

GAMING - BULLYING - SOCIAL MEDIA - MENTAL HEALTH - FRIENDSHIPS

THE PARENT HANDBOOK

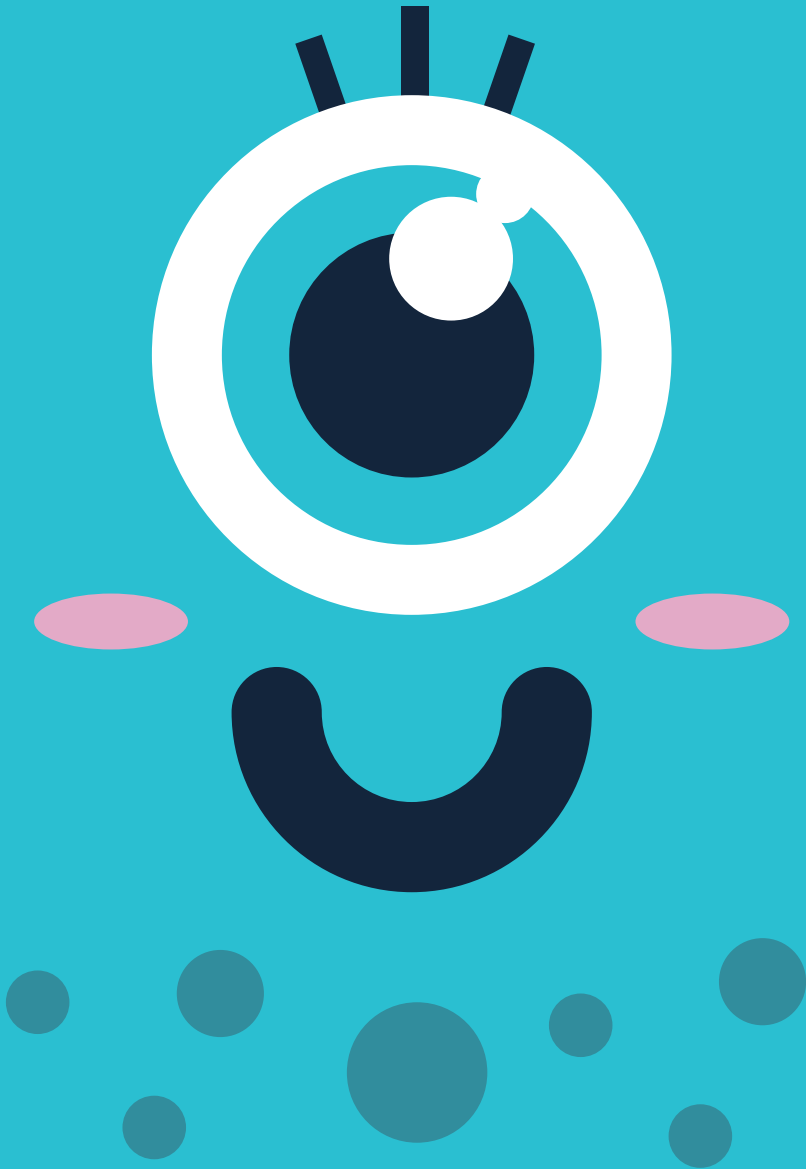
 **operationparent**



STANDARD EDITION



ELEMENTARY SCHOOL





operationparent

**Our mission is to love and support parents by
providing real world information, connection,
and hope.**

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**HANDBOOK
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Thank you for taking the time to read this handbook!

We hope these elementary years are super fun and exciting for you and your child.

Our mission at Operation Parent is to love and support you on your parenting journey. We believe the information in this parent handbook can help you stay two steps ahead of potential issues that could pull your child off track.

We recognize that the world our kids are growing up in has its challenges. Pandemics, cell phones, social media, deadly drugs, 24/7 world events – all contribute to rising levels of anxiety for parents and their children.

But when parents and caregivers have the right resource at the right time, when they know they are not alone, and part of a larger community who face the same challenges, then good things happen. Good things such as prevention, connection, resilience, and joy.

Reading through this handbook, you will raise your awareness.

You will raise your confidence.

And you will raise an awesome soon-to-be middle schooler! Yikes!

You've got this,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jean Schumm', with a stylized, cursive font.

Jean Schumm

Founder

Operation Parent

you've
got this!



The background features a large, vibrant orange shape on the left side, which curves into a teal shape on the right. The teal shape is composed of several overlapping, rounded forms, creating a layered, organic effect. The overall composition is clean and modern, with a strong color palette of orange and teal.

A Call to Parents



“First and foremost, we need to be the adults we want our children to be.”

-Brené Brown



Beginning the Journey

Start your journey off on the right foot...

Understand your role as the parent.

Your job is to PROTECT. Don't be afraid to do your job. They need to know you will keep them safe. Your role is not to be your child's "friend". They will have plenty of friends, but right now they need YOU to love and protect them.

Think with the end in mind.

In other words, remember, you are not really raising a child... you are raising an adult. Now is the time to teach them to be accountable, dependable, and responsible.

Be a positive role model.

Right now, you are the center of your child's life. This won't last forever so be intentional with your words and deeds, because they need you to be their number one hero.

Set boundaries.

Nothing says “I love you” like setting boundaries. Help your child learn that rules are a part of life and help keep everyone safe. Start by establishing a set bedtime, limiting computer time, and banning cell phones during meals.

Don't go it alone.

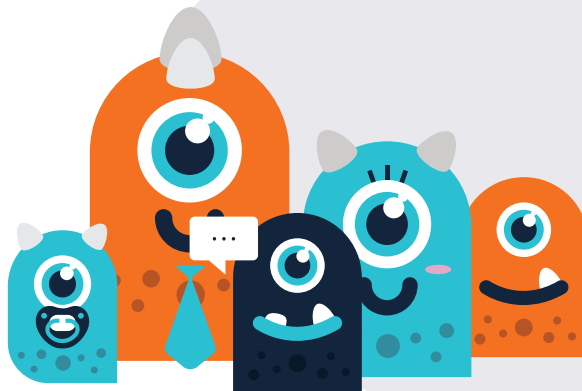
It's never a good idea to travel alone! This is true for parenting, too. Get to know the parents of your child's friends. Befriend other parents, too, because it takes a village of engaged parents to keep kids safe today.

Talk to your child's teacher.

Ask how your child is doing in school and see if there is anything you can do to help your child grow and learn. Teachers love to discover that you are interested in your child's school life!

Give yourself a break.

At some point you will stress out, be overwhelmed, lose your temper, or just plain blow it. When everything goes wrong: stop, take a deep breath, give yourself a break, and go back to being the best parent you can be.



