



Here for young people
Here for communities
Here for you

The

Dignify

Parent Guide

Navigating Digital Life From 0-18

Your guide to resources, tips, and practical advice for talking about healthy relationships and digital resilience at every stage from birth to 18.

About This Guide:

At Dignify, we're here to help parents, carers and families feel confident — not judged — when it comes to digital life.

Whether your child is a toddler watching cartoons or a teen navigating group chats, this guide is designed to support you through every stage of the parenting journey. There is no one way to do things, and no perfect age when every child is ready for their first phone or social media account. But we are here to give you the tools to make thoughtful, informed decisions for your child and family.

Imagine a **big red button** with a sign that says **“Don’t press this.”** No explanation, no context – just a rule. For many children and teens, that kind of approach makes the button all the more tempting. Screens and smartphones are everywhere. Simply saying “No” without a conversation can backfire.

Instead, we hope this short guide will equip you to grow connection with your child, adapt your approach at each stage of development, develop healthy boundaries together, and make the most of the wider support available. **You are not alone on this journey!**

Page 2.....**Growing Connection:** Start With Conversations
Page 4.....**Digital Journey:** A Guide for 0-18
Page 6.....**Setting Boundaries:** Some Practical Tips
Page 8.....**Dignify Resources:** You Are Not Alone

For more resources and information, visit dignify.org

Growing Connection: Start With Conversations

Step 1: Prepare Yourself

These are tricky conversations for all of us, and there are a couple of things that can help set you up well

- Develop an understanding of online risks (Dignify’s 2024 Report), and how your child’s brain is wired (see parents.dignify.org)
- Set an intention to be unshockable and non-judgemental - this will help your child feel safe to share openly



Step 2: Model It

Children mirror their parents, and notice how adults use phones. Be the example you want them to follow. Asking them to charge their phone downstairs? Perhaps you could try the same.



Step 3: Normalise Empowering Conversations

Create natural opportunities for conversation (over dinner, or a walk)

100 one minute-long conversations are better than one 100 minute-long conversation. This isn’t about having the ‘one big talk’.

Start age appropriate conversations as early as you can - there is power in being the first to mention the tricky topics

Ask open, non-judgemental questions. Be curious.

- What do you think screens are for?
- What do you see your friends doing online?
- What did you think of that meme that was going around?
- What do you think are the upsides – and the risks online?

EARLY YEARS

PRIMARY

SECONDARY

**EARLY YEARS
(0-4)**

Modelling & Foundations

Key conversations/practices could be:

- Screens are for shared moments, not solo use
- Talk about what's real vs pretend
- Begin modelling healthy habits (e.g. no phones at dinner)

**KS1
(5-7)**

At this stage you can start normalising open conversations, even if they're not on big topics! Get used to using the proper names for body parts, and talking openly about love, friendships and respectful behaviour with others. Model and teach consent from an early age.

Supervised Exploration

Key conversations/practices could be:

- Talk about kindness online and offline
- Begin conversations about YouTube, gaming, and ads
- Introduce the idea of 'private' information

**KS2
(8-10)**

Key conversations/practices could be:

- Introduce the idea of 'safe' vs 'unsafe' online
- Talk about asking an adult before clicking or watching
- Set clear screen-time routines

Building Digital Awareness

**KS3
(11-13)**

Deciding when to give your child a phone isn't one-size-fits-all. Every family is different. Typically, this happens around early teens. Here are tips and conversation guides to help you navigate these digital milestones.

Key conversations/practices could be:

- Discuss group chats, peer pressure and screen time
- Begin age-appropriate conversations about online harms, body image and exposure to inappropriate content. Normalise mentions of porn and sexting
- Talk about what to do if they see something upsetting

First Phones and Social Pressures

X, Instagram, WhatsApp, Snapchat, TikTok, YouTube, Discord, Reddit, BeReal, Pinterest, Twitch, Roblox, Houseparty, Signal and Threads are all 13+ (Telegram is 16+)

13 is a key age requirement for most social media platforms

Independence and Risk Navigation

**KS4
(14-16)**

Key conversations/practices could be:

- Talk openly about sexting, nudes, and pornography
- Discuss consent, respect, and digital footprints
- Encourage critical thinking about online relationships

Digital Citizenship and Adult Prep

Key conversations/practices could be:

- Talk about managing digital identity (e.g. uni, jobs)
- Discuss online dating, scams & privacy
- Encourage them to support younger siblings or peers

17-18

Setting Boundaries: Some Practical Tips

Here are some tried-and-tested tips from parents across the UK:

1. Involve your child

- Let your child help shape the rules – it helps them feel respected and cultivates problem solving and ownership
- Review boundaries regularly; “How’s your phone use going?” ; “Anything you’d change?” Keep the door open.

2. Create a family agreement

- Write down shared expectations. Reduce the ‘them’ and ‘us’ by joining your children in the changes you’re making.

3. Teach choices and consequences

- Digital devices can offer freedom – but also responsibility. Plan for what you will do when boundaries are crossed
- Be proportionate and compassionate - it’s tricky for us all!

4. Set up parental controls

- Set up age-appropriate blockers and filters on devices, apps and WiFi. The NSPCC has some great guidance here.

5. Set screen time limits

- Decide a balance between offline and online activities
- Use apps to manage time on social media and games

6. Loan the phone

- From the outset of giving a smartphone make it clear that it’s yours (you pay the bills!), but on loan to them.
- This will make it easier for you to help set boundaries

7. Check the phone

- Create expectations that you will look at their phone, and check it regularly. This isn’t an invasion of their privacy, but a way of keeping them safe and sparking conversations

8. Delay social media

- Give thought to when and what Social Media platforms you allow - age requirements are there for a reason, and delaying access can be beneficial

9. Have phone-free zones

- Try keeping phones away from the any spaces where natural nudity occurs (bedrooms, bathrooms). Also consider the dinner table or homework spaces.

10. Phones out of bedrooms overnight

- Helps protect sleep, reduces late-night scrolling, and can protect from digital threats.
- “*But what about my alarm?*”
Simple: Buy an alarm clock!

Dignify believes we need a **whole-community approach** to help our children navigate their digital life. Here are some ways you can connect in and find support for you and your community.

Supporting Parents & Carers

Resources - visit parents.dignify.org

Workshops - email education@dignify.org

Dignify Parent & Carer Network - scan here:



Dignify For Schools & Youth Clubs

We offer workshops and resources for Primary, Secondary and Youth Groups. Our Survey gives young people (aged 13-18) a voice.

Would you consider introducing us to your school or youth group? Let's talk... email us on education@dignify.org



One YMCA Services

One YMCA offers a range of services for young people including family services, counselling, youth work and domestic violence support



Need More Support?

Here are trusted organisations offering practical advice, conversation starters, and tools to help you keep your child safe online — at every age:

NSPCC – Keeping Children Safe Online

- Guidance on online safety, sexting, and harmful content.

Internet Matters – Age-Specific Guidance

- Age-specific advice on screen time, gaming, and social media.

Childnet – Parent & Carer Toolkit

- Tools to start conversations, set boundaries, and stay informed.

CEOP Thinkuknow – Online Safety Education

- Resources to protect children from exploitation and abuse.

Smartphone Free Childhood

- Support for delaying smartphones (14) and social media (16).

