



A RESOURCE FOR FAMILIES

How to create a Family Technology Agreement

What is a Family Technology Agreement?

A Family Technology Agreement outlines the ways a family can work together to develop and maintain a healthy, balanced and safe relationship with technology.

The term technology refers to all screens and internet capable devices in the house (including laptops, desktops, iPads, smart tablets, iPhone, smart phones and gaming consoles). Some families may opt to include TV in this agreement.

Why create a Family Technology Agreement?

Generally, technology has many positives and it can be highly valuable to all family members. However, unrestricted or unregulated usage can be unsafe.

When consistent and reasonable guidelines are developed and reinforced, individuals can be protected from some of the potential dangers. Similarly, when clear expectations are established, conflicts and disputes can be avoided.

Things to consider when creating an Agreement

It is essential that every person covered in the agreement is also involved in the creation of the agreement. When children's opinions are validated and they are invited to contribute their ideas, they will usually perceive an agreement to be fair and reasonable. Therefore, they will be more willing to comply.

A Family Technology Agreement should be customised for your family. You should consider factors such as the age of family members, number of devices, family values, parenting styles and the family's lifestyle. The main aim is to create an agreement that works for the family and enhances the family dynamic. If an agreement is hard to follow, it will have limited uptake and longevity.

Family Technology Agreements should be regularly reviewed to ensure that they suit your family's needs. It is likely that you will need to make amendments as children get older, new devices are obtained or family circumstances change.

What should a Family Technology Agreement look like?

A Family Technology Agreement will be unique to your family and individualised for each family member.

Common inclusions will cover:

- usage guidelines and time limits
- passwords, privacy and safety settings
- appropriate content and conduct.

What are appropriate usage guidelines and time limits?

The key aim is to support family members in building a healthy relationship with technology; this means a balance of online and offline activity. It can be difficult to determine the best parameters for technology usage. The appropriate

amount of screen time will generally be influenced by factors such as your child's age and maturity, the type of content they are consuming, their learning needs and their reliance on technology.

Consider your child's screen use in the context of their overall health and wellbeing. For example, is online time getting in the way of their sleep and exercise? Is it impacting on their face-to-face connections with family and friends? The answers to these questions should assist you.

The following can be warning signs that your child's online activity is having a negative impact on them:

- less interest in social activities like meeting friends or playing sport
- tiredness, sleep disturbance, headaches, eye strain
- changes in eating patterns
- reduced personal hygiene
- obsession with particular websites or games
- extreme anger when being asked to take a break from online activity
- appearing anxious or irritable when away from the computer
- becoming withdrawn from friends and family.

What about passwords, privacy and safety settings?

Secure passwords have the following attributes:

- at least eight characters long
- includes numbers, symbols, lowercase and uppercase letters
- not derived from personal details such as family names, birthdates, addresses
- not shared with anyone outside of the family
- changed regularly.

Parental controls refer to parent managed settings which restrict what a child can access. Some parental controls can seem complicated to set up, although step-by-step guides can generally be found online.

Parental controls can be applied to:

- smartphones, tablets and other devices
- search engines
- broadband and mobile networks
- social media.

Whilst parental controls may offer some reassurance, they can be limited in effectiveness. Even with parental controls applied, children can find (or stumble across), inappropriate and unsafe content. Parental controls are not a substitute for supervision and monitoring.

It is more effective to teach your child critical thinking skills, safety strategies and resilience. Always encourage your child to talk to you about anything that makes them feel upset, uncomfortable or unsafe.