

11 Ways Your Kids Learn Using Technology

Two-year-olds using iPads, elementary schoolers hooked up to video games, the challenge of prying your middle-schooler away from the computer long enough to eat a decent meal... Technology is everywhere and its draw on kids is obvious, but can kids learn using technology?

Technology, says Larry Berger, executive director of Wireless Generation, is becoming more social, adaptive, and customized, and as a result it can be an amazing teaching tool. Now, programs are connecting kids in online learning communities, tracking kids' progress through lessons and games, and customizing each students' experience. So, before you press the off button, consider these eleven ways that you can maximize your child's technology time at home and at school.



Learning with Technology at Home

Whether you're passing back your touch-screen phone to your child, or your toddlers' preferred playtime is at the computer, here are eight ways to make sure your child's experiences with technology are educational and fun.

- **Focus on Active Engagement** Any time your child is engaged with a screen, says Shelley Pasnik, director of the Center for Children and Technology, ask questions. Stop a program, or mute the commercials, and ask engaging questions. What was that character thinking? Why did Clifford do that? What would you have done in that situation?
- **Allow for Repetition** DVDs and YouTube videos add an essential ingredient for young minds: repetition. Allow your young child to watch the same video over and over, and ask him what he noticed after each viewing.
- **Make it Tactile** Unlike computers that require a mouse to manipulate objects on the screen, new tablet computers allow kids manipulate "physical" objects with their fingers. Hands-on apps, like Montessorium, are good for young, tactile learners.
- **Practice Problem Solving** An emerging category of games will force your child to solve problems as he plays, building concentration and analytical skills in the process. Berger recommends games that kids have to figure out, such as Max and the Magic Marker or Crayon Physics. If your child is stuck, encourage him to find new ways to approach the problem.
- **Encourage Creation** Use technology for creation, not just entertainment. "Kids have so few opportunities to express their will or make choices," says Pasnik. Let your child record a story on your iPod, or sing a song into your video game system. Then, create a totally new sound using the playback options, slow down and speed up her voice and add different backgrounds and beats until she's created something uniquely her.
- **Show Him How to Use It** Many computer games have different levels and young children may not know how to move up or change levels. If your child is stuck on one level that's become too easy, ask if he knows how to move up and help him if he wants more of a challenge.
- **Ask Why** If your child is using an app or game the "wrong" way, always pressing the incorrect button, for example, ask her why. It may be that she likes hearing the noise the game makes when she gets the question wrong, or she might be stuck and can't figure out which group of objects match number four.
- **Focus on Play** Young kids should be exploring and playing with technology. "Bring a spirit of play," says Pasnik, "rather than a focus on drilling skills."

Learning with Technology at School

Schools are investing more and more in technology. Whether your child's class uses an interactive Smartboard, laptops, or another device, here are three ways to make sure that technology is used effectively.

- **Ask For Your Own Log-In** Often, school programs come with a parent log-in that will allow you to see your child's progress. If it doesn't, says Berger, "ask to see the reports that a teacher has access to." Then, check his progress every few months. It's a great way for you and your child to be on the same page about his progress.
- **Ask About Teacher Training** Technology is often implemented in classrooms without appropriate professional development. If your child's classroom is using a whole-class system, such as Clickers or an Interactive Smartboard, ask how it's used in class and what training the teacher has had. "As a parent," says Berger, "you want to know if teachers feel well trained and they're putting [new technologies] to good use."
- **Find Parent Resources** One of the best ways that technology can help your child is by helping you learn more about learning. Berger recommends the web site Freereading.net for information and lessons targeted at developing early reading skills.

Computers, smart phones, and tablets aren't going away, but with a few tweaks and consideration, you can make your child's technology-time productive, educational, and fun!