

AVG Technologies Digital Diaries: Parenting dilemmas for the digital age, children ages 10-13

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Introduction

The AVG Digital Diaries survey shows that most kids graduate to adult digital social networks at eleven years old. Even though sites like Facebook require a person be at least thirteen, preteens are having their parents create an account or are finding other ways to get around these restrictions. AVG also reports that a majority of 10-13 year olds have their own computer and in some countries most have them in the privacy of their bedroom. This is quite different from the days when media was watched on a family television in the living room.

Another new challenge for parents is that children now have the ability to communicate with the world. They can access information they may not have the skills or maturity to process. Parents also have new opportunities to look into their child's life. 58% of parents peek in at their child's digital life without their child being aware. This is where children's privacy and necessary parental supervision come into conflict in homes across the world.

Parents react to these old and new challenges in different ways. Having a sense of your particular parenting style and having an understanding of other parenting styles can be helpful in reducing conflict and building better family relationships.

Media Parenting Styles

What's your style, and how do you connect with your child's digital world?

Engaged: Engaged adults are enthusiastic and spend time with kids learning about their online world and sharing strategies, stories, and resources. The advantage to this style is that kids can learn social and critical thinking skills from adults. With this style, there is likely to be less conflict and better communication.

Restrictive: Restrictive parents establish and enforce rules about digital toys and tools. Restrictions around what kids are able to access and how they communicate with others is a necessary part of raising a child. Too much of this style, however, can encourage children to be sneaky and desire what's forbidden. There may be more hostility and power struggles if the rules are unreasonable and negative parent reactions are frequent. On the other hand, most parents value the establishment of rules, and kids need them as well.

Hands Off: Hands off parents have few rules and restrictions and let their kids do what they want most of the time. This style of parenting may include watching television or playing video games as a family, but teaching safety or social skills often goes unspoken. Hands off parents may underestimate the influence that media has on a child and family.

Middle Ground: Middle ground parents are flexible depending on a child's age, temperament, and circumstances. This approach requires parents to be attentive to their child's needs, and to reflect upon their own reactions and blind spots. Reasonable rules are set and restrictions enforced as needed.

Think about your style and how it is working for your family. If your child is having trouble in school, or seems irritable after being online or playing video games, it may be time to shift your style and become more involved. You have the right to limit how your child spends time online and how much time is spent. You have a responsibility to teach your child how to navigate this complex technology landscape. Some children have the technical skills of an adult, but they don't have the maturity or life skills you have.

Resources

- **Christine Carter, PhD**, has helped thousands of parents find more joy in their parenting while raising happy, successful, and resilient kids: <http://www.raisinghappiness.com/>
- **Common Sense Media** is a terrific resource for up-to-date information on all types of media for kids: <http://www.commonsensemedia.org/advice-for-parents>
- **The Online Mom** provides tech tools for parents: http://www.theonlinemom.com/main_cmt.asp
- **The Pew Internet & American Life Project** is one of seven projects that make up the Pew Research Center, a nonpartisan, nonprofit "fact tank" that provides information on the issues, attitudes and trends shaping America and the world: <http://www.pewinternet.org/>
- **Shaping Youth** is a forum about media and marketing influence on kids: <http://www.shapingyouth.org/>

To learn about Jason Brand, visit <http://www.jasonbrand.com>.

To learn about Rona Renner, visit <http://www.childhoodmatters.org>.