



Children and Media

7 tips for educators in the digital age



THE MANNERHEIM LEAGUE
FOR CHILD WELFARE



Publisher

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For educators

Media is a part of the lives of children in many ways. The internet, social media, games, television and other media content and platforms are part of the growth environment of children. Parents and educators may ponder how they can support the media skills of children and a balanced, responsible use of media.

Adults do not have to know everything there is to know about the internet, games or the latest applications. However, expressing

positive curiosity and a will to understand how children use media is needed.

This brochure deals with questions relating to the media usage of children in grades 1–6, in particular. ‘Media’ means both traditional and digital forms of media, content and communication channels.

What topic relating to media use will you talk about with your child today?

1

Become familiar with how your child uses media

Every child has their own way of using media. It is therefore important that you become familiar with the applications, games and content that your child uses. Do you know what your child most enjoys doing with media?

Media is used in various ways for finding information, interaction, self-expression, learning and entertainment. The internet, social media and games can be used to reinforce friendships, make new friends and follow personal role models and interests. Active media users may produce their own media content and influence and contribute to matters that are important to them.

For children, social media services and game environments can be one place among others where they spend time with friends and new acquaintances, relax and engage in hobbies. Conversations are held using instant messaging software, games and social media platforms, often in private groups where communication can be quick and spontaneous.

Ask and listen with an open mind to what is important or enjoyable to your child, what they are interested in online or how media is used among the child's friends. Children this age, i.e. those in grades 1–6, typically enjoy talking about their favourite content or media use. Parents should listen attentively and share experiences with their child.

When online experiences are an everyday topic of discussion, it is often easier for the child to also approach an adult if they experience anything negative on the internet.

Open, positive dialogue supports the growth and media skills of a child. You should also show your child that you appreciate their knowledge and skills. You can ask for help with your media use and let them teach you. It is essential for a child to receive positive feedback, and positive encouragement can be given on media use.

Have a talk with your child

- What does your child most enjoy doing on the internet or on their phone?
- What kind of games do they play?
- Which apps, gaming communities and social media services are important to the child? What do they do there and with whom?
- In what situations and for what purposes do they prefer to use media?
- Where does the child search for and obtain information?
- Who does the child follow or admire online or in gaming communities? Why?
- How can the parent support the child's use of media?

2

Support your child's media skills

Media skills develop in interaction with friends, family and other media users. The more familiar you are with the media your child uses and their habits of using the internet, the better support you can provide for them.

Media can be an important hobby for a child. It can involve e.g. gaming, photography, making videos, programming or other digital activities or expression. Media skills are often useful in school and in other hobbies as well. The use of media may also be a part of the child's play and hobbies: they may e.g. take pictures or make videos, create their own content or follow their content on social media.

There are more and more sources of information available in the digital age. You need the ability to identify and interpret various content and their ways of influencing you. You may also want to practice how to identify advertising together.

Make sure that your child has access to reliable, versatile information on topics that interest them as well as positive peer support. Children have the right to take part and obtain information via media.

Media education is part of day-to-day upbringing

There are many ways in which adults at home can support a child's media skills, which are learned by doing, thinking about

and trying out things together. The use of media often requires the same skills that are also needed in other areas of life. Children cannot learn these skills on their own. Therefore, parental support plays an important role. Which media skills are the most important in your opinion?

Have a talk with your child

- Which of the child's media skills are you especially proud of?
- Which media skills does the child feel confident about?
- In what areas does the child need support?
- In the child's opinion, what should the parent know about media use, gaming or the internet?
- What could you learn from your child? What could you teach them?



Diverse media skills are needed in the digital age



Getting your child their first device?

What should you pay attention to when getting your child their own phone or smart device?

In many families, children get their first phone when they start school. However, there is no specific recommended age for when your child should get their first device. Their first phone does not have to be a smartphone either.