Your Parental Responsibilities

What Are Your Parental Responsibilities?

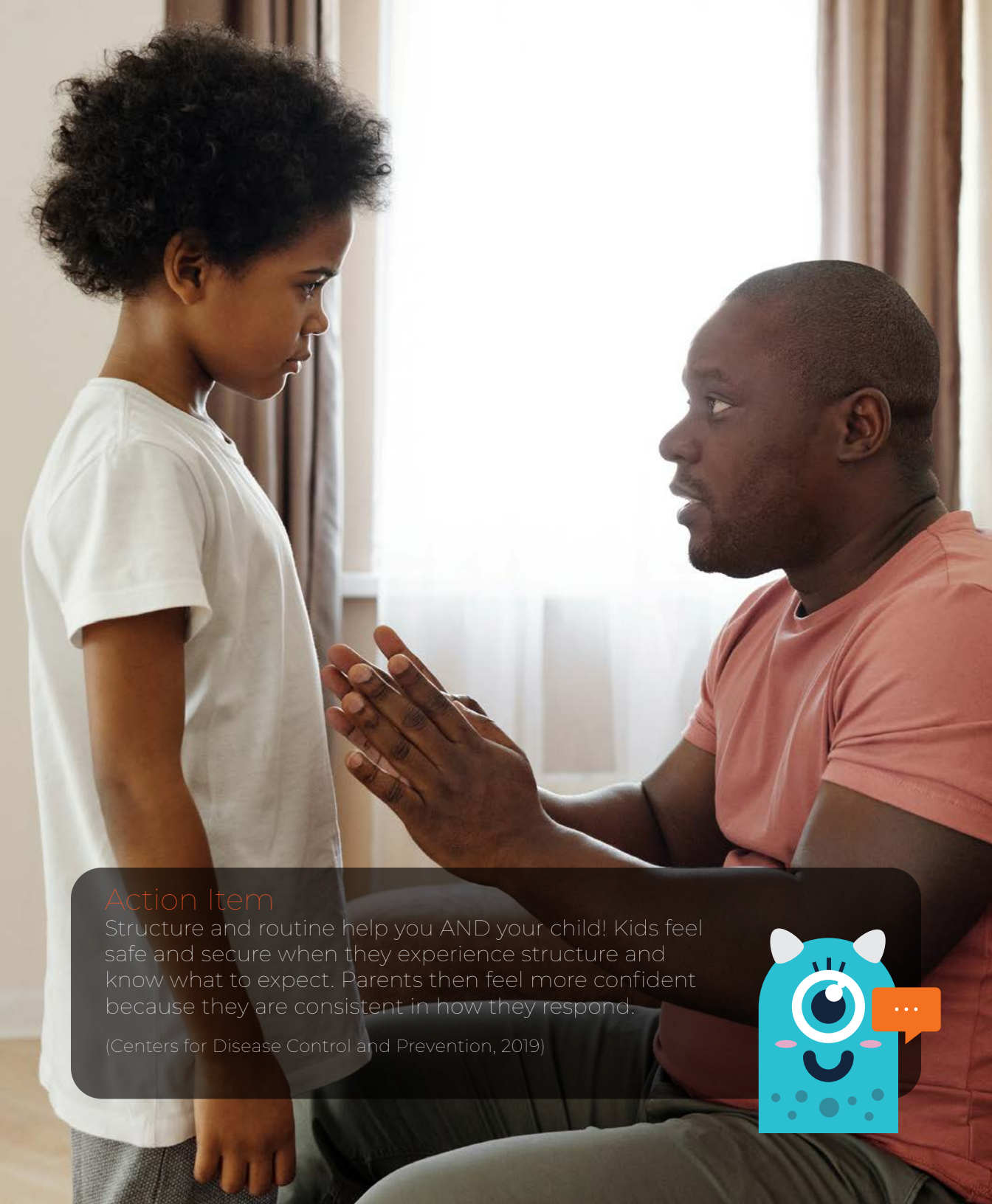
Sometimes it can be hard to know exactly what your child needs from you. Social media and popular culture often make it more confusing by presenting a skewed image of what your relationship with your child should look like. So what are your responsibilities as a parent?

You are responsible for:

- Providing the basic necessities of life: food, clothing, housing, education, and health and dental care.
- Helping your child learn and grow so they can be more independent.
- Setting limits for your child and holding them accountable with appropriate consequences.
- Helping your child do their best at school by getting adequate rest, a healthy breakfast each morning, and making homework and reading a priority.

You are not responsible for:

- Making sure that your child is always happy (help them be successful, independent, and resourceful instead).
- Winning a parenting popularity contest (Help your child do their best, and don't worry about everybody else).

