



TECHNOLOGY

Parental guide to understanding digital media protection resources

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INTRODUCTION

Through social media, online platforms, and ever-present digital devices, parents today face a tidal wave of risks that can harm their children. There are many dangers in the technology world, including cyberbullying and “harmful materials,” as well as the known addictive nature of social media. Make no mistake, online apps can be amazing tools. They can provide resources and opportunities for every generation to pioneer the next technological advancement. But dangers are around every terabyte of data. Empowering parents with the *right* tools and resources to navigate this complex environment is key to garnering the benefits while mitigating the risks.

Digital parenting tools offer more than just monitoring and tracking your child’s internet use, which can be difficult even under the best circumstances. But there can be a learning curve of teaching and equipping parents to make decisions that maintain their family’s beliefs and safety standards.

Although this publication concentrates on mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets, parents should note that ensuring digital safety can differ greatly between devices, including gaming consoles, PCs, Wi-Fi-enabled audio devices, and smart home assistants, like Amazon’s Alexa. Every type of device raises different safety concerns and needs specific measures.

State mandates are coming in fast and furious, and state social media regulations are accumulating to address real concerns associated with social media use.

For example, age verification laws have had a tricky time passing constitutional muster, and have been blocked by the courts in California, Utah, Arkansas, Ohio and Mississippi. While there is a need to protect children online, there is also an important balance to ensure we do not weaken constitutional rights. There are legitimate questions as to whether it is the government’s job to police the internet or social media.

In Arkansas, U.S. District Court Judge Timothy Brooks found the proposed law was an unacceptable affront to free speech, saying that the “loss of First Amendment freedoms, even for minimal periods of time, constitute[s] irreparable injury,” and that there was “no compelling evidence” that children would be protected by the legislation. A judge in California took the state to task for claiming their speech regulation bill would somehow improve children’s privacy. Judge Beth Labson Freeman said that age verification mandates are “likely to exacerbate the problem by inducing...children to divulge additional personal information.” Every time these bills have been challenged, they have failed to withstand even basic constitutional scrutiny.¹

Alternatively, a market-based approach that rewards competition and relies on consumer responses could be the right solution. Not only does this make the development of digital parenting solutions more efficient, but it also helps to keep them relevant and user-friendly.

Tip 1: Available tools for parents

It is important to note that social media tools available to parents are endless. Some cater to a range of needs, from location tracking to content management, providing parents with the resources necessary to foster a safe and balanced digital space for their children. Here are just a few of the examples.

Parental monitoring apps

Life 360² is a standout in the realm of parental monitoring apps, offering features such as real-time location tracking, driving behavior data, and emergency response services. Its focus is on parents of teenagers. Life360 offers several subscription tiers: the free version includes basic location tracking, while premium plans, which range from \$4.99 to \$19.99 per month, offer additional features like driving reports, crash detection, and 24/7 driver care support. This tiered pricing model allows parents to choose a level of monitoring that suits their family's specific needs and budget.

Content Filters and Safe Browsing Tools

When it comes to safe browsing, Qustodio⁵ and Net Nanny⁶ are robust options.

Qustodio⁷ offers a free version with basic filtering capabilities, but for a more comprehensive feature set, including time quotas, detailed activity reports, and social media monitoring, prices range from \$54.95 to \$137.95 per year, depending on the number of devices covered.

¹ Importing unconstitutional speech laws won't protect children," Chris Cargill, Mountain States Policy Center, January 19, 2024, available at <https://www.mountainstatespolicy.org/importing-unconstitutional-speech-laws-won-t-protect-children>

² "Life360: Family Locator & GPS Tracker," Life360, available at <https://www.life360.com/>, accessed January 18, 2025.

⁵ "Qustodio: Parental Control for Online Safety," Qustodio, available at <https://www.qustodio.com/en/>, accessed February 3, 2025.

