Handbook

Digital Wellbeing for Children's Development

for Caregivers & Educators

September 2025

Prepared jointly by:

EDIVERSITY 教育大同

KIGUMI GROUP

Welcome

Welcome to **Digital Wellbeing for Child Development**. In today's world, children grow up immersed in digital technology and artificial intelligence (AI) like never before. As caregivers and educators, equipping ourselves with a clear understanding of digital wellbeing is essential to support their healthy growth and development.

This workshop is not about perfection or always doing the "right" thing. Instead, it's an **opportunity to revisit the values that hold our families and communities together**—such as kindness, balance, respect, and resilience—and **explore how we can strive to live those values as much as possible in our daily behaviors, including in how we use technology and digital devices**.

Together, we will gain practical insights and deepen our awareness, empowering us to guide children thoughtfully and confidently through the digital world. By doing so, we nurture a generation that not only adapts to the digital age but thrives with purpose and balance.

We invite you to use this Handbook to reflect and affirm your own commitment to digital wellbeing, then bring that understanding to bear on your family, classroom & community.

Digital Parenting: Steering the Family Car

Let's think about parenting in a digital age like driving a car with your kids in the back. The car is your family. Driving is parenting. You're steering your family down the path of living in a digital age.

You have carseats, seatbelts, airbags. It's a given that any car you choose should have those things, right?

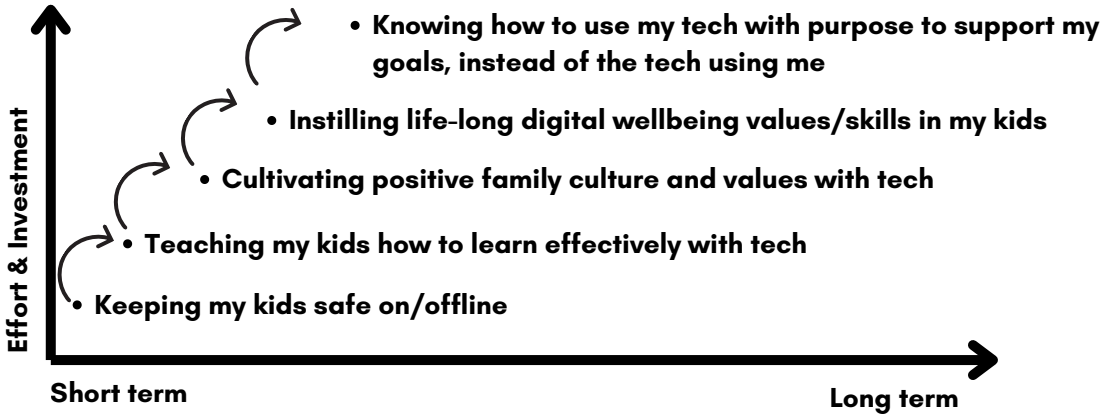
But are seatbelts and airbags enough to keep your kids safe and healthy? Unfortunately, no. Are they going to help you get to where you want to go in the car? Also, no.

Seatbelts and airbags are very important, but relatively small parts of driving. The most important part of successful driving isn't the steering wheel, or the brakes, or the airbags. **The most important part of successful driving and getting safely to where your family wants to go is: the skill, focus and attentiveness of the driver.**

That's why this workshop focuses on your **individual competencies and ability to judge context** instead of giving you lists of rules to check off.

Goals for Parenting in Digital Age

Where are you at right now in your journey of parenting with technology?



Reflection Questions

What do I already know about this subject (digital parenting)?	
What are my main objectives and what do I want to walk away with after the workshop?	
How am I feeling about my ability to learn today about this topic?	
Is this subject (digital parenting) similar to other subjects I've seen or learned about before?	

