

CHILDREN, ADOLESCENTS AND SCREENS

GUIDE ON THE USE OF DIGITAL DEVICES



Children, Adolescents and Screens
Guide on the Use of Digital Devices

Government of Brazil
2025

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Presentation

The improvement of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) has brought numerous benefits to societies, breaking down borders, connecting people and accelerating the production and dissemination of knowledge. Research shows that Brazilians are among the most connected people and most frequent users of the internet and social networks.

However, although they provide obvious benefits, these technologies have also brought to light problems that have generated increasing concern. In recent years, the excessive use of mobile devices and screens by children and adolescents has become a matter of concern for family members, educators, psychologists, pediatricians and rights protection professionals.

In addition to the risks of exposure to abuse, violence and bullying, specialists and policymakers have warned of delays in child development and in teaching and learning processes, which could be caused by the use of digital devices in inappropriate contexts or intensities. This is a theme that mobilizes international organizations, scientific communities and governments around the world; and in Brazil, it could not be different.

By bringing together several government agencies, specialists and representatives of civil society, listening to companies, children and adolescents themselves, we sought, in the perspective of the constitutional rule of child's rights absolute priority, to draw recommendations that could be discussed along with various public policies, with the justice system, with the current norms and with the policies and terms of use of digital platforms.

In this spirit, this Guide presented by the Federal Government is a response to the aspirations of Brazilian society and, at the same time, a major step toward the construction of a healthier digital environment for Brazilian children and adolescents.

Preamble

The digital environment brings numerous opportunities for connections, exchange of ideas and information, business and innovation. However, the perception that people have intensified the time spent using digital devices such as cell phones, tablets and digital games has worsened after the Covid-19 pandemic – a time when schools, work environments and family contacts have been abruptly transposed to the virtual dimension. The public debate on the consequences of such changes to the physical and mental health of children and adolescents has intensified in recent years and demanded responses from public authorities in Brazil and abroad.

This government, since its inception, has been working to **ensure the protection and promotion of the rights of children and adolescents on the Internet**. In early 2023, specific structures were created in the Secretariat of Social Communication of the Presidency of the Republic (SECOM), in the Ministry of Health, Human Rights and Citizenship and in the Ministry of Justice and Public Security dedicated to public policies for the digital environment.

Between April and October 2023, the Interministerial Working Group “Prevention and confronting violence in schools” operated under the Ministry of Education, including recommendations related to the digital environment in the booklet “Recommendations for Protection and Security in the School Environment”. Also in October 2023, after conducting a public consultation, the Brazilian government launched the first version of the Brazilian Media Education Strategy, which seeks to implement the provisions of the National Digital Education Policy.

Between October 2023 and January 2024, SECOM, with the participation of six other Ministries – Chief of Staff of the Presidency, Ministries of Health, Justice and Public Security, Human Rights and Citizenship, Education and Development and Social Assistance, Family and Fight against Hunger – promoted a public consultation on the use of screens by children and adolescents. Subsequently, the Working Group was officialized for the elaboration of a Guide for the Conscious Use of Digital Screens and Devices by Children and Adolescents, with the participation of some of the greatest Brazilian specialists on the theme.

The Working Group was composed of representatives of the government, the justice system, civil society organizations and specialists on the subject. The meetings took place between March and September 2024, discussing issues related to the Brazilian reality and the state of the art in scientific studies and discussions by governments around the world. In May, the activities of the Working Group included a meeting with the business sector, so that its perspectives also served as subsidies to the writing of the Guide.

The debates that resulted in this document also benefited from the cooperation with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which was a partner in organizing G-20’s parallel event “Promoting the integrity of information: combating disinformation, hate speech and threats to public institutions online”, held in May 2024 in São Paulo, which had representatives from almost 50 countries and had a panel dedicated specifically to protecting children and adolescents online and to Media Education initiatives. The elaboration process also included the collaboration of Instituto Veredas, which also

prepared in April 2023 a quick response with synthesis of evidence, “Screen Time for Children and Adolescents”, which served as a starting point for a survey of systematic reviews, meta-analyses and other peer-reviewed studies that integrate the more than 300 references consulted for the writing of this document.

Based on the principle of inclusion and the active participation of children and adolescents, the preparation of the Guide was also supported by a structured listening process with children, adolescents, families and educators promoted by the Instituto Alana, with the valuable support of the British Embassy in Brazil. Children and adolescents participated, from 43 municipalities distributed in all regions of Brazil, linked to public or private schools, located in urban, metropolitan or rural areas. The aim of this listening was to identify and address in an inclusive and democratic way the presence of screens*, digital devices** and social networks*** in the daily life of children and adolescents. The meetings took place in remote and face-to-face modes and had the technical partnership and the facilitation of young researchers from the Rede Conhecimento Social (Recos - Social Knowledge Network). At various times, whether in online public consultation or listening to children and adolescents, a desire and a demand for useful, balanced, easy to understand recommendations, based on the best available scientific evidence emerged. Moreover, and according to what our Constitution provides, it remains clear there is a collective responsibility to ensure the digital welfare of children and adolescents, which rests not only on families, but also on society, companies and the State.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that, in April 2024, the National Council for the Rights of Children and Adolescents (CONANDA) proposed Resolution n. 245, which provides for the rights of children and adolescents in a digital environment and establishes that companies and public authorities should promote awareness actions on the rights and risks posed to children and adolescents in their relationship with the digital environment, as well as benefits and risks associated with digital products and services. This Guide is one of the first actions to implement what is outlined in the Resolution.

The expectation is that this Guide will cover a broad process, in which multiple actors such as governments, civil society, companies and family members can be inspired to promote a healthier relationship between Brazilian children and adolescents and the vast and dynamic digital environment.

JOÃO BRANT
Secretary of Digital Policies

* *TN*: “Screen” is a generic term in Portuguese with broad social recognition, intentionally used in the plural form to refer to the different uses of technological devices present in the daily lives of children and adolescents. The term’s easy social understanding was crucial to its choice (even though not all digital devices have “screens,” such as home assistance devices, for example).

** *TN*: The term “digital devices” is used in Portuguese to refer to technology-mediated business models that connect providers and consumers. These are online environments where people interact in exchange relationships, which may involve work, education, leisure, or entertainment. In this sense, social media websites or apps are one type of digital platform, but there are also other platform formats.

*** *TN*: Social networks is used in Portuguese as a synonym for social media, or for technological products developed by companies and based on people’s social interaction experiences.

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Executive summary of recommendations

1

Children and adolescents live through intense changes in growth and in bodily, mental, and psychosocial development influenced by external, environmental and cultural factors. The set of scientific evidence currently available indicates that *problematic or excessive* use of digital devices by children and adolescents are associated with several **delays in cognitive, emotional and language development**, as well as health problems and mental disorders.



2

One of the factors that mostly contributes to the **early and excessive use** of digital devices by children and adolescents is the **excessive use by adults**, who serve as role models and references of behavior.

3

Decisions on the use of digital devices in family settings should always consider the rights to **full protection**, **the best interest**, and the **progressive autonomy and participation** of children and adolescents.

4

Companies that develop applications that can be used by children and adolescents should invest in **age verification** strategies, offer products or services based on **security by design** principles, collect the minimum data required, not expose children to marketing communication (including gambling), combat child labor and expand the offer and dissemination of tools that facilitate family mediation processes.



5

All those for whom the Brazilian legislation provides shared responsibility for children and adolescents must collaborate to guarantee the **right to privacy** (interpersonal, institutional and commercial) of such subjects, in relation to the digital environment.



6

Digital and Media Education policies contribute to developing skills for the proper use of and to taking advantage of the benefits of digital devices and applications, as well as help to reduce risks for children and adolescents in the digital environment.

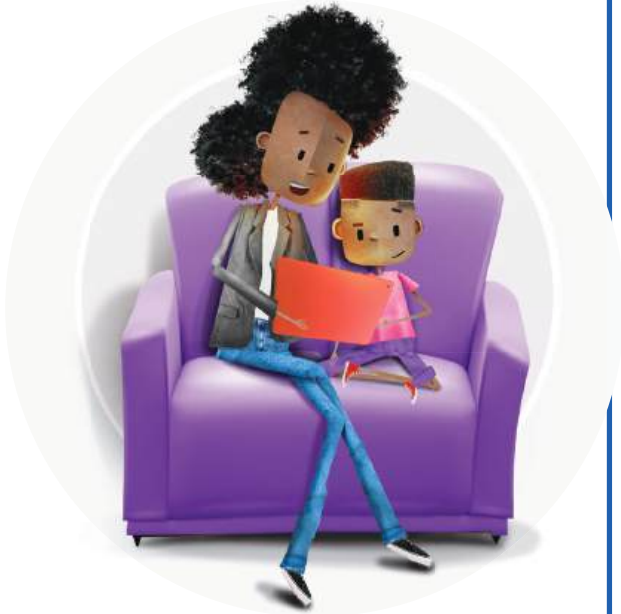
7

The implementation of general rules on the regulation of the use of cell phones in school units should be guided by Federal Law no. 15,100/2025, considering the importance of **pedagogical autonomy**, **democratic management** and participation of the school community.



8

The use of digital devices should take place gradually, as the progressive autonomy of the child or adolescent increases:

- It is recommended that **children under 2 years do not use screens and digital devices**, except for contact with family members by video call, accompanied by an adult;
 - It is advised that **children (under 12 years old) should not have their own smartphones**, and the **later** they are given or acquire their own device, the better;
- 
- **Access to social networks** should observe the **age group signaled by the Advisory Rating**, through colored square icons linked to the applications in the virtual stores where they can be downloaded. It is stressed that most social networks are not designed for children, containing patterns that stimulate prolonged and potentially problematic use, and the presence of children in them can pressure others to do the same, because they fear they will feel excluded;
 - The use of electronic devices, applications and social networks during **adolescence** (12 to 17 years) must be done with the supervision of **family members** or educators;
 - *The non-pedagogical use* of digital devices in the school environment, **at any stage of teaching**, can bring damage to the learning process and development of children and adolescents;
 - Schools should **carefully evaluate** the use of devices, such as cell phones or tablets, for pedagogical purposes in Early Childhood, avoiding their individual use by students;
 - Schools should avoid pedagogical tasks that stimulate the **possession of their own cellular devices**, as well as the **use of messaging applications, by children (before 12 years of age)**;
 - The use of digital devices for the purpose of **accessibility** or overcoming barriers should be encouraged by children or adolescents with disabilities, **regardless of their age group**.



Introduction

The presence of children and adolescents in digital environments has grown each year and the reality is that children and adolescents also occupy virtual spaces for various purposes. When we observed data from the TIC Kids Online Brasil survey over time, we noticed that, in 2015¹, for example, 79% of the participating children and adolescents had accessed the Internet in the three months prior to the survey; given that, in 2024², this percentage reached 93%.

Therefore, even though the inequalities are considered in the access and quality of the connection, the relationship between children and adolescents and the digital environment is *a phenomenon that is part of the experiences of contemporary childhoods and adolescences* and influences all of them, directly or indirectly.

This Guide presents *contributions from a country in the Global South*, which approaches the subject based on scientific evidence produced worldwide and is also sensitive to the ways in which the reality of screen consumption by children and adolescents affects *Brazilian households*, so diverse and so plural. A country that has *legislation based on the best interest of children and adolescents**, which recognizes their unique condition as individuals in development, and seeks to apply this legislation on a daily basis.

In the following pages, when the term “*digital environment*” is used, this Guide considers “information and communication technologies (ICTs), such as networks, content, services and digital applications available in the virtual environment (internet); connected devices and environments; virtual and augmented reality; artificial intelligence (AI); robotics; automated systems, biometrics, algorithmic systems and data analysis”^{3 4}.

Therefore, this Guide intentionally uses the word “*screens*”, in the plural, to talk about the different uses of technological devices in the day-to-day of children and adolescents.

It is also based on the understanding that *technologies*, in turn, *are not merely neutral tools* and cannot be used in just any way. Rather, they reflect the logic of a certain culture and a global model of organization of power⁵. Therefore, we talk about technologies that offer specific ways of seeing life.

In this context, an important distinction is the one that presents the Internet as a wide connected structure – in which several products and services are hosted for various purposes – and the notion of social networks, or social media, as technological products developed by companies and based on experiences of socialization between people. Thus, *social networks are on the internet, but the internet is not reduced to the dynamics of websites or social media applications*.

By mentioning *digital platforms*, this Guide will be mentioning business models mediated by technologies in which suppliers and consumers connect. These are online environments where people connect to exchange relationships, which can be work, teaching, leisure or entertainment. Thus, *social networking sites or applications are a type of digital platform, but there are also other platform formats*.

* **TN:** The term “childhoods and adolescences”, in the plural form, are intentionally used to convey the diversity of experiences of “being a child” or “being an adolescent” in Brazil, shaped by geographical, social class, gender, and other factors.

The digital environment presents to the general public – and to children and adolescents, more specifically – both *opportunities* that enhance experiences, learning and affective bonds and *risks* for those who walk through these new lands and spaces. Here the risks are addressed from their potential to cause *harm*.

If, by way of illustration, a child has experience with traffic, usual for large urban centers, it is possible to say that it offers *opportunities* to this child (such as the circulation between different places, which enrich their repertoire of experiences and facilitate the development of skills and the formation of bonds). These opportunities, however, involve exposure to *risks* (such as the need to cross streets, the risk of getting lost or the possibility of being approached by an unknown person) that will not necessarily be converted into *harm* (such as a traffic accident or theft).

However, still in the proposed imaginary scene, so that the child and the adolescent can exercise their citizenship and walk freely around the city, rules are necessary – crosswalks, traffic lights, the requirement of wearing a seat belt and having a child seat, the need to wait until a certain age to occupy the passenger seat, etc. In addition, it is necessary that *people* transmit information about such rules, with interest on the welfare of this child or adolescent, and for *processes* articulated by institutions and organizations to assist in applying these rules in their daily experiences.

In this case, since children and adolescents circulate through the digital environment, it is essential to understand that their protection is linked to the *regulation of platforms* (rules), the *education and empowerment* of adults and children and adolescents *subjects* (people) to deal with the demands of this context and the *development of safe and powerful experiences* (processes), as structuring pillars of the products/services available.

Experiencing digital citizenship requires understanding that digital technologies add a layer of complexity and new questions to an old question: how can you ensure that all people exercise their rights and duties in life in society?



Digital citizenship involves:

- The condition of being a citizen in digital environments of interaction (such as social networks), as well as in non-virtual environments, which can be directly impacted by the use of digital technologies;
- The set of rights and duties created to regulate the interaction between people during their use of digital technologies, including the creation of specific laws against crimes committed in virtual environments of interaction;
- The very exercise of the set of civil, political and social rights nowadays, an exercise that can be facilitated or not by the responsible, ethical and secure access and use of digital technologies.

Children and adolescents learn, therefore, in life in society. And even with skills to handle digital devices, they need to have someone to support them when they cross the street, explain the possible paths and prepare them to walk around on their own.

Thus, according to the idea that *societies can create safer and more friendly digital environments for children and adolescents*, when they are attentive to the uses they make of technologies⁶, this Guide offers information and recommendations that can serve as support for all those responsible – the community, companies, society in general and the public authorities – to have subsidies to promote and prioritize their best interest.

Multiple Childhoods and Adolescences

According to the United Nations-UN, around 25% of the world's population is composed of people between 0 and 14 years of age, which corresponds to about 2 billion children and adolescents⁷. In Brazil alone, we accounted for 19.8%, or 40.1 millions of these individuals. At the same time as the numbers show great quantity, they also call on us to consider the *diversity* that makes up such experiences.

Therefore, we *talk about childhoods and adolescences in the plural* because children and adolescents have unique experiences, which cannot be generalized. There are social determinants – linked to class, race, gender, place of origin, religion, culture, territory, being a person with disabilities, from quilombola, indigenous, riverside populations, etc. – that cross the relationship of these individuals with the world around them.

In this sense, considering the multiple Brazilian childhoods and adolescences, based on their bond with media, is fundamental. After all, it is an audience that has grown amid different screens and media devices, consuming the narratives that circulate in these spaces and incorporating them into their everyday experiences.

Provision, Participation and Protection

In Brazil, the different childhoods and adolescences are the focus of legislation that recognizes their *rights* and provides guarantees of provision, participation and protection for this segment of society.

The so-called 3 PS of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) align directly with Article 227 of the Brazilian Federal Constitution (1988) and reinforce the basic principles of the Statute of the Child and Adolescent - ECA (1990). Documents based on the recognition and confrontation of vulnerabilities of children and adolescents, both in an inherent and structural way^{8 9 10}.

Children and adolescents need care, protection and the support of adults to build their professional, educational and transition paths to adulthood, but it is essential to admit and value their progressive autonomy in the processes of implementing their rights.

The **absolute priority**, provided for in the law for children and adolescents, signals the importance of preference in the formulation and implementation of public policies and measures to meet the basic and essential rights of these individuals – food, health, education, leisure, culture, right to play, among others – (provision); to listen to them about decisions that may affect their lives, taking into account their opinions, ideas and protagonism in the transformations of reality (participation); and safeguarding them against acts or practices that could damage the integrity, social coexistence and quality of life (protection).

In this Guide, we embrace the challenge of considering the use of screens made by children and adolescents in light of the rights to provision, participation and protection. Among several aspects, we consider, for example, that the provision of universal and qualitative access to digital and media education is a requirement for the experience of citizenship nowadays; that children and adolescents need to be present and express themselves in the digital environment; and that such experiences should be guided and based on care for their safety, privacy, health and social coexistence at all times.



Children are people too!

When children act or speak in an intelligent or developed way (similar to an adult), a popular saying is normally appears:

“Look at this, he thinks he is a person”

This is a simple and current example of how children’s perspectives are often delegitimized in day-to-day relationships.

The legal instruments that establish the rights to provision, participation and protection of children and adolescents serve as an umbrella for their rights, enabling them to live life fully in society and reaffirming their status as people!



1

Contexts of use of screens and digital devices by children and adolescents

Brazil is a continental country with quite distinctive characteristics in its macro-regions. And just like the extent of the territory, its population is also diverse. Therefore, speaking in contexts involving the use of screens and digital devices by Brazilian children and adolescents considers different realities, referring to millions of people.

The Brazilian law provides definitions^{11 12} that guide the elaboration of this Guide and direct the priority of its actions for people up to 12 years incomplete (children) – with special focus on the first six years of life (early childhood) – and for those who are in the range from 12 to 17 years of age, or under 18 years (adolescents).

From childhood to adulthood, several regions of the human brain continue to develop and mature under influence of both internal stimuli and external influences. This process of neural and mental growth and development has characteristics that make children and adolescents more vulnerable. Therefore, there is a need for adult supervision, as family members and educators, in the daily routines of children and adolescents, as they are responsible for them until they are 18.

Today, neuroscience provides compelling evidence that the adolescent's brain does not equate to the adult brain, being an organ still in development and undergoing an intense reprogramming process beginning on puberty. Brain areas linked to emotions intensify its development, while other regions, such as the prefrontal cortex, associated with self-control and impulse regulation, only reach full maturity around the age of 25¹³.

Such developmental pattern makes teens curious about the outside world (and more prone to take risks), but it also allows them to adapt more easily to their environment – hence one of the origins of their curiosity and attraction for online digital games¹⁴, virtual challenges* and social networks.

Children, especially the youngest, are in a moment of intense brain development, building the skills that will serve as the foundation for future abilities. The interaction between children and their caregivers can have repercussions on their entire life course^{15 16}. The quality of these interactions between caregivers and infants or children is one of the most important and enduring factors related to child development, associated with the socio-emotional, cognitive and language domains¹⁷.

* **TN:** “Virtual challenges” is used in Portuguese to refer to content consumed by children and adolescents that encourages self-harm or may pose a risk of death. The term's easy social recognition was crucial to its choice (although the literature also refers to the expression “self-harming practices” as a synonym).



Screens in early childhood

There is a reasonable consensus in the scientific literature that, because they are in a critical period of rapid linguistic, cognitive and emotional development, babies (up to 2 years of age) can suffer serious harms^{18 19} if exposed to screens, especially for long periods, and that other forms of interaction such as play, face-to-face relationship with caregivers and family members, and exposure to music and books should always be prioritized for this age group.

Studies also point out that even after 2 years of age, activities that stimulate movement and socialization are preferable to screen exposure²⁰.

Daily experiences, however, show that family overload and the lack of alternatives for play without screens often lead to the use of these devices.

Recent data from the PIPAS Project, based on a survey conducted in 13 Brazilian capitals in households with children up to 5 years of age, indicate that 24% of households have no books, while in 33.2% of them, children in this age group watch programs or play on TVs, smartphones and/or tablets for more than two hours a day²¹.

This Guide emphasizes that family members and caregivers of children in early childhood should not be blamed but rather informed about the risks that problematic or excessive screen use can cause.

Screen-use habits are formed in early childhood²², and it is important to recognize that, in terms of child development, the use of digital media can affect the quality of the interaction between children and their caregivers.

Children learn as they explore the world around them, while establishing safe and affectionate relationships with adults and other children.

As stated later, in chapter 3 of this Guide, several countries have created official regulations or recommendations regarding the digital well-being of children and adolescents.

In Brazil, the Brazilian Society of Pediatrics (SBP)²³ advises that children under 2 years of age should not be exposed to screens. Between **2 and 5 years**, screen time is recommended to not exceed one hour per day, preferably while interacting with adults; for the age group between **6 and 10 years**, one hour longer than the previous group; and up to three hours for those aged **11 to 17 years**. These guidelines are currently included in the Child's Booklet, which is delivered to Brazilian families, and it is important to consider the different contexts and how these recommendations are implemented.



"Before the pandemic I could do my school assignments, and then I would use my cell phone. After the pandemic I feel that I lost this control".

