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Digital Life Newsletter For Parents

Dear Parents and Guardians,

This month's issue deals with **Learning with Technology**. I hope you find it helpful.

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How can you tell if an app or a website is really good for learning?

Despite the claims of certain products that they teach your baby to read or do math, media that's really good for learning may not produce immediate, observable results. Instead, websites and apps with the most learning potential help your child learn *how* to learn -- and make them want to come back for more. It's a bit tough to find the good stuff, but it's worth it.

Products that lay the foundation for lifelong learning encourage questions, foster curiosity, and support critical thinking. They teach by engaging children, building concepts and deep understanding, providing feedback about performance (and adjusting difficulty accordingly), and providing opportunities to strengthen learning beyond the play session. A few that incorporate these qualities include open-ended sandbox games such as *Minecraft* and *Algodoo*, creative games such as *Faces iMake* and *Curious World*, and math apps such as *DragonBox* and *Get the Math*.

Use these pointers for finding apps and websites that are really good for learning:

Consider what you'd like your child to learn. Are you interested in boosting certain academic subjects such as math and reading, or are you looking for skill builders for creativity, logical thinking, or social-emotional learning? Or both? Common Sense's learning ratings evaluate each product's potential for facilitating your child's learning in these broad areas.

Let your child's interests be your guide. No sense insisting your child play a dinosaur game such as [Ansel and Clair: Triassic Dinosaurs](#) when she really prefers the cute pups in [Pet Bingo](#).

Investigate independently. Dig deeper than the developer's description in the app store. Read unbiased reviews and download a demo if possible or play on the site.

How can I help my child learn with digital tools?

The learning potential and success of any teaching tool depends on who's using it and how kids' learning is being supported by the teachers, parents, and friends in their lives. Children can skim the surface of [Sid Meier's Civilization V](#) and get something out of it, but they'll get a whole lot more if parents help extend their learning with other history-related activities.

Fortunately, it's not difficult to foster this kind of learning, because your children can guide the way. Your role is to get them talking, reflecting on their actions -- and thinking. Ask them questions about the programs they're using. Depending on the content and your child's age, you can be specific ("What's happening in the game?") or abstract ("Is it better to be brave or safe?"). Encourage them to think critically not only about the subject matter but also about the piece of media itself (who made it? Why do the characters look the way they do?). Take the learning offline by planning related activities (create an original story inspired by the story-making app [Dora and Friends](#), for example).

Look to the developer for ideas too. Take advantage of any parent material that comes with the app, game, or website, and find out if the developer offers materials or ideas to help extend the learning potential of its product. [The game Roblox](#), for example, [dedicates a portion of its website to parent education](#).

All content in this newsletter was taken from the Common Sense Media website.

<https://www.commonsensemedia.org/learning-with-technology>