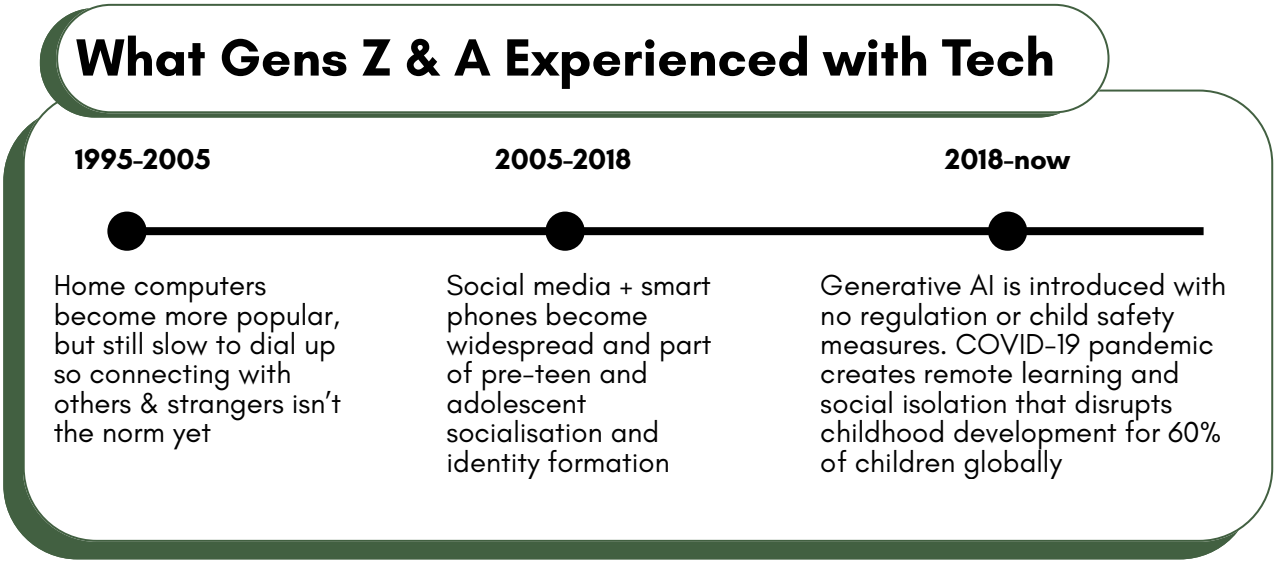
Understanding Gen Z & A Digital Natives

When we talk about digital natives, we actually are referring to anyone who was born after the 1980's who grew up with relatively easier access to technology, including computers and phones. That means you are probably a digital native, too!

But as new technology is introduced into the world - like smartphones, home computers, touchscreens, or gen AI - **each generation of digital natives has a changing relationship with their technology,** is changed by the technology (socially, emotionally and sometimes developmentally) and has a unique set of characteristics from the digital natives who came before.

Sociologists and psychologists don't agree on exactly all the details about what makes today's digital natives different, but there is a general acknowledgment that **parents and teachers need to make a purposeful effort to understand the digital natives who were born into Generation Z (born late 1990s-early 2010s) and Generation A (born early 2010s-present)** because of the unique technologies that shaped (and shape) their childhood and adolescence.

What Gens Z & A Experienced with Tech



There are many positive characteristics of Gen Z and A children, including higher levels of creativity, openmindedness and inclusive values, and competitiveness. However, one important key feature of Gen Z and A to understand is that, unlike preceding generations, they have **grown up relying heavily on smartphones and social media for communication, entertainment, and forming communities;** were the generation that experienced the introduction of **experimental and not-well-understood technologies** like attention-based social media (Facebook, TikTok, Snapchat) and gen AI; and are the **only generation in history to undergo remote learning and social isolation during formative times in their lives that was brought on by COVID-19**, which affected social and communication development for 66% of children globally.

Source: Wolf K, Schmitz J. Scoping review: longitudinal effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on child and adolescent mental health. Eur Child Adolesc Psychiatry. 2024 May;33(5):1257-1312. doi: 10.1007/s00787-023-02206-8. Epub 2023 Apr 21. PMID: 37081139; PMCID: PMC10119016.

Play-Based Vs. Phone-Based Childhood

Some sociologists and psychologists who study Gen Z and A digital natives and their relationship with technology believe that children are increasingly moving towards what they call a "phone-based childhood." They contrast and compare this to a "play-based childhood."

A **play-based childhood** refers to a childhood where **children spend most of their time on purposeful, self-directed play activities** that are voluntary, intrinsically motivating and have strong make-believe qualities. Play requires physical, verbal or mental engagement, builds strong metacognitive skills, independence & peer co-dependency and contributes to learning major life skills (problem-solving, cooperation, resilience, communication).