Parents should be aware of the reason why they are getting their child a device. When a child gets their own device, they are one step closer to independent media and internet use. This means that the child needs media

skills and information about media use that is appropriate for their age and level of development.

Think about the support that your child needs. What content or games are they ready to see? What agreements will you make together when it comes to using the phone?

Children often find many other things to do and ways to spend time on their phone than what the original purpose of the phone was. Parents should regularly practice how to use the phone and the internet together with their child and set rules for safe usage no later than when the child gets their first device.

Discuss the following things together:

- For what purposes and in which situations will the device be used?
- When will the phone be set aside (e.g. bedtime, mealtimes, when moving among traffic, when the teacher says so)?
- Safe passwords and device access codes that are not revealed to outsiders.
- Asking permission from a parent before downloading apps or creating personal profiles; downloading apps requires a password that only the parent knows.
- What information or things may the child share about themselves or people close to them in various channels?
- The settings of apps and social media services should be set as private at first.
- Possible spending of money on the phone or in games; parent's credit card information should be password-protected.
- Telling an adult if the child comes across anything negative, such as cyberbullying, confusing contacts from strangers or scary content.
- On the way to school and when moving from place to place, the phone should be kept in the backpack or pocket so that the child pays attention to their surroundings and travels safely.



3

Create a balanced digital life

The flood of sensory stimuli requires the skill to manage media use and the ability to concentrate. Many games and social media apps are designed to encourage people to spend as much time with them as possible. A developing, growing child needs adult support to take care of personal wellbeing. Wellbeing is supported by e.g. getting enough quality sleep, regular exercise and meals, meaningful hobbies and meeting people face-to-face.

The management of time and media use is not always straightforward or easy for children, nor is it for adults. Anticipation, or the habits and skills used to manage media use, is crucial. You should have a talk with your child about how the use of smart

devices can affect e.g. the use of time, sleep, school and hobbies, exercise and friendships and family relations. Support the child's skills to manage their time and find meaningful, positive things to do. It is important to remember moderation in media use as well.

Your child may spend a lot of time on the internet, because it not only contains interesting content, but is also the place where their important friends are. New friendships can also be formed online and in games. Talk to your child about whether interaction online causes pressure to take part or be present. Talk about who your child spends time with online and whose company they enjoy.

Take care of at least the following:

- Getting enough sleep
- Place where the mobile phone is parked at night
- Taking care of schoolwork, housework and other duties
- Outdoor activities and exercise
- Family agreements for the use of smart devices
- Taking breaks from screens
- Meeting friends and other people face-to-face, spending family time
- Ergonomics, such as good workspaces and changing positions



Remind them that although smart devices make it easy to always be available, this is not a must. Encourage them to spend time with peers face-to-face and support their friendships.

Motives for media use and time management

Encourage your child to observe how media use affects them and the people close to them. How does it make them feel? What needs does the child meet with the use of media, gaming or watching series or films? Do they do it for entertainment, to engage in a hobby, to learn, to spend time with friends, to relax? And is media use, in the child's opinion, sometimes just a way of "idling away" their time to e.g. avoid something negative, such as loneliness or boredom? It is important to provide a range of versatile activities to a child who is still practicing how to manage their time.

If you are concerned about your child spending too much time with media, find a suitable moment to calmly bring up the subject. Talk to your child about what they find fascinating in media and how you could try to build more balanced daily routines and find versatile activities. Parents should be familiar with games and other media content, because this often makes it easier to make agreements and set boundaries.

Help your child to identify signs of excessive media use, such as irritation, tiredness, an inability to concentrate, sleep problems and neck and shoulder pain. Help them to practise the skills to manage media use and focus only on what they need at the time.

Children are different and need the kind of support that works best for them. Some need discussions while others need activities and actions or a stronger adult presence. If it is difficult to stop e.g. playing a game or using a smart device despite agreements and requests to do so, you can encourage the child to take a break or do something else by sitting down next to them and helping them find a suitable place to stop.