(Girl, 17 years old, Brasília-DF)



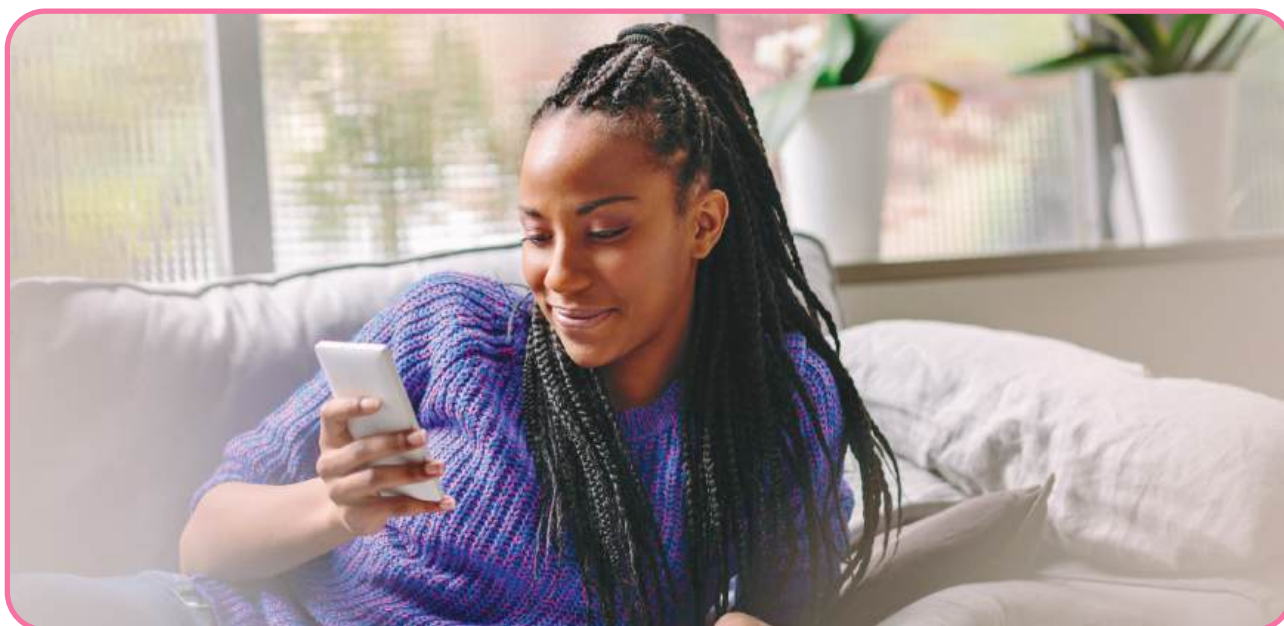
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"My youngest son is 12 years old, he uses [social network name], [app name], has had a phone since he was around 6 years old, and the computer we gave him exactly at the time of the pandemic, when distance-learning classes began; he needed this resource".

(Father, Campina Grande-PB)

For example, in a context of hyper connection associated with consumer experiences, entertainment, education, social coexistence, territories and affective bonds mediated by the Internet, studies have shown that, especially after the Covid-19 pandemic, the recommendations are not effectively adopted by a significant portion of Brazilian families^{24 25 26}.

A more promising path seems to be to differentiate contexts and types of screen use associated with the experiences of children and adolescents²⁷.





Not every screen is the same

A common argument in discussions about the excessive use of smartphones and digital devices by children and adolescents is that new media always generate some measure of panic, and that concerns surrounding the digital world occurred in a comparable way when radio or television was invented.

Each new media in turn, brings its own cycle of opportunities and risks. Mobile technologies connected to the Internet can be more interactive and dynamic, but they can also amplify the consequences and increase the likelihood of exposure to risks.

There are studies pointing out that the damage to the motor or^{28 29} visual³⁰ development may be greater in the case of small devices, such as smartphones and tablets – which often lead to poor body posture and closer proximity to the screen – than in the consumption of audiovisual content on televisions. Additionally, unlike televisions, which can be seen by several people at the same time, facilitating family mediation, small devices tend to favor individual use by children and adolescents.

Furthermore, the availability, portability and user-friendly interfaces designed for ease of use of these devices promote prolonged or excessive usage patterns. These patterns are, in turn, encouraged by operational modes devised by many of the digital platforms, with manipulative design and availability of online content so it is linked to recommendation algorithms.

Thus, not every screen is the same, and uses vary even depending on the types of screens and technologies available.

Usage patterns in the world and in Brazil

In metrics comparing screen uses across countries, Brazil stands out, along with other nations from Global South, as one of those with the highest levels of digital mobile device use or Internet access throughout the day^{31 32}.

In the Brazilian context, some of the main indicators reflecting the relationship between children and adolescents with the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are found in the TIC Kids Online Brazil, TIC Domicílios (Households) and TIC Educação (Education) surveys, carried out annually by the Regional Center of Studies on the Development of the Information Society (Cetic.br), linked to the Center for Information and Coordination of Ponto BR (NIC.br) and the Internet Steering Committee in Brazil (CGI.br).

The available data reveal a reality of intensive and growing use of phones for Internet access among Brazilian children and adolescents, across all socioeconomic groups.



Highlights of TIC Kids Online Brasil 2024³³

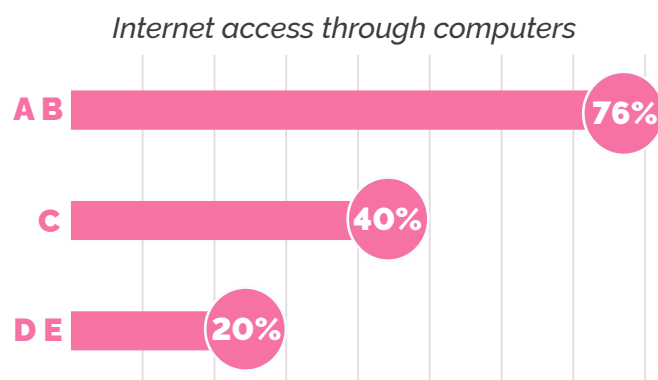
93%

of the population aged 9 to 17 years are internet users in the country, representing approximately 24.5 million children and adolescents.

23%

of Internet users aged 9 to 17 reported having accessed the internet for the first time by the age of 6 – the proportion was 11% in 2015.

The smartphone remains the *main device* for internet access among users aged 9 to 17 years (98%). Among internet users from classes D and E, 77% reported using a smartphone as their *only device for internet access*.



Internet access through computers was reported by 76% of the users of classes AB, 40% in class C and only 20% in classes D and E.

69% of internet users aged 9 to 17 *accessed the internet via television* (compared to 43% in 2019). The proportions were 88% among classes A and B, 73% in class C and 57% in classes D and E.

The research also reveals that the use of digital devices by Brazilian children and adolescents is mainly for **entertainment** or **educational** activities, as well as for accessing **social networks** – although the terms and policies of use of the main platforms indicate that they are not intended for people under the **age of 13**.



Highlights of TIC Kids Online Brasil 2024³⁴ about how children and adolescents use the internet

about how children and adolescents use the internet

86%

of internet users aged 9 to 17 reported *listening to music online* and 84% said they *watch videos, programs, movies or series on the Internet*.

86%

reported using the Internet to *research or complete school assignments*.

83%

of internet users aged 9 to 17 said they have a *profile on social networks*. Among those aged 15 to 17 years, the proportion reached 99%.

42%

of users aged 9 to 17 reported *having a profile on YouTube*, 69% on *WhatsApp* (70% in 2018), 63% on *Instagram* (45% in 2018), 45% on *TikTok* and 19% on *Facebook* (66% in 2018).

WhatsApp (53%) was the most widely used platform among users from 9 to 17 years, followed by *YouTube* (43%); *Instagram* (45%) and *TikTok* (37%). *YouTube* is the main platform accessed by users aged 9 to 10 years (45%) and aged 11 to 12 years (45%). *Instagram* is the main access platform for users aged 13 to 14 years (58%), while *WhatsApp* stands out among those aged 15 to 17 years (78%).



Scientific studies conducted in several countries have shown that the patterns of use of digital screens and devices by children and adolescents can also be impacted by the daily **routines and mental health conditions of mothers, fathers and family members**³⁵.

Therefore, it is necessary to **consider the specificities of different cultural contexts**. Screen use during childhood and adolescence varies according to the cultural, territorial, economic, social and health conditions of each family.



"Parents have this responsibility to know when to give a cell phone to the child".

(Boy, 15 years old, Bezerros-PE)

"I think the child should not have access before the age of 5 because it is when the child is developing the prefrontal cortex, and that is where the cell phone directly affects this development".

(Girl, 16 years old, Picuí-PB)

"For me it depends a lot on the child, there are some 7-year-olds who already have maturity, others who are 16 who still cannot control themselves, depends on them, how parents brought them up, on their behavior. It will vary for each person because each person is different".

(Boy, 11 years old, Santarém-PA)





When is it advisable to give a child or adolescent a smartphone?

This is certainly one of the questions that most troubles many families today. It is common for parents, in an effort to make daily routine easier for children who already use smartphones and tablets for digital games or entertainment, to give them their own digital device.

Some experts highlight a disproportion between the care families take to avoid exposing children to risks in certain physical spaces, fearing they might be victims of crime and violence; and they disregard risks that may exist in digital environments.

Just as guardians would not allow a child to walk alone at night in a dangerous place in the city, unrestricted or unsupervised access to internet-connected devices should not be permitted.

Possession of a smartphone or other device with messaging or social media applications opens numerous possibilities of unsupervised use by family members or guardians, including strangers contacting the child or adolescent.

In any case, the decision not to allow the possession of a smartphone is not always purely individual and, in part, usually reflects what the families of the child's friends and peers decide. It is worth remembering that the possession of a smartphone grants access to all internet content, regardless of the Advisory Rating ; stimulates individual use both at school and at home; offers the possibility of access to social networks; and creates pressure so other friends can also join these environments.

Therefore, especially after the Covid-19 pandemic, marked by the intensive use of screens by children and adolescents, movements of mothers and fathers have emerged in Brazil and around the world, seeking to postpone this moment until around the end of Elementary School or the beginning of High School, as a kind of *collective decision* agreed upon within groups of classmates or friends^{36 37}.

The available scientific evidence indicates that the later the possession of a smartphone occurs in childhood, the lower the risks to physical and mental health ³⁸, and to academic performance³⁹. Possession of smartphones in adolescence is a reality and, *if well managed, can bring more benefits than risks*^{40 41 42}.

On the other hand, we live in a digital world, and it is expected that at some point the benefits and risks of this world will challenge these developing individuals. For example, for many families, the possibility of staying in touch with children in contexts of urban violence is considered important.

Therefore, it is essential, as highlighted in this Guide, that this *process be discussed, agreed upon and conducted under the supervision of responsible adults*. It is a choice that depends on the context, the dynamics of each family and the maturity of each child or adolescent in relation to rules of use, security and privacy.

In this Guide, based on what is currently known⁴³, *it is recommended that the ownership of a personal **smartphone** should not occur before the age of 12, and the later it occurs, the better*.

In any case, even if the use of entertainment applications or digital games occurs before this age, whether on a family member's device or on their own, it is worth remembering that 1) protection measures are usually better enabled in children's versions of the applications; 2) protective measures on devices and family supervision tools can play an important role in monitoring both the time spent and the content accessed; and 3) In Brazil, the Advisory Rating⁴⁴ can be used as a parameter for information about the content available for access.

As for *own social media accounts*, it is worth remembering that the terms of use of most platforms indicate their use only from adolescence, since these networks were not designed for use by children. The recommendation is that, *even in adolescence, the use of social networks should occur with family mediation*. In addition, there are sensitive periods of development⁴⁵, especially during puberty and early adolescence, where the numerous risks (detailed in Chapter 5) can be greater than possible benefits, depending on the context and family dynamics.

Thus, this Guide recommends that users and caregivers observe the *Advisory Rating of social networking applications* to check the minimum age recommendation for each service offered. After all, each network has its particularities.



"I think that a child under 12 should not have any kind of social network. I think that social networks are more for adults, right? Now, the streamings, maybe, they could improve this Kids part a little by putting a time limit. For example, I put it there on the kid's version of [streaming name] . Their own profile should already say something like this: "after 3 hours it will stop working," a screen will appear, as in some applications, the [app name], when I used it at that time, at the beginning, it worked this way. After a certain time, the screen would say "Only tomorrow, now". I think this could be improved in the streamings".

(Mother, Contagem-MG)

How the business model of digital platforms works

By consuming and producing content in different formats and of different natures, children and adolescents are accessing not only an online environment, but also a range of social, economic, political and cultural realities.

However, these experiences occur in an environment that, although public in terms of communication, is mostly controlled by companies and, therefore, guided by private interests. Several recent international documents have pointed out that the business models of so-called digital platforms bring numerous advances and innovations that benefit societies but also have negative consequences. Some of these documents highlight how, in order to increase profits through advertising and business outcomes, these business models have caused harm to democracy, information integrity and human rights^{46 47 48}.

Part of the digital ecosystem is based on a business model that collects, analyzes, uses and shares substantial amounts of information about people.

An organized structure based on *data* – or several types of information about users – enables the provision of personalized services, for example, but also poses risks to the rights to privacy, security and protection of individuals.

The term "attention economy" refers to the fact that *the attention span of users of digital services has economic value*, because the business model involves selling this attention to advertisers^{49 50 51}. In contemporary society, people's routines are being developed more and more within the context of digital platforms, which seek to increase the users' time in such spaces⁵².



"Here in Brazil, we blame the user, and we don't blame the platforms. [...] Who wants to keep us connected all the time and subject to the advertisement?! [...] If we don't think about these political issues, we'll blame the user. When platforms are exposing ads, stimulating consumption".

(Educator in management position, Fortaleza-CE)



What are "digital platforms"?

"Digital platforms" is a term that includes social networks, but also sales websites, product and service intermediaries, knowledge-sharing sites, among many others. They can be defined as digital services that facilitate interaction via the Internet between two or more distinct but interdependent groups of users, such as companies or individuals⁵³.

Digital platforms thus involve the circulation of information collected at a certain point, along with numerous other points of large corporate networks. Central to the contemporary economy, these are infrastructures that have expanded their operations on the web and concentrate data and value in a few companies⁵⁴. These companies, in turn, mediate human activities, such as routine interpersonal interactions, entertainment, education and security systems and models, financial and commercial transactions, political acts and speeches, among others⁵⁵.

Thus, the *information about user behavior and usage patterns also has economic value*. Moreover, the massive collection of data about the people behind profiles and/or avatars allows companies to understand the consumers better.

More connected time means more opportunities for users to provide information about themselves and be exposed to advertisements. Because of this, many tools have been developed to maximize people's engagement on platforms, encouraging them to stay connected and constantly involved in online experiences⁵⁶, engaging in activities that reveal their behavioral patterns.

Notifications, for example, are constant invitations to return to applications; and reactions to posted content indicate users' preferences.



Understanding the business model of digital platforms

Many social networks, digital games and useful apps can be downloaded free-of-charge from online stores. Have you ever wondered *how digital apps and products that are offered “free-of-charge” on your **smartphone** are paid for their services?*

Often, what remunerates those who produce and develop these applications is advertising revenue. To sell these ad spaces, these apps collect and market data about you, without you noticing.

Many people do not know that these *data have economic and commercial value*, since it allows companies to develop a clearer profile of consumers. Therefore, *by simply clicking or scrolling on an application screen, you are providing data that can later be used to offer you products or services and to profile who you are or what you consume.*

The Brazilian law establishes that only the minimum data necessary for the operation of an application should be collected and its use should be limited to the context for which the user or guardian has consented to the collection of data - and, in the case of children and adolescents, always according to their best interest⁵⁷.

That is why it is important to be aware of data usage terms and policies and to understand that *everything you do in the digital environment produces a trail of information about you* that can be used by commercial agents for their own purposes.

The habit of browsing the internet accessing social networks as a pastime or intensive use for e-commerce and business is common in people's routine. However, many users do not realize that several applications available on smartphones induce *behaviors that are not always in their interest or that may be harmful to their health and well-being.*

This is the case with stimuli such as seeking “likes” or the constant behavior of checking notifications or news, which can create a vicious circle of seeking pleasure from “social rewards,” provided by new likes or comments from other people.



"I didn't want further guidance because I already have it. I wish I could lose the desire to stay in front of the TV, or to keep fiddling with my cell phone".

(Girl, 12 years old, Porto Velho-RO)

This is the case with stimuli such as seeking "likes" or the constant behavior of checking notifications or news, which can create a vicious circle of seeking pleasure from "social rewards," provided by new likes or comments from other people.

These behaviors are linked to the "reward system" of the human brain – and thus, the progressive repetition of such behaviors leads to habit, which can cause changes in the structure and function of the brain⁵⁸. That is, the design of technology, linked to a commercial purpose, can change the way the mind works, establishing habits not necessarily aligned with the best interests of users.



"About the use of cell phones, researching on the subject, the algorithm – especially of short videos – works quite strategically. They check what kind of trend and content we like to watch and thus build our persona. In the middle of this something we want appears and also something we do not like. So, we continue "scrolling" because we know that, at any time, something good will appear. This reminds us of dopamine, which makes us crave more and more. This can really harm sleep. Sometimes we start watching a series and we can't stop, and we stay up all night on TV too".

(Girl, 17 years old, Buriticupu-MA)

Companies responsible for designing these products know, for example, that user engagement increases if psychological trends are exploited⁵⁹:

- People pay more attention to stimuli that causes fear or seem threatening, and notifications create a constant sense of urgency or need to respond.
- People constantly seek comparison and social approval from their peers, which occurs, for example, with the “likes” feature on social networks.
- People tend to follow the opinions of those regarded as popular or successful, which Companies Companies responsible for designing these products know, for example, that user engagement increases if psychological trends are exploited⁵⁹:



“Sometimes we don’t pay [attention], like when a teacher or a mother says that we’re not supposed to use the cell phone all the time. Sometimes, even to pay attention in class, we don’t care much, do we? But, let’s say, if it is a famous person, right, that we do not know, like, someone everyone knows, you know, saying something; then it seems like something switches on in our mind and we usually focus more on that, do you agree?”.

(Boy, 14 years old, Criciúma-SC)

Therefore, retaining user’s attention and engagement is part of the business model of many digital platforms, and the design of their applications reflects this. By encouraging infinite scrolling – a timeline that never ends – combined with recommendation algorithms, these products tend to cause much more intense usage than the user would ever intend.



Recommendation algorithms

Algorithms are nothing more than a sequence of computational codes programmed by someone to facilitate a particular activity.

Recommendation algorithms are built to suggest items or content to users based on the processing of their personal data. They are used on social networks, *streaming* services (platforms for watching movies and series, for example) and digital commerce sites, among others, and serve to adapt the presented content or products to the specific interests and behaviors of each user, increase engagement on the platforms, and/or suggest advertisements for products and services that users are more likely to buy.

In the digital environment, advertising based on user behavior (*behavioral advertising*) is created from the processing of personal data, which allows the application of this type of algorithm.

Profiling is the name given to one of the types of processing user's personal data, as it is used to classify individuals into profiles that can predict their behavior, socioeconomic situation, health, personal preferences, interests, and consumption desires, among other characteristics. This practice is associated with the possibility of directing advertising to extremely specific consumers groups (*micro segmentation in advertising*).

Increasingly, new artificial intelligence systems and tools are designed for *commercial exploitation*, which are especially harmful to children and adolescents.

In addition to steering behavior toward consumption, with highly persuasive and targeted commercial messages to specific groups, *the algorithms associated with profiling pre-determine the content that children and adolescents receive*, restricting information diversity and the possibility to experiment or explore what is different, skewing their worldviews and limiting their free development of personality, dignity, honor and image.

In other words, if the content that children and adolescents encounter is always "more of the same", some opportunities – such as access to different perspectives on life and the richness of online experiences – become severely compromised.

It is normal to use the term *manipulative design*⁶⁰ to refer to this set of practices and knowledge that aim to influence user's behavior; not for their best interest and well-being, but for the purpose of manipulating them so they will act according to the interests of the digital platform⁶¹.



"I also think that this algorithm forces a specific pattern very much, because, like, we see what is said in comparison, this is also very much because of the algorithm, which benefits only one type, only a pattern of body, clothes, and many things, and leaves no room for other types, other patterns".

(Boy, 15 years old, Bezerros-PE)

Sometimes the design of applications uses so-called *hidden or misleading patterns*⁶². These patterns are virtual strategies that lead users to actions without their explicit consent, interfering in the autonomy of their decisions and, in a misleading way, encouraging consumption. Some characteristics of these patterns are⁶³:

- 1. Asymmetry:** The site or application presents unequal options, making it difficult to choose certain actions.
- 2. Disguise:** The real effect of a choice is hidden, leading the user to unintended actions, such as shopping.
- 3. Deceitfulness or Falsehood:** Design induces false beliefs through distorted information or omissions, such as time-limited promotions.
- 4. Omission of information:** The interface conceals necessary information, such as additional fees that appear at the end of a purchase.
- 5. Restriction:** The interface restricts available options, requiring social media login to collect more data.

Other common strategies include offering many sharing options (to collect personal data), using emotional appeal (such as sad icons to keep the user on the page), providing inaccessible privacy policies (which make data management difficult), designing interfaces that favor certain actions through larger buttons (to encourage their use), and implementing procedures that make it difficult to revoke consent⁶⁴.

A recent study on mobile device applications for children up to 5 years of age found hidden patterns in most of them, such as social relationship pressures, browsing restrictions, pressing for urgent choices, and the use of "baits" to stimulate more gaming time and encourage purchases⁶⁵.



Highlights of TIC Kids Online Brasil 2023⁶⁷

81%

of users aged 11 to 17 have seen the promotion of products or brands on the internet.

50%

of internet users aged 11 to 17 asked their guardians for a product after seeing an “advertisement or publicity”.

59%

of users aged 11 to 17 have seen videos of people demonstrating how to use a product, 59% also reported having seen videos of people unboxing a product. Among users aged 15 to 17 years, the proportions were 73% and 66%, respectively.

What the next step of this Guide highlights is that *Brazilian legislation provides rights for children and adolescents, which must be prioritized by all agents co-responsible for them.*

Among these rights is the provision that children under 12 years of age cannot be targeted by advertisements that take advantage of the deficiency of their judgment and experience, including in the digital environment, and that the processing of children’s personal data of children must be carried out with the specific and prominent consent of at least one parent or legal guardian^{68 69 70 71}.

