Three Pillars of Digital Health

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Roger laughed as he described a recent scene with his two teenage kids. He was driving his daughter and two friends to a softball game and noticed that the car was unusually quiet and calm. "I thought at first that they must have been preparing for the big game. How naïve!" he shared with me. "Once I got to a red light, I was able to look back and really see what was going on."

Roger could see that, far from calm, the girls' thumbs were getting the texting workout of a lifetime. The deceptively quiet ride had been host to a frenzy of social connections.

Roger asked, "Who are you all texting?" His daughter absentmindedly responded, "Each other!" Her friends giggled without looking up from their phones.

Welcome to the Digital Revolution. Emerging technologies have changed the way we live and communicate as a dazzling array of digital tools has become integrated into our kids' daily lives. Children and youth today spend more time with these media than they do engaging in any other activity in their waking hours, and it is transforming the way that they learn, share, connect and grow.

We often spend so much time arguing about whether video games or social media are *good* or *bad* for kids that we miss the most important part of the conversation: What is it that our kids need to thrive? We already know three key ingredients.

1. **Digital participation:** Young people who participate meaningfully in their digital lives learn that technology isn't just for entertainment; it is also a tool for learning, networking and engagement.

2. **Digital citizenship:** We like to think of digital citizenship as the habit of mind that guides the way we treat one another online.

3. **Digital discipline:** Digital discipline is the set of skills, behaviors and practices that enable us to power down and unplug when we need to.

At the end of the day, we know that technology alone isn't the key to kids' 21st-century success. It's how they use it. Digital participation, citizenship, and discipline enable them to use digital tools in ways that are useful and meaningful to them and to the world.