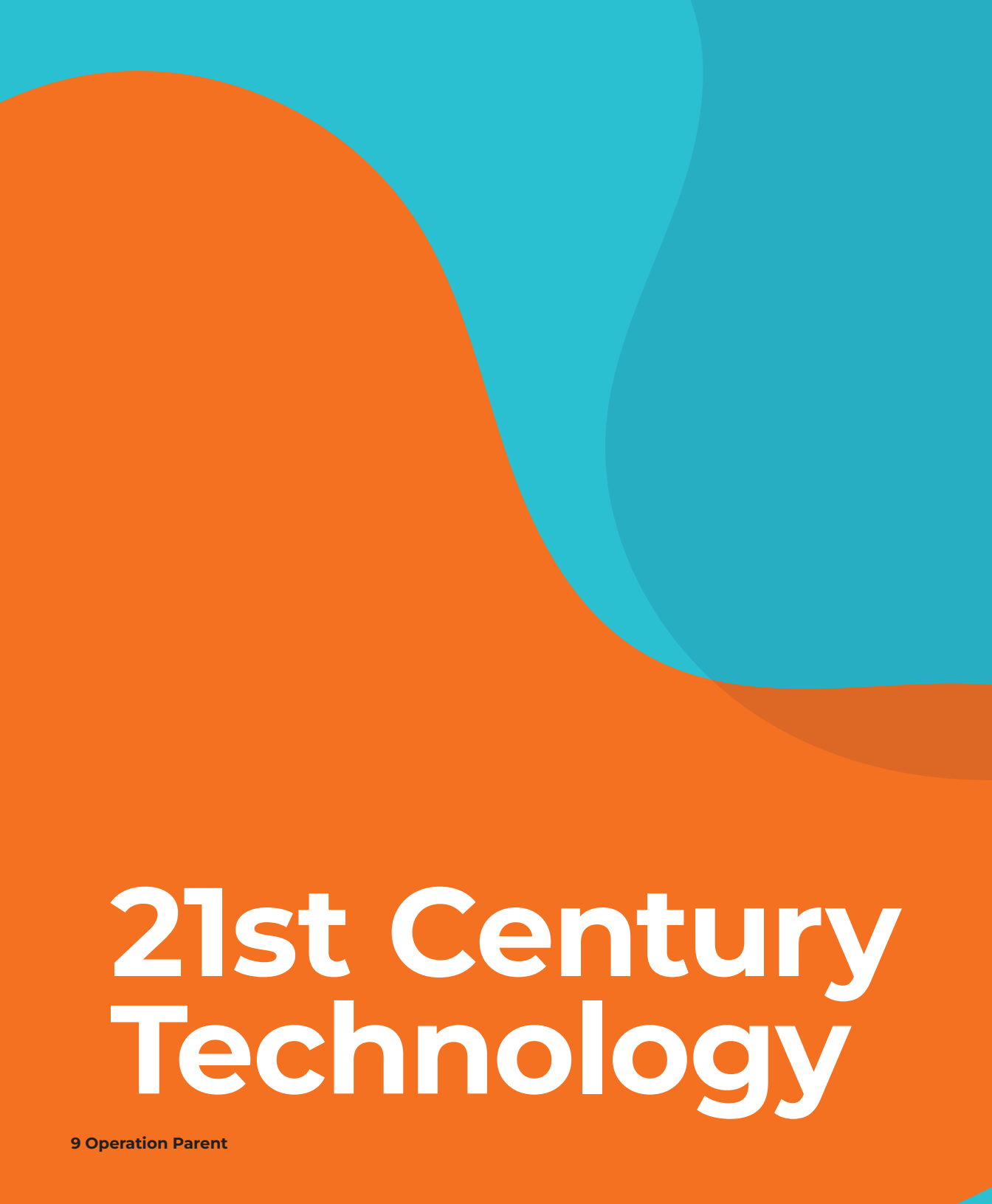


Action Item

Structure and routine help you AND your child! Kids feel safe and secure when they experience structure and know what to expect. Parents then feel more confident because they are consistent in how they respond.

(Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019)





21st Century Technology



Did you know?

YOU ARE NOT ALONE!

66% of U.S. parents say parenting is harder now than ever, and many blame technology!

(Auxier, Anderson, Perrin, & Turner, 2020)



Cell Phones

Does your child have a cell phone? Technology can be a wonderful tool for you and your kiddos! But it can also cause lots of problems when unleashed without boundaries. As you begin to raise your “digitally responsible” elementary-aged student, remember that a cell phone, iPad, or gaming system puts the entire world at their fingertips. Pornography, toxic websites, and predators are less than three clicks away, so here are some important tips for keeping your child safe in today’s high-tech world.

When to get your child a cell phone is a personal decision based on need and your child’s maturity. If you believe it is time for a cell phone, the Bark phone is a great first smartphone and includes location alerts, built-in text and social media monitoring as well as tamper-proof parameters for screentime.

KNOW YOUR CHILD’S PASSWORD/PASSCODE. Parents, you have the right to check your child’s phone! This is to keep them safe, and to prevent unhealthy tech use. Let them know that you will be monitoring them and their cell phone use.

Set up a Parent/Child Cell Phone Agreement (sample on page 57). No more power struggle! This will help clearly define the rules, as well as the consequences for breaking the rules. Having a structured agreement helps children know the expectations, and helps parents know what to do when they are not met.

Be aware of pre-loaded apps on your child’s phone. You might need to delete many of those! (Web Browser, YouTube, social media, etc.)

Did you know?

There are amazing devices (phones, watches, apps) that make safer tech possible for your child with features like, parent managed contacts, GPS tracking, and tamper proof parental controls. These are a great way to introduce your child to responsible technology use under your control.

(Our faves: Bark phone and Gabb watch)



Action Item

Make it a rule in your house that all digital equipment gets charged in your bedroom at night. Studies suggest older children that sleep with phones in their rooms are at greater risk for poor sleep quality.

(The American Academy of Pediatrics, 2016)



Social Media

Did you know the recommended age for most popular social media sites is 13?

This is due to the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (since these apps collect so much personal information). These sites also tend to be unsafe places for kids and young teens. These popular social media sites do ask users to confirm their age when setting up an account, but of course this guardrail is easy to get around. According to The Common Sense Census, 38% of 8–12-year-olds have used social media. (Common Sense Media, 2021)

Set up all online accounts together. This will help you know their usernames and passwords, set up parental controls, and have

conversations about healthy and appropriate online behavior.

Not all social media sites have privacy settings. Stay away from those that don’t! **Without privacy settings, you cannot control who views your child’s account.** Operation Parent suggests NO “public accounts” at this age!

Talk to your child about never sharing personal information: full name, address, phone number, age, location, geotagged photos, etc. Also explain the importance of keeping their passwords between you and them. Many young people share passwords with friends as a sign of affection and/or trust. Explain why this is risky.

Popular Social Media requires user to confirm age as 13+

YouTube 

Facebook 

Instagram 

 (Twitter)

Snapchat 

TikTok 

Discuss with your child the importance of only “friending” people online who are known personally. **Periodically sit with your child and scan through their list of “friends” together.** Help your child understand that people they may come across online are not always who they appear to be,

and they should never agree to meet them in person!

Don't blindly trust parental controls. Check in periodically to see how the devices are being used, and that those controls have not been tampered with.

Gaming

Research games before you buy! What will the game teach your child? Game ratings are a good place to start (see pg. 17).


Find games you can play as a family and turn these activities into precious bonding time. Taking an interest in your child's online activities can go a long way! Use their interest to spark conversation and teachable moments. "Why is this your favorite game?" "Are you playing with anyone else?"

Many gaming systems can connect to the Internet and have built-in capabilities for chatting with other gamers and sharing videos. Your child might be exposed to offensive language, sexual content, and bullying behavior while playing an otherwise "safe"

game. Many systems allow you to disable these functions, but don't rely too much on these controls to keep your child away from harmful content.

It's very important to continue to monitor their online gaming activity with your own eyes and ears.

Setting limits for your child's time on games is vital. Kids can easily become consumed by video games. The Child Mind Institute recommends no more than 60 minutes of gaming on school days, and no more than 2 hours a day on weekends. (Petry, 2019)



For helpful webinars on technology, check out [operationparent.com/webinars!](https://www.operationparent.com/webinars)

Helpful Resource:

Common Sense Media is an amazing online resource to learn about games, movies, shows and music before deciding if it's age appropriate for your child.

Visit [commonsensemedia.com](https://www.commonsensemedia.com) today!

Action Item

If you decide to purchase a game console for your child, set it up yourself. Then you can choose the best settings (i.e. privacy, purchasing, friending/chatting, etc.).



