

Digital Driver's Ed

RIDE. PRACTICE. DRIVE

SCREEN SANITY™

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One of our Screen Sanity Rules of Thumb is "Ride. Practice. Drive." Before you hand your child the keys to a car, they spend many years shadowing you in the backseat, followed by a learner's permit — with you logging hours by their side, coaching them with ongoing support and assistance. As student drivers demonstrate the ability to make wise decisions, we trust them with more responsibility.



1. Ride

ARE THEY PREPPED AND READY?

While your child is still "backseat shadowing" you, use these years to

- **Establish your core values, and regularly narrate** ways your screen supports or hinders them, and model the healthy habits you desire your children to learn.
- **Create a Family Screen plan that clearly articulates** device-free zones and safety/accountability plans, and practice making them a predictable part of your daily routine.
- **Strengthen your relationship with your child** by being honest about your own tech habits, and finding opportunities to regularly unplug, listen with your full-face, and create memories as a family.
- **Introduce topics they will encounter in the online** world, including pornography, sexting, online safety, privacy, cyberbullying, comparison and self-image, and the permanence of digital footprints.
- **Test Drive it Yourself**

Before you say yes to any new device or app, try it out yourself and get familiar with it. The more you learn about what your child will experience, the better.

2. Practice

MENTOR YOUR CHILD DURING A "LEARNER'S PERMIT" SEASON

Start with strong limits, and release them slowly.

- If you are ready to let your child try a new device or app, plan to log some hours in the passenger seat, coaching them through the thrills and hazards they will encounter.
- **Continue to use device-free zones — like** mealtimes + bedrooms overnight.
- **Establish ownership:** The parent owns the device/app — the child is "leasing" and does not have a right to privacy.
- **Internet Access:** At first, remove or disable the native browser. When it becomes clearly needed on the device, install a monitoring service like OurPact as a safety net the same day you re-instate it. No app store (has access to browsers).
- **Texting:** Only allow texting to a small # of friends and family at first. Start with single-person texting before moving to group texting. Consider mirroring or monitoring on a separate device. Install a monitoring app like Bark as a safety net.
- **Apps:** Only allow a small # of apps at first, and restrict app store purchases. Make their accounts private. As you add new apps, teach kids to read reviews, and tighten the app store settings.
- **Social Media:** Know all logins and passwords. Continue to use a monitor like Bark. Start with a shared family account, then allow one personal account before allowing multiple. Discuss (and approve) all initial posts. Limit # of friends at first, and approve new followers slowly/wisely. Try co-creating stories or videos with your child, showing them how to block unwanted solicitations, reject messages from strangers, and report inappropriate content immediately. Occasionally log in and look around, but don't overdo it.
- **Coach your child to use Screen Time + Family Link to self-monitor** their digital wellness, and brainstorm types of personal "friction" they can use to encourage healthy tech habits, or discourage bad ones.
- **Accidents are bound to happen.** Don't freak out when your child encounters roadblocks or emergencies. Let them know you are safe harbor; they can tell you anything.

3. Drive

Sometime before they flee the nest, you want your child to be an independent, safe smartphone driver, who knows how to navigate the digital world in a healthy, responsible way. Trust them to merge cautiously, and be on call as roadside assistance.