⁶ "Net Nanny: Parental Control Software," Net Nanny, available at <https://www.netnanny.com/>, accessed February 15, 2025.

⁷ "Qustodio: Parental Control for Online Safety," Qustodio, available at <https://www.qustodio.com/en/>, accessed March 1, 2025.

[Net Nanny](#)⁸ provides similar functionalities with packages that cover from one to twenty devices, costing approximately \$39.99 to \$89.99 per year. These tools offer customizable filters that can block inappropriate content across various categories and alert parents about potentially risky online behavior.

[Google Family Link](#)⁹, on the other hand, is a free service provided by Google that helps Android users manage the apps their kids use, keep an eye on screen time, and remotely lock devices when necessary. It's an effective tool for budget-conscious families who use Android devices, ensuring no additional costs while providing essential parental control functionalities.

Screen time management

Both [Apple's Screen Time](#)¹⁰ and [Google's Family Link](#)¹¹ facilitate screen time management. Apple's Screen Time is integrated into all iOS devices at no extra cost and provides detailed reports and tools for setting restrictions on app usage, device access times, and content types. Google's Family Link provides similar functionalities for Android users, also without any additional fees. These integrated tools make it easier for parents to monitor and manage how much time their children spend on their devices and what they are accessing during that time.

Overall review of the applications

In reviewing these tools, it is important to consider not only the cost but also the ease of use, the breadth of features, and the level of customer support. Life360, Qustodio, and Net Nanny are praised for their monitoring capabilities and user-friendly interfaces, but come at a cost that may not be suitable for all budgets. In comparison, Google Family Link offers a no-cost solution that, while perhaps less extensive in features than some paid apps, provides solid basic controls for Android families.

The choice of tool often depends on specific family needs, whether it's detailed insight into online behavior, extensive content filtering, or simple time management. By combining each of the strengths of these applications, parents can tailor a digital parenting strategy that is both effective and economical, ensuring their children's experiences are positive and protected.

Tip 2: How these tools work

⁸ "Net Nanny: Parental Control Software," Net Nanny, available at <https://www.netnanny.com/>, accessed March 10, 2025.

⁹ "Family Link: Parental Controls," Google, available at <https://families.google/familylink/>, accessed February 28, 2025.

¹⁰ "Apple Support: Family Sharing Setup," Apple, available at <https://support.apple.com/en-us/108806>, accessed March 5, 2025.

¹¹ "Family Link: Parental Controls," Google, available at <https://families.google/familylink/>, accessed March 15, 2025.

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Learning how these tools work will allow informed decisions about which products may fit family needs best.

Technological frameworks

Parental Monitoring Apps: Apps such as Life360 use GPS technology to allow monitoring in real-time. This feature maintains a real-time overview of kids' whereabouts directly on their phones, providing an invaluable peace of mind when it comes to commuting or social events. Some apps also offer more advanced features that will analyze driving behaviors, using GPS data and motion sensors to monitor speed, braking patterns, and whether the user has a phone in their hand while they're driving.

URL and Internet Filter Technologies: Content filtering solutions like Qustodio and Net Nanny drive their rich content-filtering technologies via URL filtering, keyword detection, and AI algorithms, which analyze the context of a web page on the fly. They know the difference between things that are safe and dangerous, even if it's on the same site, that children can be protected from things like that, but be able to find educational content and things that aren't harmful. New organized threats persistently evolve with digital content, and the data are updated for machine learning algorithms until October 2023.

Screen Time Management: If you want to manage the target device, Apple's Screen Time and Google's Family Link offer administrative control. They function by integrating with the device's operating system to monitor and control all app usage. Parents can impose rules on what apps are available at what times, how long, and schedule downtime to make sure screen time is balanced with everything else. These tools also track app usage trends, which can help parents better understand their child's digital habits and adjust as needed.

