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Digital Parenting



María José Rodrigo, María Ángeles Balsells, Enrique Bernardino, María Ángeles Espinosa, Victoria Hidalgo, María Luisa Maiquez, Juan Carlos Martín, Raquel Amaya Martínez & Ana Pizarro Carmona

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Digital Literacy: a 'duty' on positive parenting

The use of **information and communication technologies (ICT)** has increased exponentially, especially in the last decade. Due to their generalised use for any task or activity in digital society, the entire population, even older people, must bring themselves up to date on these technologies in order to adequately adapt and respond to the current social demands. Likewise, the term "digital orphans" was coined to refer to the case of children at any age who had to learn on their own about the use of ICT, since their parents barely served them as models or guides. In this sense, this is not a generational divide motivated by the lack of access to the devices that allow their use, but it is usually due to the parents' lack of the digital competences that allow for an optimal use of ICT during the realisation of their children's tasks. This learning area, known as **digital literacy**, must be covered and be part of the parental competences, considering the relevant role of ICT in the family dynamics and the need for the regulation of a responsible use to ensure an appropriate development of children. Likewise, digital literacy must satisfy the functioning needs in the digital era for older people who live alone or accompanied by their families.

Digital literacy must also be aimed at children and adolescents. Although digital literacy is partially covered in the school contexts, especially as a support for the learning of the subject matters, with the promotion of aspects such as autonomy, curiosity and responsibility, it is essential to provide a certain continuity of such learning in the family scope, for different reasons. Nowadays, the family scenario cannot be conceived without any type of technological devices, thus their regulated, constructive and risk-free use has become a new socialisation area in the education of children.

► How do ICT affect our daily life?

The transfer of the use of ICT to the family or social scope entails other purposes besides to the objectives related to learning. Thus, for example, family leisure has changed. Although families continue to go to the park, go for a ride on their bicycles and play board games, screens have become a ludic resource that is shared between parents and children, as they watch together films and shows offered by digital platforms or play different sorts of videogames. This is probably due to the scarce leisure time they have, and the circumstances derived from the health crisis we have gone through. There is now also the need to regulate their predominating use in daily activities, in order to prevent them from becoming a source of sedentary lifestyles and unhealthy habits during meals or distracting the children from their school tasks. In adolescence, the abuse of ICT has shown the importance of preserving privacy, protecting the digital identity and promoting an adequate management of the social networks. Another two aspects of family functioning dynamics that have changed are relationships and communication formats. Traditionally, conversations took place in a specific and simultaneous space and time to share information, discuss different topics or coordinate ourselves in different aspects. However, synchronous face-to-face communication is being replaced, or at least complemented, with another more asynchronous format through instant messaging, digital platforms and social networks.

What can I do as a parent?

The term “**Digital Parenting**” has been recently coined, distinguishing two aspects in the exercise of the parental task in the digital scenario:

- (a) the use of digital resources for the promotion and learning of positive parenting (exchanging information with other parents, managing educational content and online games, following structured online programmes of parental competences, etc.).
- (b) the analysis and regulation of the use of screens in children to promote their constructive use and prevent risks.

To foster these two aspects, it is essential to improve digital literacy in the parents, regardless of their age, education level and environment, which is far from being achieved. It is also necessary to apply an external control that monitors or evaluates the quality of the resources in terms of their content and the ethics shown in them by those in charge of such resources. Therefore, the promotion of positive parenting in digital spaces, as well as the sustainable and effective adaptation of the education systems to the digital era, are priority objectives in the European policies for the promotion of the educational development of citizens in the digital society, in both informal and formal learning environments. In April 2022, the European Parliament and the Member States of the European Union approved the Law on Digital Services (LDS), which gathers a series of measures with the aim of providing a digital regulation, stopping illicit content and offering a better protection to Internet users and their fundamental rights. The premise that served as a basis for the development and approval of LDS is that whatever is illegal offline is also illegal online.

The basis of this Law is given, among other aspects, by the hard evidence on the use of screens in homes. In early childhood, the use of ICT is strongly conditioned by what parents offer. From a very young age, children begin to interact with screens, to have simple conversations on the phone (even figurative conversations), to touch images or pictures in tablets and to play simple educational games. Later on, screens start becoming part of the daily life of children, as they use digital devices autonomously with ludic or learning purposes. In middle childhood, curiosity and exploration with ICT mark the use they make of them and, although the purpose is shared with the younger age groups, the component of peer socialisation is added, through online activities and instant texting. Similarly, certain contents and activities aimed at adults begin to draw their interest.

► **Should we ban ICT from our kids?**

In adolescence, the use of screens becomes a need rather than an option. A series of needs typical of this stage come into play, such as the search for identity, taking control over the train of emotions they experience, gaining autonomy and independence, the search for peer acceptance and risk exploration. According to the study conducted by the Reina Sofia Centre about adolescence and youth (FAD) and the MAPFRE Foundation, the activities that are conducted most frequently in the Internet are related, on the one hand, to fun and enjoyment (searching, listening to and/or downloading music) and, on the other hand, to the search for information and documentation (for studying, work, information and general education). At a second level, adolescents visit websites and search for information related to leisure, such as events. Likewise, they also use ICT to communicate and play videogames online. Other activities include consulting information about other people, uploading photos or videos, following blogs or websites, and sharing or forwarding information and news with other people. Moreover, many adolescents and young people are users of the “Internet of things” (making use of interconnected devices to monitor or manage home activities), they participate in websites to share files, share or forward information about other people, participate in forums and bet online. Less frequently, they create their own content and have their own website or blog.

