

# Why the Best Parental Control Is You

Instead of flipping a switch, be the voice in their head.

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If your kid's online, there have probably been times when you've wanted to track everything they've texted, see their entire social media history, or just shut off the internet entirely. Those are the times you wish for the perfect parental controls -- something that will grant you all the access and authority you want without making a bad situation worse. The truth is, while clicking a few buttons on a hardware device or downloading a monitoring service seem like no-brainers, [the most effective parental control is free and knows your kid very well](#). That's right: It's you. Digital tools and settings can help you stay on top of your kid's online life, but can't replace staying involved, having conversations, and helping them make responsible choices. Need more convincing? Here are the key reasons why you are the best parental control around:

**Fighting tech with tech can fail.** If they put their minds to it, kids can defeat almost any parental control. One of the truisms of the digital age is that your kids probably know more than you do, and it's easy for them to Google "How do I get around parental controls?" and [read step-by-step instructions for dismantling your carefully chosen software or device](#). Of course, there are tools that do what they promise and offer you some comfort and control ... at least for a while. So, if shutting down the internet via a tap is helpful for your family, pairing it with conversations likely will make it more effective. And if your kid does an end run around your parental control, [let them learn to code so they can channel their skills in a positive way](#).

**Spying isn't sustainable.** Kids -- especially older kids -- may feel like parental controls invade their privacy. According to one study, [the loss of trust prompted by parental controls can weaken your whole relationship](#). Simply shutting the internet off is one thing, but if you try to track your kid's social media accounts or read their text messages, they may just create new profiles and take their conversations to other platforms far away from your prying eyes. Instead, when you decide it's time for them to go online or have a phone, let them know upfront that you'll do spot-checks -- not to "catch them" or get in their business -- but to support them as they learn balance in the digital world. If you decide to use parental-control devices or platforms, integrate them into ongoing

conversations so they can serve as a safety net as your kid is learning the ropes. The world of digital media and its influence on our kids are far too complicated for simple solutions or ultra-strict oversight.

**What you say makes more of an impact.** Instead of flipping a switch, be the voice in their head. Teaching and modeling a healthy approach to the online world will have a much more lasting impact. Being able to shut down the internet in your home at key times can be very helpful, but it's also a bit like always fastening your kid's seatbelt for them: Eventually, we want them to remember to buckle up on their own. To get a kid to really remember something, [research shows that some information requires repetition over time](#). A combination of showing them a healthy approach and discussing media and tech use over time, on multiple occasions, will help kids regulate themselves and build skills to carry into adulthood. When you say things like, "Remember to think before you post," "Don't talk to strangers on the internet," and "Use strong privacy settings," they'll remember. As new technology comes and goes, we are our kids' North Star, the constant guidance in a constellation that keeps changing shape, and tech-based parental controls will never shine as brightly as our influence.

**Sharing instead of shutting down sparks learning.** Sometimes we let our kids use devices because we're looking for a few minutes to get something finished, and setting time limits and doing spot checks -- verbally or with digital parental controls -- is important. But the more we can [watch and play with our kids](#), the more they'll learn from the media they're using. Research shows that just sitting with your kid while you watch [heightens their awareness](#), which can make them more receptive to learning. It can also boost [literacy skills](#) and [empathy](#), and -- since we know our kids best -- when moments come up in media that apply specifically to our kids' lives, we can use those instances to start a discussion, ask questions, and make connections. Also, the more we model this dialogue with media for our kids, the more they can look at it critically, ask questions themselves, and take away lessons for their own lives.

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