An illustration of a child with a large, dark, curly afro hairstyle climbing a wooden ladder. The child is wearing a grey puffer jacket over an orange shirt, dark blue pants, and white sneakers. They have a black backpack on their back. The child is positioned on the ladder, with one foot on a rung and both hands gripping the side rails. The ladder is made of light-colored wood and is set against a plain white background. The bottom of the image features a solid orange band containing the page number and title.

2

Digital rights of children and adolescents

All legislation used as a reference in this Guide considers children and adolescents as individuals whose rights are guided by the principles of *full protection* and *progressive autonomy*. People whose identities are also shaped by experiences with the media.

Thus, the right to communication of this public is linked to the possibility of social participation and access to other rights, which need to be jointly guaranteed, focusing on the best interest of these individuals.



Full protection and progressive autonomy of children and adolescents

In their unique condition as individuals in development, children and adolescents have the right to have adults acting in their favor. Thus, there are fundamental and specific rights guaranteed to them, focusing on their **healthy development across many spheres of life**.

Fully protecting children and adolescents also involves observing the **shared responsibility** of various groups in society over these individuals, **including in the digital environment**.

Supported by the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, any measure of child and adolescent protection must include the participation of these people in society.

Children and adolescents, however, gradually apply their learning to their experiences and, in this sense, develop their abilities. There is much discussion, therefore, of a **progressive process of autonomy** that considers age groups while also taking into account the particularities of different contexts.

The freedom to browse, consume and produce in the digital environment must be associated with processes of education, dialogue and supervision of online activities. After all, in the experimentation of opportunities there is also a chance of exposure to risky situations.

Highlighted in General Comment No. 25 on children's rights in relation to the digital environment, respect for the **progressive development** of the capacities of children and adolescents determines the level of autonomy with which each of them can engage in digital experiences. "A child obviously should receive more attention than an adolescent when accessing the network. And the autonomy of a 17-year-old adolescent should be greater than that of a 14-year-old. But in all these cases, freedom appropriate to the specificities of each age group should be cultivated"⁷².

The absolute priority given to Brazilian children and adolescents appears explicitly stated in Article 227 of the *Federal Constitution*⁷³ and guides the *Statute of the Child and Adolescent (ECA)*⁷⁴ in defining the fundamental rights of this group, for which a series of guarantees are provided. The ECA covers cases of protection for people under 18 years of age in mass media⁷⁵; details legal penalties for cases of child pornography in theater, cinema, television, photography or any other visual media⁷⁶; and also describes penalties for similar cases on the Internet⁷⁷.

*The Consumer Protection Code*⁷⁸, in turn, addresses consumer exposure to marketing communication practices. The document contains three articles dealing with aspects related to advertising, including one that defines the concepts of misleading advertising and abusive advertising. As for abusive advertising practices, the law considers advertising that takes advantage of a child's lack of judgment and experience to be discriminatory and illegal.

In 2014, the *National Council for the Rights of Children and Adolescents (CONANDA)* approved **Resolution No. 163**⁷⁹, which deals with abusive advertising and marketing communication targeting children and adolescents, listing aspects that can be classified from this perspective, comprising "elements of advertising language (...) more receptive and, consequently, more persuasive to children and adolescents"⁸⁰.

Also in 2014, the **Internet Civil Framework**⁸¹ was created to guarantee rights and protections to Internet users, including children and adolescents – since routine experiences and indicators show them as users.

The document links digital rights to access to the Internet and the exercise of citizenship, guaranteeing rights such as the inviolability of intimacy and private life; protection and compensation for material or moral damage arising from eventual violation; and the requirement for clear and complete information on the collection, use, storage, processing and protection of personal data⁸² – which can only be used for specific purposes.

In 2015, the **Program to Combat Systematic Intimidation (Bullying)** was formalized by law⁸³ and stipulates the modality of Virtual **Bullying** or **Cyberbullying**. This occurs when someone, in the digital environment, uses context-specific instruments to depreciate, incite violence, or tamper with photos and personal data to create psychosocial embarrassment. More recently, this conduct has been considered a crime under Brazilian law⁸⁴.

In 2016, the **Legal Framework for Early Childhood**⁸⁵ was instituted, establishing principles and guidelines for the creation and adoption of public policies focusing on children up to six years of age. This milestone recognizes the relevance of the first years of life in child development and development of the human being. Article 5 of the document points out several areas to be prioritized, including "protection against all forms of violence and consumer pressure" and "the adoption of measures that prevent early exposure to marketing communication".

This idea was reinforced by **Decree No. 9.579 of 2018**⁸⁶, two years later, requiring any advertising strategy to comply with the requirements of rights foreseen for children.

Also, since 2018, the **General Law on Protection of Personal Data (LGPD)**⁸⁷ addresses, in

Article 14, the processing of personal data of children and adolescents in online and offline contexts. The law defines the best interests of this public as a basic ethical principle for activities such as data processing.

Among the contributions of the LGPD is the requirement that information about data processing be communicated to users in a simple, clear and accessible way, in a language that allows understanding not only by guardians but also by the children themselves.

Other parameters come from multilateral conventions and treaties that indicate the need for democratic regulation of what is practiced in the various media and require commitments and accountability from signatory states.

The United Nations' (UN) **Convention on the Rights of Children**⁸⁸ is an important instrument of support in this regard. As a State Party to the Convention, Brazil guarantees the fundamental rights of all people under the age of 18; including privacy, security and the broad perspective of the right to communication.



UN General Comment No. 25⁸⁹ on children's rights in relation to the digital environment has, since 2021, addressed the perspectives of children and adolescents themselves on how digital technology is vital to their future and how they believe that this environment should support, promote and protect their engagement in a safe and equitable manner. It is worth mentioning that this document was prepared after consulting more than 700 children, adolescents and young people, aged between 9 and 22 years, from 28 countries across six continents.

Based on the general principles of non-discrimination, the best interests of the child, the right to life, survival and development, and respect for the opinion of the child, the extensive and detailed material calls upon the signatory countries to develop public policies that allow these individuals to exercise their rights on the Internet, effectively constituting them as citizens in this environment.

According to the document, "threats to children's privacy can arise from the collection and processing of data by public institutions, companies and other organizations, as well as from criminal activities such as identity theft. Threats can also arise from the activities of children themselves and from the activities of family members, colleagues or others, for example, by parents who share photos online or by a stranger who shares information about a child"⁹⁰.

The attention to privacy mentioned in the previous paragraph was reinforced, a year later, by **Constitutional Amendment No. 115 of 2022⁹¹**, which recognized the protection of personal data as a fundamental right of the Brazilian people. This protection continues to be extended by new measures, such as Law No. 14,811 of 2024, which addresses the many forms of violence against children and adolescents (cyberbullying, abuse and sexual exploitation, among others).

This is also the case with **CONANDA Resolution No. 245⁹²**, launched in April 2024, on the rights of children and adolescents in the digital environment, which states that both public authorities and companies need to actively collaborate in disseminating correct information on rights and risks affecting children and adolescents in digital contexts, as well as on risks and opportunities linked to products and services.

The processes of constructing and reaffirming the citizen identities of children thus require a shared responsibility among family, society (including companies such as digital platforms operating on Brazilian soil) and the State, **not only in the application of current legislation, but mainly in the adoption of broader ethical principles** consistent with the experiences of children and adolescents who occupy the digital scene.



The role of the Justice System

The 1988 Constitution and the Statute of the Child and Adolescent created an institutional framework assigning fundamental attributions to the Justice System in defending the interests of children and adolescents. In the decision-making process of judges, prosecutors, public defenders and lawyers, the complex relationships between this audience and internet-connected digital devices should be considered, in light of what is currently known.

For example, collecting testimonies by videoconferencing can **facilitate access to Justice for children and adolescents**, especially those living far from the headquarters of courts, Public Prosecutor's offices or Public Defenders' offices. Avoiding attendance in the formal setting of a courtroom can also stimulate free and open statements.

However, **inequalities in Internet access** and the necessary **safeguards** ensure that their systems adequately protect the data and intimacy of children or adolescents, who must be accompanied by an adult. In any case, the option of being physically present in these institutions must always be available to children or adolescents in order to express themselves and participate in the proceedings that concern them.

In addition, if a teenager is deprived of liberty due to an alleged infraction, the lack of personal contact may negatively impact on rehabilitation and restorative justice. In such cases, face-to-face interaction should be provided to foster the ability to engage significantly with their rehabilitation, avoiding the use of videoconferences, as referred to by the Committee on the Rights of the Child in General Comment No. 25.

Agents of the Justice System may also be called upon to resolve disputes in the exercise of parental authority power. In such cases, they should always keep in mind the child's best interests, in the exact terms defined in General Comment No. 14 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

This applies, for example, to discussions about the need for the child or adolescent to communicate with one of their guardians. As this Guide advises against smartphones ownership before the age of 12, it is recommended to give preference to "*dumbphones*", which are devices without access to social networks or messaging applications, for this purpose.

The importance of outdoor activities and the right to disconnect

Brazilian law guarantees, as part of the freedom of children and adolescents, the *right to play*^{93 94}. However, in recent years, there has been a significant decline in both the quality and amount of access to autonomous, independent and meaningful experiences with nature and in open and public spaces⁹⁵.



"Childhood and adolescence go up to the age of 18. We have enough adulthood and elderly life, but the first parts are only lived once, so nothing better than making the most of it".

(Girl, 17 years old, Buriticupu-MA)



The right of children and adolescents to disconnect is a fundamental factor for their development and well-being, as well as fostering a sense of belonging to the territory in which they live.



"Yesterday she (daughter) did not access it much because she had plenty of things to do. She plays futsal, you know, so she went to futsal and in the afternoon, she went to school. So, that means, she didn't have much time. Just a little in the morning because, by the way, she is addicted to that little game".

(Mother, Paranavaí-PR)





"I think the big question about the use of these technologies is also in moments of living together, in the contexts of the family. [...] Families are having fewer moments together. [...] It is necessary to think about socioeconomic conditions, in family contexts. The game and cell phone are the leisure that children have when they are not at school".

(Educator in management position, Fortaleza-CE)

A recent survey⁹⁶ points out that Brazil is one of the countries where children spend more sedentary time in front of screens, and less than half follow the recommended guidelines for physical exercises. Hence the importance of the State, civil society, school and family ensuring safe, ethical, inclusive and high-quality opportunities for all children and adolescents in various online and offline contexts.

At the same time, a broad and consistent set of research provides evidence that access to open spaces and connection with nature improve the most important milestones of a healthy childhood – self-regulation, immunity, physical capacity, active learning, creativity, sociability – and contribute significantly to full development⁹⁷.

In addition, the benefits of a childhood rich in community experiences in the city and its natural spaces are mutual: children who nurture an affective bond and recognize themselves as part of the territory in which they live are also concerned with this space, which contributes to the development of citizenship and environmental conservation.

In this sense, it is essential that the public authorities ensure safer, greener urban spaces, rich in opportunities for meetings, interactions, play, learning, movement and coexistence⁹⁸.





Disconnect to reconnect

It is not always possible for children and adolescents to spend most of the day in the streets, parks, squares, clubs, sports venues or beaches, because Brazil is diverse, with rural territories, scattered territorial areas and different social situations, marked by huge inequalities in access to urban infrastructure, public equipment and leisure spaces. Cities, territories and public authorities do not always provide appropriate and necessary spaces.

The lack of these spaces and family overload – especially for women responsible for domestic care and childcare – often require children and adolescents to stay indoors, and there are not always those who supervise them. In addition, public safety, traffic violence and the time required to reach public facilities are constant concerns for families when considering leisure options as alternative to screens.

Still, as far as possible, it is essential that families seek to balance the time spent on online activities with outdoor activities, especially when, for whatever reason, the child or adolescent has spent prolonged periods using digital devices or playing electronic games.

Recent scientific research^{99 100} suggests that time spent in outdoor activities can alleviate or compensate for the losses caused by excessive online time in the process of motor, social and language development.





3

Digital well-being



"I am the mother of a teenager and also of children, a 5 and a 7-year-old. This discussion (...) is not only about cell phone time, but about school, culture, sports, safety and the workload".

(Mother, Belo Horizonte-MG)

"As I live in a street that is an avenue, I can't let her play outside. It's better for her to stay on the cell phone and sit still than getting into trouble".

(Father, Recife-PE)

The digital well-being of a user is influenced by distinct factors that go beyond the aspect of "screen time".

Chapter 2 of this Guide showed how "time" is important to the business models of many platforms. However, managing the time spent in these spaces or using such resources is just one of the steps that can be taken to achieve digital well-being.

Culture, values, self-esteem, health diagnoses, the quality of access to resources, the design of available digital products or services, among other factors, are elements capable of affecting the ways in which children and adolescents engage with the digital world.

Thus, the scientific evidence and practical strategies presented in this material need to be considered according to the "real life" conditions of many different Brazilian families, with special attention to the most vulnerable contexts.

This section of the Guide is specifically addressed to adults who make decisions **for** children and adolescents daily, and it invites them to consider the possibilities of engaging *with* these individuals as well.





"Children and adolescents need to have their opinions taken into account on the theme of screens and digital environments. After all, how do you discuss this if they have no say? It is necessary to ensure space in their routines so that they can express themselves in a playful way. "Nothing about us, without us"."

(Girl, 14 years old, São Paulo-SP)

This does not exempt all other actors who need to generate conditions so that, between risks and opportunities, digital security measures are adopted, digital rights are guaranteed, and the necessary digital and media education strategies are promoted.

In this sense, **digital well-being is an ongoing path** (which is gaining new contours over time) **than a fixed destination.**

Mediation of Families

The idea of "mediating" has to do with "being in between" and playing an important role in a process that flows between two other points, from one person to another. This is where the term "media" comes from - after all, it is the media that provides access to information, services, other people, etc. - and the way media organize their messages shapes experiences

Families also play a key role in mediating children's and adolescents' interactions with the world, including the digital world.



"And then we decided to establish the rule not only inside the school, but every room in the house, inside the village, inside the community. We know, I am a mother, too. I am the mother of three. They have cell phone moments [...], but we have our moments to meet, to talk with the older ones, to talk with the younger ones, to talk with the chief, to talk with the elder, [...] to play. We see the positive side. And we also talk to them about what leads them to the negative side. And that's it".

(Indigenous Community Educator, Manaus-AM)

It is already known, for example, that learning *and development are associated with mediated use*¹⁰¹. Adult mediation is necessary so that the content, once explained, makes sense to the child.

It is important to focus not only on the quality of what is offered to the child but also on the quality of attention given to them.

It is possible that, when faced with the need to attend to household tasks or to rest, family members may rely on appropriate audiovisual content, even for children in early childhood, according to the Advisory Rating*.



The importance of observing the Advisory Rating

The Brazilian Constitution and the Statute of the Child and Adolescent¹⁰² establish that it is the responsibility of public authorities to provide information about the age adequacy of content that can be accessed by children and adolescents.

To implement this standard, the **public policy of Advisory Rating** is carried out by the Ministry of Justice and Public Security. Its objective is to inform society about content that may not be suitable for certain age groups, covering TV programs (both free to air and pay TV), cinema, home video (DVD), digital games and applications, RPG games, radio programs, public shows and video on demand (VOD).

As the name indicates, it is an **advice**, of informative nature, about the recommendation of contents for each stage of child and adolescents' development. The creation, regulation and application of the Advisory Rating was a societal achievement of the Brazilian society, reflecting families' desire for *information to decide on what contents children and adolescents should have access to*, with security and responsibility, while respecting access to culture and the diffusion of thought, without being prohibitive.

The Advisory Rating Policy considers the shared responsibility of the family, society and the State, and follows several objective analysis criteria. To determine the age classification, three main themes are considered: "sex", "drugs" and "violence". Works are analyzed in their entirety, not only in isolated parts. In addition, attenuating or aggravating context may increase or decrease the recommended age, subdivided into "General Audience", 10, 12, 14, 16 and 18 years¹⁰³.

* **TN:** Brazilian public policy that provides guidance on the age-appropriateness of content that may be accessed by children and adolescents.

When square and colored icons appear with the recommended minimum age accompanied by the letter “A” (for self-classification), it indicates that the rating was assigned by the application’s own company, based on government recommendations. This is a provisional symbol, which still requires to be endorsed by the Ministry of Justice and Public Security (MJSP).



In turn, when there is no letter “A”, it indicates that MJSP itself has already carried out the necessary evaluations and analyses. Therefore, *content officially classified by the government is represented by the following symbols:*



If there is any doubt about the suitability of a particular application or digital game for children and adolescents, the *Advisory Rating* offers a valuable tool to guide the choice of family members or guardians. This Guide even recommends that it be used as the *main reference for the minimum age of access to social networks in Brazil*.

Another example of appropriate use, even for children in early childhood, is making *video calls with family members*¹⁰⁴. In this type of activity, it is important to explain who appears on the screen, repeat what they say, translate more difficult expressions and describe what is happening so that the child can understand this moment.

As children grow up, these processes begin to require different strategies, as they need to adapt to more complex situations. Therefore, it is important to pay attention to the quality of what content is offered to adolescents and how their behavior reflects their involvement with media and digital content.



Supervision and Family Mediation

Family supervision can be understood as a set of mechanisms that allow the direct guardians of children and adolescents to view and/or restrict access to devices, computers, operating systems and websites.

Family mediation is a set of strategies adopted by parents, family members or guardians with the aim of monitoring and guiding how children and adolescents interact with the many possible uses of the media, considering what is valued and verbalized on the subject. This process is a crucial step in understanding and assimilating the benefits and risks of the digital environment among children and adolescents.

The mediation carried out by the family – and also by the community, school and peers of children and adolescents – can take on more active, restrictive or monitoring profiles.



Some forms of mediation^{105 106}

Active mediation for safe use of the digital environment – A set of attitudes, which includes conversations about the online content accessed by children and adolescents' and focusing on practices that promote safe and responsible internet use.

Restrictive mediation – actions that indicate explicit rules and limits for the use of the Internet and mobile devices.

Monitoring – checking online activities performed by children and adolescents after use, such as reviewing the browsing history.

The recent scientific debate has indicated that *the mere prohibition and intense restriction of screen use does not appear to be an effective strategy*. Restrictive guidelines focused only on screen time seem to have little practical effect¹⁰⁷ and should not be relied upon^{108 109 110}.





Children and Adolescents' relationship with Screens: a shared responsibility

Guidelines based solely on screen time were, for the most part, developed at a time when the mainstream media was television, which was consumed in a collective environment and with programs of defined duration – which is not the case for individually used digital devices, such as smartphones¹¹¹. In addition, this type of guideline does not necessarily consider the different contexts of use and the content displayed. Finally, the expectation that all Brazilian families, regardless of their configuration and context, will be able to independently find healthy alternatives for screen use is unrealistic and can generate a sense of guilt in family members and caregivers.

At this point, it is worth reminding families that *getting involved in the mediation process does not mean taking responsibility for it alone*. Brazilian legislation establishes that responsibility for caring for children and adolescents is shared and involves not only families, but also governments, schools, companies, communities and society as a whole in this challenge.

Although it is necessary to point out the risks of screen use and to suggest good practices and alternatives, seeking to enhance the quality of experience can contribute to maximizing the benefits of technological tools.

The issues listed in this Guide are related to the excessive, compromised or unsupervised use of digital tools. To avoid these unhealthy uses, family members, caregivers and guardians may establish **clear rules or agreements for use**, which, preferably, are not imposed disrespectfully but are justified early on to children and adolescents, who are directly affected by them.



"When I see her spending a lot of time on social networks, I call her to talk, pick up an educational toy, and we watch a movie together. I think it's not about forbidding but using the time they spend on the cell phone doing other things. In order for them to feel comfortable with us and to understand that there are other ways of having fun, some parents want to prohibit or just let them use it, but without having an open conversation with their children".

(Mother, Ananindeua-PA)



Tips for exercising family mediation¹¹²

The reality of Brazilian families is marked by a great diversity of arrangements. In addition, adults, caregivers and guardians are often not familiar with digital devices and tools.

In this Guide, we define “family mediation” as the practice of supervision and dialogue by caregivers regarding the online activities of children and adolescents. Some companies often label the resources offered to facilitate this practice as “parental control” t, although the term “control” is considered problematic in the most recent scientific and normative discussions^{113 114 115}.

Given the challenge of implementing *safeguarding measures in the daily interactions of children and adolescents with screens*, the following tips are included:

- *Communicate openly*: maintain open communication about the responsible use of technology, discussing both benefits and risks, and encourage children and adolescents to share their experiences (positive and negative).
- *Be a good role model*: demonstrate responsible use of digital devices, showing a balance between online and offline life.
- *Have quality family time*: when possible, disable notifications so they do not interrupt moments of interaction with the child or adolescent.
- *Avoid distractions during meals*: do not access (if possible, do not bring) connected digital devices (smartphones, tablets, smartwatches, etc.) during family meals.
- *Establish time limits*: set clear rules on daily screen time for children, adolescents and adults, adapting the limits according to age and individual needs.
- *Prioritize a sleep routine*: disconnect at least one hour before bed and do not take connected devices to the bedroom at night.
- *Prioritize school activities*: complete school assignments or homework before engaging in any entertainment on screens.

- *Encourage outdoor and Interact or promote outdoor interactions:* encourage outdoor activities, sports and offline social interactions to balance screen time.
- *Teach digital skills:* educate children and adolescents about online security, privacy, digital etiquette, and how to identify reliable and unreliable sources on the Internet.
- *Enable pedagogical uses at home:* encourage educational activities in the digital environment, such as research on school topics, playing educational digital games, video editing for school assignments or projects.
- *Stimulate creative uses of technology:* encourage the creative uses of technology, such as digital art, programming, blogs or vlogs, among other resources.
- *Promote shared-screen spaces:* keep devices in shared areas to supervise usage and foster family interaction.
- *Engage in dialogue:* talk about and interact with the content consumed by children and adolescents (movies, videos, posts, ads, etc.).
- *Actively participate in the digital activities of the child:* go beyond just “monitoring” the use of digital devices, build bridges of dialogue that reduce distances in communication and allow mutual understanding of how the platforms work, as well as about the other resources used by children and adolescents.
- *Monitor and act:* watch for signs of mental health problems or digital dependence and seek professional help if necessary.
- *Have a dialogue with the school:* be an active part of the child’s and adolescents’ school community, collaborating on processes based on their best interests, including safe and productive use of technology.
- *Use family mediation tools:* test tools for family mediation (when available) in the routine, to monitor and limit access to inappropriate content, including content filters and time restrictions. Be aware of design patterns that may be present in the acceptance of such services.

