

Raising Responsible Digital Citizens: A Shared Responsibility

Guest Speaker's speech - By Albert Opoku

12th July 2025

Good morning, Madam Principal, distinguished guests, dedicated teachers, proud parents, and most importantly, our brilliant students!

It's a true honour to be here today at The Ridge School's 27th Speech & Prize Giving Day. As we celebrate the achievements of our young ones, we must also look at the evolving world they are growing up in – a world profoundly shaped by digital technology.

Today, I want to talk about **our shared responsibility in raising responsible digital citizens**. I'll begin by explaining why digital guidance an essential part of parenting is now. Then, I'll share three key roles parents must play – what I call the **PNG** roles: **Protect, Nurture, and Guide**. Finally, I'll offer practical steps for parents, students, and teachers to work together in this vital endeavour.

The New Era of Parenting: Digital Guidance

The world has changed drastically. Most of us parents here today did not own a phone when we were teenagers. Our childhoods were largely offline. But our children were born into a digitally connected world, powered by the internet and increasingly dominated by social media.

In today's world, parents and teachers are no longer the sole means of education and guidance. We now compete with celebrities, social media influencers, and media personalities who, through technology, have direct access to the hearts and minds of our children. This access can be a knight in shining armour, a tool for immense good – think of online educators and digital mentors. But it can also be an evil outlaw, a pathway for those who could pollute a child's mind or expose them to harm.

This is why my core message today is this: Parents, you cannot delegate the responsibility of providing digital guidance for your children. In this era, parenting now fundamentally covers not just food, shelter, clothing, and education, but also digital guidance. It is an inseparable part of modern parenting.

To help us embrace this crucial role, I want to introduce an analogy using a familiar term from the digital world: **PNG**. For those familiar with image files, PNG stands for Portable Network Graphics. But for our purpose today, PNG will stand for the three vital roles parents must play in their children's digital lives: **Protect, Nurture, and Guide**. Just as a PNG file is an image, our children are an image of us, their parents. We are

responsible for shaping that image, ensuring it is clear, vibrant, and resilient in the digital landscape.

Your Three Key Roles: Protect, Nurture, and Guide (PNG)

Let's delve into these three essential roles:

1. **Protect:** The digital world has its dangers, and as parents, you are the first line of defense.
 - **Practical Step for Parents (Younger Children):** Consider installing **Google Family Link** or similar parental control applications on your children's devices. This allows you to manage app usage, set screen time limits, and even monitor their location, effectively keeping those "evil digital outlaws" at bay.
 - **Practical Step for Parents (Pre-Teens & Teenagers):** Before buying a digital device for your pre-teen or teenager, have a written agreement that both of you should sign. This agreement should clearly state that as the provider of the funds, you are effectively the landlord and your child is a tenant. It should specify that you will have access to the device to inspect its usage when needed, and that you should know the password. Emphasize that you will trust the child to use it responsibly and will respect their privacy, fostering a balance of trust and accountability.
 - **Personal Anecdote:** At home, I've trained my five-year-old to call our devices "Mummy's phone" and "Daddy's iPad." Anytime he says, "I want the phone or iPad," we gently correct him, saying, "Now, you don't have a phone; it's Mummy's phone," or "It's Daddy's iPad." It's a small action, but it has a big impact. He knows that Mummy and Daddy control the usage of the device, establishing a clear boundary of ownership and authority.
2. **Nurture:** Beyond protection, we must nurture healthy digital habits and a positive relationship with technology.
 - **Practical Step for Parents:** Engage with your children's digital world. Play games with them, watch their favourite educational videos, and ask them about what they're doing online. This shows interest and creates an open dialogue, making it easier for them to come to you with concerns.
 - **Practical Step for Parents:** Encourage a balanced digital diet. Just as we ensure they eat healthy food, we must ensure they have a healthy mix of online and offline activities. Set clear "tech-free" times and zones in the home.
3. **Guide:** Empower your children to make responsible choices and navigate the digital landscape wisely.
 - **Practical Step for Parents:** Teach critical thinking. Help them understand that not everything they see online is true. Discuss online safety, privacy, and the permanence of digital footprints.
 - **Practical Step for Parents:** Encourage digital creativity and learning. Guide them towards educational apps, coding platforms, or online courses that align with their interests and foster valuable skills.

This is not a burden for parents alone. It's a shared responsibility.

For Our Students: Making the Best Use of Digital Technology

You are digital natives, and this is your world. Here are three practical steps you can take:

1. **Ask Before You Click:** If you see something online that makes you feel uncomfortable, or if you're unsure about clicking a link or downloading something, **always ask a trusted adult** – your parents or teachers – before you proceed.
2. **Balance Your Screen Time:** Technology is amazing, but so is the real world! Make sure you balance your time online with playing outside, reading books, spending time with family, and pursuing hobbies.
3. **Learn and Create:** Use the internet and digital tools to learn new things, explore your interests, and create. Whether it's researching a school project, learning a new language, or making digital art, technology can open up incredible possibilities.

For Our Teachers: Supporting Parents as PNG

Teachers, your role in this digital age is more critical than ever. You are vital partners with parents in this shared responsibility.

1. **Collaborate with Parents:** Share resources and best practices for digital safety and literacy. Organize workshops or information sessions to help parents understand the digital tools their children are using.
2. **Integrate Digital Literacy:** Weave digital citizenship lessons into your curriculum. Teach students about online etiquette, cyberbullying prevention, and responsible information consumption.
3. **Be Digital Role Models:** Demonstrate responsible and ethical technology use in the classroom. Show students how technology can be a powerful tool for learning and positive engagement.

In Conclusion: Our Collective Commitment

In closing, let me reiterate what we've discussed today. We've established that digital guidance is now a fundamental part of parenting. We've explored the three crucial PNG roles for parents: Protecting, Nurturing, and Guiding our children in the digital world. And we've outlined practical steps for parents, students, and teachers to collectively embrace this responsibility.

The digital revolution is not just a technological shift; it's a profound societal one. By embracing our roles as Protectors, Nurturers, and Guides – as PNGs – we can ensure that our children grow up to be responsible, resilient, and thriving digital citizens, ready to harness the power of technology for good.

Thank you.