

**Naomi Shanks**

OUR babies can't touch a fork unsupervised, yet they must grow into adults utilizing all manner of tools in productive lives. Social media is just another tool in the box. How do we help our children develop from "No!" to independence? By accompanying them every step of the way.

My daughter rode on the back of my bicycle for years before she ever learned to ride herself. Helmets for both of us were non-negotiable. I'm a careful cyclist, but we were sharing the streets with literally thousands of other riders and drivers. My daughter needed to understand that we always take steps to keep ourselves safe, no matter how skilled and experienced we are. Eventually she got her first "big-girl" bike and learned to ride independently. For years she rode only around our gated, guarded, car-free compound. Now 11, she rides on the streets of Shanghai, but I am always right behind her. Soon she'll ride



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outside with friends, and eventually by herself. She'll be ready, though I'll still be watching from the window.

As our children develop as users of social media, they need to walk a similar path, gaining experience of increasing complexity with the purposeful accompaniment of responsible adults. We start by using media together, inviting our youngest children to join us in looking at pictures and posts from close family and friends, letting them select an image we might choose to share. As they move through lower

school, we help them explore media within the confines of a safe community with guarded entry, perhaps a learning platform such as Edmodo, or a social space like Club Penguin. Secondary students begin to use public platforms, with teachers structuring and supervising their learning engagements, and parents discussing and monitoring their use of personal media at home. At every stage, we keep our critical thinking "helmet" on, striving to be safe in our interactions, and protecting ourselves from those who may not be.

Social media is a fantastic tool. We are still learning how to use it effectively, and how to change with the resources available to us. For kids this flexibility is instinctive, and they accompany us as we learn to use 21st century tools in new ways. This mutual accompaniment gives us tremendous opportunities to connect with our kids, working together to create and share the story of social media in our classrooms and our lives.