

# What to Tell Parents About Kids and Computers

By Lorrie Jackson

Answers to the top 6 questions parents ask teachers about kids and computers.

## WHY A TECHTORIAL?

### What will I learn today?

You will learn how to respond to some of the most common questions parents ask about computers and their kids.

### What hardware and/or software does the techtorial apply to?

No particular hardware or software is needed.

### Which National Educational Technology Standards for Teachers does the techtorial address?

The techtorial will help teachers accomplish standard IV d in particular.

The International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) has developed a set of National Educational Technology Standards for Teachers. Standards or Performance Indicators are included for each techtorial to help teachers and administrators improve technology proficiency. For a complete description of the standards indicated, go to [NETS for Teachers](#), click Standards in the menu bar on the left, and then click the arrow to the right of Standards and Performance Indicators for Teachers.

Most parents support classroom technology use in general, but they have some basic questions concerning computer use and their kids. This techtorial will help you respond to parental concerns while building rapport and enlisting their support.

## QUESTION #1

What basic computer skills does my child need?

Specific skills will depend on a student's age and ability, and on a school's emphasis on technology. The following basic guidelines should apply, however:

- By first grade, students should be able to identify the basic parts of a computer, open a program, and use a mouse (left-button). They should also be beginning to use correct hand position when typing.

- By third grade, students should be able to create a simple word processing document, read and take notes from a Web site chosen by the teacher, do basic troubleshooting, and use common keyboard shortcuts (such as using ALT F4 to close a program).
- By fifth grade, students should be able to perform simple searches on the Internet, create simple spreadsheets, type 15-25 wpm (words per minute) with proper technique, and format word processing documents.
- By seventh grade, students should have acquired the basic computer skills needed to succeed in content-area classes. Those skills include proficiency with productivity software (such as Office or AppleWorks), an understanding of online safety and copyright issues, and basic troubleshooting skills.

## **QUESTION #2**

My child spends a lot of time on our computer at home. What can I do make sure he's safe?

Cut down on inappropriate and dangerous computer use, and encourage parent-child communication, by placing the computer in a public space -- not a child's bedroom. Then monitor the child's at-home computer use as closely as possible. Be aware of

- how much time the child is spending at the computer. Set limits appropriate to each child's age.
- what the child is doing on the computer. Is he doing homework, playing games, using e-mail, surfing the Web?
- how much computer time is actually being spent on homework. Most kids spend a lot of time playing -- and complaining that they're swamped with homework.

Any student of any age can fall victim to someone with malicious intent on the Internet. Keep your child safe by making a firm rule against e-mailing, or chatting with, strangers online.

## **QUESTION #3**

My child types so slowly that it takes her hours to complete homework and other assignments. What can I do?

You can help your child improve her keyboarding skills by

- looking into the keyboarding instruction offered at your school. Today, most elementary, middle, and high schools offer keyboarding classes.
- purchasing keyboarding software or downloading free keyboarding programs from the Internet. See the techorial Keys to Keyboarding for more information.
- watching the child's hand and body posture when she is working on the computer at home. Make sure he or she uses both hands and rests the fingers on the home row.

#### **QUESTION #4**

We can't afford a home computer. How can I keep my child from falling behind?

Most communities today offer computer resources for student use. Those include

- libraries,
- community centers, and
- houses of worship

If no such opportunities exist in your community, look into starting a service project in which tech-savvy students collect older computer equipment and distribute it to those in need.

#### **QUESTION #5**

I don't know nearly as much about computers as my child does. What do I need to know and how can I learn it?

You're never too old to learn about computers. You can find out what you need to know by

- asking your child for help.
- attending free classes in your community.
- monitoring your child's computer use and asking questions.

## QUESTION #6

My child wants his or her own computer. When does he need one and what kind should I get?

Computer needs vary with a child's age. As a general rule,

- K-2 students -- who should always be supervised during computer use -- probably shouldn't have their own computers, especially if they have the use of a family computer.
- Students in grades 3-12 can use a personal computer with increasing autonomy and independence.
- A basic model is best -- and be conservative when purchasing software.
- Find out what programs are being used at school. Having the same software -- particularly such productivity software as Office or AppleWorks -- at home and at school can be a big help for any student.
- An Internet connection usually is a necessity for school research. For most students, dial-up access is a slower -- but cheaper -- alternative to cable or DSL.

## TELL ME MORE!

Where can I learn more about online safety for parents and kids?

The FBI publishes a book called *A Parent's Guide to Internet Safety*, which is available for download. *KidSmart Guide to Early Learning and Technology* is another great resource for parents of children in preschool through second grade. *SafeTeens* and *SafeKids* also are excellent Web sites with tips for parents and children using the Internet.