

**Lisa Kervin:** Steven and I have talked about how digital technologies can enhance our interactions and experiences with children and the role of adults during children's digital play.

We've shared ideas with you about ways you can use digital technologies in diverse ways, with the focus always being on high quality interactions with the children in your service.

**Steven Howard:** As educators, we are often co learners with digital technologies alongside children, and that's perfectly okay. It's important to model our positive interest in thinking about digital technologies.

This time, we will focus on how we can leverage digital interactions with our children to support them to make good digital decisions. Children will be increasingly expected to do this on their own as they get older. And when they are directing their own digital activity, we want them to have good digital diets and make safe and productive digital decisions.

Maybe you've heard of digital footprints. We all have digital footprints. Social media posts, our health records, search histories, these all contribute to our digital profile. Children are increasingly developing digital footprints too, from excited parents sharing ultrasound pictures, to social media posts, to what we as educators post about children in our own platforms.

These come from a place of excitement and interest, and wanting to connect and share, although there's also apprehension around it. Current trends to respond to this worry have increasingly sought to separate children from devices. We argue this is not tenable as a permanent solution.

More sustainable would be to equip children with the knowledge and skills to make the most of the digital opportunities that can be beneficial, while safely navigating the risks and pitfalls along the way. At the end of the day, this is what we will ultimately expect of our children as they progress through and beyond their childhood.

**Lisa Kervin:** Lots of adults worry and feel a responsibility to keep children away from bad things when it comes to digital technologies. Eventually children will be faced with having to do this themselves though. In these moments we need children's digital decisions to be productive, appropriate and safe. This is where adults have a critical role.

Consider your own behaviours, patterns, the financial decisions we make, our priorities. Across each of these, our learning, our experience, and our practice puts us in a better position to make positive and productive decisions. Why should it be different for children's digital decisions?

To enable children's safe and productive digital practices, we need to support young children's digital activities initially with rules and guardrails.

But if we are the ones always doing this for our children, it will be difficult for them to learn and practice doing this for themselves. If a child is never involved in making digital plans, or good digital choices, then why would they do one thing instead of another? We would expect bumps along the way, the moment they are tasked with doing this for themselves, though.

So how do you talk about digital citizenship with children? This is a question we get asked a lot, and something we are developing our own understandings about. With you, parents, and our colleagues, much of our digital discussions are focused on what might happen in the future, like where our digital footprints might end up, or the consequences of digital safety.

The idea of the future is an abstract concept for children to understand, so we need a different approach. The good news is that children have many wonderful adults around them who can help them with this, like you. You are a capable other in the lives of the children you work with, even when you may not be the expert on the specifics of the digital technology.

You are an expert in early childhood pedagogies, and with your expertise, children can engage with quality digital content that supports their development through play, creating and designing, communicating, problem solving, amongst many other things, and avoid inappropriate content.

In terms of conversations with children, we've recently been working with children to help them understand how photos can be changed and altered, introducing them to the idea of filters. Having read the picture book, *Where the Wild Things Are*, a firm favourite here, and I'm sure in your service too, we invited children to photograph themselves using the iPads as they struck their wildest pose.

We printed these out and invited the children to choose different printouts that we'd also made of a whole range of animals and insects and invited them to alter their pictures. Some children added insect wings, others added an animal's face

over their own. Their legs were transformed using animal legs, extra arms were added, torsos changed.

The finished products bore little resemblance to the images of themselves that they had started with. It was a lot of fun and it gave us the opportunity to talk about how images can be changed digitally through filters. A nice example of how we use digital alongside the arts to help children understand quite an abstract idea.

Other areas that we have, or have seen, tackled in conversation and play are children's rights and responsibilities. Asking permission to take a child's photograph is important. So too is asking permission to share their image. In one playful example that Stephen and I particularly like, and with acknowledgement to our colleague Susan Edwards, conversations took place as a connected group was brought to life by connecting strings between the different devices that could send and receive information.

Children wrote messages to each other on a piece of paper, or drew pictures to each other on a piece of paper, and moved it along the string to the recipient. This brought the abstract concept of a digital network to life and inevitably resulted in conversations about responsibilities and consequences once children started re sharing those private messages with others.

Whereas at the start of the session, children were readily prepared to share their information with strangers online, by the end, they better understood why they would not do this.

**Steven Howard:** We also regularly get questions about children's big feelings and behaviors, which can often seem more frequent and intense in relation to digital activities.

How to deal with these is an important question. In short, we do this in much the same way as we support our children when they are frustrated, mad, or distressed for reasons that aren't digitally motivated. We're also interested in another question. What can we do to equip our children? So these challenges are less frequent, less intense, or shorter, because our children are themselves making better digital decisions.

We want children to have the ability and strategies to increasingly make healthy and productive digital decisions. Central to this is supporting their self regulation. Self regulation also features prominently in Early Childhood

## Australia's Statement on Young Children and Digital Technologies and the Early Years Learning Framework.

What we know is that many of the things that we can do to support self regulation outside of digital contexts also apply in digital contexts. First, we know that children learn from observing and mirroring what we do. Children bring life into their play. Shopping, the doctor's office, building, and work.

Children are acutely aware of what adults do, and this includes our digital decisions and behaviors too. One of the most influential things we can do is set and model a healthy digital diet. More than just doing this, it's also an important opportunity for conversation. Vocalize the choices you make and the reasons for making these choices.

What's your plan for a digital experience? When do you stray from the plan and why? How do you stay on track despite competing priorities and distractions? Why did you decide to stop when you did? And what strategies did you use to remind you? Some of the choices adults can help with include the quality of the digital experiences that are chosen.

For example, there are many apps in digital games that don't allow much exploration, imagination, or interaction at all. These can often make it more difficult for a child to self regulate because there's no clear end point and they're designed to keep you focused on the task. They're designed to be more difficult to disengage from.

This contrast experiences like creating a video story or discussing digital photos, where there is opportunity for interaction and play with our children and a clearer end point. We also know that children are better able to regulate when there are clear and consistent expectations and boundaries.

There is opportunity to involve children in making these plans and setting boundaries. This helps ensure children are invested in the plans that are negotiated and understand the reasons for them.

We make suggestions to help you take some positive steps toward helping your children be active, collaborative, and safe in making healthy digital plans and decisions as you help them become more active and informed digital citizens.