

When Santa brings a smartphone...

Technology will form a big part of Santa's gifts this year – phones, tablets, games consoles and all the accessories – what to do – how to decide?

It's head-wrecking for parents, wanting children to be up to date, reading the scary stories, worrying about cyberbullying, the impact on sleep and on physical condition. Indeed, many parents feel that their children know far more than they do about it all.

So, here are a few tips to ease the burden on parents – to help you out:

- If your child is getting their first device, or getting a more advanced device than they already have, sit down with them **before** Christmas and agree rules for its use: where can it be used, for how long, watching their privacy, what to do if something goes wrong.
- It's important that children and young people understand the need to be careful with personal information, privacy, cameras and uploading photographs. Have conversations with them and make sure they know what is safe behaviour. Regularly review privacy settings on their device and online accounts.
- When buying games, check the PEGI rating to make sure it's age-appropriate. Check out www.pegi.info to get more information on the importance of having the correct PEGI rated games.
- Try not to be negative or fearful when you're speaking to children about technology – they need to know how to use it safely and your attitude will determine how comfortable they will be in coming to you with a problem when they have one.
- Make sure you know what to do if something goes wrong. Help **prepare them for situations** they may encounter and how to manage or deal with these situations.
- Activate all necessary parental controls **before** the gift is given. These are settings that allow you to limit the device – time limits, age limits and so on. Check out www.webwise.ie to learn about parental controls and ask the store to adjust the settings if you're not sure how to do it. Santa can do this too!
- There are some things you need to consider about internet-connected toys - what information does the toy collect - will the toy take pictures or store recordings of my child - does it require location services to work or will I be able to turn this feature off - what parental controls are available and how do I access them?
- Ask Santa to bring other, non-technology gifts to keep balance. Outdoor gifts, crafts, books, board games will encourage children to move and to play with other children. Don't forget to join in these activities too!
- Have some no technology time, when all devices are switched off. Digital detox is very important and getting a break is good for everyone.

Remember, there are lots of benefits to technology. There are thousands of educational, creative and age-appropriate apps for your child and you to enjoy. And, to keep balance over the Christmas, invest in wellies and raincoats and hit the outdoors!