THE BRIGHT & DARK SIDE
OF THE DIGITAL WORLD
DIGITAL PARENTING

Connecting
for
GOOD

WHAT IS VODAFONE ALBANIA'S "DIGITAL PARENTING" INITIATIVE?

The digital world is a playground filled with endless possibilities, but just like any playground, it needs responsible guardians. That's where Vodafone's Digital Parenting initiative comes in. We believe parents are the superheroes when it comes to guiding their children's online adventures.

Imagine a world where your child can explore the wonders of the internet with confidence, learning and connecting safely. That's the vision behind Digital Parenting. We don't want to hand out rulebooks, but rather equip you with the knowledge and tools to navigate this exciting, yet sometimes complex, digital landscape.

Our goal is to empower you to create a safe and positive online environment for your child. We want them to reap the incredible benefits technology offers — from connecting with friends and family to unlocking a world of knowledge — while being aware of potential pitfalls.

Think of it as building a digital bridge together. We'll provide the support, resources, and expert advice, so you and your child can embark on a happy digital journey, exploring the vast possibilities the online world holds.

A new study by EU Kids Online reveals a significant increase in smartphone usage and internet time among European children compared to 2010. The report, which surveyed children aged 9-16 in 19 European countries, found that most children use their smartphones daily and spend between 2 to 3.5 hours online each day.**(eukids2020report_final.pdf (uio.no).**

While internet usage has soared, the study also highlights a concerning gap in online safety education. Many children haven't received any online safety advice from parents, teachers, or friends. Even when they experience negative situations online, they rarely seek help from professionals, typically turning to friends or family instead.

Vodafone's Digital Parenting initiative offers valuable insights into the digital landscape for youth. It highlights the need for improved online safety education and support systems for children navigating the online world.

Section 1 – Digital Dilemmas

From jargon busters to conversation starters, read our Parental Controls & Safety Settings Guide to learn even more about keeping your child safe online.

Section 1.1: Parental controls & safety settings checklist

1.   Is my child aware of how to use the internet safely?
Talking regularly to your child about some of the risks of being online can help them understand why parental controls and safety settings will help keep them safe. There is lots of information about some of the risks and opportunities children face online at **Vodafone's Digital**.

2.   Have we talked about setting boundaries as a family?

Sitting down as a family to agree on how technology should be used to help ensure everyone has a positive experience online can be incredibly helpful. This conversation could also cover how parental controls and safety settings will be used to help set boundaries. For example, setting screen time limits on devices will can family members to switch off before bedtime and support healthy sleeping habits.

3.   Am I using parental controls and safety settings in all the right places?
(see most popular below)

-          Broadband service provider e.g. Vodafone Broadband
-          Tablet or smartphone e.g. iPhone
-          Games console e.g. Xbox
-          Game e.g. Minecraft
-          Search engine e.g. Google
-          Video streaming service e.g. Netflix

4.   Do I know what apps or games are age-appropriate for my child?

Check the age rating for games by looking for their PEGI rating. With apps such as social media platforms, you can find out the age rating in their community guidelines.

It can also be helpful to research the apps or games your child wants to use to decide for yourself if they are age appropriate. The Digital Parenting resource can help you find out what the age restrictions are for some of the most popular apps, games and devices.

5.   Am I having the right conversations with my child about being safe online?

By talking to your child about the benefits and challenges of using technology, it can help you understand what experiences they are having. Creating a safe space for them to feel comfortable opening up to you about their digital lives is key.

Here are some conversation starters:

Ask them what they enjoy doing online and if there is anything that they don't like or find upsetting!
Tip: Approach the conversation positively with interest and listen as much as possible

Ask them what issues their friends come across online!
Tip: Children often find it easier to talk about issues others might be having. Subject prompts – online bullying, scams, excessive screen time, seeing upsetting content, coming across nasty comments or people.

Ask them what more you could be doing as a family to make their experience online happy and healthy!
Tip: This is an opportunity to praise what they are already doing and bring some solutions to the table.

Section 1.2: Parental controls Jargon Buster

Common terms you may come across when reading information about parental controls and safety settings.

Section 2 – Tech Tools & Apps

Information about parental control apps, safety features built into devices, and educational apps for kids.

Section 2.1: Child's first phone: How to tell if your kid is mature enough

There is no one-size-fits-all answer to the question of when a child is ready for a smartphone but the research suggests that it's important to consider the child's age and developmental stage. While the evidence on the impact of smartphones on children is still developing, there's no doubt they are becoming increasingly common. Here's a look at smartphone ownership rates in some regions:

• **Europe:** A study of 19 European countries found 80% of children aged 9 to 16 used one to go online daily, or almost daily.

