
Parenting, Media, and Everything In Between

Here's the Secret to Raising a Safe, Smart Kid

It's not lots of limits, but it's not being hands off, either. By [Sierra Filucci](#) 5/31/2016

Topics: [Privacy and Internet Safety](#), [Screen Time](#)



When it comes to parenting frustrations, nothing beats the challenges of [setting screen limits](#), picking appropriate media, and [figuring out Snapchat](#). We're raising "digital natives" but we're supposed to be the experts? Actually, no. It turns out, the most effective way to help your kid have a healthy relationship to media is by being their media mentor.

Many of us think we need to have all the answers. Or we just stick our heads in the sand and hope for the best. But, as so often happens, the middle road is juuuust right. Researcher [Alexandra Samuel surveyed 10,000 North American families](#) and found that some parents put strict limits on what their kids could watch or play ("limiters"), especially when they're young, while others (especially parents of teens) let their kids control screen time and embrace the idea that more tech is good tech ("enablers").

But about a third of the parents -- whom she calls "media mentors" -- consistently engaged in media with their kids, despite their ages, and these kids had better outcomes. Kids of media mentors were less likely to access porn, chat online

with a stranger, and impersonate an adult or peer online. Exactly what you're hoping for as a parent, right?

So what does it take to be a "[media mentor](#)"? Here are the steps:

Talk about media and tech

Here's where most parents are #winning. In the 2015 [Common Sense Census: Media Use by Tweens and Teens](#), 87 percent of tweens reported that their parents regularly discussed Internet safety. These conversations can include everything from stranger danger to creating strong passwords and should be empowering rather than scary.

Play, watch, learn together

Media mentors play video games, watch movies, and download apps with their kids. They share their favorite YouTube videos and explore new music together. It's not all the time, of course -- who has time for that? -- but staying engaged and showing interest breeds comfort and camaraderie.

Teach new skills

Kids with tech-savvy parents have some advantages when getting up to speed on digital life. They can introduce kids to specialized websites and explain the ins and outs of Instagram. But that doesn't mean the rest of us have nothing to offer. Parents can show kids -- especially young ones -- how to use a mouse, do a Google search, charge a device, and so on. [Children's librarians](#) are another tech resource, too.

Follow their interests

You know what your kid is into -- [whether it's dinosaurs](#), [Minecraft](#), or [Taylor Swift](#) -- and you can use these interests to support positive engagement with media and tech. Find cool dinosaur apps, sign your kid up for a *Minecraft* coding camp, or take a digital music-making class together.

Do your research

High-quality content makes a difference in how kids interact with media. Parents who seek out good content by [checking reviews](#), surveying friends, and exploring content themselves expose kids to better stuff.



[About Sierra Filucci](#)

Sierra has been writing and editing professionally for more than a decade, with a special interest in women's and family subjects. She has a master's degree in journalism from the University of California at Berkeley.... [Read more](#)

RELATED ADVICE & TOP PICKS



[Tweens, Teens, and Screens: What Our New Research Uncovers](#)



[5 Questions to Ask Before You Get Your Kid a Phone](#)



[Screen-Time Limits for Parents?](#)

Best Apps for
Toddlers