

Have a Tech Savvy Holiday

As we approach the holidays, kids of all ages are wishing for a cell phone, laptop upgrade, or the hottest new gaming devices.

But oftentimes, we're hesitant. We have real concerns about how to keep them safe, whether on their phones, gaming or streaming content on their devices.

Hi, I'm Letitia Barr, founder of TechSavvyMama.com. Since 2008, I've shared technology, education and parenting advice on TechSavvyMama. And I've partnered with StreamSafely.com to share how you and your family can stay safe when using this season's hottest digital devices.

Phones, laptops, tablets and gaming devices make great gifts, but it's important to teach your kids how to be safe when using their new tech. The last thing we want to do is give a gift that could make your family susceptible to malware attacks and identity theft. Here are some tips on how you can teach your child to stream safely to keep your home network and personal information secure.

1. Teach your kids about parental controls. Mention parental controls and most kids groan. They don't see controls as protection. Providers of pirated content lack these security features. This gives children unrestricted access to adult content and may expose them to inappropriate and explicit

advertisements. Parental controls on computers, streaming services and cell phones protect our kids from inappropriate and potentially harmful material. Show your kids how parental controls act as a feature that keeps them – and you – safe in the digital world.

2. Help them understand where malware comes from. Your computer and mobile devices store sensitive personal information that hackers want. Account numbers, usernames, passwords, files, photos and emails are all targets. Hackers are constantly trying to access this information by coaxing you into downloading their malware that then provides an entrance to your computer or device. With our worlds going digital, your kids need to understand the possible impact of ONE misstep. Teach your kids to download only with your permission, and only from legitimate sources, making it hard for hackers to infect their tech. Avoiding malware keeps devices up and running, because nobody wants a tech blackout.
3. Make them aware of how gaming devices and platforms can put your family at risk. Modern gaming systems are designed to connect to the internet. When you enter your personal information into internet-connected gaming systems, it doesn't just go to the physical gaming device. There's a risk it could be accessible to others. Gaming hardware can sometimes come pre-loaded with apps and

sites that allow access to legitimate content- and also pirated content. So be sure your kids know that just because your new gaming platform comes pre-loaded, it doesn't always mean it's safe from pirated content.

4. Teach your kids to avoid offers that seem too good to be true. Make sure your kids know streaming services that provide illicit or illegal downloads don't offer the same protection as legitimate streaming services. They may be lured into an offer of free content from torrent websites, but "free" often comes at a price. Explain to your kids - and frankly, to any of your friends and family – the difference between illegal and legitimate streaming services.
5. Alert your kids that their favorite entertainment may look legal but could be a pirate trap. Torrenting is a common way for people to illegally download pirated TV shows or popular movies. Since hackers know this, they often disguise their malware as torrent episodes of the most popular television shows and hot film releases to trick people into downloading them. The more popular the show or movie, the more likely that a torrent file is going to contain malware. So, tell your kids that if something is free, it's probably too good to be true.

While we're home for the holidays, the demand for entertainment will be high. Criminals will try to take advantage of this by offering illegal services that provide movies, TV shows and live programming. But by teaching your family these five important things, you can be sure that everyone will stream safely.