

# eParenting™

## High-Tech Kids



**“I learned how and why parenting needs to adapt to social media use.”**

**“I will be more proactive in letting my children understand the positives and negatives of social media.”**

*—Comments from parent participants in Cooperative Extension’s eParenting™ programs*

### Situation

The role of media technology in children’s lives has increased at an astonishing rate over the last century. When we think about previous generations and the roles played by radio, television and magazines, it is clear that this phenomenon is not new. However, the evolution of digital media since the introduction of the personal computer in the late 1970s has been extraordinary and continues at a historic pace.

Many contemporary parents are only partially aware of the kinds of media that their children are using. Watching their children grow up as digital natives, parents often feel left behind and seek to learn more about the emerging digital world in which their children are growing up.

Currently, most programs for parents about digital media focus on the potential negative effects of its use (for example, cyber-bullying and online predators) and how parents can protect their children from such dangers. While these programs are valuable, they ignore the many posi-

tive aspects of digital media, including the ways that it can contribute to a child’s development, enhance the parent-adolescent relationship and provide tools that can strengthen and extend childrearing skills.

Today’s parents can benefit from a better understanding of the role digital media play in their children’s lives and by learning how to use new media to enhance their responsibilities as parents.

### Response

Cooperative Extension Family Living county educators and state specialists came together to examine the role of digital media in children’s lives and explore ways new media could strengthen family relationships.

The team consulted with national experts in the field of parenting and technology and followed up by developing, administering and analyzing a survey of middle school parents to learn more about their experiences with digital media.



## Family Living Programs Impact Report

---

With a strong, research-based foundation, the team worked together to develop a new curriculum titled *eParenting™ High-Tech Kids*. The primary goals of this program for parents of youth 9 to 14 years old include: 1) to help parents understand the role that digital media can play in supporting their adolescents' growth and development; and 2) to develop strategies using digital media that can enhance their parenting skills.

### Outcomes

Though currently in the piloting stages, the initial evaluation data is very promising and is being used to make revisions to the curriculum.

In the first pilot, Pierce County Family Living Educator Lori Zierl collected evaluations from 9 of 12 participants. Each completed a retrospective evaluation rating their understanding of concepts taught in the session on a scale of one to five with one being "none" and five being a "great deal" of understanding. The following average increases in understanding were reported:

- How digital media appeals to and fulfills adolescents' growth and development (2.4 to 4.7).
- How to use digital media to help you parent your adolescent (2.3 to 4.4).

When asked to share at least one new skill or idea they planned to implement as a result of the workshop, some responses included:

- Discussing specific expectations.
- Considering their child's input on discussions of consequences.
- Exploring the internet together.

A second pilot workshop was held in Green County by Family Living Educator Bridget Mouchon. Feedback from the 13 parents who attended was quite positive, with the majority of participants reporting increases in understanding the program's key outcomes. This included a better understanding of how digital media fulfills adolescent growth and of how to use digital media to help them parent.

### Next steps

The curriculum is currently being revised based on the data that was collected. After suggested changes are made, the program will be offered more widely, further refined, and made available statewide to county Family Living educators.

Based on feedback, work group members are exploring the option of expanding the topics to be covered. The work team is also beginning to explore how the program can be delivered in an online format. Based on parents' requests, future programs will include issues of internet safety and social media use.

**Today's parents can benefit from a better understanding of the role digital media play in their children's lives and by learning how to use new media to enhance their responsibilities as parents.**

### To learn more

To learn more about this project and Family Living Program's work strengthening Wisconsin families, contact:

Mary Huser

Program specialist  
University of Wisconsin-Extension  
Family Living Programs  
608-265-3589  
[mary.huser@ces.uwex.edu](mailto:mary.huser@ces.uwex.edu)