A **phone-based childhood**, in contrast, refers to a childhood where **children spend a disproportionate amount of their time from 0-18 years using smart phones, tablets, and computers**. When children replace play with phones and tech devices, this can result in delays to speech and communication, a chronic lack of physical exercise & poor physical coordination and development, decreased or delayed self-regulation skills, and fragmentation of their attention spans.

Reflection Questions

What **social, emotional and life skills** did you develop when you **played** as a child?	
Is playing an important part of your child's life right now? **What do you observe them learning & practicing when they play** (alone or with others)?	

Sources: Nesimović, S (2021.) "THE EFFECTS OF MOBILE PHONE / TABLET USE ON PRESCHOOL CHILDREN," International Journal of Science Academic Research Vol. 02, Issue 04, pp.1290-1294, April, 2021

Medical Guidelines for Screentime

0-2 years	No screen time if possible, or limit the use of digital devices and media to video chatting with family/friends.
3-5 years old	Receptive screen time (such as watching videos) should be limited to their attention span for each viewing, and no more than 2 hours total / day. Should be balanced with 3 hours of physical activity / day.
6-9 years old	Need at least 1 hour / day of moderate to vigorous physical activity. Screens should be used in moderation, with purpose, and in balance with time spent on a variety of non-screen activities like physical activity.
10-12 years old	At least 1 hour / day of moderate to vigorous physical activity. Children often begin to use media more independently, but still need the mentorship and oversight of adults. Focus on speaking about first phones, social media accounts, and gaming.
13+ years old	At least 1 hour / day of moderate to vigorous physical activity. Talk with teens often about the experiences they are having and the choices they are making online. Ensure you are modeling good media behaviors.

Sources: Boston Children's Hospital Digital Wellness Guide (2025); GUIDELINES ON PHYSICAL ACTIVITY, SEDENTARY BEHAVIOUR AND SLEEP, WHO (2019)

Reflect & Plan for Play

When in their regular schedules do your children/students have the opportunity to: • ...negotiate conflict/disagreement safely? • ...practice communication with others? • ...physically move their bodies & develop coordination? • ...learn to self-regulate (in an age-appropriate way)? • ...play offline?	
Do you believe the on / offline balance your children / students currently have follows the medical guidelines for screentime above?	
What does on- and offline balance mean to your children at home and in school? How do you judge this?	
Which activities from the above list do you believe you can help make time for in your children's / students' schedules (circle all that apply)?	

Keeping Kids Safe Online

Let's think back to the "car" that you're learning to steer and drive to keep your family safe in a digital age. In this section we're talking about the seatbelts and airbags in your car: the cybersafety basics and technical tools that are in your digital parenting toolkit.

Cybersafety isn't the only thing you need to keep your kids safe, but it is extremely important. So whose responsibility is it to teach kids (and you) cybersafety basics?

Actually - there isn't any clear answer, because cybersafety has only become a topic in child development since the introduction of social media, personal computers and smart phones. However, there is an urgent need for parents, schools and other parts of society (like mental health professionals and social workers) to work together to teach kids and adults both how to keep safe online. We cannot wait for permission.

Here is how our community can share the responsibility for cybersafety for kids:

Who?	What They Can Do to Help Cybersafety of Kids
Tech companies	Tech companies that design and commercialise tech devices (hardware and software) are largely responsible for building safe design & data privacy for children and underage users into their products and services. This includes a range of professionals in the tech space, including: tech business leaders, tech investors, software engineers, and UX/UI designers who bring specific design and algorithmic features to market.
Regulators	Regulators and lawmakers can help by continuing to create evidence-based regulation and policies for safe design and child safety.
Parents and caregivers	Parents and caregivers are the guardians of a baby's first digital footprint and should think about what photos and data about the baby they're sharing before the child grows into an age to make their own decisions about data privacy and what to share online. Parents and caregivers are also role models for children and should model data privacy and cybersafety at home and with the child.
Teachers and schools	Teachers and school leaders can provide important foundational digital literacy skills, including teaching fundamentals of cybersafety to young children, ensuring children have media literacy training and more.
Kids themselves	Last but not least, kids themselves, especially in adolescence, become active agents making decisions about what is acceptable risk versus too much risk in online situations. For older adolescents it's important to communicate this nascent responsibility while also constantly affirming that you are there to support and guide them with whatever they encounter.