Some digital platforms offer *family supervision tools* for their products and services. Generally advertised as “parental control” tools, these features do not provide proper control over user’s activity but can *assist in managing the time spent and content accessed*.

However, due to the limitations of the tools for effective family mediation, *it is not enough to simply activate these resources as they were equivalent to the necessary support*.

Evidence shows that tools, both for age verification and for “parental control”, can be easily circumvented or may not align with the standards set by caregivers, creating a false sense of security, if they are not accompanied by dialogue and greater involvement of family members¹¹⁶.



Forms of age verification on digital devices

For children and adolescents to access age-specific content, in accordance with the principle of progressive autonomy and the rules of the Statute of the Child and Adolescent, age verification is essential to identify who is accessing the service.

There are several ways currently available to establish the age of a user of an application or platform¹¹⁷. Some may be based on self-declaration – filling in a date of birth, for example – which brings the challenge of being easily bypassed. Others rely on providing other types of personal data, such as biometrics or civil documentation, which may involve the processing of sensitive personal data¹¹⁸.

There are other technologies that allow identification, with a reasonable degree of confidence, of the age group of users of digital services, based, for example, on usage patterns and content consumption. This can include artificial intelligence or verification through credit card ownership or other platforms. It is worth mentioning that, even in these cases, users’ personal data are processed.

Always respecting the right to privacy and protection of personal data, children and adolescents should not be required to provide more data than is strictly necessary to prove their age.

In addition, it is essential that applications and developers of digital services that can be used by children and adolescents ensure the implementation and operation of *age verification mechanisms that are proportional to the risks*, adequate, transparent, user-friendly and compliant with Brazilian legislation¹¹⁹.

It is important to consider, therefore, that given the gaps in age verification mechanisms, some of which are more invasive than others in terms of the personal data processed – *the choice of method should be based on the level of risk posed by the product or service when accessed by a child or adolescent*. In this context, it makes more sense to adopt a method that requires the processing of more sensitive data for a pornographic site than for subscribing to a newsletter received by email, for example.

Problematic or excessive use is not an exclusive issue for children, adolescents or households. The Constitution¹²⁰ is explicit in determining that it is also a responsibility of the State, companies and society.

The Civil Framework of the Internet guarantees Brazilian users the free choice of programs to “exercise parental control of content which is understood as inappropriate for their underaged children”¹²¹. In turn, the General Law on the Protection of Personal Data establishes that one of the conditions for processing personal data of children is consent, and points out that, when used, this “must be carried out with the specific and prominent consent given by at least one of the parents or legal guardian”¹²².

It should be noted that mothers, parents, family members and caregivers do not necessarily have the time, digital skills and knowledge that fully access or manage such tools – especially in the manner currently recommended by the industry – or even to understand how the spaces where their children browse operate.



“Back then we had no idea what it causes for our children today, for example, I used my own date of birth to create their social networks. Parents have no idea of these things. If awareness does not come from the parents, there is no use, there are parents who won’t even accept a school complaint”.

(Mother, São Paulo-SP)



"I see many parents who expose their children too much. And I can imagine when these kids become teenagers – because teens don't like to appear online. I wonder what will happen when they become adults and these videos are still around".

(Educator in management position, Fortaleza-CE)

An example of this is the phenomenon known as *sharenting*^{123 124}. The term is a combination of two English words: *share* and *parenting* (referring to parents caring for their sons/daughters). Based on the *constant sharing of images and information of children or adolescents* by their guardians on connected platforms and applications, this practice ignores the risks related to the use of children's and adolescent's personal data, with impacts of a wide proportion in the short, medium and long term on the lives of these individuals.

Sharenting has been practiced by famous and anonymous people around the planet, as well as by family members and other adults or reference institutions of the child/adolescent – *such as schools* and other communities they belong to – without appropriate attention or reflection. Sometimes intentions are good, but the consequences can be harmful. And this is not clear to many of these actors.

One of the focal points is the *protection of data of children and adolescents*. We do not always notice the continuous and unprecedented flow of personal and behavioral information being collected, analyzed, manipulated and marketed. This is not only the result of the engagement of children and adolescents with digital media, but also of the sharing of content posted by family members and guardians, or transferred through connected devices in the home or school environment¹²⁵.

Posts that record family events, images captured by connected electronic babysitters, songs requested to domestic virtual assistants or even the selection of resources such as educational digital games should be observed, among others, as sources of information about user behavior – including children and adolescents – that enable analyses with economic value¹²⁶.

Family members, guardians and caregivers also need to reflect on their own use of screens, recognizing that they serve as role *models* for children and adolescents.



"There should be rules for parents too. Sometimes children are addicted to the cell phone because of their parents. My mother is addicted to her cell phone; she does not listen when we talk to her".

(Girl, 14 years old, São Paulo-SP)



"I agree. Sometimes parents' words come back to haunt them. They do not respect the rules".

(Girl, 11 years old, Rio de Janeiro-RJ)



"But the agreements have to be made in meetings with parents. I even plead, "for God's sake, take your children away from them (...)". I keep insisting on this and also on the agreement with adults, because the assistants don't get off their cell phones. So, in every meeting the director has to reinforce with the elementary school assistants that they cannot stay on their cell phones".

(Elementary School Teacher, Campo Grande-MS)



"I work in a bank, so I have 3 screens in front of me. I think, out of 24h, I stay about 13h on screens, or on my personal cell phone, or on computers. I see that I am not a good role model for my son, if I'm honest. I tell him not to waste so much time on screens, especially on games. I don't play, but I stay a lot on [app name] and on [app name], so I make this self-criticism. Nowadays I do not like talking on the phone, I just like to talk by audio on [app name]. In fact, I am addicted to screens".

(Father, Juiz de Fora-MG)

Studies show that excessive use of screens by adult family members, the use of screens at mealtime by the family, and use of screens in the bedroom are associated with increased screen time among adolescents and problematic use of social media, video games and smartphones^{127 128}.

Likewise, the mere use of screens by parents to control behavior as a reward or punishment is less effective than well-conducted family monitoring and agreement on limits set together¹²⁹.

Thus, whenever possible, caregivers can provide better guidance when they are familiar with the resources that will be used.



What to consider before allowing access to or downloading apps that will be used by children and adolescents

- What is the appropriate age to use the app? (This information is available when the app is downloaded)
- What protection settings are enabled under the terms of the platform?
- Do advertisements appear during their use?
- Does the app focus exclusively on activities with a booster system or rewards?
- Does the app require payments to obtain any resource?
- Does the app promote any meaningful learning?
- Does the app contain scenes or strong elements of violence (e.g., deaths, violent attacks)? Is violence presented as natural or without any negative consequences?
- Does the app have patterns that stimulate prolonged or problematic use, such as automatic playback, accelerated content or an infinite timeline?



"I think they are absolutely right in doing it for children because they are the ones discovering the Internet, and the world, now. It has to be monitored and everything else, but when you already have maturity, you are already growing and developing in this awareness, I think you should have more freedom".

(Boy, 15 years old, Bezerros-PE)

It is also strongly recommended to create a *family media plan* ¹³⁰ or "*agreements*". This is a set of decisions and definitions that focus not on prohibition, but on what is feasible within each family's reality.

Implementing a media usage plan tends to be more successful when the rules are clear, consistent, and created with the participation of children, adolescents, their families and guardians – which is especially relevant to adolescents, who have more autonomy as they spend more time without adult supervision.

This was also reflected in the reports of children and adolescents consulted for the formulation of this Guide, in which *perceptions of the value of the rules varied across age groups*.

Children were aware of the potential dangers of the Internet and screens, so they agreed to closer monitoring, referring to feeling safer as a result. *Adolescents*, as they grow up, claim to need more space and privacy, so they may feel invaded depending on the rule, but also because they consider themselves capable of managing their own use.





Messaging applications

Apps, messaging applications or messaging features are those that allow communication between users through text, video, or audio messages sent to private chats.

These users can be people, companies, or even chatbots that forward various messages. It is important to pay attention to commercial messages, which can pose risks of abuse, fraud or sharing of personal data, as well as to messages of a radical nature, which can contain extremist content (incitement to hatred and intolerance).

At the same time, it is important to understand that these are also significant spaces for social interaction among people nowadays. And children and adolescents are not outside this reality. According to the survey TIC Kids Online Brasil 2024, 70% of Internet users aged 9 to 17 access WhatsApp with high frequency, and 53% use the platform “several times a day” and 17%, “every day or almost every day”.

Thus, *an additional challenge arises for family mediation processes*: monitoring experiences in private message exchange forums, considering the possibility of exposure to potentially harmful links and content (such as interaction with unknown adult users, access to extremist, fraudulent or inappropriate content), but also the legitimacy and privacy of relational experiences, especially for adolescents.

All the factors mentioned above can assist in deciding how to give children and adolescents access to the digital environment, and, to what extent, this implies (or does not imply) the possession of devices such as a smartphone.

This Guide recommends that smartphone ownership (as a widely connected handheld device) occur only *after the age of 12* and reinforces the need for several criteria when making this type of decision.



Questions to discuss with the family about the appropriate time to own a smartphone¹³¹

The child or adolescent...

- How will you use it?
- Will you get it because you really need it, as a reward or punishment, or due to pressure from your group of friends?
- Do you need a smartphone, or would a traditional portable phone suffice without access to applications (known as a “dumbphone”)?
- Can you deal responsibly and respectfully with online opportunities and risks, especially regarding other people?
- Are you aware that entertainment and distraction possibilities will compete with other activities in your routine, such as offline play, sports, and socializing with friends?
- Are you aware of the risks to privacy and the importance of not providing personal data online without proper care?
- Do you understand the basic risks present in the digital environment, such as the possibility of being a victim of fraud, scams, gambling or exposure to hate speech?
- Have you been advised about the importance of not sharing your photos or images on open networks, as they can be accessed by strangers?
- Do you have basic knowledge of online security, such as not sharing your passwords with others?
- Will you react calmly if your use or possession of the device is suspended by those responsible for you due to irresponsible or risky use?

Maternal or family burdens

The federal government held a public consultation on the “Use of screens by Children and Adolescents”¹³² – an opportunity in which several Brazilian families shared their experience in dealing with technologies.

The reality of the screen use by children and adolescents varies across different Brazilian homes, and it is common for families to be the ones most accountable for the consequences of the relationship between the children and adolescents and the media.

More than that, adopting monitoring and mediation strategies can be delicate to some family realities and seem impractical in others.



“Work days, the travelling conditions in large urban centers, the domestic tasks of women who divide their time between providing and caring, among others, were difficulties listed for the exercise of family mediation and monitoring the flows of contents and experiences lived by the child and adolescent segment, in their relationship with the different screens”¹³³

Report of the Public Consultation on “Use of Screens by Children and Adolescents”

Families with the *smallest support networks for child and adolescent care tend to offer more screen time*, especially to be able to perform other tasks such as self-care and household work. Often screens play the role of a “nanny”, assisting in the care provided to the child^{134 135 136}.

The Brazilian reality includes many family arrangements headed by single mothers. In addition, the lack of vacancies in public daycare centers, paternal abandonment, lack of a support network and the absence of safe green spaces for leisure, among other factors, can contribute to increased screen use to enable professional activities or rest.

The recommendations presented here, as well as the tools offered by the industry, are not intended to create anguish, a sense of guilt or make caring and responsible people feel lonely in this arduous task. Rather, it is important to communicate to families that other players are also responsible for providing resources, fully protecting and promoting the rights of children and adolescents, as established by article 227 of the Brazilian Federal Constitution.



"The only way I can get him away from the TV is to get onto the floor and play with him, but it's time we don't have (...), I'm so tired when I get home from work, like a zombie. Sometimes it is our choice to rest, to have time alone. Sometimes it's not even what the child wants, but it's what I need, so I end up giving him my cell phone".

(Mother, Sorocaba-SP)



"It is not a matter of educating families. It is a matter of public policies priorities and budget. Quality spaces, burdens of families who work 8h, 10h, 12h. These app delivery workers, for example, who 'work themselves to death' and don't have time for their families. We need to think of several issues where alternatives are given to the use of screens".

(Educator in management position, Fortaleza-CE)



Article 227. It is the duty of the family, society, and the State to ensure, with absolute priority, the rights of children and adolescents to life, health, nutrition, education, leisure, vocational training, culture, dignity, respect, freedom, and family and community living, as well as to protect them from all forms of negligence, discrimination, exploitation, violence, cruelty, and oppression.

Quadro-resumo: Em busca do bem-estar nas experiências digitais



Whenever possible, give preference to



When possible, avoid

Use for a *limited and previously agreed time*

Excessive use and *without a previously agreed time limit*

Compensate the time spent on digital devices with *face-to-face or outdoor activities*

Sedentary and constant use of digital devices as the only strategy for entertainment

Disconnect during meals and at least 1h or 2h before bedtime

Exceed 5h of daily screen use

Collective or family use of digital screens and devices

Individual use of digital screens and devices, which can lead to isolation

Used **for** educational purposes

Uses **without** educational purposes

Applications or audiovisual services with a *children's profile or version*

Use, by child or adolescent, of audiovisual applications or services *in the adult version*

Use of applications *with* a family supervision tool available and enabled

Use of applications *without* a family supervision tool

Audiovisual content chosen according to the *Advisory Rating or specialized curatorship*

Audiovisual content chosen by *recommendation algorithms and without Advisory Rating*

Applications that favor *active* usage

Applications that favor *passive* usage

Digital games that enhance significant *learning* or the development of cognitive skills

Digital games with explicit or fantastical *violence*, or that reward violent behavior without stimulating reflection on it

Digital games that require **player skills** to overcome challenges and advance to the next level

Digital games that require **cash payment to gain skills** and advance to the next phase

Regulations and recommendations: the global experience

When the daily practices of digital platforms are linked to violations of rights affecting their most vulnerable users, the well-being of children and adolescents becomes directly dependent on the quality parameters applied to the performance of such activities.

In other words, the quality of the experiences that children and adolescents have in the digital environment also depends on regulation, or of laws that govern the internet in each country.

Many countries have adopted rules that guide conduct and balance potential predatory actions that compromise the best interests of children and adolescents. This has been done via regulatory strategies and complemented by recommendation-based initiatives.

Recently, several countries have reinforced their regulatory frameworks for digital services in relation to the protection of children and adolescents' rights.

In 2022, the *European Union* approved the *Digital Services Act*¹³⁷, which establishes several transparency obligations and a duty of care for digital platforms operating in its jurisdiction. The law expands the responsibilities of digital platforms regarding posted content, expressly prohibits advertising targeted to children and adolescents, hidden patterns and the use of sensitive personal data for targeted advertising purposes. Platforms are also obliged to assess possible risks to the rights of children and adolescents and to take measures to mitigate them, such as implementing family supervision tools, abuse reporting mechanisms and age verification tools.

In 2023, the *United Kingdom* approved its *Online Security Act*¹³⁸, which increases the responsibilities of digital platforms that children and adolescents can access, requiring them to uphold the "duty of care". The law also establishes a number of other obligations, including the assessment and reduction of risks, provision of effective abuse reporting channels, and establish the "security by design" as the standard for applications usable by children and adolescents, that is, to consider safety for children and adolescents throughout the life cycle of a digital product or service, including its design, development and deployment¹³⁹.

In November 2024, the *Australian* Parliament passed a law prohibiting adolescents under 16 from having their own social media accounts, requiring digital platforms to adopt reasonable age verification measures to ensure the effectiveness of this policy.

Since 2021, China has implemented a law to protect children and adolescents on the Internet¹⁴⁰, which requires companies to adopt measures such as providing reporting channels and mandates that social networks, digital games and other applications do not use mechanisms that induce excessive use.

By way of comparison, although several laws have been passed in recent years to criminalize conduct in the digital environment, Brazil still lacks robust and comprehensive legislation, focusing on the protection of the rights of children and adolescents online.*

In addition to the regulations governing digital services, there is a broad set of official recommendations – issued by governments, health authorities or professional medical or psychological associations – which, being evidence-based, serve as important references for official guidelines on the use of digital screens and devices by children and adolescents. These are constantly evolving guidelines. For example, one of the topics still under discussion is the age at which social networks, as they currently operate, would be considered safe for use.

In the *United States*, a 2023 recommendation document by the largest public health authority stated that, “at this time, we still do not have enough evidence to determine whether social networks are sufficiently safe for children and adolescents”¹⁴¹.

In April 2024, a committee of specialists submitted a report of recommendations to the *French government*, warning that excessive use of social networks may be a risk factor for depression and anxiety in cases of pre-existing vulnerabilities¹⁴².

With regard to screen time for children and adolescents, many countries, such as *Cuba* and *Italy*, follow the general rule of the *World Health Organization*, presented in the table below, which employs age cutoffs, while others, such as *Colombia*, do not adopt specific limits¹⁴³.

It is worth noting that recommendations sometimes address screens or digital media, in general, as the subject of the recommendation, while others provide specific guidelines for certain uses, such as introducing internet access or using social networks.

The table below summarizes a comparison of some international documents related to guidelines for the use of digital devices by children and adolescents:

* **TN:** Brazil recently passed, in September 2025, Law No. 15,211/2025, known as the Digital Statute for Children and Adolescents. This law establishes safety-by-design obligations for digital platforms and holds them accountable for maintaining illegal or inappropriate content (even if posted by third-party users) on accounts registered as belonging to individuals under 18 years of age.

International comparison: recommendations on screen time or type of use by age group



World Health Organization



Recommendation document

The WHO's guidelines on physical activity, sedentary behavior and sleep for children under 5 years¹⁴⁴

Guidelines:

- *Up to 2 years:* zero screen time; should not be kept immobilized for more than 1h at a time, in strollers, chairs, etc.
- *From 2-4 years:* sedentary screen time should not exceed 1h; the less, the better.



Brazil



Recommendation document:

"Less screens, More Health," of the Brazilian Society of Pediatrics¹⁴⁵

Guidelines:

- *Up to 2 years:* avoid unnecessary exposure to screens.
- *Between 2 and 5 years:* limit the daily screen time to a maximum of 1h/day, always under the supervision of parents, caregivers or guardians.
- *Between 6 and 10 years:* limit daily screen time to a maximum of 1h-2h/day, always under the supervision of parents, caregivers or guardians.
- *Adolescents (11 to 17 years old):* limit screen and videogame time to 2-3h/day and never allow them to play "all night long".
- **Do not allow children and adolescents to be isolated in rooms with a television, computer, tablet, cell phone, smartphones or a webcam; stimulate use in shared places of the house.**
- *For all ages:* no screens during meals and disconnect 1-2h before bedtime.



South Africa



Recommendation document:

"24-hour movement guidelines from birth to 5 years" ¹⁴⁶

Guidelines:

- *Up to 1 year:* avoid exposure to screens, ensuring at least 30 minutes of daily movement activities.
- *1 to 2 years old:* avoid exposure to screens, ensuring at least 180 minutes of daily movement activities.
- *Between 3 and 5 years:* a maximum of 1h of screen time daily, with at least 60 minutes of vigorous physical activity.



Argentina



Recommendation document:

"Babies, children, adolescents and screens: what's new?", by the Argentine Society of Pediatrics ¹⁴⁷

Guidelines:

- *Up to 18 months:* no screen time.
- *18 to 24 months:* use screens with carefully selected content and under supervision.
- *3 to 5 years old:* do not use screens during meals or bedtime, or for the purpose of calming the child; avoid violent content; technology should not replace other activities, including outdoors.
- *From 5 to 18 years:* establish limits on the time spent using all types of devices, ensuring a "protected time" for regular physical activity and adequate rest; establish screen-free areas at home; create a plan for family use.



Canada



Recommendation document:

"Screen time and preschool children: promoting health and development in a digital world," by the Canadian Society of Pediatrics¹⁴⁸

Orientações:

- *Up to 2 years:* no screen time, except for video chat with adult family members.
- *From 2 to 5:* limit to 1h or less per day.
- Keep daily routines without screens, especially during family meals.
- Avoid screens for at least 1h before bedtime.



United States



Recommendation document:

Beyond screen time: a guide for parents on the use of media," by the American Pediatrics Association¹⁴⁹

Guidelines:

- *Up to 2 years:* media use should be extremely limited and only when accompanied by an adult, to talk and teach. From 18 months onward, if digital media is introduced, choose high-quality programming, and stay with the child during use.
- *From 2 to 5 years:* up to 1h daily, provided that it is interactive, educational and non-violent content, combined with other activities.
- *From 5 years old:* always with parental supervision, ensuring that media use does not replace other important activities, such as sleeping, family time and exercising.



"Health Recommendation on the Use of Social Media in Adolescence," by the American Psychological Association¹⁵⁰

Guidelines:

- It states that the use of social networks is not, in itself, beneficial or harmful. In most cases, the effects of social networks depend on the personal and psychological characteristics and social circumstances of the adolescents themselves. In general, potential risks are higher in early adolescence than in late adolescence and therefore close supervision is recommended, especially between the ages of 10 and 14.



"Online health and safety for children and young people: best practices for families and industry guidance", by the U.S. federal government¹⁵¹

Guidelines:

- It does not suggest limiting screen time, but it guides parents and caregivers to create family media plans, balance screen time with other activities, engage in dialogue, exercise parental supervision and set an example through moderate use of screens.



"Social Media and Youth Mental Health," Recommendations of the U.S. Surgeon General¹⁵²

Guidelines:

- He argues that, as adolescence is an especially vulnerable period of brain development, exposure on social networks at this age deserves renewed care. He states that the zeal for the online well-being of children and adolescents should not fall solely on families but also requires greater involvement from technology companies and public authorities.