User experience

For parental control tools to work, they need to be easy to set up and easy to use daily. In most cases, the tools are designed to be intuitive, guiding parents through the setup process, often with tutorials or customer support. This helps bring these tools to life for people who are not very tech-savvy.

Privacy and security features

Tools that monitor and control children's digital activity come with increased privacy and security risks. The reputable parental control apps encrypt data collected from devices and store it on secure servers. They are also in

compliance with relevant privacy regulations such as COPPA (Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act) in the U.S., which has strict guidelines on how data on minors can be collected and used.

However, such tools come with their limitations and effectiveness based on the respective technological capabilities involved and the ability to integrate into the metabolic processes of everyday life within the respective realms of privacy and user friendliness. By learning about these, parents can not only select appropriate tools but also implement them effectively to help ensure their children have a safer digital experience.

Tip 3: Advantages of a market approach

As always, a market approach to developing and deploying parental controls on devices will more effectively match parental preferences than a rigid system of state mandates and regulations. This is the best way to understand why the market path is best for dealing with facilitating digital parenting through innovation, when market forces govern how these tools are customized and what their development costs in terms of time and effort, as well as money.

Innovation and competition

Innovation drives the tech market, and developers are continually fighting for consumer attention and market share. The market approach incentivizes “parental control tool developers” to find increasingly innovative and effective ways to differentiate their products as competition continues to mount. This creates a cycle of regular updates that not only improve existing features but also add new ones to handle future digital risks and parental worries.

When new forms of online communication develop, those developers could build in ways to monitor them, ensuring that parents have the tools they need to safeguard their children against new threats, such as cyberbullying, on the next round of social media platforms. The rapid change of technology requires equally quick responses, something a market-driven approach is uniquely capable of delivering and can never come from government overseers.

Customization and choice

If we know anything from family experiences, a single solution does not work across the board for the different needs and values of each family member. The market-based approach offers a range of tools that suit different parenting styles and worries. Depending on what parents want, they can find the tools that best fit those needs, ranging from the least, to the most intrusive monitoring tools, or something that stands more towards teaching digital literacy.

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For example, some families may want something with more location tracking and geofencing features, while others may want better web filtering. If you look at the market, there are specific apps that focus on one aspect of control, or you can get suites that provide a wider selection of applications.

Cost-effectiveness

To ensure cost-effectiveness, we must have market competition. Competition can help make parental control tools more affordable and accessible to a wider variety of families. The availability of free versions and starter plans permits some degree of parental control without necessarily spending money, so that families can get basic features and upgrade them, as needs and income change. This tiered approach creates the best route for parents in making their access much easier for their families, as well as creating pressure on companies as the average price point and clear value proposition per family.

Tip 4: Case studies and success stories

Life360 — Keeping families connected and safe

Life360 has been empowering and uniting families across the globe through safety and connectivity. Their 'Life Stories' blog has a listing of testimonials from those who have benefited from the app in sharing where they are and how to respond to an emergency. The following four narratives detail exactly how the versatile app can be used to bring an extra layer of protection to family safety, as well as peace of mind at home and on the go. Parents have described how Life360 aided them during life-threatening situations like car wrecks, allowing them to be prepared and responsive.

Read more stories like this one: [Life360 Life Stories](#)¹²

BARK — Protecting Kids Over All Digital Channels

Bark specializes in tracking children's digital behavior across multiple platforms and notifying parents about possible dangers, such as cyberbullying, online predators, or unsuitable content. The “Reviews and Testimonials” section is packed with positive reviews from parents who have used the tool to intervene in potentially harmful situations.

See more reviews here: [Bark Reviews and Testimonials](#)¹³

Qustodio — Encouraging Healthier Digital Habits

¹² “Life360 Blog: Life Stories,” Life360, available at <https://www.life360.com/blog/category/life-stories/>, accessed January 25, 2025.

¹³ “Bark Reviews and Testimonials,” Bark, available at <https://www.bark.us/learn/bark-reviews-and-testimonials/>, accessed February 5, 2025.