Just like you teach your children and students to take care of themselves and keep healthy in the long-term by brushing their teeth, cleaning and caring for their bodies and minds, you can also introduce Good Digital Hygiene for your kids when they start using devices, especially without you. Here are some of the basics:

Good Digital Hygiene Basics for Kids

TECHNICAL

- Change passwords regularly
- Use trusted cybersecurity software
- Don't share specific personal data

INTELLECTUAL

- Think before you post / share
- Manage your digital trail
- Don't rush to make decisions

EMOTIONAL

- Listen to your gut / instincts
- Double check with trusted people
- Remember your family & teachers are there for you

It's also important to be able to teach your children how to recognise common types of scams and how many scams rely on mid- to long-term "social engineering," or building of trust for manipulative purposes. Test your knowledge of common scams below.

Quiz: Do You Know Your Scams?

Match the definitions to the type of scam:

A	Posing as a reputable person and extracting sensitive information	Doxing
B	Using a fake voice to pose as a real person and extracting sensitive information	Grooming
C	Publishing sensitive information on the internet without the person's consent	Social engineering
D	Manipulating or exploiting individuals through building trust on gaming or social media platforms	Phishing
E	Techniques of psychological manipulation to gain trust and trick users to disclose sensitive info	Vishing

Answers: A) Phishing, B) Vishing, C) Doxing, D) Grooming, E) Social Engineering

Cybersafety Conversation Prompts For Kids 7+

Use these prompts with your kids to jumpstart important convos on cybersafety. Prompts at the top of the page are best for younger, primary school kids, while prompts lower to the bottom of the page are best for pre-teens and teens.

What safety rules should we always follow when we're online? (Examples: not clicking links that pop up while we're playing games; not sharing personal info; not corresponding with strangers)

How do you come up with your passwords? How do you remember your passwords and store them?

How do you decide what to share online and what to keep private?

From 1-10, how would you rate our family's practice at being safe and private online? How would you rate your own?

Have you ever seen anyone go too far when they posted online? What happened? (Examples: things friends said in chats, social media comments, or DMs)

How do you decide what to post and what not to post online? Give some examples of things you would NEVER post, things that you would post under certain circumstances, and things that you started to post but then deleted / changed your mind.

When you look at your digital footprint, what kind of vibe would you say you're putting out into the world?

Preparing for Life's Digital Transitions

Parenting is full of "firsts": first pacifier, first solid food, first step, first day of school, first piano recital. For parents of digital natives, there are many new "firsts" you may not expect, including: first phone, first social media account and first AI companion. Let's take a look at some of the most common milestones you can expect and prepare for with your family.

First Digital Footprint

As parents, you're responsible for not oversharing your kids' data. Be selective about posting photos and information about their birthdays and personal details to avoid problems in the future like identity theft or cyberbullying.

Understanding Parental Controls

It's important to learn about and install all the parental control softwares before or soon after your kids start watching or using devices on their own for extended periods of time. Some platforms have their own parental controls built in that you should learn how to manage, and there are third-party softwares for an additional layer of security.

First smart watches

Smartwatches are good for keeping track of your children's location but can also act as distractions and build an unhealthy sense of dependency if utilised inappropriately during school time, during play time or while with friends. Choose kids' watches that have GPS but no or few smart features to minimise distractions.

Giving Your Kid Their Own Phone

First phones are a major responsibility, step towards independence and decision-making for kids. Establish clear boundaries, teach them about responsible use, and be clear on what they plan to use their phones for (i.e. communication, not just entertainment) to support digital development.

Teaching About Advertising

Teaching kids to recognize adverts in YouTube videos and digital product placement of toys or foods aimed at them will help them differentiate "need" from "want," better navigate diigital platforms and media, and build core critical thinking skills.

Building Healthy Gaming Habits

Gaming (mobile games, multiplayer games, etc.) is an increasingly popular past time, especially for boys and men. Gaming can add positive social outlets but can also become unhealthy and take away time from in-person activities. Violence, sexual imagery, scams, grooming & cyberbullying are also key risks in gaming.

