KOALA: Help Parents Bring Up the Artificial Intelligence Generation!

Advice you've probably seen

1. Set up parental control/monitoring
2. Hand pick age appropriate content
3. Choose technologies based on age recommendations

Is it any good?

Choosing age appropriate content for your children is a good idea, but what happens when you're not around? Make sure your children come to you for help! Let them fail (but carefully!) Let them make small mistakes online or when using devices, but under your supervision. This can help them to understand their own responsibility and learn how to overcome problems.

Why do children love their screen time? In order to make technologies engaging for children, the tech industry has explored a technique called persuasive design, which turns games or applications into something much more appealing or addictive, by providing in-game awards or peer pressure. The key element for the success of such persuasive design is for the tech companies to get hold of lots of data about our online habits, including what games/application we like the most, when we use them, for how long, etc. A lot of these data is being collected in a very opaque manner. Therefore, all the focus on controlling children's screen time or shielding them from inappropriate content is not enough!

Rethinking parent-child engagement

Existing parental control/monitoring mechanisms on the market focus on traditional online risks, such as inappropriate content, viruses, or restrictions; these mechanisms do not help parents/children raise their awareness of opaque data privacy risks nor help them cope with them. We need to rethink `digital parenting'.

It is important for parents to invest time to co-experience their children's online activities, by asking simple questions like "why do you like this?" or "can you show me your favourite things on this?". In this way, parents can not only create an understanding of their children's digital world but also an opportunity to recognise risks they may have encountered or mistakes they may have made.

Are we good role models? As parents, we frequently underestimate how much time we spend using devices and services, and part of helping children learn healthy habits regarding their use of technology involves setting a good example. Setting rules and creating lasting habits for healthy technology use should be done for the whole family and not just for children.

Don't forget

- Go through privacy settings on your child's digital device, like smart phones or tablets, and make sure that all unnecessary privacy permissions are turned off.
- Engage conversations with your child regarding their online experience from a young age in order to form a habit of co-learning and co-experiencing.
- Pay more attention to what they do in front of the screens, instead of the amount of time.

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