• **UK**: By age 11, 91% of children in the UK own a smartphone, according to data from the country's communications regulator, Ofcom.

• **US:** recent survey data suggests 42% of US children have a smartphone by the age of 10, with 91% owning one by 14.

On the one hand, smartphones can be a valuable tool for communication, social connection, and information access. They can also help children feel more independent and secure.

On the other hand, there are also potential risks associated with smartphone use, such as cyberbullying, social comparison, and addiction. Children may be particularly vulnerable to these risks during certain developmental phases, such as puberty.

Section 2.2: 6 Questions for parents and kids before you buy their first smartphone

FOR PARENTS:

1.   MATURITY AND RESPONSIBILITY: Can my child handle the phone responsibly? This includes following rules, managing time effectively, and making good choices online.

European studies emphasize the importance of cognitive development and self-regulation before introducing smartphones. This aligns with their emphasis on cognitive development and self-regulation.

Cognitive Development: The Digital media exposure and cognitive functioning in European children and adolescents of the I. Family study highlights the importance of a well-developed prefrontal cortex for good decision-making, impulse control, and managing distractions. These skills are still under development in younger children, making them more susceptible to online risks and excessive screen time. Smartphone exposure and Media multitasking (MMT) are associated with higher cognitive inflexibility, suggesting that the digital environment may adversely impact youth's ability to smoothly shift between tasks.

Self-regulation involves managing emotions, attention, and behavior. A child who struggles with self-regulation might have difficulty following phone use rules, limiting screen time, or resisting inappropriate online content.

Children and adolescents may be particularly vulnerable to digital stress because the neuronal myelination and synaptic pruning within the parietal and prefrontal cortex (areas related to attention control and delayed reinforcement) are not fully developed, leading to compromised emotional-regulation and reduced control of impulses.

By waiting until your child shows stronger cognitive development and self-regulation skills, you can help them navigate the complexities of smartphone use more effectively.

2.   DIGITAL LITERACY: Does my child understand online safety basics like cyberbullying, stranger danger, and responsible online behavior?

Imagine your child venturing into a giant, exciting playground for the first time. It's filled with wonder, but also potential dangers. The EU's Safer Internet Centre (SIC) recognize that different aged children need different approaches.

For young ones, simple explanations with relatable examples and positive reinforcement might be used. Games and interactive activities could help younger children learn about stranger danger and treating others online with kindness. It's like teaching them not to talk to strangers by using scenarios they understand. They also learn about being kind online, just like they would be kind on the real playground.

As your child gets older, more complex discussions about cyberbullying, online privacy, and responsible behavior could be undertaken. It's like teaching them to be critical thinkers, able to spot scams and fake information online.

But online safety isn't just about avoiding dangers. You want your child to be a good digital citizen, treating others with respect and being mindful of what they share. It's like learning the golden rule of online playgrounds!

3.   OPEN COMMUNICATION: Am I comfortable having open conversations about their online activity and any issues they might encounter?

A European study on the impact of parent-child communication on children's digital behaviour and online safety, conducted by Dias et al. (2016), highlights the significant role parents play in guiding their children's engagement with digital technologies. This study, which includes perspectives from parents in various countries, emphasizes that open and effective communication between parents and children is crucial for fostering safe and responsible online behaviour.

The study emphasis on open communication in healthy child development perfectly aligns with talking openly about your child's digital life.

Strong Parent-Child Relationships: The document highlights the importance of secure parent-child bonds. Open communication about online activity strengthens this connection by fostering trust and creating a space for open dialogue.

Early Intervention: By talking openly (under 8 years old), parents can identify problems like cyberbullying or inappropriate content early on. This allows for guidance and intervention before issues become more serious.

Healthy Development: The document emphasizes healthy development across all aspects of a child's life. Open communication about online activity ensures their digital world is safe and supportive, promoting overall well-being.

It's about creating a safe space where your child feels comfortable discussing anything they encounter online, positive, or negative.

Here's how you might approach this open communication:
- **Start Early:** Even with younger children, talk about online safety and kindness. Lay the groundwork for future conversations.
- **Initiate Conversations:** Don't wait for problems to arise. Casually ask about their online activities, who they talk to, and what games they play.
- **Be Approachable:** Create a judgment-free zone where they feel comfortable confiding in you about any issues they might face online.
- **Listen Actively:** Pay attention to their concerns and avoid interrupting. Show genuine interest in their online world.
- **Focus on Solutions:** Work together to find solutions to problems. Offer guidance and support without being overly restrictive

FOR KIDS:

4.   NEEDS VS. WANTS: Why do I really want a smartphone? Is it for safety and communication, connecting with friends, or entertainment?