Introducing Social Media

Planning the introduction of social media as a parent is crucial to ensure your kids develop healthy, balanced online habits. Speak to your kids early on as they see social media from friends and on TV to set boundaries that are right for their mental health and personal safety.

Handling Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying often builds off in-life bullying, and can happen in and out of school, including on text group chats, multiplayer games, or on social media. Doxing and deepfake images are some of the more prevalent forms of cyberbullying amongst adolescents globally. Parents should equip themselves on how to keep communicating with their child if they're experiencing cyberbullying, know what counts as cyberbullying, and who to turn to for help at school.

Building a Positive Digital Wellbeing Environment at Home

The overall digital environment at home sets the tone for how children perceive and interact with technology. Children naturally learn by observing the behaviors, attitudes, and values of the adults around them—particularly their parents and caregivers. A supportive environment includes **clear guidelines, open communication, and shared digital activities**. Families that engage together in digital activities—like discussing online content, researching topics of interest, or collaborating on creative projects—embed important skills such as critical thinking, responsible sharing, and online safety practices. **Homes that prioritize learning and curiosity over passive consumption encourage children to ask questions, seek trustworthy sources, and evaluate the information they encounter online.**

Let's start with reflecting on some of the most common ways parents use screens at home:

Reflect & Analyse

Do I do the following things?

Use screens as pacifiers or to calm my kids down and avoid fights?
Use screens as rewards?
Use screens as disciplinary tools (i.e. take away screens to discipline)

If "Yes":
- What are the pros in the short term?
- What are the cons in the long term?
- When and where do I do these things?
- What do I have control over to change to avoid doing these things regularly?

If "No":
- Why not?
- What challenges were there in doing this?
- How did I overcome?

Reflect on My Role Modeling

Do I do the following things?

Eat regularly with a screen (i.e. watching or using a screen while eating)?
Look at my phone regularly while playing with or spending time with my kids?
Use screens to put myself to sleep?
Prioritise checking my phone immediately in the morning when I wake up?
Use or check my phone or screens at family meal times regularly?
Balance my phone/screen usage with other activities (physical, social)?
Share lots of photos, videos and personal info on social media publicly?

If "Yes":
- What messages am I sending my kids?
- What are the cons in the long term?
- What do I have control over to change to avoid doing these things regularly?

If "No":
- Why not?
- How do I teach my kids my reasons why?

Reflect on Family Values

What values are the most important to you and your family?

Curiosity **Openmindedness** **Creativity** **Forgiveness**

Kindness **Bravery** **Strength** **Honesty**

Communication **Gratitude** **Humility** **Fairness / Justice**

Humor **Perseverance**

Write my own: _____

How are these values embodied in your current tech practices as a family?

How can you improve your tech practices as a family to reflect your top values?

Credible Resources on Parenting in the Digital Age

Boston Children's Digital Wellness Lab

Family Digital Wellness Guide,
Boston Children's Digital Wellness Lab

Tips and evidence-based research from clinical studies on digital impact on teens, pre-teens and young children

Center for Humane Technology

Digital Well-Being Guidelines for Parents,
Center for Humane Technology

Released during COVID-19 to support families during school closures, this list of tips and conversation starters is extremely helpful even post-COVID

Nationwide Children's
When your child needs a hospital, everything matters.

Digital Well-Being for Parents
Centre for Family Safety & Healing at Nationwide Children's Hospital (USA)

Advice from pediatric specialists on screen-time, developmental milestones and tech, and more

youth, media & wellbeing RESEARCH LAB
@ Wellesley Centers for Women

Youth, Media & Wellbeing Research Lab
Wellesley College, USA

Evidence-based research center collaborating with medical providers on mental health, social media and kids-related topics.

Additional Note Taking

Project

感創啟
「感・創・啟」全方位價值承傳計劃
Teaching and Learning for 2030

Organizer

EDIVERSITY
教育大同

Sponsors

SWIRE TRUST

利銘澤黃瑤璧慈善基金
Drs Richard Charles and
Esther Yewpick LEE
Charitable Foundation

周大福
CHOW TAI FOOK
周大福慈善基金
Chow Tai Fook Charity Foundation