Parenting in the Digital Age

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

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

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

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

- **Discuss behaviors you want them to embrace and what behaviors you want them to avoid.** Online learning, research, creating, and communicating and sharing ideas and projects are positive behaviors. Yet there are negative behaviors to avoid such as cyberbullying, inappropriate photo or video sharing, plagiarizing, and cheating. Remind your kids that anything shared digitally can potentially be public and permanent.

- **Educate yourself about appropriate ways to monitor your child's digital world.** Use monitoring to encourage conversations and "course

corrections" when necessary. Be careful not to over-react, but use this information to ask questions and have teachable moments.

The following tools and practices can assist you:

- **Set up agreements on what sites and behaviors are okay, but let your children know you will be monitoring to make sure they follow your family guidelines.** View the history or use parental controls that send monitoring reports to you on a regular basis. But recognize that many kids know how to delete the browser history. The website https://onlinefamily .norton.com offers parental controls that allow you to monitor the sites that your child visits on PC or Mac. There are also free applications for smart phones that offer safer browsing and monitoring options.

- **Consider setting up filtering at the wireless router level.** This will assist you in screening out inappropriate sites regardless of what device is used. But recognize that kids may have access at other public Wi-Fi sites. Check with your service provider about this option or try OpenDNS.

- **Keep in mind that communication is more useful than solutions based on technology.** As teens get older and demonstrate responsible use, parents should be monitoring less and less, particularly if a child has demonstrated that he or she is making good choices.

The following websites offer great tips for parents and teens:
— Connectsafely.org
— Commonsensemedia.org
— Stopbullying.gov

Adapted from Agatston, Patricia W. 2013. "Parenting in the Digital Age." May 28. www.cyberbullyhelp.com/parenting-in-the-digital-age.