supporting parents in the digital age:

## real-life situations and practical advice

**Elizabeth Milovidov**, founder of Digital Parenting Coach, and expert in digital parenting.

The digital age, with its constantly evolving technologies and its viral trends that spread at breakneck speed, present parents around the world with unprecedented challenges. As a digital parenting coach who has worked in the United States, Europe, Africa, Asia and the Middle East, I have observed just how profoundly cultural contexts influence parenting practices when it comes to technology. I have compiled four real-life situations drawn from my international experience.

## United Kingdom:

### renegotiating digital habits with young children

### The context

Sarah is a British mother of two boys aged 4 and 6. She felt overwhelmed and quite desperate about her family situation. Her children would throw tantrums whenever she tried to limit their tablet use, and the situation would turn into a nightmare if she made a move to take it away. There were three particularly critical moments: in the morning before school, during meals and at bedtime.

The habits had gradually taken root: at first she had allowed them a few minutes of screen time in the morning so that the parents could get ready, then during meals to have a bit of peace and quiet, and finally, in the evening 'to help them wind down'. After a few months of this, her young children began constantly asking for their screens and became aggressive when she refused.

### My advice as a coach

**Recognizing and accepting where we're starting from.**

Parents need not feel guilty or ashamed of their initial attitude towards digital technology. In fact, we are the first generation of parents who must raise our children with and through digital technology. There is no room for 'I should have done this or that'. We must seek solutions and find strategies to support our decisions and our development.

**Introduce activities that replace screen time and involve your children in setting new rules.**

In the digital world, where both children and their parents get instant gratification, I suggested to Sarah's family that they come up with appealing alternative rituals and activities that would make them want to engage with the physical world. During meals, the family could play the game 'name three good things that happened today' or 'positive and negative things from your day'

(sharing the best and worst of the day). The idea, of course, is to encourage lively conversation during meals, in which everyone can take part. In the evening, reading rituals can be helpful, where children choose the book and interact with their parents. Listening to a podcast can also be a good screen-free option.

## France:
supporting pre-teens' first digital explorations

### The context

Thierry is the father of two children. He discovered that Chloé, his 10-year-old daughter, was secretly using TikTok, despite the family ban. Chloé lied about her age when creating her account so she could follow the viral dance routines her classmates were talking about at school. Shocked and concerned, Thierry discovered that Chloé was interacting with strangers.

At the same time, he caught his 12-year-old son searching for pornographic images online.

### My advice as a coach

**Turn a crisis into a learning opportunity.**

Always bear this principle in mind: 'Don't panic!'. Rather than reacting with punishments, bans or digital bans, parents can use these situations as a starting point for more vigilant digital education. All children are curious and drawn to the unknown. Our role as parents is to support that curiosity and set boundaries and rules so they can grow up safely.

**Have an open-minded conversation about sexuality and relationships.**

My first piece of advice is to welcome children's curiosity, whilst explaining to them why certain content is not suitable for their age. These conversations can take various forms depending on each family's cultural and social context. However, it remains essential to establish an open dialogue with children on these topics. It is important to tailor the conversation to the child's maturity. Parents may be reluctant to talk about sexuality and intimate matters. If a child is old enough to ask questions, they deserve an age-appropriate answer from their parents, rather than finding it on their favourite search engine.

**Draw up a 'family digital contract' together.**

A family digital contract doesn't have to be complicated. Simply take a sheet of paper or some sticky notes and work with your children to define what is and isn't allowed at home. This contract can cover apps, screen time, consequences for breaking the rules, as well as parents' commitments. Very young children are quite good at expressing what they like or dislike, and they are more likely to respect the rules when they've helped to draw them up.

**Use parental controls as a support, not as a surveillance tool.**

Parental control tools are there to protect children, not to spy on them. By explaining them clearly, parents can build a relationship of trust based on transparency.

## Qatar:
video game addiction among teenagers

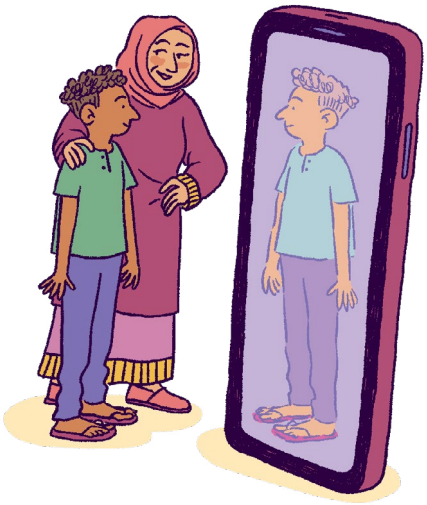
### The context

Fatima is a mother living in Doha. She came to me seeking advice and support for her 15-year-old son, Ahmed, who spent several hours a day playing online during the week, and even more so during the holidays. His grades had dropped and he became aggressive when she tried to limit his gaming time. In a cultural context where extreme temperatures limit outdoor activities for much of the year, video games had become his only means of escape.

