



Laptops for kids should come with ground rules

At what age is it OK to get my child a laptop? I'm concerned about losing control if the computer is mobile.

The second part of your query addresses the heart of the issue, says Renee Clauselle, a Franklin Square psychologist. With toy companies designing laptops for preschoolers even, what's more important than age is how the child will be using the laptop, she says.

What you're probably worried about is what social networking sites your child may be visiting and what other Internet sites she might have access to without your knowledge.

First-, second- and third-graders are socializing on sites such as Club Penguin, which are more anonymous, Clauselle says. She advises sites such as Facebook be off limits until high school, but concedes that may not be realistic in today's middle school culture, where students routinely use computers to do homework and everybody



PARENTAL GUIDANCE

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seems to have a Facebook page.

Clauselle recommends signing a "cyber pledge." Figure out what's acceptable to you — does the laptop have to stay in the kitchen? Can social networking sites be visited for only an hour a day after homework is finished? Tell children you will be monitoring them, and map out consequences for breaking the agreement. "Parents need to set ground rules before kids have access to this stuff," Clauselle says. "It's harder to take back freedom once you're already given it."

NEED HELP with a parenting question? Write to Beth Whitehouse, Newsday, 235 Pinelawn Rd., Melville, NY 11747-4250, or e-mail her.