Although the use of ICT in the different evolutionary stages may be quite positive, a very early use also involves a series of risks, with the educational actions of the parents being crucial to prevent such risks. Digital supervision must be practised from the approach of positive parenting, which entails incorporating the competences in matters of digital parenting to both the socio-technological context that surrounds the parents and their children, and to their particular needs in this area, with the aim of influencing the positive development of childhood and adolescence. Therefore, parents must consider and assume the opportunities that digital spaces imply (immediacy, remote communication, participation, connectivity...), without disregarding or undervaluing the multiple, advantages, benefits and qualities of the exercise of positive parenting in the face-to-face family spaces (warmth, physical contact, communication, real experiences, establishment of rules and limits, etc.).

How to apply Positive Parenting on the use of ICT

In order to apply the approach of positive parenting to the exercise of the parental competences in the digital world, Vaquero (2020) proposed three principles (the 3P) from which this fusion must be organised: presentiality, progressiveness and permissibility.

- ▶ **Presentiality.** This principle refers to the fact of being present whenever and wherever the children are in contact with screens, in both physical and virtual spaces. Messages through communication channels such as chat and video-call, and messages of affection through the mobile phone (e.g., “how was school?”), are examples of communication linked to parental digital action. An open and pro-active attitude must be maintained toward screens, supporting their use through a progressive accompaniment adjusted to the ages of the children and to the dynamics that are generated in the virtual spaces in which they are. Knowing, being and participating in these virtual environments allows for discussion and more parental means and tools to diversify the learning opportunities and to manage an adequate use proportional to the needs of each person and adjusted to the present technological context.
- ▶ **Progressiveness.** The principle of progressiveness of access and use implies the inclusion of some guidelines based on the progressive proportionality to the characteristics of the needs of age and the educational, social and family context of children and adolescents, discarding “universal recipes”. Therefore, the management of screens in the family scope must contemplate the peculiarity of each child. Their gradual use, depending on the characteristics of the child or adolescent, refers to both the time and progressive inclusion of use in other contexts, such as going from its use in the family context to individual or group participation in virtual learning environments through different devices in educational centres.
- ▶ **Permissibility.** Unlike permissiveness (excessive tolerance), the principle of permissibility refers to its necessary regulation through the establishment of guidelines, norms or boundaries regarding the use of screens. It mainly consists in delimiting, negotiating and agreeing upon guidelines or rules that regulate the relationship, attitudes and behaviours with technologies. Based on an external regulation in the stage of 0-3 years of age, such rules must be agreed upon among all the family members, exploring the opinions of the children and listening to them, in order to make them participate and thereby respect these rules and acquire commitments. In turn, from the perspective of positive parenting, respect toward these rules must be based on mutual love, trust and the recognition that both parents and children have rights and responsibilities. Regarding the guidelines that regulate the use of technologies inside the household, it is important for these to be few, concise and clear, proportional to the responsibilities and adjusted to the needs of each family member, as well as consensual and respected. These rules are not permanent in time and following the premise that they must be adapted to the characteristics of the children and to the contexts in which they are immersed, it is necessary to periodically monitor, supervise and evaluate their suitability. All this must be contemplated with great sensitivity to ensure the quality of the ethical principles and contents of the online resources, in order to prevent exposure to abuse as consumers and to values and attitudes that affect the development and well-being of children and adolescents.



Additional Resources

- ▶ **Website on 'Friendly Screens':**
<https://www.pantallasamigas.net/>
- ▶ **Research article:** Suárez–Perdomo, A., Byrne, S., y Rodrigo, M.J. (2018). Evaluación de la calidad ética y del contenido de los recursos online para padres. *Comunicar*, 26, 19–28.
<https://doi.org/10.3916/C54-2018-02>
- ▶ **Monograph about good practices of positive parenting in the digital world:** Vaquero, E., Balsells, M.A., Fernández, L., Fuentes–Peláez, N., y Mateos, A. (2020). *El ejercicio de la parentalidad positiva en un mundo digital. Presencialidad, progresividad y pautas.*
<http://diposit.ub.edu/dspace/bitstream/2445/177959/1/buenas-practicas-ejercicio-parentalidad-positiva-mundo-digital.pdf>
- ▶ **Research article:** Vaquero, E. (2020). Digital parenting. *Studium educationis*, 3, 203–214.
<http://doi.org/10.7346/SE-032020-14>
- ▶ **Research article:** Arranz-Freijo, E.B., García-García, L., Acha-Morcillo, J., Barreto-Zarza, F.B., Etxaniz-Aranzeta, A., Olabarrieta-Artetxe, F., y Roncallo-Andrade, P. (2021). Bebés y pantallas digitales: una propuesta educativa audiovisual desde la parentalidad positiva. *Educació Social. Revista d'Intervenció Socioeducativa*, 77, 187–201.



More information

- ▶ **María José Rodrigo:** mjrodri@ull.es
- ▶ <https://familiasenpositivo.org/>
- ▶ <http://www.femp.es/>
- ▶ <https://eurofamnet.eu/contact>
- ▶ <https://www.facebook.com/Eurofamnet/>
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