

# Creating A Safe and Loving Walled Garden of Online Learning: Tips for Promoting Healthy App Use with Parents and Caregivers

It's evident that the grownups in a child's life play a crucial role in keeping their kids safe and nurtured online. Guiding families in helping their children navigate the digital world responsibly is a significant responsibility, but it's also imperative in a quickly digitizing world. By assisting families to make healthy, safe, and informed decisions about assessing content and choosing the apps their children can engage with, we give caregivers an important tool for parenting, bonding, and playing with their children.

As parents or other grownups in a child's life, everyone wants to do what is best for their children. However, when it comes to safe app use, many families are unsure what safety is or how to ensure their kids' success. **Here are some tips from librarians at the Urban Libraries Council about navigating the world of apps appropriately with young children:**

## 1 Safety first!

ULC and Google Play have teamed up to provide a [curated list of Teacher Approved apps](#) that are safe for kids and help ensure literacy success. Helping families understand their goals for using apps is a critical first step. Are they choosing sites for education? For play? When helping older kids use apps, encourage parental monitoring of contacts, friends, and online communities. Setting parental limits, such as parent settings and enabling privacy settings, is crucial. By limiting access to the rest of the Internet, you are creating a safer environment and a veritable "walled garden of learning." This not only ensures safety but also lets your child know they are cared for in this part of their world.

## 2 Prioritize educational content.

Let children know you are looking for apps that promote healthy learning. Look for apps rich in literacy, math, or [21st-century skill](#) building and tell the child why this is critical. A trusted place to start is using curated lists such as the apps list co-created by ULC and Google.

## 3 Check for age appropriateness and interactive learning.

Select apps designed specifically for your child's age and developmental level. Look for educational apps that are engaging and interactive and foster learning through play. Avoid apps that are passive for the learner or that promote violent or inappropriate content.

## 4 Watch the clock.

Limit screen time according to age-appropriate guidelines. The [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) recommends no more than one hour of high-quality screen time per day for children aged 2 to 5. Adults can also help children manage time limits by setting an alarm or creating time-bound routines. "You can play with this game until I'm done washing the dishes."

## 5 Play together!

[Play](#) is critical for early development, and playing together—in any way—can help develop great bonds and attachments. Emphasize the importance of parents/caregivers and children playing together when using digital apps. Some ways parents can be involved include playing together and discussing the content as they play. Use prompts and ask questions to help the child understand and reflect on what they're learning. If they are playing a game, encourage them and make sure they feel confident.

## 6 Talk it out.

Choosing and using apps can be a great conversation starter. Be sure to discuss what is happening on the screen and in the app. Help parents model their inquisitiveness with the app and talk about what the child likes, dislikes, is learning, or wishes they had.

## 7 Create a Family Media Plan.

The American Academy of Pediatrics offers a robust tool, the [Family Media Plan](#), to help families articulate and prioritize their wishes for children's digital learning. The Media Plan allows families to articulate how online learning can benefit their children's education and help them grow and flourish.

## 8 Use a Family Media Contract.

A [family media contract](#) can be signed to help you and your child agree to what they are allowed to do while using an app. This media contract is designed to hold even your 3-year-old accountable for using apps safely.

