



Parenting Goes Digital

Situation

Today 90% of [Americans are online](#) and 69% of US adults use social media. The average American spends more than 10 hours per day on [screen time](#) and a third of Americans live in a household with three or more [smartphones](#). In fact, smartphones are the great equalizer, providing young adults, minorities, those with no college experience, and those with lower household income levels a connection to the Internet.

[Parents are digital media consumers](#), as well, using mobile devices and social media to seek out parenting tips, interact with other parents, and connect with their children. Research shows that digital media can be a useful means for providing education to parents and that online parenting education can be as effective as face-to-face settings in influencing positive parenting change.

Although parents' access to and use of digital media is expanding, there are few high-quality, research-based resources that exist to provide parenting information and support positive family technology use.

Response

The Digital Parenting Workgroup, a team of University of Wisconsin-Extension Human Development and Relationship colleagues, responded by designing, implementing, and evaluating *eParenting*[®] -- a suite of digital parenting education programs offered digitally about parenting in a digital world:

[eParenting[®] Co-Parenting](#)

provides divorced or separated parents of infants to teenagers ideas on how digital media can be used to enhance parenting skills and build a connection between children and all their parents and caregivers. Parents subscribe to receive *eParenting[®] Co-Parenting* via several text messages per week for eight weeks and are recruited through mandated co-parenting classes.

[eParenting[®] High Tech Kids](#)

was created to combat the negativity prevalent in conversations about youth and technology and, instead provide parents with positive uses and strategies for using digital media in their interactions with their 9- to 14-year-old children. Schools send *eParenting[®] High Tech Kids* as a weekly email to families on their school contact list for about four months.

[eParenting[®] Little Ones](#)

was written for parents of 0-5 year olds or "little ones" and highlights how digital media can be used to enhance parenting skills and support kids' growth and development. *eParenting[®] Little Ones* uses [short videos](#) shared with parents through 1-hour Facebook learning parties and through weekly emails from their children's childcare providers or preschool teachers.

*Our results show
**digital
parenting
education
programs**
can increase
parents' knowledge
about
child development and
parent-child
relationships,
and **boost social and
informational
connections**
for parents.*

Results

When evaluated in 2016, over 35,000 Wisconsin parents in about half of Wisconsin's 72 counties participated in the *eParenting*® programs. Evaluation results from these projects suggest that digital parenting education programs have several positive impacts on parents.

Online programs easily fit learning into parents' daily life. Parents appreciate the easy accessibility of our online parenting education programs. Across these projects, parents reported valuing the UW-Extension connection, the quality, research-based information, and the formats. Parents reported appreciating these convenient and accessible methods for learning new parenting ideas and information:

"I was able to listen and read the content at my own pace – also [I liked] being able to replay videos if I needed to."
(Little Ones parent)

"As a single mom with 2 jobs and 2 kids, my time for reading is limited. Receiving eParenting emails made it possible for me to stay connected at my pace. I could read the articles during my lunch on the day that worked best into my schedule. It was very convenient."
(High-Tech Kids parent)

Parents learn from online parenting programs. Parents across *eParenting*® programs reported incorporating digital media more positively into their parenting. The strong majority of parents in all three programs reported increased knowledge of how to positively integrate digital media into their parenting. Over three-fourths of *High-Tech Kids* and *Co-Parenting* respondents shared that they had learned a new idea or skill because of the *eParenting*® text messages or emails. Many parents could give concrete examples of how they were using digital media in their parenting. After attending the *Little Ones* program parents shared that

they had learned the value of "setting tech limits for myself" or "talking about using media together and not just as a way to entertain child." *Co-Parenting* attendees found that the frequent, digital nature of the programs helped them remember and practice parenting lessons they had learned in face-to-face classes.

Online programs enhance parents' connections. Up to two-thirds of parents shared *eParenting*® programs with a friend, co-worker, or family member. Parents also reported that the online programs gave them a sense of a positive connection to other parents, UW-Extension, and their schools.



To learn more, contact:

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Or read the impact reports for individual programs:

[Co-Parenting](#)

[High-Tech Kids](#)

[Little Ones](#)