ESRB Rating*

Basic Guide

ESRB ratings provide information about what's in a game or app so parents and consumers can make informed choices about which games are right for their family. Ratings have 3 parts: Rating Categories, Content Descriptors, and Interactive Elements.

**



Has content that may be suitable for persons ages 3 and older. Contains no material that parents would find inappropriate.

**



May be suitable for persons ages 6 and older. Titles in this category may contain minimal cartoon, fantasy or mild violence and/or infrequent use of mild language.



Has content that may be suitable for ages 10 and older. Titles in this category may contain more cartoon, fantasy or mild violence, mild language, and/or minimal suggestive themes.

****Safest option for elementary aged kids**



Has content that may be suitable for ages 13 and older. Titles in this category may contain violence, suggestive themes, crude humor, minimal blood, simulated gambling, and/or infrequent use of strong language.



Has content that may be suitable for persons ages 17 and older. Titles in this category may contain intense violence, blood and gore, sexual content, and/or strong language.



Has content that should only be played by persons 18 years and older. Titles in this category may include prolonged scenes of intense violence and/or graphic sexual content and nudity. Microsoft does not support AO titles.



Has been submitted to the ESRB and are awaiting final rating. This symbol appears only in advertising prior to a game's release.

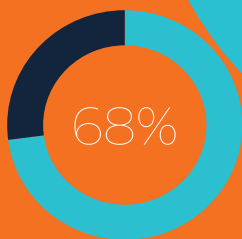
*ESRB: Entertainment Software Rating Board

operationparent.org 18

Healthy Tech Habits

Model healthy digital behavior. Your child is observing how you use technology and will learn far more from your actions than from your words.

Take the time to understand the technology that is in your home and that your child is using. Educating yourself will help keep your child safer, allow you to better engage with your child, and get the most out of the technology.



Roughly seven-in-ten parents (**68%**) say they are sometimes distracted by their smart-phone, with **17%** saying this happens often.

(Auxier, Anderson, Perrin, & Turner, 2020)

Are you on your cell phone constantly?

Are you texting and driving?

What are you posting online?

What does your child have access to when they borrow your phone or sit down with your tablet?

What is on your phone and computer?

What apps are you using?

Set boundaries for your family.

Video chatting must be done within parent's view.

No cell phones during family meals.

**Set a limit on gaming
<60 minutes on a school night is suggested.**

No TVs in the bedroom.

All digital devices are charged in parent or guardian's bedroom every night.

Conversation is Key!

Ask your child what their favorite sites are and what apps they love the most!

Then make sure you check the privacy settings periodically. Using a parent/child cell phone or social media agreement is great for jumpstarting a conversation with your child. Together you can set guidelines, discuss what is appropriate, and promote safety (see page 57 for sample).

***Remember:** these are ongoing discussions you will need to have through middle and high school too. Your child will make mistakes.

BE THEIR SAFE PERSON who doesn't freak out when they come to you needing help.

Helpful Conversation Starters:

Phones

“What friends would you like to talk to/text?”

“Do you know not to talk to/text with people you do not know?”

“Let’s talk about how we are going to limit our phone usage together!”

“Do you understand why we have limits to what you can and cannot do on your phone?”

“Sometimes people are mean to each other online. What would you do if you saw someone being bullied?”

“Some apps are not appropriate for your age, but we can discuss this more as you grow.”

Gaming

“Tell me why you’re so into this game.”

“Can I watch you play?” or “Can you teach me how to play?”

“Do you play with anyone I don’t know?”

“Do you understand why I limit your screentime?”

“What other hobbies do you enjoy?” “Can we do any of those together?”



The background features a large orange shape on the left and a teal shape on the right, both with rounded, organic edges. The text is centered in the lower half of the image.

Alcohol, Nicotine & Drugs



Did you know?

The younger a child starts alcohol or drug use, the higher the risk for serious health consequences and adult substance abuse.

(NIH, 2023)



Too Early to Talk About Drugs & Alcohol?

Although it seems scary, it's not too early to talk to your elementary age child about the dangers of alcohol and drugs. Kids as young as nine start to view alcohol more positively, and over 3,000 kids as young as 12 try marijuana each day! The earlier you start these conversations with your child, the better! (SAMHSA, 2022)

THE GOOD NEWS! – YOUR INFLUENCE MATTERS!

Your child is constantly exposed to messages that make drugs and alcohol look like fun, that everybody uses them, and that they are perfectly safe. Don't let the media, or social media control the message your child hears.

Teenagers cite their parents as one of the largest influences in their decision NOT to use drugs, so now's the perfect time to start talking and establishing your family belief system on underage drinking and drug abuse. If you have open, honest, and consistent conversations with your child about alcohol and drugs- they are more likely to respect your rules and advice. Talk early and often! (SAMHSA, 2022)

Your Child's Brain — Under construction and off limits!

A child's brain is still developing and more vulnerable than an adult's. Did you know drug use can lead to serious changes in the brain that affect how a person thinks and acts? Some drugs can even kill cells in the brain. (NIH, 2019) For instance, alcohol misuse during pre-adolescent and adolescent years can alter brain development, and potentially have long-lasting changes in brain function. (NIH, 2022) When talking to your child about drugs and alcohol, it's important to let them know that trying these substances can lead to life-long issues, and that it's off limits in your family. This may be the time to share with them any family history with substance use, and/or addiction (depending on the maturity of your child).

The Real Facts about Fentanyl

Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid that is up to 50x stronger than heroin and 100x stronger than morphine. According to cdc.org, it's a major contributor to drug overdoses in the U.S. Illegally manufactured fentanyl is very inexpensive to produce and is often found lacing other drugs in deadly doses. 7 out of every 10 pills seized by drug enforcement contain a LETHAL amount of fentanyl. (DEA, 2024) Parents need to teach their children to NEVER take any pills/medicine from anyone but their parent(s) or a medical professional.

Action Item

Talk to your elementary-aged child about how some medicines and pills are dangerous. They need to know that they should NEVER take any medicine that isn't given to them by a parent or medical professional (like their school nurse).



Risky Substances

Marijuana isn't too bad, right?

Don't believe the myth that marijuana is harmless, as use of it in any form (i.e. smoking, vaping, edibles) is not safe for a child's developing brain! (SAMHSA)

Risks include issues with:

- attention/concentration
- problem solving/learning/memory
- poor decision making
- poor school performance



1 in 6 adolescents who use marijuana will become addicted.

Family History of Addiction?

Studies have shown that genetics increase a child's likelihood of developing an addiction by 40-60 percent! (Popescu, Marian, Dragoi, & Costea, 2021) However genetics matter less than YOUR INFLUENCE! Talk to your child honestly about family history, and how trying a drug is extra risky for them.