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Parents can use Qustodio to manage and monitor their children's internet use, encouraging healthier online habits. You can read stories from families who have been using Qustodio to make screen time and content exposure more balanced in the 'Family Stories' section on their website. The stories range from ways to lessen screen time to preventing unwanted violent content, all showcasing the successful attributes of the app in creating a safer and more productive digital playground for every child.

Visit this link for Family Stories: [Qustodio Family Stories](#)¹⁴

All these platforms include a variety of features aimed at meeting the unique needs and challenges of today's families, emphasizing the opportunity and necessity of being an active and informed digital citizen.

Tip 5: Recommendations for parent-friendly resources

Our recommendations are tailored to meet the needs of family dynamics and preferences, ensuring that all parents can find tools that resonate with their specific parenting style and requirements.

Comprehensive parental control apps

Qustodio: This tool offers a robust set of features, including internet filtering, time management, and social media monitoring across multiple platforms and devices. It's particularly beneficial for parents who are looking for detailed reports and the ability to customize the control features to suit their family's needs.

Norton Family Premier¹⁵: Known for its strong internet security background, Norton provides features that help monitor and manage children's online activities. Its instant lock feature, location tracking, and detailed reporting make it a solid choice for parents concerned with both online and offline safety.

Device-specific controls

Apple Screen Time¹⁶: Integrated into all iOS devices, this feature allows parents to track the amount of time their children spend on devices and set limits on app usage. It's ideal for families already invested in the Apple ecosystem, offering a seamless and user-friendly experience.

Google Family Link¹⁷: For Android users, Google Family Link provides similar functionalities to Apple's Screen Time, including app management, device time

¹⁴ "Qustodio Family Stories," Qustodio, available at <https://www.qustodio.com/en/family-stories/>, accessed February 10, 2025.

¹⁵ "Norton: Online Security for Your Family," Norton, available at <https://us.norton.com/>, accessed February 20, 2025.

¹⁶ "Apple Support: Family Sharing Setup," Apple, available at <https://support.apple.com/en-us/108806>, accessed March 5, 2025.

¹⁷ "Family Link: Parental Controls," Google, available at <https://families.google/familylink/>, accessed February 28, 2025.

limits, and activity reports. It's free and integrates well with Android devices, making it accessible for budget-conscious families.

Specialized tools for social media and content filtering

Bark¹⁸: This tool is excellent for monitoring social media use, emails, and texts. Bark uses advanced algorithms to scan for issues like cyberbullying, online predators, and depression. It alerts parents only when issues are detected, reducing the overhead of constant monitoring.

Canopy¹⁹: Canopy stands out for its sexting prevention and explicit content blocking technology that works in real-time. It's particularly suited for parents who are concerned about the content their children may encounter online.

Educational resources for digital parenting

Common Sense Media²⁰: This website provides reviews and age ratings for movies, games, apps, and websites, helping parents make informed decisions about the media their children consume. It also offers a plethora of articles and tips on parenting in the digital age.

NetSmartz²¹: Developed by the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, NetSmartz offers free educational resources to teach children about online safety in an age-appropriate manner. It's a great tool for parents looking to educate their children about the internet.

Engaging with technology

Circle²²: This device manages every connected device in your home. It can filter content, limit screen time, and set a bedtime for every device in the house. It's especially useful for parents who want to manage internet use without installing software on individual devices.

ESET Parental Control for Android²³: This app provides a comprehensive set of controls, including app blocking, time limits, geofencing, and location tracking. It's tailored for parents who prefer granular control over their children's device usage.

¹⁸ "Bark Protects: Online Safety for Families," Bark, available at <https://www.bark.us/protects/home/>, accessed March 1, 2025.

¹⁹ "Canopy: Parental Controls," Canopy, available at <https://canopy.us/>, accessed March 5, 2025.