Imagine your child is eyeing a shiny smartphone, longing to join the digital world their friends seem to inhabit. Parents knows this feeling, but they also want to ensure that desire stems from a genuine need, not just fleeting wants.

Here's how the EU's Safer Internet Centre (SIC) might approach this situation

STEP 1: SPARKING REFLECTION

You don't have to bombard your child with statistics or simply ask "Why?". Instead, they'd encourage open-ended questions like, "What superpowers do you think a smartphone could give you?" or "How would having a phone change your adventures?" This playful approach helps your child explore their motivations.

STEP 2: NEEDS VS. WANTS DETECTIVE

Together, you and your child can become detectives, figuring out the real reason behind the phone wish. Is it a **need** for safety and staying connected with family? Perhaps a simple phone for calls and texts could be the answer. Or maybe a safety app on a non-smartphone could address that concern.

STEP 3: FRIEND CONNECTION MISSION

If the main reason is staying connected with friends, studies would encourage **exploring alternative ways to achieve that mission**. Could they chat with friends on a tablet with messaging apps, or maybe have supervised computer time for video calls?

STEP 4: ENTERTAINMENT QUEST

If the phone seems like a giant entertainment portal, the SIC would suggest an alternate adventure. Maybe there are exciting books waiting to be devoured, board games to conquer with the family, or a new hobby to explore. The goal is to ensure the phone isn't the only source of entertainment.

STEP 5: ALIGNING WITH GROWTH

The SIC understands that children's brains are still developing, and sometimes later is better. They might suggest focusing on other important skills first, like building strong friendships face-to-face or exploring the wonders of the real world.

By following these steps, the SIC empowers parents to have open conversations that go beyond a simple "yes" or "no" to phone ownership. It's about understanding your child's motivations and finding solutions that nurture their growth and well-being in the digital world.

5.   **DIGITAL WELLBEING:** **How will I manage my screen time and make sure the phone doesn't become a distraction from other activities?**

Imagine this: you and your child are explorers venturing into a new land — the exciting, but sometimes overwhelming, world of smartphones. European psychologists, want to help you both navigate this new territory and ensure it doesn't distract from all the other incredible adventures waiting for you.

Setting Up Camp: Age Matters

Just like younger explorers need more supervision, younger children might need stricter limits on screen time. This allows them to focus on building important skills like playing creatively and interacting with the real world. As your child gets older, you can adjust the "screen time campfire" — allowing for more freedom but always keeping safety and responsible use in mind.

Planning the Journey: Prioritizing Activities

Think of your day like a treasure map. Let's mark down "must-do" activities first: homework, playtime, spending time with family, and getting enough sleep. These are the gold nuggets of your adventure, and screen time can't overshadow them! We can even create tech-free zones, like your bedroom at night, to ensure these precious moments aren't interrupted.

Learning by Example: Be a Role Model

Remember, you're the captain of this digital exploration! If you're constantly buried in your phone, your child might think screen time is always the most important treasure. Let's show them the value of balance by putting down our phones during meals, family time, and even exploring the wonders of the real world together.

Getting Help from the Tools: Parental Controls

Think of parental controls as a handy compass and map. They can help us set healthy screen time limits, navigate away from areas that might not be safe, and keep an eye on the digital path your child is taking. But remember, these tools are there to support you on your journey, not replace open communication.

Discovering New Territories: Alternatives to Screens

The digital world is vast, but it's not the only one! Let's explore other exciting territories together. Maybe we can try a new sport, learn a cool musical instrument, create masterpieces with paint and clay, or embark on backyard adventures. There's a whole world of fun waiting to be discovered, and it doesn't involve a screen!

By following these tips from European psychologists, you and your child can create healthy digital habits. You'll ensure their smartphone is a tool for exploration, not a distraction, and that all the amazing adventures life has to offer are never put on hold. Remember, the most valuable treasures on this journey are the memories you create together, both online and off!

6.   OPENNESS TO RULES: Am I prepared to follow reasonable rules about phone use, like screen time limits, app restrictions, and bedtime phone curfews?

Here's how to approach your kid based on the European Society for Cognitive and Developmental Psychology principles:

a)   Open Communication is Key
- **Start a Conversation:** Instead of simply imposing rules, initiate a conversation about phone use. Ask your child "What are your thoughts about phone rules?" or "How do you feel about screen time limits?"
- **Listen Actively:** Pay attention to their concerns and avoid interrupting. This fosters a safe space for open dialogue.

b)   Collaborative Approach
- **Discuss Needs and Concerns:** Talk about your concerns regarding excessive screen time and potential distractions. Also, explore their needs for using the phone (communication, entertainment).
- **Brainstorm Solutions Together:** Work together to create phone use rules that address both your concerns and their needs. This fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility.

c)   Focus on Developmental Benefits
- **Explain the "Why" Behind Rules:** Help your child understand that rules are in place to support their development. Screen time limits can help them get enough sleep for healthy growth, and app restrictions might protect them from inappropriate content.
- **Highlight Alternatives:** Discuss alternative ways to fulfill their needs. Suggest hobbies, outdoor activities, or spending quality time with family to replace excessive screen time.