***Practice ways to say “no” with your child.** This will help them battle peer pressure. GIVE THEM FULL PERMISSION TO BLAME YOU! “No, my parents would ground me forever!” or “No, my dad would pull me out of basketball”. Whatever your child feels confident in saying.

***If you have alcohol or any medications in your house, keep them locked up and keep track of how much you have.**

Vaping (E-cigarettes)

Vapes consist of a heating device that vaporizes liquid in a cartridge, and the resulting vapor is then inhaled. Vaping is unsafe for kids, as 99% contain nicotine (which is highly addictive and can harm the young brain) and other harmful chemicals. (CDC, 2023) It is also possible to use e-cigarettes to vaporize marijuana.

Kids are drawn to vapes because they're easy to use and they come in a variety of sweet and fruity flavors, not to mention, a lot of older kids are vaping too. The most popular for young people are disposables, which are not only easier to hide, but come in appealing colors and patterns too! They are readily available and can be purchased online by anyone.



Action Item

Talk with your child early and often about the risks of vaping. Use is on the rise in youth, and they need to know that they are dangerous.



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Emotional & Mental Health



Did you know?

Mental health tops the list of today's parental concerns.

(Minkin & Horowitz, 2023)



Coping Skills

Each school year brings more homework, more projects, more tests, and a lot more drama into your child's social life. As a parent, it is natural to want to shield them from pain and make their life easier, but that is not what they need. Learning to deal with adversity and overcome obstacles builds self-confidence and self-esteem. Support and help your child, but don't try to fix everything. Kids are amazingly capable! Remind them of that.

How do I equip my child to deal with anxiety, worries and fear?

Realize that having some worries and fears is perfectly natural. Teach your child how to handle feelings in a healthy way through journaling, talking about it, drawing and/or painting to express thoughts and emotions.

Journaling can help your child sort out their thoughts. Suggest writing down feelings, fears, and challenges, and letting the journal be a safe place to unload their mind. Make your home a safe place to discuss emotions and feelings and be ready to listen whenever they want to talk. Help your child solve problems by getting them to think independently about the problem. Then help brainstorm solutions.

When your child struggles to solve a problem, ask these three questions:

What did you try?

How did it work?

What else can you try?



Trauma & Adolescent Development

Childhood trauma is more common than you may think. This trauma can range from losing a beloved pet, to pandemic isolation, to experiencing domestic abuse. According to *childwelfare.gov*, trauma occurring during childhood or adolescence can have a substantial impact on adolescent development. As parents, we need to be aware of potentially traumatic events for our children and be sensitive to trauma in other children around us.

By the age of 16, two-thirds of children report experiencing at least one traumatic event. These events include:

- Abuse
- Community or school violence
- Witnessing domestic violence
- National disasters/terrorism
- Global pandemics
- Sudden or violent loss of a loved one
- Refugee or war experiences
- Physical or sexual assault
- Neglect
- Serious accidents or life-threatening illnesses

It's important to recognize the signs of traumatic stress and its short- and long-term impact. These warning signs may be different from child to child, as younger children will have different indicators than older children. **Child Mind Institute** gives the following possible trauma indicators for ages 6-11:

- Anxiety
- Increased aggression, anger, and irritability (like bullying or fighting with peers)
- Sleep and appetite disturbances
- Blaming themselves for the event
- Moodiness or crying
- Concerns about being taken care of
- Fear of future injury or death of loved ones
- Denying the event even occurred
- Complaints about physical discomfort such as stomachaches, headaches, and sluggishness, which may be due to stress
- Repeatedly asking questions
- Refusing to discuss the event (more common in kids ages 9 to 11)
- Withdrawal from social life
- Academic problems

(Child Mind Institute, 2023)

Action Item

If you see these signs of trauma in your child, it is important to seek professional advice/help. Talk to your child's pediatrician for the best course of action.



Coping with School Shootings

Two words that should never have to go together are “school” and “shooting”; however, in the past several years, the topic is sadly unavoidable. Many parents are more anxious about this than their students are; however, eventually kids pick up on their parents’ anxiety and fears. Since children as young as five run through active shooter drills at school, it’s important for parents to be able to have healthy conversations with their child on this topic.

Common Sense Media offers this advice: “Focus on helping kids understand the news and information they’re seeing and hearing, while allowing them to express their questions and feelings. Cutting through the noise and chaos provides the stability and security kids need to process what’s going on – and to ultimately feel safe again.”

Here are some pointers for an age-appropriate conversation for elementary students, written by Caroline Knorr for *Common Sense Media*:

What to say:

Ask open-ended questions. If your kids don't know what happened and don't bring it up, you don't necessarily have to fill in the blanks.

Use simple sentences. Feel free to oversimplify if you have to. You can say, "Someone hurt people." And if an idea is too complicated to explain – maybe you don't need to.

Don't overtalk. Once you've conveyed the news, you can wait until your kid asks questions to reopen the conversation.

Reassure them that they're safe and that people are working on the problem.

Emphasize that emergency drills help **keep them safe.**

The fact is that school shootings are very rare. However, when the horrible happens, we're overwhelmed by the constant news coverage of the inconceivable tragedy – and the level of parental anxiety can skyrocket. As parents, we need to control our emotions, and channel our worries and concerns for our children into helping them work through their feelings, as well as get involved in finding solutions to stop these horrific tragedies.

(Knorr, 2019)

Routine & Childhood Anxiety

Kids need routine in their life. A little spontaneity never hurt anyone, but a chaotic environment can lead to anxiety and increased fear of the unknown.

What Can Caregivers Do to Help? (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2023)

- Connect with your child through routine screen-free activities, praise and encouragement, and talking about what is making them feel worried/scared.
- Help them find a way to cope and manage fears through deep breathing, positive self-talk like “I can do this”, thinking of a safe place to retreat, gradual exposure to feared activities, or rewarding brave behavior.
- Build healthy habits into your family routine that reduce stress and help support a positive mood, like getting active, eating healthy, and getting plenty of sleep. Healthy tech boundaries (pg. 19) and routines are also part of a healthy lifestyle. These healthy habits also aid in increasing self-esteem and confidence!
- Talk with your child’s pediatrician to discuss additional strategies and other tips for their mental wellbeing.

Signs your child may be experiencing anxiety:

- Racing heartbeat
- Sweating or blushing
- Stomachaches or shaking
- Feeling very cold or very hot
- Trouble sitting still/focusing

(American Academy of Pediatrics, 2023)

Action Item

Remember, you are your child's biggest advocate! Always speak up on behalf of their mental and physical health! Don't dismiss any worries or concerns you may have, but seek out answers from a professional (pediatrician, counselor, teacher).