²⁰ "Common Sense Media: Reviews and Advice for Families," Common Sense Media, available at <https://www.common Sense Media.org/>, accessed March 10, 2025.

²¹ "NetSmartzKids: Internet Safety Education for Kids," NetSmartz, available at <https://www.netsmartzkids.org/>, accessed March 15, 2025.

²² "Circle: Screen Time Management for Families," Circle, available at <https://meetcircle.com/>, accessed March 18, 2025.

²³ "ESET Parental Control for Android," ESET, available at <https://www.eset.com/us/home/parental-control-android/download/>, accessed March 10, 2025.

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There is no silver bullet when it comes to completely securing a child's digital experience; a combination of market-driven solutions and engaged parenting is key to managing the challenges posed by the digital world.

Nothing in this publication shall be construed as an attempt to aid or hinder the passage of any legislation.

These tools and resources offer a wide range of options to help parents manage their children's digital footprint effectively. By choosing the right tools and combining them with active, informed parenting, families can navigate the challenges of the digital world more safely and confidently. Each tool has its strengths and is designed to cater to different aspects of digital parenting, from safety and security to education and media management.

Conclusion

We have covered a wide swath of digital tools and resources available to parents who are trying to make sense of their children's digital lives. The importance of combining these technological tools with informed, dedicated parenting cannot be overstated. While these tools provide necessary safeguards and management resources, they are most effective when used as part of a broader parenting strategy that includes communication, education about online safety, and the importance of trust created between parents and their children. Resources such as "Common Sense Media" and "NetSmartz" play a critical role in this educational effort, giving parents and children the tools they need to learn how to safely enjoy the digital world and make smart digital decisions.

There is no silver bullet when it comes to completely securing a child's digital experience; a combination of market-driven solutions and engaged parenting is key to managing the challenges posed by the digital world. These tools not only protect children but also respect their needs for independence as they grow. Ultimately, creating an environment of trust and open dialogue about digital use is crucial for helping children navigate online spaces safely and responsibly.

When creating a digital parenting strategy, parents need to remain adaptable and responsive to the ever-changing digital landscape. This involves constantly learning and pivoting to new tools and practices as they emerge. By staying informed and involved, parents can ensure that their approach to digital parenting remains effective and relevant, empowering their children to benefit from the digital world while minimizing its risks. Resources like the Family Online Safety Institute also provide valuable curriculum, such as their '[Good Digital Parenting](#)' program, to further equip parents with practical skills and insights.

As digital technologies continue to evolve, we must also evolve our strategies for managing and protecting our children's engagement with these tools.

SUMMARY & KEY FACTS

While digital tools offer tremendous educational and social benefits, they also expose children to risks like cyberbullying, addictive content, and privacy concerns. A mix of informed parenting and flexible, market-driven tools is the most effective way to create a safe digital environment.

1. **Digital risks are real and growing** – Children face dangers such as cyberbullying, inappropriate content, and addiction, especially via social media and smart devices.
2. **Parental control tools vary widely** – Options like Life360, Qustodio, Net Nanny, and Google Family Link help parents monitor location, set screen time limits, and filter content.
3. **State regulations face legal hurdles** – Efforts to mandate age verification and regulate social media use have largely failed constitutional tests in several states.
4. **Market-based solutions outperform mandates** – Innovation, customization, and affordability in parental tech tools are best driven by consumer demand, not government regulation.
5. **Successful digital parenting requires education and flexibility** – Tools alone aren't enough; parents must stay informed, communicate openly, and adapt to evolving technologies.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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He is married to his high school sweetheart and has two children, Wyld and Rowdy. Sebastian graduated from Nampa High, CWI with an associate's degree in liberal arts, and Boise State with his bachelors in Political Science and American Government.

He has been involved in the policy making process in Idaho for the last 5 years starting as a Senate Page and most recently as a Legislative Candidate in District 12. Sebastian currently serves on his local city council.

