

Parents Connecting in a Digital World

Often parents have a difficult time discussing issues with technology. Below are some ideas to begin the discussion with children and their devices.

- 1) The most effective strategy for being a part of your kids' digital lives is to have such a great relationship with them that they want to talk to you about what they do. There is a need to stop blaming the technologies and begin focusing on the behavior. Parents and children need to sit down together and decide what is best not just for today but for the future.
- 2) The next step is that depersonalizing the conversation helps students feel comfortable talking to us. If you ask, "Do you have more than one identity on your social network," then you will receive a rather evasive answer. However, you will receive an entirely different answer if you ask, "Say, I'm just curious. Why do you think people want more than one identity on Facebook?" When you depersonalize the question, they don't feel threatened about having to reveal information about themselves.
- 3) Children need to develop a perspective of where they fit in the digital world. They need to step back from the screen and think about what it means to engage online, and how online interaction differs from real life communication. They need to think about how being a digital citizen can both connect and disconnect them.
- 4) Listen to their perspective. Parents need to know how they view the world. They need to learn from each other. It's all about the conversation. Most importantly, that their perspective is included so that their expertise is respected. Parents do not have to agree with everything they say, but they need to know that they are being heard.
- 5) Be involved in creating technology rules. When adults make all the rules, an opportunity is lost where children can develop a larger perspective, to see the bigger picture and to apply their understanding of the bigger picture to themselves and the digital life that they are living. If students are not asked to help frame the system, they tend to game the system. That is, when adults make the rules, it's "game on" for them in terms of figuring out how to circumvent those rules.
- 6) Working together. That is, it is important that home, children and school coordinate our digital citizenship efforts. Leaving digital citizenship to schools alone won't work. Most school community members agree that digital citizenship is too vast to be just a school concern. Those that act in unacceptable ways have learned them from somewhere. Parents and schools need to become partners in how technology will be provided and taught to children.
- 7) Children need to be aware rather than afraid of their digital life. There is an innate drive for parents to want kids to be afraid of the harmful elements of the Internet (the same has been in the real world, 'touch a hot stove and you will be burned'). But when students understand the cautions, rather than just heed them, they have a better chance of transferring their understanding to new situations, or at least recognizing warning signs so that they can seek help.

Points of Consideration for Children's Technology Usage

Gaming systems – Gaming systems have been around since the 1970s, but the number and quality of these systems have grown (examples include: Xbox®, Playstation®, Nintendo Switch, Playstation Portable (PSP)® are just a few examples.

- When purchasing a system is there an understanding of all the costs: Games (both purchase and rental), Accessories (additional controllers, special equipment), Subscriptions (online gaming, game rentals).
- Discuss with your child what their expectations are when using these systems. These expectations may change over time and parents need to continue to talk to about their use.
- Set parameters of use. Everyone should understand these expectations.

Tablets, Laptops and other Online Devices – Parents need to agree ground rules for your children's use of these tools. The objective is not just to establish boundaries but also to help children understand so take responsibility for their own actions.

- Set limits on when/where they can use these devices and for how long.
- Agree what types of online access and apps that are permissible and which are not.
- Encourage them to come and talk to you if anything online makes them feel uncomfortable or threatened.
- Make it very clear that they must not give out personal information without your permission.

Cell phone/Smartphone – Cell phones/Smartphones are becoming more commonplace with children Parents are finding that by providing cell phones to their kids they feel more safe, secure, and connected since they are more in contact with them. Many Smartphones have the ability to do almost all the same things that a laptop/tablet can do.

- Teach your children to respect others when using the phone.
- Cell phones can become a distraction. Set parameters to help everyone to find balance.
- Develop cell phone protocol for inside your home.
- Model appropriate mobile phone use. Children imitate and emulate your actions.

Social Media - Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat and a myriad of others have flooded the landscape with options and opportunities to share information. Social media also sets up users in competition. Prior to having your child sign up for a social media account, find out the reason why they need it at that time.

- Parent should have access to the username and password of the account. Parents should also be on the site and "follow" their children.
- Do not assume just because there are cartoon characters or other child oriented information that the content is for younger users. Sites like CommonSense Media can help identifying the best sites - <https://www.commonsensemedia.org/>
- Some users have multiple accounts on social media sites. Often one that most people know and another for close friends, be aware of what to look for on sites for multiple accounts.

Family Contract for Digital Citizenship

Kids' Pledge

1. I will not remember that not all people have access to or utilize technology in the same way. I will not treat others differently if they do not have the same online opportunities as I have been provided.
2. I will tell my parents or other responsible adult right away if I come across any information that makes me feel uncomfortable. I understand that to have technology rights that I have to be responsible in my actions as well.
3. I will tell my parents if I experience any pain or discomfort when using technology. I will remember that I need to balance technology use with other activities.
4. I will not respond to any messages that are mean or in any way make me feel uncomfortable. It is not my fault if I get a message like that. If I do I will tell my parents or responsible adult right away so that they can contact the appropriate persons.
5. I will talk with my parents so that we can set up rules for making purchases online. We will decide upon if and when online purchases can be made and secure sites for me to use.
6. I will treat others the way that I wish to be treated when using technology. I will keep in mind that my technology use affects others.
7. I will check with my parents before downloading or installing software or doing anything that could possibly hurt our devices or jeopardize my family's privacy. I will also keep programs such as anti-virus, spyware and adware up-to-date to protect our information.
8. I will be a good online citizen and not do anything that hurts other people or is against the law.
9. I will help my parents understand how to have fun and learn things online and teach them things about the Internet, computers and other technology.

I agree to the above

Child sign here

I will help my child follow this agreement and will allow reasonable use of digital technology as long as these rules and other family rules are followed.

Parent(s) sign here

Family Contract for Digital Citizenship

Parents' Pledge

1. I will get to know the services and Web sites my child uses. If I don't know how to use them, I will take the time to learn how.
2. I will teach my children to understand that other people do not have the same access to technology. I will demonstrate to my child that everyone should be treated with respect.
3. I will discuss with my child to understand how best to make online purchases. I will show my child which sites are safe and secure for buying goods online. I will also help to explain how to search and find the best value online.
4. I promise to teach my child when and how to use online communication tools. I will be a role model of when the best times to use technology and how to interact with others.
5. I will help everyone in our family to understand that our technology usage affects others. I will help my child to understand they need to act the way they want to be treated both online and in the Real World.
6. I will talk to my child about their "online friends" just as I try get to know his or her other friends in the Real World. I will explain that to have rights online there are certain responsibilities as well.
7. I will teach my children that there are some material that is available online that is protected and cannot be taken without permission. Children need to understand that this material is owned by others and they should be protected.
8. I will explain to my children when using technology they should be sitting as not to cause physical harm. I will also make sure that my children are limited on the time they can use technology so they can balance with other activities.
9. I will spend time to teach my child to protect their technology and data. I will provide an example of backing up and securing our data.
10. I realize that children watch us as adults to be a guide of how to act both online and in the Real World so will to the best of my ability provide a good model. Knowing that situations arise I will talk to my children about actions that I do not want them to share with others.

I agree to the above

Parent(s)

I understand that my parent(s) has agreed to these rules and agree to help my parent(s) explore and use technology with me.

Child sign here