Myths About Mental Health

Myth – There are no effective treatment options available.

Mental health problems are treatable. Early detection and intervention strategies do work, and the earlier you start treatment, the better. Treatment can improve the child's resilience and ability to succeed in school and in life.

Myth – Treatment is not needed, because doctors overtreat and overmedicate, and there isn't really a problem.

Receiving treatment once a mental health issue appears is vitally important. Mental health issues can affect classroom learning and social interactions, both of which are critical to future success. It is not a phase that comes and goes or something that your child will just snap out of. Without treatment, there is an increased risk of not finishing school, criminal activity, inability to provide for themselves, and even suicide.

Myth – Mental health issues only show up when you're older.

The first signs of mental health disorders usually show in childhood or adolescence. Usually, treatment does not occur for a number of years later. A failure to properly treat these illnesses can impact the way young people learn and build skills, which leads to further challenges in the future. 1 in 5 children have a mental, emotional, behavioral, or developmental disorder such as anxiety, difficulty focusing, and social challenges. (NIH, 2007) (APA, 2022)

Myth – All childhood mental health disorders are due to bad parenting.

Anxiety, depression, and other mental conditions have biological components. Parenting is not to blame! However, parents do play a vital role in supporting and caring for their child through these difficulties. Don't hesitate to get professional help/advice when needed! (Koplewicz, 2024)

Myth – Mental health issues are all caused by...

All mental health issues cannot be traced back to one distinct factor. These illnesses are very complicated and occur from a combination of biology, environment, genetics, and life experiences. The treatment will also look different for each child, as what works for one kid doesn't always work well for another.

Know When to Support Your Child's Mental Health

Parents will see their child go through some normal emotional ups and downs, such as trouble with friendships, periods of moodiness, or occasional dips in school performance. Struggles are to be expected. However, **these are some red flags that may indicate the need to see a healthcare provider or a mental health professional:**

Withdrawn – removes themselves (physically and/or emotionally) from family, friends, or activities they used to enjoy.

Changes in sleep patterns – Look for unexplained changes in sleeping habits, sleeping too much or too little, or persistent nightmares.

Engages in negative behaviors more – Drastic changes in behavior or personality, dangerous or out-of-control behavior, frequent fighting, extreme aggression or disobedience, using weapons, and expressing a desire to badly hurt others. Participates in self-destructive behaviors or has impulse control. May also try to cope using substances like alcohol or drugs.

Difficulty concentrating – Look for signs of hyperactivity and trouble focusing or sitting still, all of which can lead to poor performance in school. They may also appear to be “day dreaming” or staring off into space and unable to focus on the here and now.

Changes in eating habits and/or weight – A sudden loss of appetite, frequent stomachaches, quick change in weight.

Self-harm – A mental health issue can lead to self-harm. Hair-pulling, skin picking and cutting are examples.

Hopelessness – Speaks of hopelessness, being depressed, or may also develop suicidal thoughts or talk about attempting suicide.

How Do I Help My Child?

If you suspect a problem or have any questions, talk with your pediatrician, a mental health professional or your school counselor. They can all help you navigate this time in your child's life. If the person you are working with does not seem to be adequately equipped to help you and your child, or if they dismiss your concerns, seek a second opinion.

Use your school as a resource. Teachers see your child regularly in an orderly setting and may see behaviors or concerns that you don't. Talk to your child's teacher and ask how they are doing.

Action Item

Have open and honest conversations with your child continually. You are likely the first person who would notice the changes that may be a cry for help. Don't ignore your gut feeling that something may be wrong.





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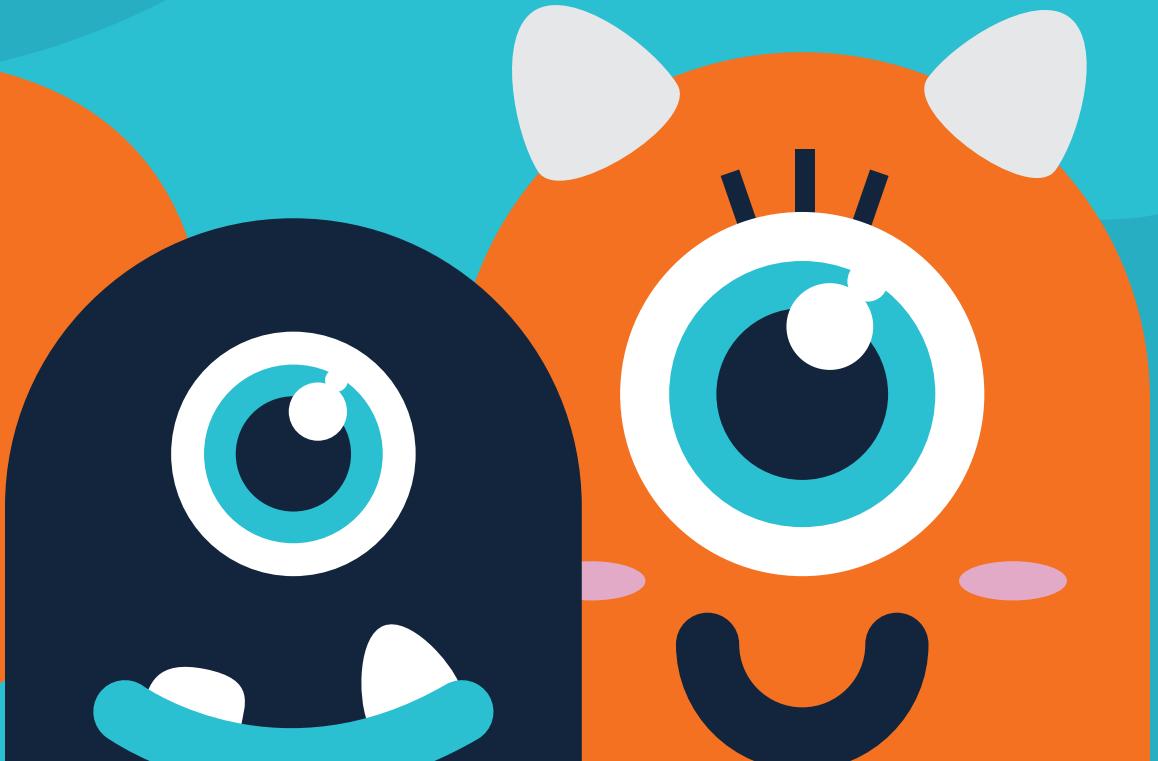
Friendships & Behavior



Did you know?