### My advice as a coach

**Understand the role that gaming plays in his life.**

Video games often fulfil unmet needs for socialization, success or even escapism. I suggested to Fatima that she and Ahmed work together to identify what gaming actually offered him: competition? Interaction with other players? Less stress?



**Adapt your solutions to the cultural and climatic context.**

In Qatar, for solutions to be viable, they must take the heat into account. We have drawn up a list of stimulating indoor activities: chess, computer programming, robotics or indoor sports, as well as other activities offered by youth leisure centres.

**Implement a phased withdrawal with substitution.**

I advised Fatima to take it step by step and gradually reduce the amount of time she spends playing online. Families manage screen time more effectively when parents start by identifying 'non-negotiable' screen-free times: family meals, the first hour after waking up. And, as always, efforts to disconnect are more successful when parents suggest alternative activities that offer comparable rewards: challenges, progress, social recognition.

**Consult a professional if you feel it is necessary.**

The World Health Organization recognizes video game addiction and defines it as behaviour observed over at least 12 months that causes a significant disruption to the person's family, social, school or professional life. Although Ahmed had only been playing intensively for three months, I advised Fatima to see a specialist as soon as possible.

## United States:

managing excessive use of digital devices within the family

### The context

Ben is a father living in California. He juggles working from home with homeschooling his three children. At first, he was very happy with this lifestyle, until he realized that his family was spending more than 60 hours a week in front of screens. His children would switch seamlessly from video-conference lessons to video games and then to surfing the internet. Ben and his wife were exhausted trying to set boundaries and reach agreements. The parents felt as though the family was falling apart, even though they were physically together.

### My advice as a coach

**Make a clear distinction between work and leisure.**

Like many families in the wake of COVID, Ben and his family have been immersed in remote working and distance learning. They quickly realized that not all screen time is the same. Part of the solution lies in identifying the different categories of use – work/school, creative activities (drawing, coding), social life (video calls with family and friends), passive leisure – to create dedicated times and spaces for each of them whenever possible.

**Introduce 'micro-detox' routines.**

In a family like this, you could suggest setting aside short but regular screen-free breaks. Taken together, these will improve the family's well-being and help everyone appreciate the time they spend together more – whether that's cooking, listening to podcasts or going for a walk.

**Set an example.**

Ben and his wife have become good role models when it comes to digital wellbeing. They have set their own rules: no emails after 7 pm, flight mode during family meals and one-on-one time with each child. Children are more likely to imitate what they see in practice than what they are told to do.

## Conclusion:

a universal approach adapted to each context

**These four examples** highlight the diversity of digital challenges depending on socio-cultural contexts, but also the existence of universal principles for all families: the importance of dialogue, the search for balance and the need to adapt our practices.
The 'ACE' approach can be applied to all situations.

– **Awareness:** keep up to date with trends, new apps and age-specific risks.

– **Communication:** Maintain an ongoing dialogue that is appropriate for your children's age. Choose the right moments to start a conversation, when your children are receptive.

– **Engagement:** get involved in your children's digital lives, showing an interest in their online activities without being intrusive.

I would like to encourage all parents and educators here to view digital parenting as a journey with no final destination. We can all learn and share our best practices, and every family must find its own balance, based on its values, culture, experience and living conditions. Our aim is not to eliminate screens, but to teach our children (and ourselves) to live and develop fully by establishing a balanced relationship with the digital world.

# The CLEMI's Tips

## Children have rights!

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)[1], inspired by the work of the Polish paediatrician Janusz Korczak, was adopted on 20 November 1989 by the United Nations. It sets out a list of fundamental rights for children, in particular the right to freedom of expression, information and participation (see, in particular, Articles 13 and 17). These fundamental rights serve as a compass to guide those involved in education and child protection.

The 196 signatory states to this convention undertake to publish detailed reports on the national situation regarding children's rights on a regular basis.

To consult the relevant United Nations texts:

– Convention on the Rights of the Child | OHCHR[2];

– General Comment No. 25 (2021) on the rights of the child in the digital environment[3];

– United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child[4].

