

Teaching My Children to Walk in Beauty

A Navajo Parent Helps Her Children Navigate Technology

Kara Pino

BEFORE YOU READ: What do you think it means to “walk in beauty”?

Introduction

Being a Diné (Navajo) mother living on the reservation, I have seen firsthand how technology has impacted young children’s daily lives. I have two kids, my son in third grade and my daughter in kindergarten at To’Hajiilee Community School. I am struggling to guide them in how they use technology and to keep them connected to our traditions.

Violence in Games

My son owns a tablet, X-Box game console, and a Nintendo Switch. While setting up his game console, I spoke to him about what games I find acceptable and what games I do not find acceptable. Unfortunately, all the games that are not proper for his age are all the games he is interested in!

Games with violence are a bad influence. I try to teach him that the content in the video games only applies to video games. If he ever took those behaviors into real life, he could get into trouble with the law. Getting into trouble with the law can be serious. There will be restrictions on his freedom, or he could serve time in juvenile detention.

Another challenge I face is my son sometimes laughs at the violence he sees in these games. I don’t want him to grow up thinking this type of violence is normal. I speak to him daily about how violence can change another person’s life and how badly a person can be hurt by being violent.



Parental Controls

When you set up devices for your children, you have the option to use parental control. This tool is helpful for parents who want to limit screen time for their children and block any inappropriate content from YouTube or internet searching. I use this tool for my children. I restrict live streams of gamers because I have noticed that other gamers use foul language. I don’t want my son to think it is okay to use foul language against another peer. It is a form of bullying. There is so much you can do to prevent your child from streaming unsuitable videos.

My daughter, even at the young age of five, is also very in tune with technology. She can navigate a tablet by using the Google assistant tool. She uses her voice to find what she is searching for. She likes to watch the “A for Adely” channel. It is educational, adventurous, and imaginative. I have fewer challenges with her because her device is in kid’s mode and set for children her age.

Setting Limits for My Children

There are times when conflicts arise between me and my kids. I must be firm about my rules. My kids get mad and start throwing tantrums. I remind them that being on their devices is a privilege. If you are on your device for a long time, it is unhealthy. It interferes with brain development.

I remind them that they have chores and obligations around the house, like taking the trash out, keeping their room clean, and doing homework. When we have livestock, they must feed and attend to them every day.

It is hard responding to my children’s negative behavior. I do not acknowledge the crying, pouting, and yelling. I wait for the moment they show good behavior, so I can praise them. This motivates them to make good choices. When their chores are done, they can have a little more time on their devices.

Help Children Stay Close to Elders

Another reason technology is challenging is that it disconnects young people from their elders. I look around and I see less teaching by grandparents and less communication to preserve our Navajo language. Grandparents and elders keep our culture and traditions alive.

With all of this technology, young people have lost a lot. For example, in my community the youth do not speak, write, or understand our Navajo language because our elders have been forgotten. They are the ones that hold all the knowledge and values to preserve our language and culture.



Kara Pino’s two children with their great grandmother (above) and with their mother on the previous page.

There are Navajo teachings and cultural demonstrations on YouTube that have become a helpful tool for families wanting to know about their culture. There are lessons on language, prayers, songs, and traditional medicine. The videos share the teachings of our elders with the younger generations.

I look for stories and ceremonies to share with my children. I want them to hold the Diné culture sacred. I want them to walk in beauty (Hózhó).

AFTER YOU READ:

1. What are this author’s main concerns about video games? How does she act on her concerns?
2. What traditions from your culture do you value? Describe lessons you learned from elders when you were growing up.

Kara Pino is a student at the To’Hajiilee Community School, part of the Family and Child Education (FACE) program. She lives in To’Hajiilee, New Mexico. The FACE program supports her educational goal, which is to complete her degrees in Business Administration and Early Childhood Education.