Here's how you might use this approach in a conversation:

-YOU: "Hey [Child's Name], I wanted to talk about phone use. Lately, it seems like you're spending a lot of time on your phone. How do you feel about that?"

-CHILD: "Sometimes I get bored, and my phone is fun."

-YOU: "I understand. Phones can be fun, but there are other ways to have fun too. Also, too much screen time can make it hard to sleep. What are your thoughts on setting some phone use rules?"

-CHILD: "Maybe, but I don't want to miss out on talking to friends."

-YOU: "That's a good point. We can figure out rules that allow you to stay connected but also make sure you get enough sleep and have time for other activities. What ideas do you have?"

By following these steps, you can create phone use rules with your child that are based on open communication, address developmental needs, and promote responsible phone use, aligning perfectly with the principles of the ESCDP.

Section 2.3: Choosing a phone for your child

Here's a breakdown on finding a child's first phone according to European recommendations, which prioritize responsible use and align with the focus of the EU's Safer Internet Centre (SIC):

1. **CONSIDER THE NEED AND TIMING:**

   - **Later Introduction:** European psychologists generally advocate for a later introduction of smartphones. This ensures a child's cognitive development and self-regulation skills are well-established before navigating the complexities of a smartphone.
   - **Needs vs. Wants:** Reflect on your child's motivations for wanting a phone. Is it a genuine need for safety and communication, or more about entertainment? Explore alternative solutions like basic phones or supervised computer use if communication is the primary concern.

2. **PRIORITIZE SAFETY AND PARENTAL CONTROL:**

   - **EU Safety Standards:** Look for phones that comply with EU safety standards for radiation emission, especially important for younger children.
   - **Operating System:** Consider operating systems with built-in parental controls. Both Android and iOS offer robust parental control features to manage screen time, app restrictions, and content filtering.
   - **Durability:** Given children's active lifestyles, a phone with a sturdy build and a protective case is recommended.

3. **FOCUS ON FUNCTIONALITY OVER FEATURES:**

   - **Simple Interface:** For younger children, a phone with a straightforward and user-friendly interface is ideal. This reduces confusion and allows them to focus on essential functions like calling and texting.
   - **Limited Features:** Avoid phones with excessive features that can be distracting or overwhelming for younger users. Prioritize functionality over high-end cameras, extensive gaming capabilities, or complex app stores.

4.   RESOURCES AND CONSIDERATIONS:

- **Mobile Network Providers:** European mobile network providers often offer phone packages specifically designed for children. These might include limited data plans, parental control features, and content filtering options.

- **Vodafone** is particularly good for a First Mobile phone as the network is a truly global one and beautifully solid and reliable. And if you are going abroad, you are likely to find a Vodafone core network in many countries as well as the in the UK. so even if your Child's Vodafone SIM can't connect to Vodafone abroad in Europe, then it will find one of our other network partners.

- **Consumer Reports:** Refer to trusted consumer reports or resources from the EU's Safer Internet Centre (SIC) for recommendations on child-friendly phones that meet safety and functionality criteria.

Vodafone: Connecting People and Protecting Children in a Digital World

Technology is woven into the fabric of our lives, especially for young people who seamlessly navigate both online and offline worlds. At Vodafone, we see the incredible potential of digital tools to empower people.

However, we also recognize the importance of protecting children in this digital landscape. As UNICEF highlights, children can be especially vulnerable online. That's why Vodafone is committed to upholding children's rights throughout our operations.

We actively support children and parents in becoming responsible digital citizens. This means providing up-to-date guidance and fostering open conversations about safe and responsible online behavior.

Our dedication to these principles has been recognized. In 2023, the Global Child Forum named Vodafone a leader in their benchmark report, placing us among the top 10 companies globally for our commitment to children's rights.

Children's Rights: https://www.unicef.org.uk

Respecting the Digital Rights of the Child: https://www.ctfassets.net

Together, we can create a safe and enriching digital experience for everyone.

Budget: Set a realistic budget for your child's first phone. Remember, the focus should be on responsible use and communication, not high-end features.

Here are some additional points to consider:

- **Open Communication:** Maintain open communication with your child about phone use. Discuss expectations, responsible behavior online, and potential risks.
- **Focus on Digital Wellbeing:** Promote healthy digital habits by encouraging alternative activities, setting screen time limits, and emphasizing responsible online behavior.