1 Online: www.unicef.fr/convention-droits-enfants/

2 https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child

3 Online: https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/general-comments-and-recommendations/general-comment-no-25-2021-childrens-rights-relation

4 Online: https://www.ohchr.org/en/treaty-bodies/crc

# Further resources

## CO-EDUCATION AND DIGITAL PARENTING: THE RÉSEAU CANOPÉ BY YOUR SIDE

Against a backdrop of unprecedented change, the Réseau Canopé supports education professionals on issues relating to digital technology and the relationship between schools and families. Through its platform **CanoTech**[1], it offers webinars and short resources that can be used to strengthen co-education and support digital parenting.

To address issues related to the growing prominence of screens in young people's lives, Réseau Canopé's expertise is based on institutional recommendations, research and practical experience. Webinars such as **Digital Parenting: Challenges and Guidelines for Supporting Families**[2] help to understand young people's usages and offer creative ideas for regulating screen time.

The '**Strengthening co-education**[3]' module on CanoTech helps to structure the relationship between teachers and parents. It addresses communication, shared responsibility, guidance and relationships with parents of pupils from other language backgrounds or in the context of priority education, as well as the impact of co-education on pupils' well-being and success, with practical tools to overcome misunderstandings and reservations.

By bringing together digital parenting, education in critical thinking and educational cooperation, Réseau Canopé offers comprehensive support, based on pedagogical experience and designed to be practical in everyday life.

The Extra classe podcasts broaden the discussion by giving a voice to researchers and professionals. The episode' **Education for digital citizenship: drawing on young people's practices**[4] invites listeners, for example, to understand the needs underlying digital practices, to value positive behaviours and to strengthen pupils' capacity for action.

**Discover Réseau Canopé's resources on co-education:**

1 Online: www.canotech.fr

2 Online: www.canotech.fr/s/38111/parentalite-numerique-enjeux-et-reperes-pour-accompagner-les-familles

3 Online: www.canotech.fr/resultats?th=renforcer-la-coeducation

4 Online: https://smartlink.ausha.co/extra-classe/education-a-la-citoyennete-numerique-s-appuyer-sur-les-pratiques-des-jeunes-parlons-pratiques-55

## CLEMI, SUPPORTING MEDIA EDUCATION AND DIGITAL PARENTING

### At school and alongside families

CLEMI, a department of Réseau Canopé, is responsible for training teachers in media and information literacy, producing and distributing teaching resources, supporting the creation of student-generated media and organizing events such as the Press and Media Week in Schools, which attracts more than three million pupils every year.

CLEMI also helps parents better understand their children's use of media and digital technologies so that they can talk about these topics with them. The aim? Giving guidelines on how to live better with screens. On its online space dedicated to families, CLEMI offers a wide range of free resources to answer the questions parents ask themselves on a daily basis: screen time, information and misinformation, social networks, cyberbullying prevention. The content is varied: practical guides, short videos, cartoons, podcasts and activities to do together. These tools encourage dialogue, the exchange of experiences and the development of critical thinking skills in children and parents alike. CLEMI also offers resources for professionals: posters, flyers and workshop scenarios.

### Our partners committed to promoting this guide

The printing and distribution of this guide have been made possible thanks to the significant financial support of Orange and the contribution of the Mission laïque française.

The distribution of this guide is based on the commitment of national, educational, voluntary and institutional stakeholders, most of whom are members of the CLEMI Steering Committee (COP): the Ministry of Culture, the Regulatory Authority for Audiovisual and Digital Communication (Arcom), the National Family Benefits Fund (CNAF), the Centres for Training in Active Education Methods (Ceméa), the Regional Youth Information Centre (CRIJ), the National Commission for Information Technology and Civil Liberties (CNIL), the e-Enfance/3018 association, the Federation of Parents' Councils (FCPE), the Federation of Parents in State Education (PEEP), the Foundation for Children, Internet sans Crainte, the LDE School Bookshop, the League for Education, and the National Union of Family Associations (UNAF).

# Parents, you're not alone!

**Digital technology is profoundly transforming the daily lives of families: screens are everywhere, children are using social media and artificial intelligence from an early age, not to mention new risks to children's health and well-being. Many parents feel helpless in the face of practices they struggle to understand and manage.**

Parents, you are no longer alone! This guide is designed for you. Leveraging scientific research, educational expertise and real-life experiences from around the world, it offers practical guidance to help you support your children in the digital world: striking a balance in managing screen time, developing critical thinking, dealing with cyberbullying, understanding how social media and generative artificial intelligence work, and, above all, fostering open dialogue.

**Because growing up in a connected world is something you have to learn!**

CLEMI – Le centre pour l'éducation aux médias et à l'information

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