France



Recommendation document:

"Guidelines 3-6-9-12", elaborated by a group of specialists¹⁵³

Guidelines:

- *Up to 3 years:* prioritize playing or reading with the child, rather than using screens.
- *From 3 to 6 years:* set clear rules for screen time and respect the Advisory Age Ratings; no digital devices (including tablets and games) before the age of 6.
- *6 to 9 years old:* start lessons about critical internet use; predetermine child's digital usage time; do not use them during meals, at bedtime or to calm the child; up to this age, do not use TV or digital devices in the bedroom, but only in the common areas of the house.
- *From 9 to 12 years:* discuss with them the best time to have their own smartphone, the later the better; supervise internet browsing.
- *After the age of 12:* allow internet use but discuss issues such as pornography and online harassment; do not use devices at night, and only at predetermined times.



Specialist's report "Children and Screens: In search of lost time", commissioned by the French government¹⁵⁴

Guidelines

Organize a progression of screen and digital device use among children and adolescents according to their age:

- *Before 11 years:* no mobile phone;
- *From the age of 11:* cell phone without internet connection.
- *From the age of 13:* cell phone with internet access, but without access to social networks or illegal content.
- *From 15 years old:* additional access to "ethical" social networks.



India



Recommendation document:

"Guidelines 3-6-9-12", elaborated by a group of specialists¹⁵³

Guidelines:

- *Up to 2 years:* no screen time. Smartphones should not be used to calm or facilitate feeding.
- *From 2 to 5 years:* maximum of 1h of screen time per day, always with parental monitoring.
- *From 5 to 10 years:* maximum of 2h of screen time per day, preferably for educational purposes, without owning a cell phone.
- *From 10 to 18 years:* use should always be accompanied by parental supervision and media education, ensuring 1h of outdoor physical activity and 8-9h of sleep daily.



United Kingdom



Recommendation document:

Recommendations of the Royal College of Pediatrics and Child Health. "The impacts of screen time on health: a guide for doctors and parents"¹⁵⁶

Guidelines:

- It states that there is no consistent evidence of health benefits or well-being linked to screen time. At the same time, it emphasizes that family decisions about screen time should consider children's development, physical and sleep needs, seeking balanced use with parental supervision while ensuring healthy times for sleep and other activities.

It is observed that it has been frequent not to stipulate restricted age groups, but rather guidelines to consider the characteristics of the developmental process of children and adolescents and to introduce digital devices with family supervision.

The most recent recommendations do not always set a daily screen time limit. This is related to an ongoing debate in the specialized literature about the idea of focusing recommendations solely on “screen time”, because, although it is easy to measure and guide, there is a risk of leaving aside how important it is to consider the contexts of use and content consumed¹⁵⁷

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In any case, this international comparison points to some general recommendations that are common to the different countries and entities making recommendations:

- The use of screens and digital devices should be *avoided for babies* (up to 2 years), giving priority to other forms of interaction and play;
- The use of screens and digital devices is permissible in childhood, if it does not interfere with *other activities essential for development*, such as play time, outdoor activities, sleep schedules, mealtimes, contact with books and educational materials and face to face family interactions;
- Access to the Internet, and particularly *the use of social networks, must occur progressively*, always under family supervision, especially during puberty or early adolescence, when vulnerability is greater.

Since there is no uniformity between official recommendations and the various types of use – jointly dealing with the consumption of traditional media such as TV, educational content or not, alongside new digital media, digital games, etc. – it is observed that these recommendations will still benefit from more scientific research and are constantly evolving.

It is noteworthy, however, that specific guidelines on the use of social networks, which were analyzed, are directed only at adolescents. This practice is aligned with the fact that most of these networks, in their terms and policies of use, prohibit access by children. This reflects a relative consensus among governments, industry and the scientific community that most social networks have not been developed for use by children.



"Because she stopped playing with toys, dolls, and no longer wanting her toys so she could stay only on the cell phone. And now she's not doing well at school, she can't learn the letters, math, it's getting bad. And the teacher even told us to take her to an educational psychologist, and she started going. So, the educational psychologist is talking to her for us to reduce this a little, you know?"

(Mother, Paranavai-PR)



"Social networks seem to be good, but they can be prejudicial too. People show a perfect life, and life is full of flaws and pathways. You have to think a lot about how to use things on your cell phone because there's a lot, a lot of bad things".

(Girl, 17 years old, Nossa Senhora de des-SE)

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The following table summarizes this set of recommendations based on scientific evidence by age group. It is worth mentioning that each child or adolescent has their own developmental trajectory and that these cutoffs may vary, including in families where multiple children or adolescents of different ages coexist.

Recommendations for families by age group of the child or adolescent

Age group	Summary of recommendations
Early childhood (up to 6 years)	• No screen time for babies (up to 2 years), except for contact with family members via video call, with an adult present, giving preference to other activities, such as play, face to face interactions, reading and physical or movement-based activities. • Giving preference to audiovisual content according to the Advisory Age Rating and curated content, rather than content suggested by recommendation algorithms. • Avoid audiovisual channels and applications that have <i>autoplay</i> enabled.
Children between 6 and 11 years	• Prioritize playtime and activities with movement, giving preference to little screen time, previously agreed upon. • When introducing digital games, prioritize those that allow family interaction, enhance learning, do not involve monetary payments and do not present explicit or fantastical violence. • Avoid the acquisition or possession of smartphones before at least 12 years of age - the later, the better. • Avoid access to social networks and messaging apps. • If the child needs a telephone for family communication, give preference to phones without internet access or applications ("<i>dumbphones</i>" / "<i>flip-phones</i>").

Adolescence (between 12 and 17 years)	• Consider that puberty is a period of brain reprogramming, with greater vulnerability and sensitivity, requiring more active family mediation, especially before the age of 14. • Exercise family mediation with special attention to social networks, messaging applications and digital games, observing the Advisory Age Rating assigned to each and using, where applicable, the available monitoring tools. • If access to social networks is granted, give preference to restricted privacy settings, with family supervision tools enabled. • Have a dialogue about the various risks present on the Internet, such as inappropriate content, pornography, cyberbullying, sextortion, sexual harassment and betting or gambling.
All ages	• Give preference to educational audiovisual content and experiences that may occur collectively. • Agree on the screen times beforehand and stick to them. • Moderate the use of digital devices by adults in moments of family interaction. • Avoid using access to technological devices as a bargaining tool (reward or punishment). • Condition the use of digital devices for entertainment only after school assignments are completed. • When introducing new devices or applications, start together, guiding and mediating their use, provoking reflections on their opportunities and risks. • Avoid the presence or use of digital devices at mealtimes, including by adults, and at least 1h before bedtime.

- Observe the Advisory Age Rating assigned for digital applications and games.
- When authorizing the use of applications, prefer settings that minimize the collection of data of the child or adolescent.
- Try to stay well-informed and seek professional help if there are signs of problematic or excessive use of digital devices.
- Advise that all content posted online can get out of hand in terms of who views it, may remain in the digital environment indefinitely and can be used for other purposes.



4

Acknowledging the risks

Policies that ensure the protection of children and adolescents in their online experiences should be guided by their digital citizenship s. These individuals need to be considered in such spaces, based on their civic identities – not exclusively focused on their status as consumers and producers of online content – in the fight against violations of their rights

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In recent years, the scientific community has investigated the issue of the use of screens by children and adolescents and their impact on health. Many recent surveys aim to find out if there is a link between physical and mental health problems and unhealthy habits in the digital environment. Although most of these studies are conducted with individuals in the Global North¹⁶², their conclusions, in terms of public health, provide relevant information for children and adolescents in Brazil.

The following sections present risks associated with the digital environment, ranging from excessive use and exposure to inappropriate content at a certain age, to exposure to violence or victimization through crimes. In the latter case, it is essential that family members, caregivers and educators know and have access to channels for reporting these crimes.



How to report criminal content online?

There are several official channels to report crimes in the digital environment:

- *Disque 100 (Dial 100)*, the National Ombudsman for Human Rights receives reports about violations against children and adolescents, whether online or offline, through different channels:

Ligue 100 (Dial 100);

Ligue 180 (Dial 180 - Women's Call Center);

Access Telegram and search "DireitosHumanosBrasil" (HumanRightsBrazil);

Stay connected with (61) 99611 0100, via WhatsApp.

[Disque 100 WEB](#)



Disque 100 Web



COMUNICA PF

The Federal Police operates a cybercrime reporting hot line, **Comunica PF** for cases of child sexual abuse, with international implications.

- The notification of a criminal fact that occurred, whether confirmed or suspected, can be made at the nearest Civil Police Station. The Civil Police investigate incidents of violence, based on reports from victims or witnesses. It is up to the Civil Police to initiate the investigation and, after its conclusion, forward the findings to the local Court, which decides whether to proceed with a legal claim.
- The Public Prosecutor's Office can also receive criminal reports, as it plays a key role in combating violence against children and adolescents; its actions are guaranteed by the Constitution and law, in the defense of the rights of these individuals. In the criminal area, its role ranges from investigation to proposing the appropriate judicial measures, gathering evidence and ensuring the accountability of offenders.
- It is also possible to contact the police via phone number 190 (*Military Police*).
- The nearest *Guardian Council* is responsible for ensuring compliance with the rights of children and adolescents and may assist victims or their family and forward reports to the authorities.



ESCOLA SEGURA

In case of threats and attacks against schools, complaints can be made via the **Escola Segura** (Safer School) channel.

In addition to official channels, there are also other means of reporting inappropriate content or violence online.



In Brazil, one of the most active civil society organizations is [SaferNet](#), which receives complaints anonymously, securely and free of charge.

Digital applications or platforms themselves can offer channels and mechanisms for reporting inappropriate content or sexual crimes.

Impacts of the use of digital screens and devices on health

Regarding excessive screen use by children and adolescents, the literature indicates that it may be a risk factor for:

- Delays in speech development in early childhood^{163 164 165} ;
- Delays in cognitive development in early childhood^{166 167 168};
- Sedentary lifestyle¹⁶⁹ and obesity¹⁷⁰;
- Vision problems, such as myopia and visual fatigue^{171 172}.

Several research indicate negative impacts on the development of reasoning and socialization skills ^{173 174}. Neuroscientific research has proven that attention is a cornerstone of any learning process. The ability to select relevant information while ignoring irrelevant ones, allowing concentration, is essential for the pedagogical process¹⁷⁵.

However, many digital applications and devices lead to a state of “multitasking”, in which users have to quickly choose between various stimuli that are present. The habit of constant, uninterrupted browsing can weaken *the ability to focus* on a specific area of study for an extended period, which may contribute to a higher level of distraction¹⁷⁶. In children and adolescents, this can impair their learning ability as well as cognitive and social development¹⁷⁷, both in school and outside school.

Some scholars even suggest that new generations, raised in a digital environment, may face widespread challenges in language development, problem solving and socialization skills¹⁷⁸

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"I think it ends up being harmful because, when we are in doubt, we already research there directly, we do not use our mind. It is much easier to find an answer. I think we used to study more in the past. In my school, technology is widely used. It has tablets available, activities are launched every day in the apps, and we need to do them, because they are considered in the grade for each subject. At the same time that it is good, it has a bad and harmful side".

(Girl, 15 years old, Botucatu-SP)

In addition, the time devoted to entertainment or the use of digital devices can replace time dedicated to screen-free play, which is a fundamental activity for various dimensions of child development¹⁸¹.



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"When I need to study something, I search in [app name], but then a video starts showing there, which ends up attracting my attention and I get distracted. That means that I end up not studying at all".

(Boy, 14 years old, Criciúma-SC)

A key factor to consider is the example set by *the child's or adolescents' adults role models*. The usage patterns of family members and other caregivers are learned and repeated by children and adolescents^{182 183}. The use of digital devices during family meals¹⁸⁴, at bedtime, in a distracted manner that hinders attention in face-to-face interactions¹⁸⁵, or intensively and without interruption, are problematic habits learned. *Therefore, balanced use by children and adolescents depends, first, on the moderate use by the adults with whom they live.*



“Distracted parenting”

Recent research has shown how the constant and prolonged use of mobile digital devices interferes with interpersonal interactions or quality time experienced between family members, friends or couples. Interruptions of face-to-face conversations and intrusions during meals and shared activities are increasingly part of everyday life, affecting the quality of human relations.

In family relationships, the constant focus on digital applications and frequently checking of the smartphone screen are behaviors associated with fewer interactions between parents and children, a reduced capacity to respond to children’s needs and even the hostility of caregivers in response to the children’s or adolescents’ requests for attention¹⁸⁶. In the case of children in early childhood, such distraction can even increase the risk of domestic accidents.

If the family notices that the use of digital devices is excessive or is hindering other aspects of the child or adolescent’s life, such as family or friends, or academic performance, it is important to seek *professional guidance*.





Some warning signs that may indicate the problematic or excessive use of digital devices¹⁸⁷

- Has the child or adolescent had trouble sleeping, or difficulty waking up, because of the use of digital devices?
- Are there negative effects in academic performance that may be associated with such use?
- Has the child or adolescent had difficulty completing school assignments?
- Has there been significant weight gain or loss recently?
- Has the child or adolescent failed to do other activities they enjoy – playing with friends, playing sports, reading, or physical activities – to spend time on digital devices?
- Has the child or adolescent been more secluded, isolated, spending less time with family and friends?
- Does the child or adolescent become angry or aggressive when they are not using digital devices?

It is important to remember that many studies are still underway, and others still need to be done in order to understand the magnitude of these potential impacts and which uses would be more harmful according to the specific context of children and adolescents^{188 189 190}. From the neuroscientific perspective, we discuss the extent to which the use of digital devices could alter brain functioning^{191 192}. Hence the importance of further studies on this topic being funded and conducted by independent researchers.

Impacts of the use of digital screens and devices on mental health

The World Health Organization highlights that early childhood, childhood and adolescence are periods of both vulnerabilities and opportunities for mental health¹⁹³. The protection, security and access to rights promote the full safeguard of this target audience which is undergoing widespread biopsychosocial development. On the other hand, exposure to conditions regarding lack of protection, insecurity and rights violations are factors that expose them to mental health problems.

It is important to pay special attention to situations of vulnerability that can be aggravated by online content. Exposure to hostility, cyberbullying or harassment, emotional triggers, self-depreciative comparisons, when combined with life factors outside screens, may increase the risk of developing suicidal or self-injury behavior¹⁹⁴.

Adolescents who already face health problems or mental disorders are even more sensitive to online risks, including cyberbullying, harassment and exposure to disinformation.

Online communities related to self-injury or eating disorders can be easily found, publicly accessible and without warnings about the sensitive content available. These communities are often amplified by algorithms designed to retain users' attention, which can harm adolescents' mental health, including by encouraging unattainable standards of appearance and body image¹⁹⁵.

Another risk to consider is dangerous challenges*, which encourage self-injury or may pose a risk of death. Because of the particular moment of their brain development, in which risk-seeking behavior is increased, as well as the sensitivity to peer pressure, adolescents are especially sensitive to this type of content.

Under Brazilian law, suspected or confirmed cases of self-inflicted violence must be reported by health or educational institutions¹⁹⁶.

Federal Law no. 15.100/2025 also mandates that students' mental suffering and mental health, in relation to digital experiences, are the target of preventive and protective strategies implemented in schools. Educational networks and schools should provide periodic training on the topic and offer listening and welcoming spaces for students (or staff) who are in mental suffering and distress arising mostly from excessive screen use and nomophobia.

It is essential that family members or guardians talk to the child or adolescent and immediately seek help, if they observe some warning signs, such as sudden changes in internet use or sudden abandonment of social networking sites; participation in groups of apology to suicide and self-injury; farewell posts or images of death, suicide or self-harm¹⁹⁷.

Different terms are used in relation to inappropriate or excessive use of digital devices. Terms such as "technological dependence"^{198 199 200} or "problematic use" are applied when continuous or uninterrupted use of internet-connected devices harms the child's or adolescent's well-being of, affecting socialization, academic performance, daily routine or health.

* In Portuguese, "dangerous challenges" is used to refer to content consumed by children and adolescents that encourages self-harm or may pose a risk of death. The term's easy social recognition was crucial for its choice (although the literature also refers to the expression "self-harming practices" as a synonym).



Technological dependence

The application of the term “dependence” to the use of digital devices is subject to intense debate in the scientific community^{201 202}. New studies seek to establish whether there is a causal relationship between the use of applications, such as social networks, and conditions considered addictive, or whether the problematic or excessive use of mobile devices or social networks is more connected to mental health issues and pre-existing family issues^{203 204}.

There is also a reasonable consensus in the scientific community that certain mechanisms or patterns in applications can be harmful to children and adolescents and cause unhealthy or excessive use of these technologies. They are the so-called *hidden patterns*, embedded in the *design of these applications*, which use knowledge about human behavior to manipulate users, so that they will stay engaged longer than they would like or expose themselves more than would be appropriate for their age²⁰⁵. Among them, the following can be mentioned:

- Constant and eye-catching notifications;
- Timelines or scrolling of endless content;
- Automatic playback of audiovisual content;
- Use of “likes” or other mechanisms of social comparison or physical appearance.

It is worth remembering that the Statute of the Child and Adolescent prohibits the sale, to the child or adolescent, of “products whose components may cause physical or psychological dependence, even if due to improper use”²⁰⁶.

Regarding the excessive use of digital media by children and adolescents, the literature points out that this may be a risk factor for symptoms of anxiety, depression and aggressiveness^{207 208 209 210}. The excessive use of screens and digital devices was also associated with more impulsive behaviors and difficulty with emotional self-regulation, suggesting that problematic users could present changes in the pattern of brain functioning^{211 212 213}.

Specifically, regarding the use of social networks, studies²¹⁴ suggest that their use by children and adolescents may be related to:

- Depressive symptoms in case of problematic use^{215 216};
- Sleeping difficulties and sleep disorders^{217 218 219};
- Eating disorders²²⁰;
- FoMO (Fear of Missing Out)^{221 222}, which would be the desire to remain continuously connected with what others are doing²²³;
- Self-image problems^{224 225}, especially among girls²²⁶.



"I think I changed my style a lot because of some things I saw on the internet, the way I brushed my hair, because of recommendations (...) I changed my wardrobe. Oh, because sometimes, I mean, I see that my hair has improved, right, after I saw some little video and other things too".

(Girl, 11 years old, Rio de Janeiro-RJ)

Risk ratings in the online environment

In addition to the excessive or problematic use of digital devices, there are several other risks in the online environment in general. This Guide does not intend to cover or claim to be exhaustive, as there are already many specific materials available.

The challenge, however, is to give visibility to some processes that occur daily with children and adolescents in the digital environment and that are unknown both to them and to many adults.



Risks and harms: what is the difference?

An online risk does not necessarily mean that damage will occur, nor that all users will be equally affected. Risk refers to the *probability* of a negative impact, an accident or a fatality occurring and can be evaluated considering the specific interaction between the user and the environment.

Now, harm includes a series of negative consequences for the emotional, physical or mental well-being of the subjects²²⁷. This means that when assessing the experiences that children and adolescents undergo in the digital environment, it is important to consider not only the chance of harmful events, but also the potential impact of these events.

The so-called 4Cs of the online risk classification, which appear in the following table, reinforce how exposure to them can occur:

- in the content (in relation to harmful information);
- in contact (with risky actors that integrate the same network);
- in the conduct (potentially harmful, which can be observed or experienced by the child/adolescent);
- in contract relations (when using certain services, there are obligations imposed on users, which are usually unknown to them and result in their exploitation).

In addition, it is important to note that some risks are transversal, i.e. they cross the various connected experiences.

Online Risk Rating CO:RE²²⁸

Types of risks	<i>CONTENT</i> The child or adolescent engages or are exposed to potentially harmful content.	<i>CONTACT</i> The child or adolescent experiences or are the target of potentially harmful adult contacts.	<i>CONDUCT</i> The child or adolescent witness, participates or are victims of potentially harmful conduct between peers.	<i>CONTRACT</i> The child or adolescent are part of or are exploited by a potentially harmful contract.
Aggressive	Violent, bloody, explicit, racist, hateful or extremist information and communication.	Harassment, stalking, hate attacks, unwanted or excessive surveillance.	Cyberbullying, hate communication or hostile activity among peers, such as trolling, exclusion, actions intended to cause public embarrassment.	Identity theft, fraud, phishing, scam, data intrusion and theft, blackmail, security-related risks.
Sexual	Pornography (harmful or illegal), culture of sexualization, oppressive norms for body image.	Sexual harassment, sexual grooming, sextortion, production or sharing of child sexual abuse images.	Sexual harassment, non-consensual exchange of sexual messages, adverse sexual pressures.	Trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation, transmission of paid content of child sexual abuse.
Values	Incorrect information/disinformation, inappropriate advertising for age or user-generated content.	Persuasion or ideological manipulation, radicalization and extremist recruitment.	Communities of potentially harmful users, such as self-mutilation, anti-vaccination, adverse pressures among peers.	Gambling, bubble filter (content selection filter by similarities), micro segmentation, hidden design patterns modeling persuasion or a purchase.
Transversal	Violations of privacy (interpersonal, institutional and commercial). Risks to physical and mental health (such as a sedentary lifestyle, excessive screen use, isolation, anxiety). Inequalities and discrimination (such as inclusion/exclusion, exploitation of vulnerabilities, bias of algorithms/predictive analysis).			



"After the pandemic I feel that I stopped having this control [of cell phone use], with the arrival of [app name], with shorter videos, a much faster and easier to use feed. Its algorithm sets up a custom page for us. Whatever I want, I know it will be there. I can find a lot of information on the [app name]".

(Girl, 17 years old, Brasilia-DF)

One of the most controversial risks of the online environment for children and adolescents is the possibility of access to inappropriate content. Unlike audiovisual productions and digital games, content on internet sites, messaging applications or closed chats is not subject to the Advisory Age Rating, which covers thematic issues such as "violence", "sex and nudity" and "drugs"²²⁹.

Thus, these subjects may be exposed to content such as explicit violence, advertising of products that cause dependence, or even pornography, which may lead to early sexualization processes²³⁰. It is worth remembering that, in such cases, it does not matter whether the exposure time is prolonged or not – even quick viewing of content can have a strong impact.



"On inappropriate content, I think that it should be dealt with in the schools themselves, through sex education. Some teens have this curiosity because they listen to friends who talk to their parents about it, they start searching and go to sites they shouldn't".

(Girl, 14 years old, Curitiba-PR)

Sexual abuse and exploitation

The possibility of interactions between unknown children, adolescents and adults is expanded in social networks and messaging applications, which makes them more vulnerable to several types of abuse²³¹.

