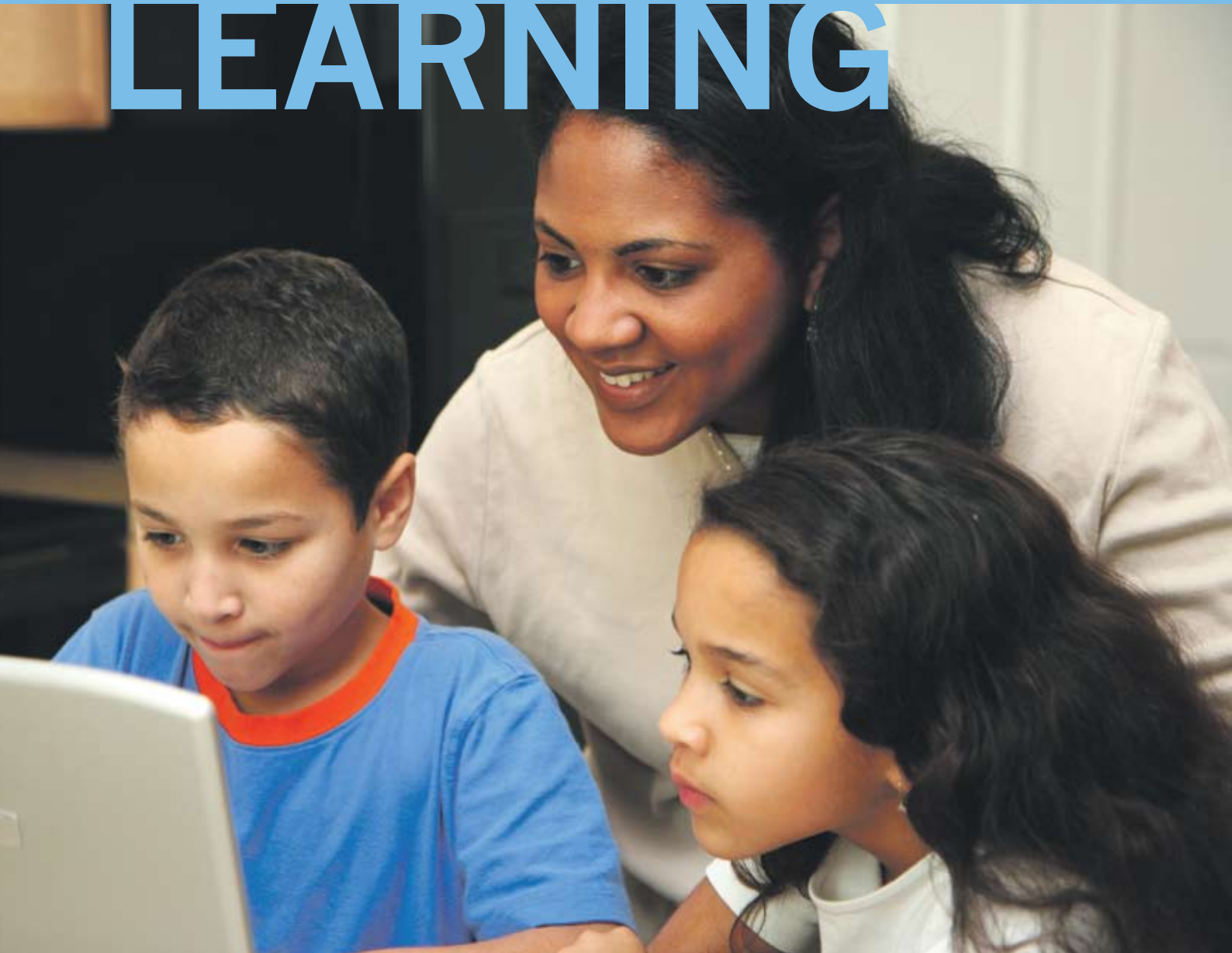


Engaging in the online activities of your children can seem daunting, but the rewards are there for those parents willing to help their children make the most of the technology.

By Kim Cotton

A LOVE OF LEARNING



As a parent of a school-aged child you're likely to be busy enough without the pressure of keeping up with the latest gizmos your child may be using.

But rather than struggle to understand these strange online worlds, you may be better off considering how you can help your child make the most of technology to enhance their learning.

Despite the speed at which new technology is being downloaded into our lives, the challenges of raising healthy, well-connected children are really not that different from previous generations.

According to Jonathan Nicholas, of the Inspire Foundation (an organisation that looks after the wellbeing of children and young people), technology may change daily, but children don't.

"Children and young people still want to make friends; they still want to be older than they ever

are; they will still be jealous of their brothers and sisters - all those things [we] experienced."

One of the keys is learning how to manage technology in the home so that it can be used as a tool to reconnect families rather than a distraction to disconnect them.

"At some point in each day the whole of the family, including mum and dad, need to turn off all technology and just reconnect and actually hold that time as a really special time - therefore allowing technology to have a balanced role in family life. Technology should be approached in the same way that you would get involved and encourage your child to learn more about their soccer, ballet or tennis lessons."

"At the same time, you can get smarter about technology just by helping your child to learn the skills they need for their learning and school work. After all, the Internet has introduced

the libraries of the world to the family home."

"The hallmarks of a successful person in the future will not be how much they know but how quickly they can find the answers to the things they don't know," Mr Nicholas says.

Therefore, as parents you can utilise your child's natural inquisitiveness and the wonderful questions they ask as a catalyst for online learning.

"Acknowledge that you don't know all of the answers and, even if you do know some of them, actually encourage your child to find the answers on the Internet for themselves," Mr Nicholas says.

A love of learning is as important in children's lives as being adaptable to change. The ability of children to use what they are good at and apply that to different situations will also

become critical. And importantly, children should be encouraged to connect with others.

"If you accept the premise that most of the knowledge that will be created in the future will be created by groups, - the ability to connect with other people, the ability to bring out the best in yourself and the best in other people, will be really important," he says.

"The key parenting challenges that were there a generation ago really haven't shifted. The one thing we really need to encourage children in is to be excited about the unknown and to see that as a really wonderful thing, and to keep investing in them our confidence that even though we don't know what's going to happen, we're actually excited to learn about that with them." ■

When the family goes online

Parents can:

- encourage a positive approach to technology
- spend time exploring the Internet with your child
- set rules for Internet use
- direct your child to useful sites and save them as favourites
- ask your child to show you new skills they have learnt
- maintain good communication with your child and an active interest in their life
- teach your child to treat others online as he/she would like to be treated
- let your child know about potential dangers online and how to handle a situation if it arises.

Benefits of going online

Children can:

- improve their research, reading and writing skills
- get help with homework
- find a wide variety of educational resources
- make and maintain friendships
- learn and have fun with others
- express themselves
- access information and view live events from around the world
- develop independent learning skills.