

Pointers For Parents

Five Ways To Help Your Child Become A Responsible Digital Citizen

by Yalda T. Uhls, M.B.A., Ph.D.

UCLA, Children's Digital Media

Center@LA, Adjunct Professor, Common Sense Media, youth development expert

(NAPSA)—Why is “Dot,” a new

original animated series on Sprout from Industrial Brothers in association with The Jim Henson Company and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, so timely and important? In 2017, 10 years after the iPhone was introduced, mobile technology has rapidly changed the way we interact with media. Children as young as 2 use tablets and phones—swiping, tapping and viewing to gain access to content. For today's youngest digital natives, digital tools are an integral part of their lives, used in fluid ways to explore their worlds. Technology is not SEPARATE but instead a PART of their lives, an important tool that helps them play, learn, socialize and engage.

Mobile interactive apps and games provide ample opportunities for children to move their bodies, learn, create digital masterpieces and explore everything and anything that captures their imagination. At the same time, in today's 24/7 digital environment, children can use media to make impulsive choices, view material that is not age appropriate or communicate inappropriately. The benefits are great but the risks must be mitigated.

When The Jim Henson Company asked me to be an advisor on preschool TV show “Dot,” I enthusiastically agreed. The show's creators wanted to embed digital citizenship lessons into each episode to help guide both children and parents to responsibly navigate technology.

The hope is that through Dot's experiences, children learn to harness the power of this interactive and informational medium in the most productive and pro-social manner. By starting to teach these digital citizenship skills early, parents can ensure that their children learn best practices and develop the skills they need to take advantage of the many opportunities that technology and media offer us.

Each episode features a learning theme—Making, Digital Citizenship, Critical Thinking, Collaboration and Teamwork, Empathy, and Perspective Taking—and integrates a STEAM (science, technology, engineering, the arts and math) curriculum.



A new cartoon show can help kids enjoy learning how to handle digital media.

Five ways to help your child become a Digital Citizen:

1. The most important thing is to model good behavior. This means think about your media use and what your children see you doing.

2. Find times when the whole family has no devices—dinner table, walks to school, hikes, sport games. The most important thing is that they learn there are times that are screen free—and that it is essential to build these into our day.

3. Pick your battles. If you don't want your teens to “unfriend” you or even worse create another page you won't know about, don't ask about every transgression and let a few things slide. Try saying a few positive things each day about their media use.

4. Live where they live. Remember, it's not just about social media...it's also about what they're watching, reading, and listening to. Common Sense Media is an amazing source for comprehensive information.

5. Look for teachable moments in the real world. You can use things that happen in real life to create stories that may resonate for teens. Bring them up in conversation. Often, kids' ears will perk up when they hear these stories.

About Dot

Dot is an 8-year-old inquisitive and exuberant tech-savvy girl who launches herself into adventures and fearlessly sets about solving problems by making mistakes and laughing even more along the way. Based on the book of the same title by best-selling author and text expert Randi Zuckerberg, “Dot.” airs weekly on Sprout and is streaming now on Hulu. Visit www.hensonfamilyhub.com.