Research shows that having just one close friend in early childhood helps reduce the likelihood of experiencing sadness, anxiety, and loneliness as young adults!

(Sakyi, Surkan, Fombonne, Chollet, & Melchior, 2015)



Friendships and Relationships

Does your child have a “best friend” right now?

During your child's life, friendships will come and go. Extra-curricular activities change, friends move away, classes switch, and a best friend from the year before might not be a best friend this year. Support your child as friends come and go, teach them what true friendship means, and remember this wise old saying: “Show me your friends and I'll show you your future.” Your child's friends will play a vital role in the years ahead! Get to know them!

Modeling Healthy Relationships

How can you help your child develop healthy friendships? Show them! Your child will learn how to make friends, how to treat others, and how to handle disagreements by watching and listening to you. Be sure to model “respect” and “forgiveness” in your language and actions to family, friends, and others.

Get to know the parents of your child's friends.

This might not come naturally, and that's ok! Why not take advantage of the time you spend waiting for your child at school and introduce yourself to other parents at school functions, sports practices, and performances? Try breaking the ice and asking the friend's parent(s) to lunch or to the park while the kids play. This will help

both families get on the same page as far as rules and expectations of each household. When your child starts going to friends' houses, you'll feel much better knowing you've had the chance to get to know their parents/caregivers.

Family Dynamics

All families look different and have their own unique strengths and challenges. Ask your child what makes your family special.

More and more children live in blended families. These new relationships between stepparents and children need time to grow and build trust. Allow your child time to develop this relationship in their own time. Support them during this time of newness and change.

Be aware of the influence that older siblings can have on younger siblings. Encourage older brothers and sisters to understand the honor of being looked up to as positive role models. This is so important! Let the older sibling know that you don't expect perfection, but you do expect them to be good examples in the way they speak to and treat their younger sibling.

Action Item

Ask your child to show you how many "friends" or "followers" they have online and talk about what it really means to be a friend. Help limit online friends to only those known personally.



Sleepovers

Supervision

Remember that your job is to protect your child. That means you should never drop your child off at the movies, the mall, or even a friend's house without speaking to the adult who is in charge.

**Your young child needs supervision...
and older siblings don't count.**

The problem is often not your child or your child's actions but the actions of others that might involve substance abuse, sexual activity, violence, and more. You can't protect your child from everything, but you can limit exposure to potential threats.

Sleepovers...worth the risk?

Nothing sounds more harmless than a "sleepover", but remember that when you allow your child to spend the night at someone else's house, you relinquish all parental control for an extended period of time!

Will the sleepover be supervised the entire time? By adults? What type of movies and games will be available? Will this be a "girls only" or "boys only" sleepover?

Will guns, alcohol, medications, etc. be locked up?

The presence of older siblings at sleepovers, or the friends of older siblings, can introduce influences and threats that your child isn't ready for.

Remember that despite the hosting parents' good intentions, eventually they will go to bed, leaving the children unsupervised. While it's tempting to take a night off from parenting, trust your built-in alarm system.

It's better to be safe than sorry when it comes to sleepovers.



Bullying

Kids might label it as teasing or joking around, but bullying happens in every elementary school. Could your child be bullied at school? Absolutely. When you hear about bullying, treat the school as your ally. It is so important to end bullying early so it doesn't continue throughout childhood.

Help kids understand teasing vs. bullying:

Teasing

Teasing is playful, good natured and goes back and forth.

Teasing makes up a small part of the relationship.

Teasing stops when the child tell the other person they don't like it.

Bullying

Bullying is one sided.

Bullying defines the relationship.

Bullying continues even after the victim asks for it to stop.

Did you know?

33% of U.S. elementary students report being bullied often while at school.

(Together Against Bullying, 2024)



33%

Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying includes stealing passwords, sending offensive texts, or spreading rumors via social media. Talk about this with your child. Encourage THINKING before texting or posting something. If they're mad, sad or angry at someone, remind them NOT to post those thoughts on social media. If they see or experience cyberbullying, a trusted adult needs to be told.

Cyberbullying in elementary school is often done through gaming systems. Trash talking and jokes can quickly turn into bullying, and kids rarely know how to handle it. One of the easiest ways to curb cyberbullying is by taking away your child's headphones and requiring all videogames be played where you can hear what is said. Many parents delay the use of online games with chat features, which also helps!

How Can I Help?

Victims of bullying are often reluctant to report it because they are embarrassed or humiliated by the bullying and might fear payback for telling on the bully. In the case of cyberbullying, your child might be afraid you will take phone or computer privileges away to stop the problem. Sometimes simply starting the conversation can help your child feel comfortable opening up. Simply ask, "Have you ever seen bullying at school or online? Have you ever been bullied?" Have check-ins with your child on this issue, and keep the conversation ongoing.

Bullying — Other ways to help:

- Keep in contact with your child's teacher, principal, or counselor.
- Have routine daily conversations asking your child about their day, friends, lunchtime, recess, etc.
- Encourage your child to join activities like sports, clubs, or theater.
- Limit the time your child is online & be present when they are using it.
- Praise children who stand up to bullies.
- Set a good example in the way you talk about/to others. Be inclusive and kind!
- Seek the advice of a professional.

Teach your child the following steps to deal with a cyberbully:

STOP –If an offensive message is received, do not respond, or engage. Stay calm.

BLOCK –Block the cyberbully and limit communication with friends about the incident.

TELL –Inform a trusted adult, you don't have to face this alone. Do not erase or delete anything. Teach your child to stand up against bullies in a non-violent way. Responding with violence can escalate the situation and get your child in trouble.

Is My Child the Bully?

What if your child is the one bullying others? While this is upsetting, it's important to solve the problem and not ignore it!

- Ask your child open and direct questions: “Your teacher mentioned you were involved in some bully behavior. Can you tell me what happened?”
- Make sure your child knows that bullying will not be tolerated. Be specific about the behavior you want to see.
- Set and enforce consequences as needed.
- Talk to teachers, school counselors, or other professionals that are able to help! Some kids who bully may have underlying emotional challenges.
- Talk with your child about a way to make amends with the person they hurt, like an apology letter or act of kindness.
- Show them you care by keeping an open line of communication, talking with them about their life and relationships.
- Do not feel like a failure, but know that you have the power to help your child change their behavior!
- Make sure your own actions towards others are not sending mixed signals to your child.

Stopbullying.gov says that when adults respond quickly and consistently to bullying behavior they send the message that it is not acceptable. Research shows this can stop bullying behavior over time!

