Q&A

When and how to let children use mobile devices for learning purposes.

Q At what age should I let my child use a mobile device and how can I maintain effective boundaries?

Chong Ee Jay: Rather than focus on age, it is more important to be aware of the abilities of your child before exposing him or her to suitable content. Since young children learn best when there is a two-way interaction, I would encourage you to engage your child as much as possible when a mobile device is being used. For example, you can watch YouTube videos together or play an interactive game with each other through an educational app.

To maintain effective boundaries, set some rules and discuss with your child the consequences of breaking them. Some examples are:

a Agreeing on when the devices can be used, and the kind of content that is allowed.
b Reinforcing that the child should seek permission from the parents before he or she uses a mobile device or downloads any app.
c Agreeing on technology-free zones in the house such as in the bedroom and at the dinner table — where no one (including the parents) is allowed to use mobile devices.

For additional protection, you can download parental control apps to restrict certain functions in the device. Lastly, avoid using mobile devices to calm down or distract young children when they throw tantrums. Little ones need opportunities to learn how to develop the ability to regulate themselves for positive social-emotional development.

Q How can the use of media and technology be integrated into programmes and curricula to support children's learning and development in the early years?

Dr Jane Ching-Kwan: The pervasiveness of technology, particularly the use of mobile gadgets in our daily lives, has gone from daily communications to entertaining our youngest users, some as young as a few months old. As such, pre-schools may be keen to understand how technology can support children's learning and development in meaningful and beneficial ways. One way to integrate technology into the early childhood curriculum is through the use of digital recording devices in documentation.

For example, when young children wish to document something they have seen or record something they have heard but are physically limited by their ability to write long sentences or draw detailed images at that early developmental stage. In this case, tech tools like digital cameras and recording devices in smartphones and tablets can help them achieve these tasks, and in the process become a platform for learning.

These tools also prove useful for educators when they want to better understand the children they teach. Educators can use digital documentation techniques to capture the children's process of learning, such as recording snippets of their conversations and the teachers' own reflections on what was observed. The information collected then enables educators to scaffold and bring each child to the next level of development.

for professionals

for parents

SET SOME RULES WITH YOUR CHILD AND DISCUSS THE CONSEQUENCES OF BREAKING THEM.
//Mr Chong Ee Jay

Ask The Experts!

CHONG EE JAY is a member of the Media Literacy Council which promotes an astute and responsible participatory culture. He is also the Manager of TOUCH Cyber Wellness, a service of TOUCH Community Service. He champions public education programmes locally and internationally, as well as counselling intervention and youth mentoring initiatives.

DR JANE CHING-KWAN is an early childhood consultant with more than 28 years of experience in the field, specialising in Child Development and Technology. She is also CEO cum Principal of KLC International Institute, a training agency for early childhood teachers, and a Director of Skool4Kidz.