

## What Smart Parents Can Do To Help Their Children Use The Computer Correctly

If children use the computer correctly, it can be a valuable learning tool. Here are some tips from the experts to help you encourage your kids to excel in school as well as enhance their creativity.

**Introduce the computer when your children are ready.** Most experts say that "lapware" designed for infants and toddlers is absurd. It's not until kids are at least 3 years old that the technology can be helpful, some experts say. Others would add two or three years to that advice.

**Become computer savvy yourself.** It's important to monitor your children's computer use, but you can't supervise effectively if you don't understand what they're up to. Rather than letting the computer become a source of conflict within the family, make it something you and your kids can do together.

**Don't use the computer as a baby-sitter.** Put the PC in a central place, where you can look over your children's shoulder and ask them questions about what they're finding. If you leave your kids unattended for long periods of time, you won't be aware of where their online travels are taking them.

**Choose the right software.** Most programs won't make your children smarter - and some might even impair their creativity. In general, avoid drill-and-practice software. "If you want the gains, use developmental software," says Susan Haugland, a Southeast Missouri State University child development expert. To find good products, read software reviews in magazines and check out Computers and Young Children ([cstl.semo.edu/kidscomp](http://cstl.semo.edu/kidscomp)) for Haugland's evaluation of current programs.

**Make sure children have balance in their lives.** Don't let youngsters get so obsessed with the computer that they neglect other activities. Kids need to take time out not only for homework, but also for exercise, socializing, non-technological creative outlets - and just pure play.

**Help children evaluate information.** Discuss the fact that everything they read on the Internet isn't necessarily true. Also, just as you teach your children that TV commercials are different from news, explain that some sites exist to sell products to kids. Ask questions to encourage them to think critically about the information they encounter on the Web. How trustworthy is it? How do you decide?

**Get involved in your children's school.** Does the school use only drill-and-practice software? Are the computers segregated in labs rather than housed in classrooms? Do teachers receive the training they need to integrate computer use into the curriculum? Find out and help with efforts to use computers to enhance learning.