In addition to exposure to sexual content inappropriate for their age, such as pornographic material, children and adolescents may be victims of image exposure, sexual grooming and sexual exploitation, which are both crimes under Brazilian law²³².

The internet can be a place for the discovery of sexuality in adolescence. One of the common practices at this stage is “sexting”, or the act of sending, receiving or transmitting nude or sexual content²³³.

Although it can be consensual and not involve violence or intimidation²³⁴, sexting can pose high risks to those who send images, since they can circulate and be reproduced in an unlimited way by digital means. Moreover, even after the age of sexual consent has been reached, which in Brazil is 14 years old, adolescents may become victims of cyberbullying or “sextortion” (the threat of unauthorized exposure of sexual content sent voluntarily).

It is essential that families maintain an open dialogue to discuss these risks and guide adolescents on how to protect their intimacy and privacy in the digital environment.

Cyberbullying



“I was going to tell him to be very careful with the people he talks to, to know that cyberbullying is out there, and also to be very careful about his connection with his cell phone, because the cell phone is very addictive. Especially the social networks that have short videos [...]”.

(Girl, 14 years old, São Paulo-SP)

“Yes, in my school there was a case similar to this one. [...] also, one of my friends started a fake account to talk badly about a girl in my school, and that caused a lot of trouble. She was not expelled, but her parents were called, and if I'm not mistaken, it even became a police matter”.

(Girl, 14 years old, São Paulo-SP)

Children and adolescents can also become victims of cyberbullying. Smartphones with access to websites, social networks and messaging applications allow forms of violence previously restricted to the school environment, for example, to reach a broader scale, extending beyond interactions within the school. This is currently a global issue²³⁵.

Sometimes acts of aggression in the virtual world may be perceived as a “game”, which makes it difficult for the child or the adolescent to identify them as such. “Trolling” associated with racism, misogyny, fatphobia and LGBTQphobia, among many others, needs to be recognized as cyberbullying practices.

The digital environment can be a space for the dissemination of attacks targeted at girls, women and Black people, reproducing the discrimination and violence that happen outside the internet. In this type of cyberbullying, degrading comments are common, comparing black adolescents and children to monkeys, offending their physical characteristics (such as thick lips or curly hair) or suggesting that they are not intelligent because they are black.

Similarly, these aggressions can devalue the opinions and abilities of girls or criticize their appearance, reinforcing ideas of misogyny. Research has shown that girls are more at risk of suffering from anxiety and depression than boys, precisely because of gender discrimination in such contexts²³⁶.

According to the definition of Brazilian criminal law, cyberbullying is systematic virtual intimidation, “individually or in a group, through physical or psychological violence, against one or more people, intentionally and repeatedly, without evident motivation, through acts of intimidation, humiliation or discrimination or through verbal, moral, sexual, social, psychological, physical, material or virtual actions”, such as in social networks, messaging applications or online games²³⁷. In other words, **cyberbullying is a crime**.





When the child or adolescent is the bullying agent

The aggressor, in cases of cyberbullying, can be a person, a group or an indefinite community, since it is common in this type of crime for the content to be shared among so many people that it becomes difficult to identify the authors. It is worth noting that anyone who shares offensive content on the internet is not merely a witness but is also an aggressor.

Under Brazilian law, if the aggressor is a child or adolescent, even if the act does not constitute a crime, it *may be considered an infraction* and subject its author to protective or socio-educational measures²³⁸.

Even when the aggressor is a child or adolescent, cyberbullying can constitute illicit acts in the civil sphere, generating the obligation to compensate the victim, which may fall on parents or guardians.

Likewise, Brazilian legislation establishes that it is the obligation of educational establishments, clubs and recreational associations to adopt measures for the awareness, prevention and combat of violence and systematic intimidation²³⁹.

Artificial intelligence tools and increased risks

Although the term “artificial intelligence” (AI) has become popular in recent years, there are several definitions and possibilities to explain about AI and its applications.

In this Guide, AI will be understood as *systems that use large volumes of data and are trained to process, recognize and generate patterns*. These systems perform “predictions, classifications, recommendations or generate decisions that can influence physical and virtual environments”²⁴⁰.

Nowadays, a significant part of the technologies used has, to a greater or lesser extent, some type of applied AI. This presence in everything, everywhere, at the same time, makes it necessary to inform and discuss the ethical, social and cultural consequences of AI models and tools^{241 242}.

These are technologies present in the daily lives of many people. An example of this is the *recommendation algorithms* found on almost all social networking sites and applications. Another utility is searching tools, which can prioritize the display of results, depending on the profile of the person who is searching – and this occurs both on search sites and in the results presented by domestic virtual assistants.

Hence the importance that AIs should be developed considering the multiplicity of childhoods mentioned in the introduction of this Guide, so that the systems are anchored in the principle of equity and ensure the inclusion of and for children and adolescents²⁴³. Thus, just as children and adolescents should receive digital and media education to deal with AI, “the creators of AI systems must be literate in child and adolescent rights”²⁴⁴.

Although there are significant benefits associated with these solutions, it is important to understand how the introduction of AI models capable of processing large volumes of information and data can also help to increase *the risks for users of these systems*, in particular for children and adolescents²⁴⁵.



Increased Risks

Informational Bubbles and Confirmation Bias – Recommendation algorithms “learn” about the potential interests and tastes of users and begin to customize what is displayed for each of them. To some extent, this may seem beneficial, but it is necessary to consider that this practice leads to the creation of so-called “information bubbles” and a reinforcement of “confirmation bias”, contexts in which people will only receive information that confirms their own convictions and beliefs²⁴⁶.

Manipulation of audios and images – With the ease of production and image manipulation, many applications offer tools that have been used to fake photos and videos, which constrain and expose children and adolescents. Known as deepfakes²⁴⁷, this practice has a significant impact on reputation, is often used as a form of humiliation and can have dire consequences. This technology has also been used to produce pornographic content from freely shared images on social networks. This risk also has an important gender component, since girls and women have become preferred victims of this type of cyberbullying²⁴⁸ and sextortion.

Scams – In addition to the use of cyberbullying, images and audios produced with artificial intelligence tools can be used to commit financial scams and crimes²⁴⁹. With some AI features, voices and faces can be easily replicated and used to commit scams or convince people that something is “true”²⁵⁰. Children and adolescents are more vulnerable to accounts and profiles that use these features on social networks, online games, and messaging apps.

Disinformation – AI systems can produce and help disseminate audiovisual content that makes false, incorrect or inaccurate information more convincing, without source verification, on social, political or public health issues, exposing children and adolescents to fake news, political extremism, conspiracy theories, or negationism²⁵¹.

*Algorithmic racism*²⁵² – Artificial intelligence is not neutral. It carries the biases, prejudices, ideologies and beliefs present in the datasets used for its training²⁵³. For example, a certain search algorithm may seem racist when, upon being asked about images of human beauty, it shows characteristics mostly of white people. In this case, it would have been taught, based on the training data, that the more common traits in white people – such as light skin and straight hair – are considered beautiful, while those of black people would be ugly, such as dark skin and curly hair.

As in the case of *algorithmic racism*, when AI is used in decision-making by machines, potential human rights violations through discriminatory biases come into play^{254 255}. With the massive use of these tools to obtain information and curate content, there is a tendency to broaden inequalities and reproduce prejudices²⁵⁶.

It should be noted that *algorithmic racism* does not mean that technologies have been built to be intentionally discriminating, but highlights that developing them without the necessary care can generate discriminatory impacts²⁵⁷.

Risks to privacy

To talk about privacy as a fundamental human right for Brazilian people²⁵⁸, including in digital contexts also means addressing data protection.

Although the privacy policies of large platforms have come to include this perspective, it is still necessary to require the implementation of measures to protect the rights of children and adolescents, with special attention to digital experiences in the Global South.

Data from users of websites and social networks is used to train artificial intelligence (AI) models without, often, requesting authorization from users for this purpose or reporting on their consequences²⁵⁹.

For children and adolescents, this privacy violation and the indiscriminate use of their data can bring serious harm, such as the dissemination of their images by online predator networks²⁶⁰ or the unbiased interpretation of the information they access²⁶¹.

The evidence points, therefore, to the need to observe privacy from different angles, such as interpersonal, institutional and commercial relations mediated by digital media^{262 263 264}.

While playing online games, being entertained by videos of their favorite artists, having their presence registered on the social networks of the schools they attend; accessing environments of clubs, condominiums and colleges through facial recognition, among so many other activities, children and adolescents have their information recorded, and a critical reflection on this is necessary.

Privacy does not depend only on the choices made by the child or adolescent. Governments, schools, families and businesses need to look at the ways in which datafication²⁶⁵ of people's lives (converting many aspects of their lives into data) has short, medium and long-term consequences, and how this connects *with data protection for children and adolescents*.



More privacy!

Interpersonal privacy considers the exchange of information between people, through what one chooses to share (or not) with acquaintances or relatively close individuals. Here, the focus is on a type of online connection that multiplies the information about users and the points of contact between them.

Institutional privacy, in turn, provides for the collection of information by institutions with which people interact – education, health, government organizations, and the third sector, among others – and considers that the forms of sharing and the destinations of such content can have long-term consequences; for example, when associated with automated decision-making algorithms^{266 267}.

Commercial privacy refers to information that is collected by for-profit organizations and used for commercial and marketing purposes.

Exposure to marketing communication



"Especially for women, this is very strong. [...] I believe that the advertisements that can reach us influence us and can convince us to buy something".

(Girl, 17 years old, Brasília-DF)

"There's one that shows football boots, that I kept asking my mom to buy, of the [same] brand I liked, until one day a player appeared in an interview on the internet, saying that the football boots were bad, that this one was the best, you know? Saying it was the best. So, I changed brands".

(Boy, 14 years old, Criciúma-SC)

Dealing with marketing communication is necessary, because the term advertising does not cover all the strategies used by the market to address children and adolescents as consumers.

Marketing initiatives that establish communication with the children's audience can be considered abusive, among several reasons, also for concealing sponsored content and/or the existence of advertising contracts.

When the audience consumes content without knowing that it is part of a marketing strategy, their right to information is violated. This also applies to the digital environment.

Moreover, the understanding that the rights provided for children and adolescents in the offline environment also apply to their online experiences is reinforced by the UN's General Comment No. 25.

In this sense, the document indicates that any form of commercial content must be clearly identified, without ever reinforcing racial or gender stereotypes. In addition, it states that profiling and triggering targeted advertising based on a digital record of children and adolescents' data, for commercial purposes, should be prohibited by law. It also contraindicates neuromarketing practices, emotional analysis, immersive publicity and advertising in virtual and augmented reality environments, which may engage directly or indirectly with children and adolescents²⁶⁸.

It is important to observe how cultural content is easily converted into commercial content, since children who circulate and entertain themselves in digital contexts are constantly treated as consumers, or even as producers, as sales agents.

It is also worth noting that, regarding *gambling*²⁶⁹, marketing communication actions directed to children and adolescents, who constitute this social segment as “target audience”, are prohibited, including the use of images of people up to the age of 17 (or elements especially attractive to this audience), as well as actions related to cultural activities aimed at children and adolescents. *Gambling brands are also not allowed* to sponsor children and adolescents, or even events directed primarily at them, nor to encourage them to engage in gambling.

Child Labor



“I think society has not yet understood that these platforms are big advertising companies. The more we stay on the platform, the more money we are giving to these companies with our attention. [...] Children today no longer want to be teachers or have other jobs, they want to be influencers, [...] because they serve as a reference, but forget that there are many other [influencers] who are not successful”.

(Educator in management position, Fortaleza-CE)

The phenomenon of so-called “kid influencers” or “kid youtubers”^{270 271 272}, as they are usually called in the country, is not exclusive to the Brazilian reality. Internationally known as “kidfluencers”^{273 274 275}, children and adolescents have gained prominence and an increasing audience on multiple digital platforms.

This type of activity, mainly involving video productions, initially drew attention, because it allowed expression and child protagonism, as well as learning communicative skills and gaining social recognition.

However, on many platforms, a strong factor for the success of what is produced by children who post content is linked to the number of followers gained and to the financial gain from monetizing their content. Thus, a large network of followers brings both social and economic recognition.

The offer of sponsorships, gifts, contracts and invitations to advertising campaigns directly influences not only the content produced, but also its nature²⁷⁶; and thus, videos that would be considered as a cultural production become commercial productions²⁷⁷.

While there are already restrictions on the monetization of children's videos on some platforms, content producers can publish sponsored material – which allows the commercial exploitation of children's content.

The recording routine, the commercial commitments, the fierce competition for visibility in different spaces, the commitment to influence other children and adolescents^{278 279 280}, among other aspects, characterize a work activity performed by children and adolescents on social media sites²⁸¹ – a clear violation of the rights guaranteed those under 18, both under the Statute of the Child and Adolescent and the Brazilian Federal Constitution, and according to the International Labor Organization (ILO)²⁸².

Considering that *child labor is illegal and unethical, the exercise of artistic participation for which there is remuneration*, as in the case of *creating commercial content by children*^{283 284 285} is only exceptionally admitted – and must comply with ILO Convention No. 138, article No. 149 of the Statute of the Child and Adolescent, Recommendation No. 139 of the CNJ* and Recommendation No. 98 of the CNMP**, which impose assessment, protection, monitoring and safeguards²⁸⁶, including authorization by court order and the condition of not affecting school activities.

It is also important to consider that, unlike artistic assignments in films, soap operas or other audiovisual productions, the exposure of children and adolescents on social networks and virtual platforms subjects them to a very specific type of public judgment that is, at the same time, immediate – given the possibility of real-time comments – but can also be potentially harmful in the medium and long term.

The legal requirements for this type of artistic activity aim, thus, to ensure legal protection regarding the time of involvement with the activity, the dedication to studies, possible forms of remuneration and mechanisms of physical and emotional protection²⁸⁷.

* **TN:** CNJ is the acronym in Portuguese for National Council of Justice (Conselho Nacional de Justiça).

** **TN:** CNMP is the acronym in Portuguese for National Council of the Public Ministry (Conselho Nacional do Ministério Público).



“Kid influencers”

The work of children and adolescents in the digital environment needs to be analyzed critically and with awareness. Brazilian legislation is adamant²⁸⁸ in establishing that:

- work for children up to 13 years of age is prohibited;
- the condition of apprentice is allowed from the age of 14;
- work, under specific conditions, is allowed from 16 to 17 years old, but cannot be nocturnal, dangerous or unhealthy.

These rules also apply to the digital environment, i.e., child labor is not permitted online either.

Some content and practices associated with digital games

One of the most frequent uses of digital devices in childhood and adolescence is digital games for entertainment purposes. Games can provide learning experiences and serve as a means for families to connect and spend time together, especially when they stimulate the “playing together”. In this case, it is essential to evaluate the suitability of the type of game and its contents for the age of the child or adolescent consuming it.

With the growth of the digital games market in Brazil post-pandemic²⁸⁹, online games have become popular among children and adolescents. This is shown by data from the TIC Kids Online Brasil 2023 survey,²⁹⁰ in which 39% of internet users aged 9 to 10 reported playing online connected with other players. Among users aged 11 to 12 years, this percentage was 60%, remaining at 53% for those aged 13 to 17 years. The research also points out that even younger children have a similar usage rate compared to older children.

Like other practices already discussed in this Guide, digital games, whether online or offline, offer a number of opportunities and risks. As cultural products, their positive or negative consequences vary according to age, context, volume of use, and the features (mechanics, design patterns, engagement strategies, etc.) that make up these products.

There is great discussion in the scientific community about the influence of violent digital games on aggressive behaviors. The literature indicates that exposure to violent content is one of the factors that can lead to such behavior^{291 292 293 294}.

However, these do not necessarily lead to violent crimes or long-term antisocial behavior, but there is a need for family monitoring of the use of digital games by children and adolescents, taking into account the *contexts of games*²⁹⁵.



"She [child] was showing strange behavior, getting a little aggressive, with some crying spells. So, we decided to talk to her, and she said that she thought the game itself was doing this. Then she decided to uninstall it and spend time without it".

(Father, Recife-PE)

It is important to understand that digital games are not all the same and that the risks listed here are potential, i.e., they will not necessarily result in harm. Instead, they served as *attention points for protection* because they help caregivers, educators, children and adolescents to become more aware of risk perceptions.



"My nephew is six years old and is learning to read. These days he showed me a literacy game. It shows the images that he needs to associate correctly, I think this has worked for him. So, when the activity is purpose-driven and well structured, it is positive, without any doubt".

(Educator of Elementary School II and High School, Cuiabá-MT)

Thus, many of the risks are not exclusively associated with digital games, but deserve attention due to both the volume of use and the difficulty users may have in identifying the risks to which they are exposed²⁹⁶.



Attention points in the use of digital games

As many digital games have not been developed with the safety of children and adolescents in mind, and therefore need regulation, their use make users subject to:

Extremist and hate speech: studies show how platforms related to online games are appropriate and used for the dissemination of extremist and hate speech²⁹⁷;

Cyberbullying practices: these are practices of systematic virtual intimidation that are so present in online environments – specially in gaming – that they have been classified as a crime²⁹⁸;

Privacy failures and improper processing of personal data: despite what the General Law on the Protection of Personal Data states in Article 14 regarding the processing of data of children and adolescents, there are risks of data misuse, sale to third parties and information leakage;

Exposure to unknown people and sexual predators: children and adolescents can interact with any users of the network, becoming potential victims of fraud, harassment and violence²⁹⁹;

Exposure to harassment: research shows that 60% of participating adolescents, between 13 and 17 years, have suffered some kind of harassment in multiplayer online games³⁰⁰;

Exposure to pornography: TIC Kids online of 2023 reported that among the most frequent users, in the age group from 15 to 17 years, 32% reported having received sexual content online and that gaming platforms are one of the means for traffic of this type of content;

Exposure to advertising and marketing communication: whether in the form of advertisements or as part of the games themselves (*advergaming*)³⁰¹, children and adolescents are exposed to appeals for consumption and brands that can be characterized as abusive³⁰²;

Exposure to sports betting, fantasy games and gambling: children and adolescents are particularly vulnerable to the allure of potential winnings and are more likely to provide personal and financial data from their own families and caregivers.³⁰³

Another risk that deserves attention is the development of “gaming addiction”, which, in 2018, was recognized by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a disease, classified as a disorder in the International Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (ICD-11). With the technical name of Internet Gaming Disorder, it can be characterized by excessive and uncontrolled use of games, neglect of daily habits due to gaming and impacts on social relationships. A study conducted in the country showed that 28% of the nearly four thousand adolescents interviewed showed problematic use of online games and presented some of the diagnostic criteria.³⁰⁴

In this context, it is important to consider how the professionalization of children and adolescents as pro players or players in the digital environment can also bring associated risks. Speaking of eSports or electronic sports takes into account the fact that some digital games have become competitive, forming tournaments similar to traditional sports, narrated by commentators and broadcast via *streaming* and even on open TV³⁰⁵. There are teams, technical staff and preparation of physical and mental health for such players (with routines that alternate workouts, physical exercises and other activities). There is even legal recognition of athletes considered professionals, registered in the employment record under the Pelé Law³⁰⁶.

The point is that, to reach the level of a professional player, training and dedication are fundamental. But how can one differentiate between intensive training and dependency on digital gaming? According to the evidence, it is important to observe behaviors that demonstrate neglect of self-care, such as not eating, not hydrating or spending long periods without going to the bathroom due to the activity – behaviors that would not be practiced in the professional category³⁰⁷.

Both for those pursuing the lucrative pro player profession and for those who consume this type of content, care for children and adolescents should be increased, aiming at their best interest and considering even the risks of incurring in illegal child labor³⁰⁸.

Game developers should adopt measures to reduce risks to the rights of this audience and create a reporting system for abuse, ensuring that purchasing tools available in games require the unambiguous consent of responsible adults. It is worth remembering that one of the foundations of the legal framework for the electronic gaming industry is the full protection of children and adolescents³⁰⁹. In addition, the rules laid down in the Statute of the Child and Adolescent regarding the Advisory Age Rating apply to digital games³¹⁰.



Useful questions to evaluate the impacts of digital games on children and adolescents

- How do they behave before I allow them to play (for example, do they keep asking to play/use)?
- How do they behave during the game (for example, do they say offensive words, become agitated, accelerated breathing, or fail to pay attention to what is happening around them or to other people?)
- Do they know how to differentiate between what is media and what is reality (for example, do they go to sleep thinking that the monster from the game is in their room)?
- Do they notice when they have used the app or game for too long? Has the child or adolescent said they felt unwell after prolonged use?
- How do they behave after the game?
- How do they behave when I do not allow them to play?
- How do they react when adults are using their smartphone or tablet?
- What digital security measures are used to protect the child, adolescent and family (e.g., “parental control” features in apps, not exposing the child or adolescent on social networking sites, etc.)?

Other risks associated with the use of digital devices

Children and adolescents are also subject to the same risks as adults in relation to the internet environment – exposure to disinformation, conspiracy theories, scams and fraud.



Online betting (bets)

With the recent legalization of online betting in Brazil, exposure to gambling advertisements has also become a reality.

Ordinance No. 1,231/2024, of July 31, 2024, issued by the Secretariat of Prizes and Bets of the Ministry of Finance established the rules and guidelines that betting operators must comply with in relation to the “responsible gaming”. Thus, the prohibition of gambling by children and adolescents must be ensured, promoting campaigns and initiatives to raise awareness about the risks of addiction, pathological gambling disorders and the prohibition of these practices for such a public.

The use of gambling platforms by children and adolescents is prohibited and must be inhibited by all responsible public authorities. This rule must be respected by everyone, with appropriate penalties in the event of non-compliance.

It is worth mentioning that any type of advertising or marketing communication for betting that involves the participation of children or adolescents or is directed to them, is *illegal* in the country^{311 312}.

In addition to the prohibitions already contained in the Statute of the Child and Adolescent (ECA), which served as a parameter for the regulation of betting, these restrictions are reinforced by the norms established by the federal government.

There are also risks related to exposure to hate content, such as *radicalization*, especially among adolescents within forums and online communities of an extremist, misogynist, racist, neo-Nazi nature, among others.

