

# Common Sense on Creating with Digital Media

## What is digital creation?

Great technology not only gives kids tools to create, but it also empowers and inspires them. Digital creation covers anything from filming a video with a cell phone and posting it online to composing music on Garage Band to creating a blog or photo album and sharing it with friends and family. The combination of easy-to-use tools that now come pre-installed in most computers and the easy ways to share videos, music, writing, and photography online means that our kids can create just about anything.

## Some facts

27% of all 9- to 17-year-old kids are practiced online producers, maintaining blogs, pages, or other online spaces at least three times a week (*Grunwald Associates, 2007*).

Most computers now come with basic photo editing software built in.

Anyone over 13 can post a YouTube video.

Social networks like MySpace have become showcases for teen-created music, video, and photos.

Some fan fiction sites give kids a forum to write their own stories about their favorite books or movies.

## Why it matters

Like everything else in our kids' digital lives, using these new powerful tools comes with new responsibilities. We want kids to create and share their music, movies, words, and images. But we also want to be sure they realize that whatever gets sent into the digital world can ultimately be captured or seen or sent around by anyone. Even if kids think what they post is private, nothing is guaranteed.

In short, the moment people share their creations online, they lose control over them. Another thing to keep on your kids' radar: Just because they can do something doesn't mean they should. (See our advice for budding digital photographers.) The promise of an audience and instant recognition can inspire kids to use these tools in inappropriate ways. Videos of fights, sexually revealing images, speech that's hateful or simply cruel all are far too common in the digital world.

## Parent tips for all kids

- » **Pick age-appropriate tools.** There are great programs for elementary kids to draw, make birthday cards, create digibooks, and more. For older kids, check that their new technology isn't too complicated or advanced for them. For example, a middle-school student might not make good choices when it comes to using the webcam on her new computer.
- » **Assess the level of technical difficulty before your kids dive in.** If they aren't ready for it, trying to do something will frustrate them — and you.
- » **Know how programs work.** You don't have to know how to make a video or create a music mash-up, but you do have to know enough to have the talk with your children about using programs responsibly. Not sure where to begin? Ask your kids how they use the tools or programs they love.
- » **Using someone else's work without their approval is a huge no-no.** It's called plagiarism or piracy or copyright violation. Any way you look at it, the idea is for kids to create something, not rip off something else.
- » **Talk about what's appropriate.** You've given them the tools, now teach kids how to use them responsibly.
- » **Once something is posted, anyone can see it, share it, re-use it, and/or comment on it.** So it should be something that your kids are willing to have anyone at the dinner table see.
- » **Don't let money — or the lack of it — stand in your child's way.** Encourage collaboration with other kids and community programs.
- » **Most importantly, encourage and motivate your child.** The creative avenues are there, the positive possibilities are endless. How you guide your child through all the choices can make all the difference. Steer kids toward sites and activities that fit their interests — and your values as a family.