Have a talk with your child

- What does the child think about their media use?
- How do they feel it affects their personal wellbeing, friendships and family relations or school?
- What activities do they find enjoyable or meaningful?
- In their opinion, what is the appropriate amount of time per day to spend with media or playing a game? How about the parent's opinion?
- What aspects of media use does the child feel are useful or enjoyable, and what are harmful?

4

Agreements make for a smoother life

Family agreements for media use or gaming may be needed to make sure that everyday life runs smoothly and includes versatile activities.

It is often easier to follow agreements when they have been prepared and justified together with the child. Agree on the situations and places where media use is appropriate and where it is not. For instance, are mealtimes, travels or visits to other people's homes kept free from smart devices?

You can make life easier by identifying, with your child, which things are non-negotiable, such as sleep, and which are negotiable and flexible. Media use should not be a hindrance to taking care of school work or other duties. It is also important to make time for exercise and meeting people in real life. If the discussion about rules turns into an argument, it may be necessary to do more positive things with the child in day-to-day life. If media use is limited as a punishment, this may cause more arguments.

If you are concerned about something in your child's media use, calmly voice your concerns and provide a reason for them. Do not read your child's messages without permission unless you have a particularly good reason

to do so, so as not to break the trust between you. Sometimes children may hesitate to tell an adult about negative experiences, because they fear that the device will be taken away from them. In addition to agreeing on media use and supporting the child's skills, you should try to understand the significance of media use to the child.

Some of the signs of harmful gaming and internet use are that the child cannot take any breaks at all or playing games and using the internet is constantly controlling their life. Does ending a game or putting away their phone cause unreasonable arguing or overwhelming distress? It is crucial that the issue is addressed and the situation fixed together.

There is reason for concern over a school-aged child if gaming starts to negatively affect e.g. school, family relations or meeting friends face-to-face, or the child starts to neglect sleep and personal wellbeing. If this is the case, media use should be limited and the rules specified. It is also important to offer something meaningful to do instead as well as the adult's presence and time spent together.

If necessary, media use can also be limited using e.g. device settings, time

tracking apps or blocking software. However, they cannot replace doing things together, having discussions and making agreements.

Talk to other educators about the media-related issues that their families are dealing with. You might want to share good practices. But try to remember that every child is unique, and different methods work for different families.

Also take part in the dialogue with your child's school and hobby community on how to work together to support children towards responsible media use.

Have a talk with your child

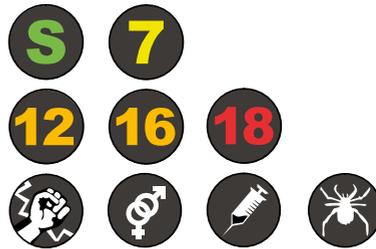
- What media use routines and agreements are there in your family? Why?
- Who do the agreements concern? Who have been involved in making the rules or establishing the common routines?
- How can the media use of family members and other people close to you affect the others?
- In the child's opinion, what routines and agreements would work in our family?
- What should be taken into consideration in terms of family members of different ages?
- Continue this sentence together: In our family, we have agreed that...

Age ratings of games and audiovisual media

Observe the age ratings. This supports safe media use. The age ratings of films, television programmes and digital games are based on the law and give a warning of any content that is detrimental to the development of underage children.

The law is absolute when it comes to the public viewing of content assigned the highest age limit, 18. It is important to also remember this at home.

Television programmes and films



Digital games



More information: → ikarajat.fi

Have a talk with your child

- What do the age ratings mean?
- How do games or films affect your mood or how you feel?