Some digital platforms, especially those that do not adequately moderate content, can provide environments where adolescents vulnerable to radicalization may connect, reinforcing the dynamics known as “*echo chambers*” – or the perception that everyone agrees with each other³¹⁴.

Adolescents may initially be attracted to content found in easily accessible environments and, from there, be directed to restricted spaces, hate speech, videos of explicit and extreme violence, incitement to self-harm or violence against others, instructions on how to commit violent acts offline, and child pornography, among other contents, circulate freely.

Non-pedagogical use of devices in the school environment

The use of digital devices in the school environment plays a dual role: promoting students’ digital inclusion and developing the skills necessary for the exercise of citizenship.

Despite the numerous possibilities of using technology to support learning, it is important to establish the limits, so that there is no harm to stimulating other skills and competences essential for the full development of students.



“My dad doesn’t let me take my cell phone to school. Because he thinks I’m going to stay on it in class. I’ve taken it without him knowing. I don’t think it would interfere because I don’t have internet. If I had internet, I would use it during the break”.

(Boy, 13 years old, Manacapuru-AM)

Coexistence in the school environment plays a relevant role in developing skills such as empathy, dialogue, cooperative conflict resolution and respect for others and for human rights. Therefore, care must be taken so that intensive use of technology, individually and without a pedagogical purpose, does not harm the interaction with other colleagues, teachers and the school community as a whole.



Highlights of the TIC Education 2022 research³¹⁵

77%

of Elementary and High School students who are Internet users reported accessing it at school, either through their own devices or through those made available to students on school premises.

- The proportion of students who access the Internet at school increases with age: among students aged 9 to 10 years, 50% said they accessed the Internet at the school institution, a proportion of 70% between 11 and 12 years old, 82% between 13 and 14 years old and more than 90% among those who are 15 and above.
- *The cell phone is the device most used by students (55%) to access the Internet at school:* 81% of the High School students used the device, 55% among the students in the final years of Elementary School and 15% among the students in the early years of Elementary School (4th and 5th years).
- Regarding school devices used by students, the desktop computer (31%), the laptop (26%) and the tablet (7%) were mentioned by students in higher proportions.
- 92% of teachers who worked in Elementary and High Schools said they used at least one digital device with students during classes, although this use was often more focused on presenting content to students than on carrying out activities that involved the use of digital technologies by students.
- The smart phone was mentioned by 67% of teachers as a resource to access the Internet in educational activities during classes, a proportion that was 47% among municipal schoolteachers, 74% among state schoolteachers and 76% among private school teachers. In rural areas, 14% of teachers mentioned only cell phones as digital devices for use in digital activities with students.
- Doing research on what teachers talk about in class was the most common activity performed by students (57%) in school, using digital devices, especially among High School students (78%). Now 55% of students in the final years of Elementary School and 28% of the students in the initial years perform this activity.
- Reading texts (47%), performing group work (45%) and accessing videos (40%) about what teachers discuss in class were also among the educational activities most performed by students in school with the use of digital devices.

A UNESCO global report (2023)³¹⁶ pointed out that technology can have a negative impact if it is used improperly and excessively. The presence of devices, such as smartphones, in the classroom, can be a source of distraction, hindering classroom management and negatively impacting students' focus and productivity. In addition, it points out that intensive use of technology tends to reduce opportunities for social interaction among students, which is crucial for the development of social and emotional skills. The document also highlights that excessive screen time has been associated with negative impacts on students' physical and mental health, as mentioned earlier.

Since the tendency to prohibit the use of cell phones in schools is recent, there are still few studies that analyze their impacts, *which at first glance seem positive*^{317 318}.

Regarding policies on smartphone use in Brazilian schools, available data indicate that, in recent years, numerous educational institutions have adopted their own regulations to limit non-pedagogical uses in this environment.

The limitation of smartphone use in schools has now extended to all public and private schools of Brazilian basic education, following the *approval of Federal Law 15.100/2025*, which "provides for the use by students of personal portable electronic devices in public and private establishments of basic education".





Highlights of the TIC Education 2022 research³¹⁹

- Among institutions serving students up to the early years of Elementary School, 42% reported that students could not use their smartphones at school. The number drops to 21% among schools serving students up to the final years of Elementary School and to 7% of those serving older students, such as High School or career and technical education.

Among municipal institutions,

34%

reported that students could not use smartphones, while 12% of state schools and 28% of private schools adopted the same measure.

62%

of municipal schools and in 67% of state and private schools, device use was allowed only in certain spaces and at specific times.

- Regarding the use of school wireless network, institutions serving students in higher levels of education tend to adopt the most restrictive measures: 59% of schools serving students up to the final years of Elementary School and 58% of those with students up to High School or career and technical education did not allow students access to the Wi-Fi password. This also occurred in 46% of schools serving students in the early years of Elementary School.
- Restrictions on student access to Wi-Fi for students occurred in 54% of municipal schools, 55% of state schools and 47% of private schools.

The Brazilian Constitution guarantees freedom to learn, teach, research and disseminate thought, art and knowledge, as well as pluralism of ideas and pedagogical conceptions³²⁰. Similarly, the National Education Bases and Guidelines Law (LDB) ensure *pedagogical autonomy* to public school units of basic education, which must be managed *democratically and with the participation of the school community*³²¹. In this sense, decisions on rules for the use of electronic devices in the school environment should consider Federal Law No. 15,100/2025 and be made with the participation of the community.



"I don't know if I would think about the rules, but about the care of the parents themselves, along with the school community, to discuss these issues. First this discussion so that later the rules may arise".

(Educator of Elementary School II and High School, Goiânia-GO)

Respecting these principles, it is also essential that education systems and institutions base their decisions regarding the *non-pedagogical* use of digital devices on the available evidence.



Connected devices and data from children and adolescents

During the Covid-19 pandemic, for formal education to be possible, there was a rapid adoption of digital devices and applications for educational purposes.

Such measures showed how some *risks* also appear when there is no in-depth reflection on *adherence to technologies*.

A first point of attention refers to how the measures adopted during the emergency period collaborated to anticipate the use of such resources in school environments, as well as to expand non-pedagogical uses, both inside and outside schools.

This refers to the debate on the balance between the need for an education coordinated with the digital world and possible negative impacts on the teaching and learning process.

Another risk that needs to be taken into account concerns the *privacy and data protection of children and adolescents*. In the period of social isolation (or since this period) some schools and institutions have adhered to strategies that have as their counterpart the sharing of information about users to third parties³²², such as educational sites, which have collected data from children and adolescents in excess or for purposes other than educational purposes; for example, for further targeting of advertising.

According to article 14 of the General Law on Protection of Personal Data (LGPD)³²³, there are a number of requirements for the collection, use and processing of data of children and adolescents, and this concerns the many contexts from which these data can be processed.

Thus, it is important to signal that *any technology or digital device involved in the school environment or dynamics should prioritize the best interest of the child and adolescent and follow the principle of minimum collection of their data, being used with criteria of transparency and adequacy of their purposes*³²⁴.

Thus, in addition to cell phones, decisions about connected cameras, facial recognition systems, platforms with didactic resources, among others, demand prevention, information and caution when deciding on its implementation.

The use of technological devices in the school environment can enhance the teaching and learning process or disrupt school engagement, sociability and even students' mental health. The many possibilities of technologies, applied in school contexts, therefore require that their different uses be understood, planned and, if necessary, regulated.

The *pedagogical or didactic* use of digital devices must follow the current education policies, by the National Common Curriculum Base (BNCC) and by decisions of the educational networks themselves. On the other hand, the *non-pedagogical* use of individual devices, such as smartphones and tablets, in the school environment, in addition to being prohibited by Federal Law no. 15,100/2025, may have negative consequences in various aspects of students' life, such as hindering socialization, weakening links between students and educators, aggravating mental disorders, among others.



"Because it's even a little rule that I have in my school's social group: when everyone is together, nobody uses cell phones because it really gets in the way".

(Girl, 16 years old, Picuí-PB)

It is essential, for example, *that the moment of recreation is preserved from the intensive use of digital devices*. Recreation is an important interval for socialization and learning processes, to stimulate movement and practice of physical and sports activities, and the individual use of a mobile device does not contribute to this.

Given the recommendation of this Guide, that *children (up to 12 years) do not have their own mobile devices* and that the possession of these devices by colleagues becomes a pressure factor for them to also have one, it is important that schools consider this in making decisions about the use of personal devices in such environments.

Defining the rules for the use of personal devices in a uniform manner is challenging due to the differences in the social dynamics and development of children and adolescents at each school stage. Thus, turning this decision into an exercise of democratic culture is an opportunity to involve the entire school community in definitions of enormous consequence.

Stimulating the enriching and educational use of technology and discouraging the use that reinforces health-damaging dynamics in schools as a whole should be the guiding points of the rules for the use of digital devices in Brazilian schools.



"The school cannot do it alone. It's too much. The school has to deal with emerging issues, current issues that the internet enhances, such as the issue of racism and homophobia. [...] It is necessary to join forces, to have a multitude of actions that warns society about this. And this union is not just by the government. I think churches are important because churches have an enormous influence on communities. Social movements need to be called, for example, women's and mother's movements... everyone. We need to raise awareness! Because the exposure of this issue related to the screen brings not only the issue [...] of the mental health of children, but also leads to other problems such as violence, pedophilia, exposure, all this... it enhances the problem. [...] It has to be a movement of society as a whole".

(Educator of Elementary School II, Fortaleza-CE)

Tips from children and adolescents themselves³²⁵



Pay attention so you don't mess up

- Do not access content that is inappropriate for your age.
- Do not watch only content selected by the platform's algorithm.
- Do not access websites that look suspicious.
- Do not let screens use hinder important activities, such as studying.
- Do not use screens before sleeping.
- Do not replace face-to-face interactions with digital devices.



It looks like good advice!

- Watch content that parents allow.
- Use screens to search for new opportunities and gather information.
- Be careful with frauds and unknown people on social networks.
- Take breaks from screen use.
- "Live the real world", enjoy childhood and the present moment.
- Have more social interactions.
- Spend more time on outdoor activities.
- Practice sports and activities they enjoy.



5

Opportunities in sight



"I teach from kindergarten to the fifth year, in the community [...] in the rural area. [...] We have more internet access inside the school and on Fridays we watch a movie, and then we make the summary of our week's activities. We look at photos and watch videos with them. Our representative here [...] the chief, addressed these issues that, within the community, teenagers would no longer like to participate in these kinds of things due to the phone. Due to the cell phone. So, in addition to establishing the rule, we take the tool, the cell phone, the computer, the social networks to a positive aspect, by creating a network of social communicators. There are ten who are in charge of photography, videos, advice, editing of various things".

(Indigenous Community Educator, Manaus-AM)

Digital and Media Education

The digitalization of society and the democratization of technologies for production and circulating information offer unprecedented opportunities to access content on any subject and give voice to people with different views. At the same time, they bring enormous challenges for building knowledge, responsibility and safe participation in the digital environment. Children and adolescents (as well as adults) need to learn to navigate this environment intentionally, reflexively and critically — not only in school, but throughout life.

Having digital access, presence and reach does not equate to fluency, maturity and responsibility for navigating the Internet. Thus, educating for and with the media is indispensable to any debate on how we want children and adolescents to build autonomy progressively, with common and critical sense to participate fully in a connected society. Something indispensable for building a healthier information environment and for sustaining democracy³²⁶.

The connectivity offered to Brazilian schools must meet the needs and expectations of educational challenges in the country. To this end, the *National Connected Schools Strategy* defined *meaningful connectivity* criteria.

Mere access to the internet and digital devices, although not yet guaranteed for the entire Brazilian population, is not sufficient to promote equity. Achieving this requires an educational policy strategy that combines access to connectivity and devices with a comprehensive pedagogical program that includes school curriculum and teacher training. Part of the strategy involves educating children and adolescents to use digital tools in a critical and creative way.

Digital Education encompasses the set of skills, competencies and knowledge necessary for the full exercise of citizenship today. In this sense, it connects with *Media Education* to address, critically, significantly, reflectively and ethically, the range of information, behaviors and social practices in the digital environment. It also concerns understanding and developing computational thinking, considering the challenges and opportunities of the digital age, the social dynamics mediated and influenced by technology and the transformations in the world of work.





Brazilian Strategy for Media Education³²⁷

In the field of opportunities, it is worth highlighting the Brazilian Strategy for Media Education (EBEM), presented in 2023 by the Secretariat of Digital Policies of the Secretariat of Communication of the Presidency of the Republic. Built from contributions collected in public consultation, EBEM brings together several initiatives of the federal government to promote media education in Brazil.

Its mission is to “promote the development of skills and competencies in children, adolescents, adults and elderly people, for understanding, analysis, engagement and critical production in their experience with different channels of digital media and information, in a creative, healthy, and conscious way, involving citizenship”.

EBEM recognizes the constant presence of digital media and devices in the daily lives of the population and the possibilities to improve the uses and practices for various audiences. Seen as a transversal competence, media education is conceived, in writing, beyond the formal teaching environment.

Actions and projects aimed at (i) promoting media education in basic education; (ii) continuing education and qualification of education professionals and multipliers; (iii) establishing partnerships with academia, civil society and the private sector; (iv) developing educational campaigns; (v) promoting the conscious use of digital screens and devices by children and adolescents and (vi) fostering social participation.

More than a set of actions, EBEM recognizes that the media ecosystem requires comprehensive public policy and attention to ensure the full exercise of the rights to information, communication and participation. With a focus on promoting broad access and the healthy, critical and safe use of digital media, EBEM’s objectives and core areas of action are concrete awareness initiatives to expand the benefits and opportunities of ICTs while reducing risks.

In this sense, both Digital Education and Media Education are basic rights and pre-conditions for the experience of citizenship in an increasingly connected world. This includes the ability to understand the influence of media on society, recognize different forms of media communication and participate in an informed and ethical manner in the digital environment.

In Brazil, this is already part of public policy: skills linked to conscious and qualified appropriation of information and communication, especially in the participatory culture, are present in the National Common Curriculum Base (BNCC)³²⁸ in a transversal way, especially in General Competence 5, which addresses understanding, using and creating digital technologies critically, significantly, reflexively and ethically across various social practices.

Another document that reinforces the importance of Media Education as a public policy is the BNCC complement in the area of Computing³²⁹, which is divided into three pillars: Computational Thinking, Digital World and Digital Culture.

The material emphasizes that it is necessary to go beyond the technical understanding and mastery of tools, applications and codes. At the Elementary School stage, one of the competencies is “understanding computing as an area of knowledge that contributes to explaining the current world and being an active and conscious agent of transformation, capable of critically analyzing their social, environmental, cultural, economic, scientific, technological, legal and ethical impacts”.

In line with the BNCC, the *National Policy of Digital Education (PNED)*³³⁰ also addresses digital culture, with a view to “learning aimed at the conscious and democratic participation through digital technologies, which presupposes understanding the impacts of digital revolution and its advances in society, the construction of a critical, ethical and responsible attitude toward the multiplicity of media and digital offerings, as well as the different uses of technologies and content”. PNED also introduced a relevant novelty: the mandatory inclusion of digital education in the curriculum of Elementary and Middle Schools.

In all contexts, digital and media education must seek to strengthen the critical and progressive autonomy of children and adolescents in relation to both the informational environment and a constantly evolving technological context, enabling them to continue learning confidently throughout their lives and exercising the fundamental right to information.



"I started reading more this year, reading a lot more than staying on the cell phone as usual. I started studying many things and other things that I'm really interested in, which are not taught at school. And I think that's exactly what the internet did. I have knowledge about other things".

(Girl, 11 years old, Rio de Janeiro-RJ)



Examples of skills developed through Digital and Media Education

- Information Literacy: developing the habit of questioning information rather than simply consuming everything available, reducing vulnerability to manipulative content and frauds.
- Understanding search engines and algorithmic personalization: fostering a more responsible attitude toward disinformation and content generated by artificial intelligence systems.
- Critical media analysis: understanding that all media messages reflect choices and carry goals, which may be more or less explicit. Recognition of unethical practices and identifying which voices are privileged or absent.
- Digital fluency: safe and assertive use of digital tools to learn, collaborate, create and share knowledge.
- Critical and creative use of content publishing environments: understanding the business models of digital platforms.
- Care with personal data and privacy issues.
- Possibility of leaving a passive consumption of information for a more conscious and transformative use of one's surroundings.
- Promotion of responsible digital use: leveraging the digital environment as a channel of communication and diversity of voices, encouraging the creation of media to engage and mobilize responsibly, while amplifying the voice and free expression of children and adolescents.

The opportunity for children and adolescents is, therefore, to perceive themselves as citizens who have a voice, able to express their opinions and exercise their rights and responsibilities in the digital world.

To do so, they need to know how to use Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to achieve beneficial and high-quality outcomes, as well as reduce the damage of digital experiences, both for themselves and for others.

In this sense, it is important that they develop both their technical skills – such as operating, creating and using tools and systems to solve problems – and *critical skills* – which enable to understand the contexts of information and other content.



”

“There are people doing university assignments and they only use their cell phone. I did my graduation thesis like this: I sent it to my professor; he corrected and reviewed my study by cell phone. That is, he had vision and already did it this way. Today I see my blind students producing studies by cell phone. [...] What if we try to bring what these devices can offer to the classroom? There will be students who don't have one. There are many homes, and families that only have one cell phone for everyone”.

(Blind educator of computer science for people with visual impairment Fortaleza-CE)



Highlights of the TIC Kids Online Brasil 2024³³¹

81%

of users aged 11 to 17 stated that this is “true” or “very true” that they know how to choose the right words to find something on the internet.

- 52% of users aged 11 to 17 agree that everyone finds the same information when they search for things online, and for 50% of the users surveyed, the first result of an internet search is always the best source of information.
- 72% of users aged 11 to 17 agree that companies pay people to use their products in the videos and content they publish on the Internet.

For

55%

it is true or absolutely true that they know how to check if information found on the internet is correct.

It is also important that all adults who directly participate in the lives of children and adolescents – family members, teachers and other professionals with decision-making power over their life dynamics – know how to make safe and critical use of digital media and technologies, including to promote them in cohesive contexts in order to facilitate learning.

It is worth considering how electronic games can also be recognized as *educational tools* and support the development of cognitive skills. Educators and students can interact in a playful and intentionally pedagogical way with digital games through which it is possible to develop skills such as planning, anticipation, decision-making, strategic thinking, etc.

Games can serve as experimental *learning spaces*³³², where students can make mistakes safely, learn from them and persist until they succeed. They also offer psychological and socio-emotional benefits, encouraging teamwork in problem solving, promoting social engagement, collaboration and connection among players.



"My teacher, who I admire, [...] created a site for our classroom so that when we had any doubts about her subject, we could enter the site and play games that are related to her subject - which will end, in one way or another, helping us when we have to do the test.. [...] We are trying to take this to all the other classes [...] because it helped a lot and our grades started going up, because the games that she recommends to us [game name], let's say, random, is actually related to the class, let's say a quiz about [name of the subject], with super-animated, fun things that I really love".

(Girl, 14 years old, Petrolina-PE)

The TIC Educação (ICT Education) 2022 indicators, mentioned in sequence, also highlight the fundamental role of teachers in promoting media education among children and adolescents.



Highlights of the TIC Educação 2022 research³³³

- Teachers were mentioned by 44% of Elementary and High School students as reference sources on the use of digital technologies; this proportion rose to 56% among students of schools located in rural areas.
- Helping students use the internet to do homework or lessons (60%) and recommending sites to complete school assignments (60%) were the guidance activities most mentioned by the students.

For

75%

of the teachers surveyed, the lack of specific training makes it exceedingly difficult to adopt digital technologies in educational activities. In this respect, 56% of teachers said they had participated in continuing education in the 12 months prior to the research.

54%

also mentioned that teachers taught students to check if information or news on the internet is true, and 53%, to use the internet safely.

- The proportion of students who mentioned receiving guidance from teachers on topics related to the critical, secure and responsible use of technologies was also higher among those at higher levels of education: while 64% of High School students said that their teachers advised them to verify if information on the internet is true, the proportion was 55% among students of the Final Years of Elementary School and 40% among those of the Early Years of Elementary School. Among students of the Early Years of Elementary School, 31% received guidance from teachers on what to do if something bothered them on the internet, a proportion that was 49% for those of the Final Years of Elementary School and 50% among those in High School.

Access and Meaningful Connectivity in the school context



"I end up complementing a lot with the [app name], because the audios and videos make the classes more dynamic. For example, I created the photography portfolio that they edited using [app name]. It was lovely and beautiful. They used it in the classroom. I think it's important to see that there is beneficial use of these technologies".

(Elementary and Middle School Educator, Porto Velho-RO)

In the school environment, access to connectivity has become essential to offering quality education and preparing students for the challenges of the modern world. Access to the Internet and educational technologies in schools encourages the adoption of more participatory strategies, as well as enabling educators and students to develop essential digital skills, such as those related to computational thinking and digital citizenship, which include the ability to analyze and use information critically and responsibly.

For the exercise of citizenship nowadays, a more connected, innovative and inclusive educational environment is necessary, one in which all students have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

The National Strategy of Connected Schools (ENEC) was launched by the federal government³³⁴, in collaboration with the education systems, to join efforts and bring connectivity for pedagogical purposes to all public schools in Brazil. With this, ENEC seeks to democratize access to technology, ensuring the digital inclusion of all basic education students.

Entire groups or classes should be able to connect simultaneously to the Wi-Fi network and securely access educational content in school environments, allowing the full potential of the available internet connectivity to be used.

In these terms, quality parameters have been established^{335 336} – which include Wi-Fi connection speed and configuration – to ensure that school connectivity meets its primary purpose of supporting teaching and learning processes.

With the minimum conditions of access guaranteed, it becomes possible to implement digital and media education capable of helping students develop technical and critical skills necessary to exercise their citizenship. After all, in a world where digital culture is part of most everyday experiences, pedagogical uses, stimulated in the school environment play a key role in fostering safe experiences in internet use.

Opportunities for children and adolescents with disabilities: assistive technologies

Some technologies available on mobile devices can also be extremely important and useful for the development, socialization, learning and participation of children and adolescents with disabilities.

