



A GUIDE FROM EICN FOUNDATION

Parenting in the Digital Age

*Raising Whole, Wise & Connected Children in a
Screen-Driven World*

BY AUNTIE EJAY

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A Note From Auntie Ejay

Dear Parent,

Can we be honest for a minute?

Parenting today is not what it used to be.

When we were growing up, if our parents wanted to know what we were doing, they simply asked, "Where are you going?" Today, your child can be sitting right beside you and still be somewhere completely different — on TikTok, YouTube, Snapchat, Instagram, a gaming platform or in a group chat you know absolutely nothing about.

And sometimes, that is scary.

But I want us to approach this conversation differently.

The goal is not to raise children who are afraid of technology. Neither is it to completely remove technology from their lives. Technology is part of their world, and they will need to learn how to navigate it.

Our job is to raise children who can navigate the digital world without losing themselves in it.

Children who know when to put the phone down. Children who know that not everything they see online is true. Children who understand that a stranger online is still a stranger. Children who know that their worth isn't measured by likes, comments or followers. Children who can come to us when something goes wrong, even when they are afraid we will be angry.

That is the kind of digital wisdom we are trying to build.

So, let's talk.

— Auntie Ejay

1 Welcome to Their World

Our children are growing up in a world where the internet isn't a separate place they "go to." It is woven into everyday life.

They learn online. They communicate online. They play online. They make friends online. They watch people they admire online. They sometimes seek emotional validation online.

For many children and teenagers, their digital world is an extension of their real world.

This is why simply saying, "Drop that phone!" may not solve the problem. We have to understand what the phone is providing.

Is it entertainment? Connection? Escape? Attention? Belonging? Relief from boredom? A way to avoid difficult emotions?

Sometimes the behaviour we are trying to stop is actually telling us something about what our child needs.

AUNTIE EJAY'S REMINDER

Don't only ask, "How much time is my child spending online?" Also ask: "What is my child getting from being online?"

2 Screens Are Not the Enemy

Let's settle this one early. Technology is not evil. Screens are not automatically harmful. And your child owning a phone at the appropriate age does not mean you have failed as a parent.

The concern is balance, content, context and supervision.

Two children can spend an hour online and have completely different experiences. One may be learning, creating or connecting with friends. Another may be endlessly scrolling content that makes them feel inadequate, anxious or angry.

So instead of focusing only on "How many hours?" we also need to ask:

- ♦ What are they watching?
- ♦ Who are they interacting with?
- ♦ How does the content make them feel?
- ♦ What are they sacrificing to stay online?
- ♦ Can they stop when asked?
- ♦ Are they still sleeping, eating, studying, playing and connecting normally?
- ♦ Is the digital world becoming their primary source of comfort or validation?

The bigger question: Is technology adding to your child's life, or gradually replacing important parts of it?

Not every child who loves gaming is addicted. Not every teenager who spends hours chatting with friends has a problem. But there are signs parents should pay attention to.

- ♦ Extreme distress when asked to stop using a device.
- ♦ Consistently sacrificing sleep for screen time.
- ♦ Losing interest in activities they previously enjoyed.
- ♦ Significant decline in school performance.
- ♦ Becoming increasingly withdrawn from family and offline friendships.
- ♦ Secretive online behaviour.
- ♦ Using devices to escape difficult emotions almost constantly.
- ♦ Repeatedly breaking agreed rules around technology.
- ♦ Continuing excessive use despite obvious negative consequences.

LOOK FOR PATTERNS

One sign alone doesn't necessarily mean there is a serious problem.

And remember: behaviour is communication. Sometimes excessive screen use isn't the root problem. It may be a symptom of boredom, loneliness, anxiety, bullying, low self-esteem or emotional distress.

Imagine being 13 and waking up every morning to hundreds of carefully edited images of people who appear prettier, richer, happier and more successful than you. Now imagine doing that every single day.

Our children are constantly exposed to other people's highlights while experiencing their own behind-the-scenes. This can affect how they see their bodies, faces, friendships, families, achievements, popularity and worth.

And then there is the pressure to perform: "Did they like my picture?" "Why didn't she reply?" "How many views did I get?" "Why wasn't I invited?"

For some young people, these aren't small things. Their online experiences can have a very real emotional impact.

Ask: "How does social media make you feel after you've been scrolling for a while?"

Not: "Why are you always on that stupid phone?"

The first question opens a conversation. The second usually closes one.

Some parents avoid difficult conversations because they believe talking about certain things will introduce their children to them. But your child is already living in a world where they can encounter almost anything with a few taps.