5

You set an example

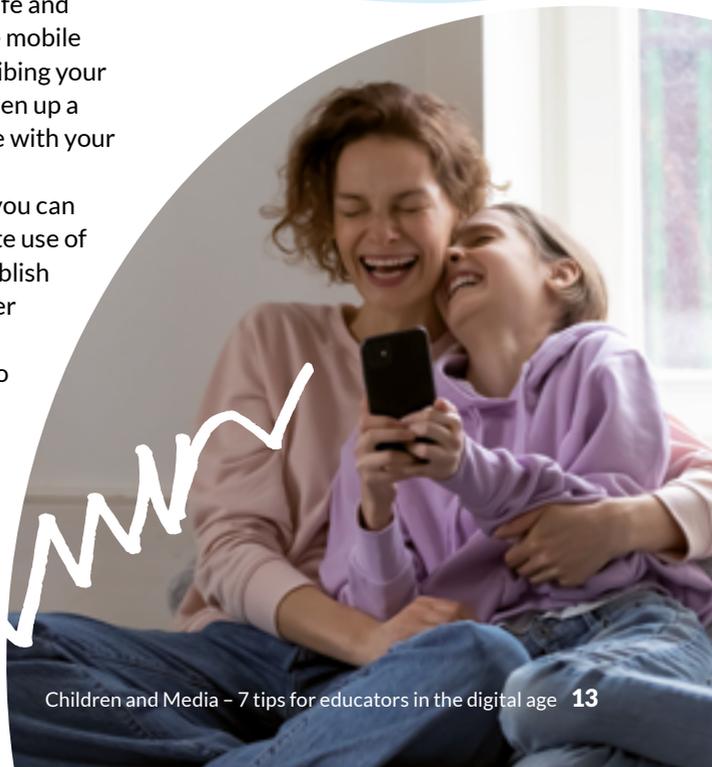
Children and adults often use media in different ways. Even so, it is important for a parent and educator to keep in mind that they set an example to the child with their personal media use. How much time do I spend online, gaming or using various devices? How emotionally available am I when I do this? How does my media use affect our daily routines as a family? Think about how it may appear to a child.

From time to time, stop and consider your habitual ways of using various media. Think about how you behave with others online, in real life and in various situations where mobile devices are present. Describing your habits as a user can also open up a discussion about media use with your child.

By setting an example, you can teach your child considerate use of the internet and how to publish things responsibly. Consider what content you publish. Take the child's opinion into account and remember to ask for their permission if you are about to post a picture or information about them online, on your social media channels for example.

Have a talk with your child

- What does the child think of your media use?
- What is similar in your ways of using the media, what is different?
- What do you enjoy doing when you spend time with media or games or online?
- How do you think your child will answer the same question?
- Have you asked for your child's permission to post photos or updates online about them?



6

Positive and safe encounters

The internet, games and social media are often important ways to stay in contact with friends. Friendship skills are also needed in digital environments.

Encourage positive interaction

Talk about how the environments of the internet or social media affect friendships and the interaction between people. How do the unwritten or self-evident rules or norms that exist in various groups affect online behaviour? Discuss what the messages or conversations are like in the channels, message threads or groups that the child uses. Is someone left out? What kind of tone is used when discussing group members versus those outside the group? What kinds of conversations do gamers have in the heat of the game?

Teach your child to put themselves in someone else's position. Encourage them to respect their own and other people's boundaries. Small, considerate acts can also be performed online to create positive encounters and be fair. If your child has a personal channel or profile online, remind them, if necessary, that they are worth much more than the number of likes or followers that they could ever get online.

Take cyberbullying seriously

Bullying or hurtful behaviour should not be accepted on the internet either. Remind your child that content that offends or insults others should never be posted or shared online or in groups.

Cyberbullying includes hurtful, threatening or humiliating messages, the spreading of false rumours, excluding someone from groups and spreading secretly filmed or unauthorized content and personal information. Cyberbullying cases may be associated with bullying in school or in hobby groups. Anyone can be guilty of cyberbullying, either intentionally or unthinkingly.

Encourage your child to talk about any negative experiences. If your child tells you about hurtful behaviour, harassment or cyberbullying, take it seriously and remain calm. Be a supportive adult and be ready to address the bullying: what has happened, in which environments and who were involved. Save any hurtful content and messages e.g. as screenshots. You may want to notify the administration of the service of the offensive content. You should block the bully or person harassing the child or remove them from the contacts.