*The Brazilian Law on the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities*³³⁷ defines “assistive technology or technical assistance” as products, equipment, devices, resources, methodologies, strategies, practices and services that aim to promote the functionality related to the activity and participation of a person with disability or reduced mobility, considering their autonomy, independence, quality of life and social inclusion.

For example, walking sticks, crutches, wheelchairs, hearing aids, magnifying glasses or guide dogs, are *assistive technologies* – as well as applications that provide text adaptation or narration, audio description of images, navigation and commands by voice or gestures, subtitles, or by the Brazilian Sign Language (Libras).

It is worth mentioning that access to technologies by children and adolescents with disabilities, in itself, does not guarantee their inclusion and full accessibility. The involvement of society is fundamental in the development process of this group. Direct, continuous and face-to-face interaction with people with and without disabilities, and with different environments, is fundamental for them to understand themselves, others and their surroundings.

It is important to note that while the law establishes that technology companies and governments must provide accessibility, training and support for people with disabilities or limitations, it also requires that these same agents ensure security, privacy and protection in the processing of these individuals’ data. Therefore, the use of this type of resource should consider the specific protection needs of each user.



“Using a computer or a tablet is not as intuitive for a blind person as it is for a person who can see, right?! It’s not a simple thing, we really need to have a moment of learning, of using that tool. While the images already say everything to those who can see, we, who are blind, have to undergo a period of learning. In the case of the computer, it means understanding the shortcut keys, knowing the keyboard, understanding what keys I need to use to navigate [...] or execute any action”.

(Blind educator of computer science for people with visual impairment, Fortaleza-CE)

According to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities³³⁸, which has constitutional amendment status, a person with a disability is defined as someone who has long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment which in interaction with one or more barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society, on an equal basis with others.



6

Recommendations for the effective rights of children and adolescents in the digital environment

From children and adolescents to children and adolescents³³⁹

- *Do not use devices when someone is talking to you*, that is not cool. It gives the other person the impression that you do not care about them.
- *Do not use them in the classroom and do not use them until late at night*, so that you can go to school the next day.
- *Do extracurricular activities to learn more*. A start, too, is to try watching longer content, because there are a lot of people who like to watch [app name] and end up learning a lot.
- Using a smartphone **can** really harm your health. For example, some people who use the computer a lot spend too much time in front of the screen, eat too much and become overweight.
- It is important *to talk about cyberbullying within the family environment*. It is necessary to recognize it in order to deal with the problem and understand that this is not just a joke.
- Regarding cyberbullying, it is also important to be aware that *not everything people say about you is true*.
- Screens are good to help us see *other black people, people with vitiligo, with some kind of disability, people from the outskirts, etc.*
- Screens are important for us to *share our wisdom* and the ways we perceive things.
- *Exchanging experiences on these screen-related topics* makes us smarter. *The experiences are individual, but the struggles are collective.*



Recommendations by children and adolescents for adults

- *Teaching by example* is important to ensure coherence when making demands.
- Adults in the family should use common sense and seek the *protection of the image* of children and adolescents as a *safeguarding act*.
- Generations have different ways of relating to screens and it is important to comprehend that *learning how to act comes gradually*.
- It is important to consider **the opinion** of the child and adolescent *when posting content about them*.
- Reporting on *cyberbullying* is particularly important, but it is not enough to say that it exists. It is necessary to *explain what can be done when it happens, who to talk to and how to ask for help*.
- In the media, the *image of children and adolescents* should be treated with great caution, *protecting* their profiles and data, and respecting *their privacy*.
- Asking for the *consent* of parents and guardians is something very relative because some may deprive the child or adolescent of using screens. What should be done is *to teach them how to use them consciously*.
- Telling *companies not to collect data from children and adolescents* while they use platforms is particularly important and necessary.
- Adapting the Terms of Use and Service to make them easier **for children and adolescents** to understand would help them not accept things that are wrong.
- The texts of the **Terms of Use and Services should be clearer** and written in a more accessible language. How can you comment if you do not understand? It is important to enforce the Brazilian Data Protection Law (LGPD).
- **Children should not work**. I think that children should not be forced to do what they do not want to or be used as a source of income.
- Regarding screens use, **it is important to understand why they should be used**.
- It is important **to be clear, especially when it comes to personal data**. Students and their families should be informed about each step and the reasons behind it, even in a school setting.

- Schools should not control students data but **should teach students how to protect it.**
- It would be ideal to review the exposure of children and adolescents by schools, and it is important to **obtain their permission or consent before posting about them.**
- One idea is to create a space where **discussions about screens are appropriate to the public**, promoting activities based on age groups, **so that children can express their opinions in many ways on the subject**, such as through art, play and movement.
- It would be interesting to **talk about the risks of screens**, such as cyberbullying, **with physical comic books** and digital versions illustrated by young people and available in braille, Libras (Brazilian Sign Language) and audiobook formats.

Families, caregivers, tutors and guardians

- **Do not allow the use of screens and digital devices by babies** (under 2 years of age), except for contact with family members via video call, giving preference to other activities, such as playtime, face to face interactions and physical activities.
- Avoid, if possible, **the acquisition or possession of smartphone devices before the age of 12.**
- **Avoid the use of social networks by children (up to 12 years old) and observe the age recommendations indicated by the Advisory Age Rating to each application** (the minimum age recommendations for access are different for each social network, for example). Most social networks are not designed for children, containing patterns that stimulate prolonged and potentially problematic use. In addition, the presence of children on social networks becomes a pressure factor for other children and families to normalize this type of use.
- Supervise the use of electronic devices, applications and social networks during **adolescence** (12 to 17 years) through **family mediation.**
- **Observe** children and adolescents while consuming media content and **seeking opportunities for interaction.**
- **Talk** with children and adolescents about the risks and opportunities in the digital environment, considering the **opinions** of all involved and elaborate family **rules** which encourage **moderate and healthy use of technologies.**
- Avoid using the possibility of access to technological devices (and their content) as a **bargaining tool.**

- **Teach by example**, avoiding excessive use of digital devices in front of children and adolescents during moments of interaction.
- Avoid the use of digital devices during **family mealtimes**.
- Encourage children and adolescents to enjoy quality time with **play and screen-free activities**.
- Preserve **quality in the sleep routine** by avoiding the possession of digital devices in the bedroom and at bedtime.
- Acknowledge and evaluate the use of **parental supervision features** available on digital platforms, applications and devices, according to the age of the child or adolescent.
- Preserve the **image and privacy of children and adolescents**, in the short, medium and long term, combating frequent, excessive and/or careless exposure of information about them on social networks.
- Do not promote illegal employment **of children and adolescents**.
- Avoid the practice of **sharenting** (exposing information about children), especially on open social networks, to preserve their right to privacy and prevent inappropriate use of their image in the digital environment.
- Inform and communicate to children and adolescents about the illegality of **cyberbullying**, its effects (racism, misogyny, fatphobia, lgbtphobia, among others), and the types of **harm it causes to victims**.
- Seek information and professional help if there are signs of problematic or **excessive use of digital devices**, carefully observing warning signs such as mental disorders, aggressiveness, social isolation, self-image problems, cyberbullying, self-harm, among others.

Business Sector

- Promote *campaigns*, with relevant impact, *on the safety of children and adolescents in the digital environment*, encouraging the healthy and moderate use of Information and Communication Technologies, in general, and of their own products and services, specifically.
- Adopt *terms and policies of use* in clear and understandable language, which prioritize the full protection of children and adolescents, reinforcing the interpretation that *Brazilian legislation* considers for their condition as right-holders.
- Adapt the language strategy used in *terms and policies of use* to the standards required by the General Law on Protection of Personal Data (LGPD), in order to communicate information about the processing of users' data in a simple, clear and accessible way, *appropriate not only to the understanding of adults, but also of children and adolescents*.
- Enforce, including through the use of artificial intelligence tools, the minimum age *verification* limits for access to applications that are not suitable for children or adolescents.
- Provide *mechanisms for family mediation* adapted to the age or degree of autonomy and maturity of children and adolescents, *facilitating access to the resource, understanding of the language used and transparency regarding data processing*.
- Give *broad publicity to the mechanisms available for family supervision*, such as parental control or supervision tools, as well as to versions of applications aimed at children; in this case, indicating the differences from the original version.
- In applications that allow interaction between children and adolescents and third parties through text, audio or video messages, synchronously or asynchronously, *disable the interaction tools* by default, and make this feature available only through parental supervision.
- Do not collect *personal data from children and adolescents* for profiling without taking into account their best interests, ensuring their right to privacy (interpersonal, institutional and commercial).
- Prohibit *advertising and marketing communication* aimed at children in applications, as well as any advertising of *gambling* directed to children and adolescents, or involving their participation.
- Curb child and adolescent *work in the digital environment, disabling the monetization of content* directly associated with so-called "kid influencers".
- Implement *safety measures for the artistic manifestation of children and adolescents in the digital environment* – including so-called "kid influencers" – according to legal requirements against child labor.

- Adopt effective mechanisms to curb all forms of *sexual abuse or exploitation* on digital platforms, as well as *removal of unconsented nudity content* reported by denunciation.
- Develop *digital or electronic games and applications* that respect the Statute of the Child and Adolescent and CONANDA Resolution No. 245/2024.
- Review and adapt the offer of applications, combating *discriminatory practices* such as algorithmic bias.
- Develop and offer products adapted to the needs of children and adolescents, adopting *inclusion and safety by design* practices in the creation of software, digital games and applications, maintaining by default the highest possible security, protection and privacy parameters, including allowing limits on access after excessive use time.
- Refrain from using *harmful hidden design patterns* and manipulative features that stimulate excessive use in applications that may be accessed by children and adolescents, such as (but not restricted to):
 - » Notifications, especially at night;
 - » Access to social networks by adolescents at night;
 - » Timelines or feeds of endless content;
 - » Automatic reproduction of audiovisual content;
 - » Use of “likes” or other mechanisms of social comparison or physical appearance.
- Develop and implement *tools to detect, curb, reduce and remove content of violence or sexual exploitation of children and adolescents*, including mechanisms and *channels to report* violations of their rights.
- Promote both automated and human *moderation* of content posted on social networks, combating the dissemination of appealing content, hateful or violent speech that affects children and adolescents, as well as *removing profiles of users* who commit potential crimes against them or stimulate harmful practices.
- Publicize to society the measures taken to protect children and adolescents in the online environment, through the dissemination of *risk analysis and transparency reports*.
- Facilitate *researchers* access to the data needed to understand and analyze usage patterns of digital applications and devices.
- Stimulate joint initiatives (“cross platform” / “cross industry”) to share and implement good practices and technologies to *combat violence against children and adolescents* and to promote *safety by design*.

Digital influencers

- Do not direct *advertising* or enable *other marketing communication* strategies for direct approach and/or building loyalty of children/adolescents.
- Be transparent about advertising messages contained in your speeches or programs, using forms of *identification of commercial bond that are not restricted to written text*.
- Curb the work of children and adolescents in the digital environment, being aware of its exceptional nature, as well as of the legal requirements for children's artistic activity in the country.
- Contribute to the *dissemination of guidelines and good practices* for the healthy use of electronic devices.
- Disseminate messages that contribute to combating *cyberbullying* (including racism, misogyny, fatphobia, lgbtphobia, etc.), hate speech and violence against children and adolescents.
- Do not encourage practices or activities that put the health or life of children and/or adolescents at risk, or that encourage them to access betting games or consume *inappropriate products for their age*.

Schools and Teaching Systems

- Carry out actions that promote critical reflection and build practical strategies to address the opportunities and risks of the relationship between children and adolescents and the digital environment, considering the provisions of Federal Law No. 15.100/2025 to foster:
 - » Activities that include children and adolescents in reflecting on the uses of digital devices and their impact on life in society;
 - » Processes that directly involve families responsible for such individuals and offer information and resources to deal with it;
 - » Solutions that include the qualification of education professionals recognizing their role as key agents in promoting Digital and Media Education.
- Establish regulations for the implementation of rules regarding the *use of cell phones in educational institutions* – taking into account Federal Law no. 15,100/2025 and the participation of the school community – and considering that the *non-pedagogical use* of digital devices in the school environment, *at any educational stage*, can bring harm to the learning and development process of children and adolescents, and that the individual use of digital devices such as tablets and smartphones *in early childhood education* should not be encouraged
- Promote *meaningful connectivity* in formal learning contexts.
- Listen to and consider the *opinions of children and adolescents* directly affected by decisions on the use of technological devices and their applications in the school environment.
- Safeguard *network security in the school environment*, including blocking access to websites or domains that have inappropriate content for children and adolescents.
- Ensure that children and adolescents with several types of disabilities – including physical, intellectual, psychosocial, auditory and visual – have *access to assistive technologies* that allow them to overcome barriers to teaching and learning in the digital environment, *regardless of their age group*.
- Ensure the *right to privacy* (interpersonal, institutional and commercial) *of children and adolescents* when using third-party applications or services within educational institutions and the school community. Consider also that the *collection of data* from children and adolescents in the school environment, whether for pedagogical purposes or not – such as through biometric and facial recognition technologies – should occur in a *minimal, proportional and transparent* manner regarding the conditions of processing and storage of such information.
- Review the adequacy of the institution's profiles on social networks, aiming to avoid the practice of **sharenting** (the exposure of information about students).

- Communicate to children and adolescents about the *illegality of cyberbullying*, as well as about the types of harm caused to victims of this practice.
- Promote *training for professionals in Early Childhood Education, Elementary and High School* (teachers, coordinators, supervisors, principals, etc.) focused on the safe and responsible use of Information and Communication Technologies and digital devices by children and adolescents, focusing on the detection, prevention and response to signs suggestive of mental and psychological distress and harmful effects from the immoderate use of these devices.
- Provide spaces for listening and supporting students or staff who are experiencing mental and psychological distress, due mostly to the immoderate use of screens and nomophobia, as required by Federal Law No. 15.100/2025.

Governments, policymakers and public policy implementers

- Create *regulations* for the digital environment that take into account the *full protection, progressive development and participation* of children and adolescents, covering legal loopholes in the regulation of digital platforms in Brazil.
- Monitor compliance with the **protection standards** – established for Brazilian children and adolescents – by providers of digital applications and content, from Brazil or other countries.
- Provide *investigative and judicial authorities* with the capacity, technical and financial resources to respond to reports of violations of rights of children and adolescents, in an agile and effective manner.
- Promote the **National Digital Education Policy** and implement the Brazilian Strategy for **Media Education**, encouraging and disseminating initiatives that reflect on the opportunities and risks of the relationship between children and adolescents and the digital environment.
- Establish guidelines for the implementation of *national public policies* that guarantee the right to privacy (interpersonal, institutional and commercial) of children and adolescents.
- Invest in *full-time education policies*, so that children and adolescents can have access to qualitative options in after school activities, engaging in educational, sports and leisure opportunities based on socialization.
- Provide and promote *meaningful connectivity* as a requirement for *digital citizenship*.
- Promote policies for the construction, renovation and maintenance of *safe and playful public spaces*, where children can exercise their right to play.
- Adopt public policies that stimulate sport, culture, physical and artistic activities *outdoors* and in public spaces, aimed at children and adolescents.

- *Encourage and finance* scientific research on the use of digital devices, well-being, physical and mental health of children and adolescents.

Guarantee System for the Rights of the Child and Adolescent

Justice System

- *Strengthen the system* so that it can respond to violations of the rights of children and adolescents in the digital environment.
- Require application providers to comply with the provisions of the Child and Adolescent Statute and CONANDA Resolution No. 245/2024, which address the *guarantee and protection of the rights of children and adolescents in the digital environment*.
- Adopt *assistive technologies* and digital tools that facilitate access to Justice for children and adolescents and ensure their participation and right to be heard ³⁴⁰ in judicial proceedings where their presence is required.
- In cases of deprivation of liberty of adolescents, due to the commission of an infraction, ensure in-person contact for meaningful engagement with the justice system and for their rehabilitation, **avoiding the use of videoconferences** for judicial procedures.
- In family courts disputes over the possession of smartphones by children, when considering the “best interests of the child”, *take into account the available scientific evidence*, summarized in this Guide, which recommends that such access should not occur before the age of 12, giving preference to “dumbphones”, without access to social networks or messaging applications.

Health Care, Social Care and Care Services

- Include content on the safe and responsible use of Information and Communication Technologies in the processes of *continuing education of health workers, the Social Assistance Network of Basic Social Protection and Special Social Protection and Care Services, to support families* of children and adolescents based on their social and territorial contexts.
- Insert contents of this Guide, in accessible language and, as appropriate, in the *technical guidelines* and other publications directed to workers of the Unified Social Assistance System (SUAS), in Social Work with Families, developed within the framework of the Reference Centers for Social Assistance (CRAS) and the Specialized Reference Centers for Social Assistance (CREAS).
- Carry out *collective actions* with the community, families, children and adolescents in health, social care and care services, to *discuss the opportunities and risks* of the rela-

tionship of children and adolescents with digital culture and to promote reflections on the use of digital devices and their implications for family, community and life in society.

- Create opportunities for dialog in *Social Groups* with children, adolescents and young people, within the scope of the Social Service and Strengthening of the Bond, on the themes: digital rights of children and adolescents; use of digital screens and devices; risks and opportunities in the digital environment, among others treated in this Guide.
- Consider, in the implementation of care services for children and adolescents, the secure use of assistive technologies, including digital devices that facilitate access, participation, listening and interaction between children and adolescents with and without disabilities, with protective measures that respect the particularities and specificities of each user.
- Invest in *measures and care services* that – by associating the right to be cared for with the right to play of children and adolescents – give more time for self-care to family members and caregivers and reduce the burden with care work. It is also important to provide information and resources so that during the rest of caregivers, children have other options besides screens.

National Consumer Protection System

- *Strengthen the system* so that it can respond to violations of the rights of children and adolescents in the digital environment.
- *Curb misleading and abusive advertising* in the digital environment that targets children and adolescents.
- *Prevent abusive practices* by suppliers that exploit the vulnerability or lack of knowledge of consumers – considering their age – to offer them products and services.

Glossary

Progressive autonomy of children: development of decision-making capacity throughout life, in which age is not the only aspect indicating their developed capacities, since these processes do not occur in the same way for all individuals in this group.

Echo chambers: limited and closed spaces of media production and consumption, which have the potential to amplify the messages transmitted within them and isolate them from different or dissenting views.

Digital citizenship: understanding and applying principles related to ethical responsibilities and behavior when using digital technologies and living in digital environments, as well as being aware of the impacts of excessive use on mental health and well-being.

Meaningful connectivity: a level of connectivity that allows users to have a secure and high-quality online experience at an affordable price, through the mastery of digital skills.

Cyberbullying: systematic intimidation, individual or in groups, through physical or psychological violence, intentionally and repeatedly, without evident motivation, involving acts of humiliation, discrimination or verbal, moral, sexual, social, psychological, physical, material or virtual aggression, such as on the internet, social networks, applications or online games.

Manipulative design: *the practice of designing software or applications that intentionally influence user behavior to benefit the designer or the company, often disregarding the user's best interests.*

Deepfake: synthetic image or audiovisual content generated by artificial intelligence systems, which can be used with the intention of harming or causing damage.

Attention economy: an approach that treats human attention as a scarce asset with economic value, therefore, digital ecosystem business models tend to stimulate maximum attentional capture from users.

Digital and media education: while digital school education comprises the set of skills, competences and knowledge necessary for the full exercise of digital citizenship in contemporary times, structuring around the pillars of digital culture, the digital world and computational thinking, and encompassing the challenges and potentialities of the digital age, the social dynamics mediated and impacted by technology and the transformations in the world of employment; media education refers to the set of skills for the critical and reflective understanding of individuals regarding the use and interpretation of different information and media content in digital environments.

Digital etiquette: rules and behaviors related to the digital environment, which serve as parameters for respectful relationships in this context.

FoMO (Fear of Missing Out): phenomenon observed on social networking sites, characterized by "the fear of being left out" and is the desire to remain continuously connected with

what others are doing.

Fatphobia: prejudice, aversion, devaluation or hostility toward fat people.

Lgbtphobia: prejudice, aversion, devaluation and harassment of LGBTQIA+ people, based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

Misogyny: prejudice, aversion, devaluation or harassment of girls and women.

Content monetization: the process of turning digital content into a source of revenue.

Neo-Nazism: practices of social intolerance based on the Nazi ideology of superiority and purity of a certain race or people over others, which generate aggression, humiliation and discrimination against those who do not fit this standard.

Nomophobia: fear or feeling of anguish caused by the impossibility of access to mobile devices or other digital technologies.

Hidden patterns: commercial practices that use digital choice architecture elements in a misleading way to subvert or impair consumer decision-making autonomy.

Distracted parenting: constant use of digital devices while looking after children and adolescents, resulting in a lower quality family relationship and a higher risk of domestic accidents.

Profiling: the processing of personal data aimed at classifying users into profiles that allow inferences about their behavior, socioeconomic situation, health, personal preferences, interests, consumption desires, among other characteristics.

Digital platforms: online environments where suppliers and consumers connect to exchange relationships, such as work, teaching, leisure or entertainment, based on business models mediated by technologies and data economy.

Full/Comprehensive protection of children and adolescents: the full enjoyment of fundamental rights that also apply to adults, as well as those addressing their specific needs, with priority in the care of public services, policy formulation and allocation of resources for their protection.

Racism: prejudice, aversion, devaluation or harassment of people based on skin color or racial or ethnic group.

Safety by design: the practice of intentionally incorporating features, safeguards and principles that prioritize the safety, privacy, rights and well-being of users from the conception of applications or software.

Sexting: the practice of sending sexual or erotic messages through apps, social networks or mobile smartphones via text, photos or videos.

Sextortion: when someone threatens to disclose intimate images, photos or videos, to for-

ce another person to do something against their will.

Sharenting: the act of adults sharing content, especially photos and videos, about children and adolescents in digital environment such as social networks, which can increase risks or compromise privacy and safety.

Trolling: slang referring to online jokes or acid humor, in which a user becomes the target of mockery.

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339. This stage brings together **recommendations given by children and adolescents from different Brazilian regions**, by means of qualified listening described in the preamble of this Guide.
340. General Comment no. 12 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child

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