If you don't talk to them, someone else will. Talk about:

- ♦ **Pornography** — what it is, why it doesn't represent healthy relationships, and what to do if they encounter it.
- ♦ **Sexting and intimate images** — why they should never send or request sexual images, and why forwarding someone else's private image is harmful and potentially illegal.
- ♦ **Online strangers** — teach children that someone can pretend to be anyone online.
- ♦ **Cyberbullying** — what to do when they are targeted and when they witness it.
- ♦ **Online relationships** — the difference between genuine connection and manipulation.
- ♦ **AI and deepfakes** — images, videos and voices can now be manipulated.
- ♦ **Viral challenges** — "Everyone is doing it" is not a safety argument.

Rules are important. But rules alone aren't enough.

One day, your child will have their own device, their own password and their own room. You will not always be there.

So we must move from "I control what you do" to "I am teaching you how to make wise decisions." That's the difference between digital control and digital maturity.

QUESTIONS TO TEACH THEM TO ASK THEMSELVES

Before I post: Would I be comfortable if my parent, teacher or future employer saw this?

Before I click: Do I know where this link is taking me?

Before I trust: Do I actually know this person?

Before I share: Is this mine to share?

Before I believe: Is this actually true?

Before I respond: Am I reacting emotionally?

Instead of creating 25 rules that nobody remembers, sit down as a family and create a simple digital agreement. Discuss:

- ♦ When devices can be used.
- ♦ Where devices are kept at night.
- ♦ Whether phones are allowed during meals.
- ♦ What happens during homework.
- ♦ What content is not acceptable.
- ♦ Which apps require parental approval.
- ♦ What happens when someone online makes them uncomfortable.
- ♦ What information should never be shared.
- ♦ What happens when a rule is broken.

And please involve your children in the conversation. Children are more likely to understand rules they helped create.

ONE VERY IMPORTANT RULE

"If something frightening, confusing, sexual, threatening or uncomfortable happens online, you can always come to me. You will not be punished for telling me the truth."

That sentence may protect your child more than another parental-control app ever will.

8 "But Everyone Else Is Allowed!"

Ahhh, this one. Every parent has heard it.

"Everyone has Instagram." "Everyone has TikTok." "Everyone has a phone." "Everyone is allowed to stay up late."

Your response doesn't have to become a shouting competition. You can acknowledge their frustration without surrendering your boundaries.

You don't have to be the most popular parent. You have to be their parent.

9 Don't Become a Digital Police Officer

Monitoring is important. But surveillance without relationship can create secrecy. Your child shouldn't feel that the only reason they make good decisions is because you might catch them.

Build connection alongside boundaries. Eat together. Talk. Ask questions. Know their friends. Know what they enjoy. Learn about the apps they use. Ask them to show you what they find interesting online.

And sometimes — put your own phone down. Children learn more from what we model than what we lecture.

Ultimately, we want our children to develop something more powerful than parental control: self-control.

We want them to eventually recognise:

"I need to sleep." · "I have been scrolling too long." · "This person is making me uncomfortable." · "This content isn't good for me." · "I shouldn't send this." · "I don't have to respond." · "I can put the phone down."

That doesn't happen overnight. It is taught gradually through boundaries, conversations, modelling, consequences and connection.

Auntie Ejay's 10 Digital Parenting Reminders

Keep these close — they're the heart of everything in this guide.

- 01** Don't be afraid of technology. Understand it.
- 02** Don't only monitor what your child does online. Understand why.
- 03** Teach your child to question what they see online.
- 04** Talk about difficult things before the internet teaches them first.
- 05** Set boundaries, but explain the "why."
- 06** Don't use shame as your primary parenting tool.
- 07** Teach your child that coming to you is always safer than hiding.
- 08** Model the digital behaviour you expect from them.
- 09** Pay attention to changes in mood, sleep, relationships and behaviour.
- 10** Remember: connection is one of your strongest parenting tools.

Dear Parent,

Your child doesn't need you to know every app. You don't need to understand every trend. You won't always know the latest slang. And honestly, they may roll their eyes when you try. That's okay.

What they need is a parent who is willing to learn their world. A parent who sets boundaries without breaking connection. A parent who can say, "I'm not sure, but let's figure it out together." A parent who teaches them that their worth is bigger than their online identity.

Because one day, you won't be standing beside them when they receive that message. You won't be holding the phone when they see that image. You won't be there when someone pressures them.

But if we have done our job well, your voice will be in their head. And they will know what to do.

That's the goal.

*Not raising children who are afraid of the digital world.
Raising children who are wise enough to navigate it.*



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