Pay attention to the bullied child's wishes on what would help them in the situation. All incidents of bullying should be resolved with the parties involved, such as the school, hobby group, the other children and their guardians. In serious cases, you should turn to the police. Remember to praise your child for speaking up and not dealing with the situation alone.

Have a talk with your child

- In the child's opinion, what things and acts count as cyberbullying? How about the parent's opinion?
- Has the child seen or come across bullying? In which environments?
- Does the child know what to do if they or a friend is bullied online? Tell your child what you would like them to do.
- How, in the child's opinion, could cyberbullying best be prevented?



Sexual content on the internet

Not all online content is meant for children. The age limit of pornographic material, for instance, is 18 years.

Be prepared to have a conversation and be a safe adult if your child has come across e.g. sexual content that they find confusing. The child should also be aware that it is not a good idea to e.g. share personal photos where they are scantily dressed or reveal personal information to strangers online. You should agree that the child will not give their phone number or other contact information to strangers and encourage them to tell their parent if someone asks for such information.

Urge your child to tell you if a contact, messages or content online is bothering them. Remind them that they do not have to watch confusing or scary content if someone at school, for instance, shows such content to others. It is smart to say no to something that you do not want to see. If you hear that something like this has happened, you should contact the teacher and the other parents.

Remind the child that nobody can pressure them into doing something they do not want to do. Boost your child's self-esteem and the ability to clearly refuse, if contacts or content shared by others online feel unpleasant or confusing. Harassment should not be tolerated.

Safe internet use

The publicity and privacy of various media environments should be discussed together. How can different services be used safely and responsibly? What information about the child can be seen by other internet users? If your child has social media profiles or channels, it is a good idea to keep them private at first.

A good ground rule to ensure that your child uses the internet safely is that no personal information, such as a phone number or photograph, is sent to strangers. Giving away personal information and photos increases the risk that your child will end up a victim of wrongly shared personal information, false rumours, fraud and other malpractice. It is vital that you tell your child what information or photos of themselves, their family and friends they are allowed to share online and in their profiles. The benefits and potential drawbacks of sharing their location on various platforms is also worth discussing.

It is a good idea to become familiar with data protection and the terms and conditions of apps and services together and find out how and for what purpose they collect user data. Some services have a section or site for parents

describing safety and privacy. Parental consent is often required for using online services.

Safety can be improved by exercising discretion. If your child uses social media services, a private profile is often safer than a public one, as it protects them from negative comments, sexual harassment and other risks. Taking care of passwords, device access codes and the privacy settings of apps are important basic elements of safe internet use. Discuss what makes a password safe. Remind your child that passwords should not be shared with other users online.

Have a talk with your child

- How can you know who to trust online?
- Has a stranger ever contacted the child? How did the child respond to the situation?
- What is the wise course of action when dealing with strangers?
- What things should be kept private?
- What things, information and photos of themselves and others may be shared online and what may not? Why is it important to ask for permission to post something?
- How can they ensure safety and privacy online for themselves and for their friends and other people?

7

Have fun together

You learn a lot by experiencing things together. Positive moments together are important to a child. Parents often play games with small children, but do remember to also play games with school-age children. Accompany your child to YouTuber or gaming events or the movies. Share the greatest things or most interesting articles of the day with each other. Ask your child to tell you about their favourite videos, games or YouTubers, players or other online idols that they follow. What things in media does the child get excited about? What kind of content brings you both joy? You can also share things that interest you.