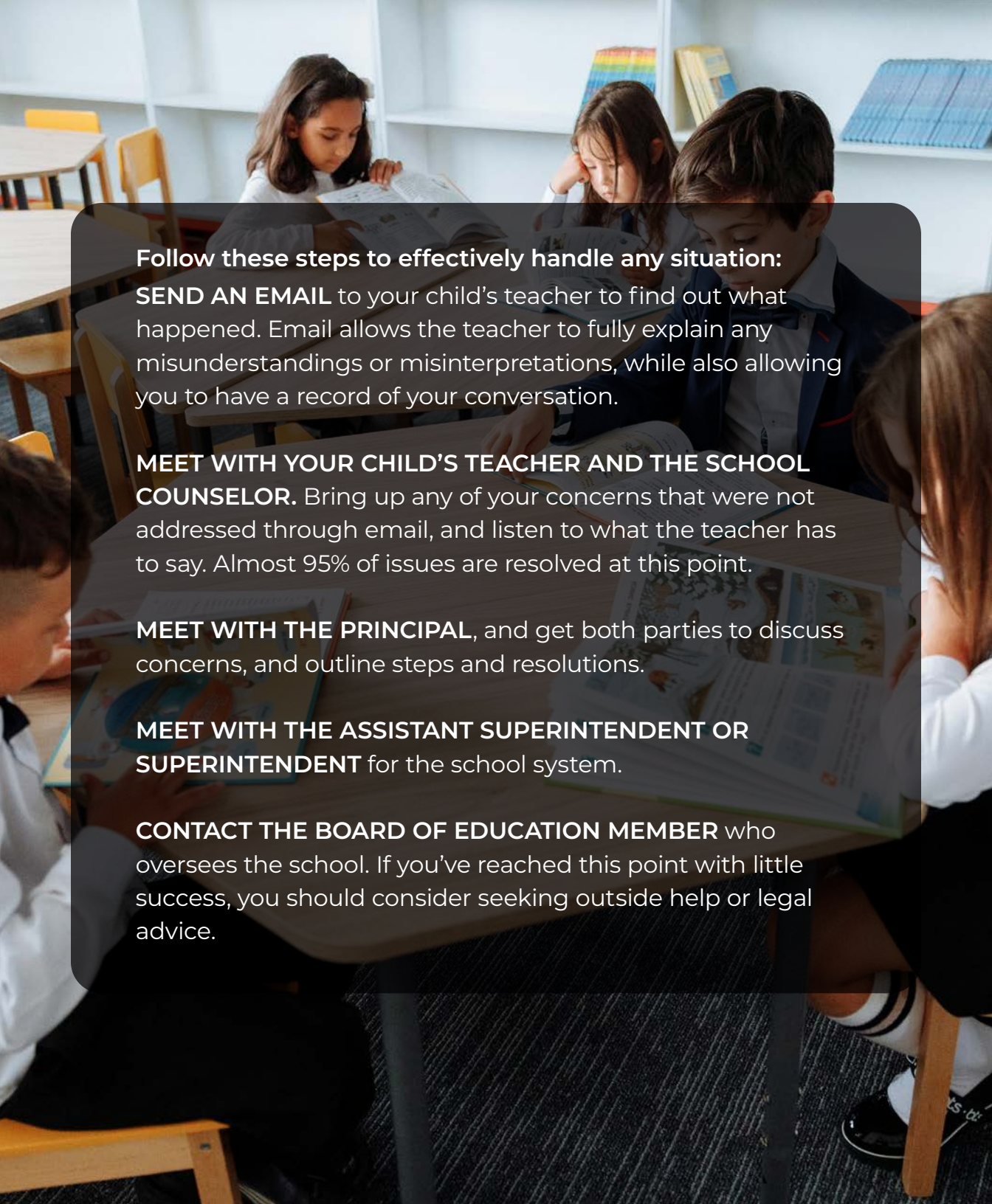
(Carothers, 2024)



Resolving Issues at School

Problems will arise at school over the course of your child's education. One of the best things you can do is to build relationships with your child's teacher and the school's staff. Having a prior relationship will make it easier should issues and conflicts arise.

Parents often first hear about a problem through their child. If your child shares a story with you about a school event, try to remain calm. Focus your attention on resolving the issue with the teacher and the school, and don't escalate the situation through social media or by lashing out at the teacher. Also, keep in mind that you are only hearing one side of the story. One former school teacher used to tell parents, "I won't believe everything your child says about you, if you won't believe everything they say about me." Open communication is key.

A group of children in a classroom setting, sitting around a table and looking at books and papers. The children are dressed in school uniforms. The background shows bookshelves with books.

Follow these steps to effectively handle any situation:

SEND AN EMAIL to your child's teacher to find out what happened. Email allows the teacher to fully explain any misunderstandings or misinterpretations, while also allowing you to have a record of your conversation.

MEET WITH YOUR CHILD'S TEACHER AND THE SCHOOL COUNSELOR. Bring up any of your concerns that were not addressed through email, and listen to what the teacher has to say. Almost 95% of issues are resolved at this point.

MEET WITH THE PRINCIPAL, and get both parties to discuss concerns, and outline steps and resolutions.

MEET WITH THE ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT OR SUPERINTENDENT for the school system.

CONTACT THE BOARD OF EDUCATION MEMBER who oversees the school. If you've reached this point with little success, you should consider seeking outside help or legal advice.

Media Contract

I WILL...

- Immediately answer a call or text from _____ (my caregivers/family).
- Ask my parents before I download any app to my phone.
- Ask my parents before I download/share any photos online.
- Tell an adult if anything online makes me nervous, afraid, or uncomfortable.
- Leave my phone in _____ (common space/parent room) to charge at night.
- Share all passwords with my parents.
- _____
- _____

I WILL NOT...

- Talk, text, or interact with anyone online I do not know.
- Bully, humiliate, spread rumors, or make fun of people online.
- Create fake profiles or pretend to be someone else online.
- Use my phone during school unless there is an emergency or needed for class.
- Share personal information (address, phone number, location, or other personal info online).
- Share my passwords with anyone outside of my family.

I UNDERSTAND THAT...

- My parents/caregivers can take away my phone at any time.
- Having a phone is a responsibility.
- Not everything I see online is true.
- Too much time on a screen is bad for me. I will honor the set screen limits below:
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____

MY FAMILY WILL...

- Have open conversations with me, and answer questions I have about internet/device safety.
- Help me find media that is appropriate and fun.
- Model for me how to be a responsible, kind, and balanced user of the internet and devices.

Child Signature

Parent Signature

*Feel free to make copies of this page of the handbook for your family!

 operationparent

THE PARENT HANDBOOK

SOCIAL MEDIA
VAPING
ANXIETY
DEPRESSION
DRUGS
ALCOHOL
GAMING

STANDARD EDITION
MIDDLE | HIGH

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HELPFUL?**

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