

Safer kids online - implementing screen limits and protecting the work of future leaders

 By [Carey van Vaanderen](#), issued by [ESET](#)

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With the new academic year now in full swing, children and students across South Africa will be sitting down at their computers to study, complete their coursework, and possibly even write exams online. This is an exciting time, but it is also fraught with worry as digital distractions are rife.

As parents, guardians, and caregivers, it is important to provide the necessary guard rails to ensure that while technology remains an important educational tool, children do not lose focus on their studies, or worse, fall victim to cyber-threats and bullying at this crucial time.

The internet, smart phones and tablets have become an essential part of our daily lives. The same is true for our kids. Estimates suggest kids and teens between the ages of 8 to 18 spend about 44.5 hours each week in front of digital screens. When used well, digital devices and the internet are powerful educational tools and can inspire a love of learning. Younger people are also more vulnerable to various cyber threats which is why protecting digital progress is so important. The international Safer Internet Day, which takes place every year on 8 February, highlights the need for greater awareness and action to ensure the internet is a better and safer place for all. Parents need to ensure that children are equipped to do the best that they can do, but how do they do it? How do you protect kids from trolls and the cyber-bullies when they need technology for study and research purposes?



Carey van Vaanderen, CEO of Eset South Africa

A sensible approach starts with creating a healthy environment that encourages exploration, but with clear boundaries. Clearly, our reliance on technology isn't going to diminish, but there are ways we can all become better at managing it. Managing technology with intelligence has never been more crucial. Which is why protecting technological progress is at the very centre of the Eset ethos.

Digital distractions

What might seem harmless at first glance; studying while watching TV, texting, or checking social media, can impair learning and result in lower exam scores.

A study conducted by Dr Larry Rosen, a psychology professor at California State University showed that 80% of high school students surveyed reported frequently switching between studying and technology. The same survey showed a direct correlation between digital distractions and a decline in marks.

Disconnecting devices is not a solution, but limiting what sites, services and platforms can be accessed is. If we want students to learn and perform at their best, smart phones and other online distractions must be managed.

The benefits of removing distractions while studying are almost incalculable. Most students incorrectly believe that they can perform two challenging tasks at the same time. They may like to do it, they may even be addicted to it, but there's no getting around the fact that it's far better to focus on one task at a time.

One method of controlling access to digital technology is to physically remove it and allow for periods throughout the day when it can be used. Research suggests children study most effectively for around 45 minutes. It's important that those

precious minutes are productive and free of distractions. Welcome breaks can then be used for quick updates and catch ups, but a relatively strict routine needs to be adhered to. It's too easy to get lost in Reels and TikToks beyond the allocated time.

Parents should also make use of a decent internet security platform, which should be a prerequisite on mobile phones and laptop computers anyway. Eset's own internet security solution allows for screen and browsing limits to be set in place and allows parents to manage the access from their phone.

The solution ensures that students can focus on what they need to start the school year on the right foot but continue healthy habits for safe online behaviour right up until exams.

With other cyber threats like identity theft, malware attacks and the potential loss of any data stored on a device should it be stolen or hacked, it is imperative that any device connected to the internet have suitable security protection.

Guiding children through constant technological change is hard enough as it is, which is why using tech to your advantage wherever possible is an absolute must. It's safe to say your kids will thank you for it in the end.

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Carey van Vlaanderen is CEO of ESET Southern Africa. ESET is a global provider of security software for enterprises and consumers and is dedicated to delivering instant, comprehensive protection against evolving computer security threats.

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