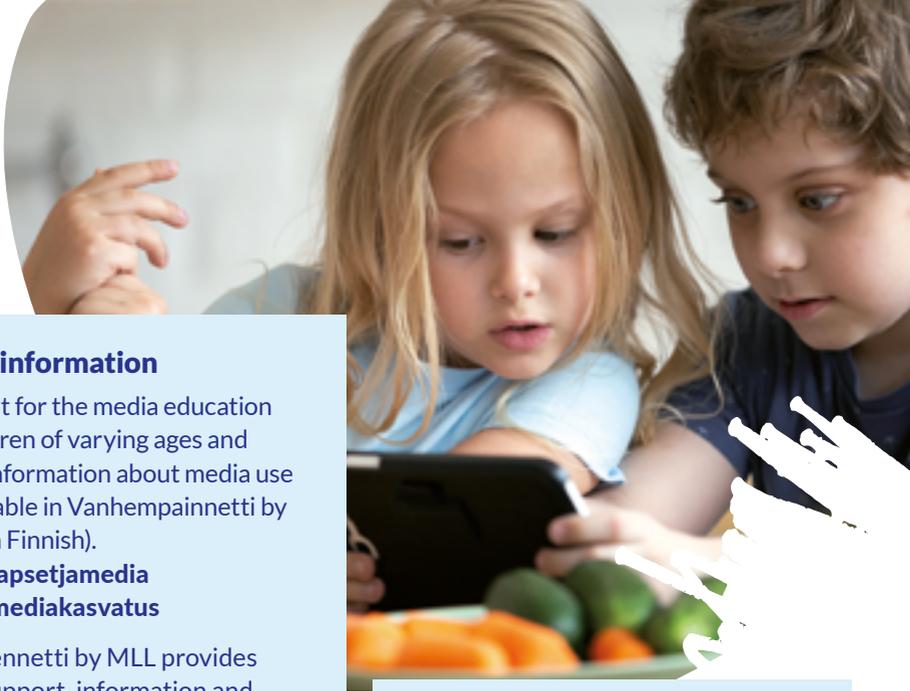
Try making videos together, creating a social media profile relating

to your hobby or doing something fun that interests both of you. At the same time, you will both learn diverse media skills and also think about questions concerning e.g. publishing content. In addition to dealing with practical matters, family message groups can also be used to bring joy to others in many ways and show the child that they are important and the parent is thinking about them.

Have a talk with your child

- How would they like to spend time together?
- What kinds of things would the child like to do together with media?





More information

Support for the media education of children of varying ages and more information about media use is available in Vanhempainnetti by MLL (in Finnish).

mll.fi/lapsetjamedia

mll.fi/mediakasvatus

Nuortennetti by MLL provides peer support, information and help with various questions (in Finnish). nuortennetti.fi

Invite an MLL instructor to hold a parents' evening or lesson or provide other media education training. mll.fi/tilaakouluttaja

If you are concerned about your child's media use, you can also contact the free MLL Parents' Helpline, chat or online letter service in Finnish.

Parents' Helpline, tel. **0800 922 77**
Mon 10 am–1 pm and 5–8 pm, Tue
10 am–1 pm and 5–8 pm, Wed 10
am–1 pm, Thu 2–8 pm

Vanhempainnetti letter service
and chat mll.fi/vanhempainnetti

Child and Youth Phone,
tel. **116 111** (in Finnish)

Mon–Fri 2–8 pm and Sat–Sun 5–8 pm

The Child and Youth Chat

is available Sun–Wed from 5–8 pm.

You can write the letter service
at any time. [nuortennetti.fi/
lasten-ja-nuorten-puhelin](https://nuortennetti.fi/lasten-ja-nuorten-puhelin)

Child and Youth Phone in Swedish:
ung.mll.fi

Useful websites

mediataitokoulu.fi

nettivihje.fi

someturva.fi

media-avain.fi

mediakasvatus.fi

pelikasvatus.fi

pelitaito.fi

Media education is part of day-to-day upbringing. There are many ways in which adults at home can support the media skills and digital wellbeing of a child. Media, games and the internet often require the same skills that are needed in other areas of life as well.

This brochure describes the media culture of children and the ways in which parents can guide their child towards safe, responsible media use.

mll.fi/mediakasvatus



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