Tips for Parents: Family Technology Use Policy

Cell phones, MP3 players, TV, the Internet…it seems as if kids are always plugged in. Many parents compete with technology for their kids' attention, and lose. Additionally, cyberbullying, sexting, pornography, and stranger danger online all present a significant safety risk to our kids. In Tips for Parents: Family Technology Use Policy, learn how to create your family's technology rules, and enforce them.

The 5 Questions

When considering any technology for your kids, begin by answering these five questions:

1. Who can use it?
- How old should they be?
- Are they responsible enough to take good care of it?
- Do they understand the basics of stranger danger and safe usage?
- Are they mature and responsible enough to follow the rules?

2. What are they allowed to do with it?
- Be very specific about what they are and aren't allowed to do with it.
- Let them know that they should never take or look at naked photos of themselves or others. If they see them, they should tell you.
- No bullying. Define what bullying is, and be a good example to your child.
- Address what kind of profanity, violence, or sexual content is allowed, if any.
- Teach them that whatever they text, post, email or tweet will become part of the public realm and they can never get it back, so it better be something they're proud of.
- What will be the consequences if they violate your rules? Keep them appropriate for the violation. If you are overly strict, it's likely your child will just learn how to hide what they're doing. Grounding from the technology for a period of time is often an appropriate discipline.

3. Where are they allowed to use it?
- You have the right to limit where your child uses the technology.
- School, the dinner table, church, and in the room with their door closed may all be examples of places your child is not allowed to use the technology.
- It is highly recommended that the computer your child uses be located in the busiest area of your home, where you can monitor what they are doing with it.

4. When are they allowed to use it?
- Many kids lose important sleep because they are social networking or texting.
- We recommend that the child gives you their phone each night to charge in your bedroom, where they won't be woken by texts or be tempted to text.
- You can limit Internet use at night by keeping the router in your room and switching it off at night.
- Technology is a privilege, not a right. This means that its use should only be allowed after school, homework, chores and family time are completed—if the child has earned it with responsibility.
- Clearly define how much they are allowed to use it. This may mean setting time limits, or sticking within the family plan. If they go over and additional charges are incurred, they must be responsible for paying for them.
- Make it a rule that the child must answer/respond to you when you contact them, set a clear consequence if they don't, and enforce it.

5. How will it be monitored?
- It is your responsibility to monitor your child's technology usage.
- Inform your child that you will be monitoring, and how.
- Learn about privacy settings and teach how to use them to your child.
- Use cell phone bills, monitoring software, and look at the technology itself and what content has been viewed. This is not an invasion of privacy—it's not about snooping. It's about keeping your child and other children safe from predators, bullies, and content they think they are old enough for but that is really harmful.

Talk

One of the best things you can do regarding technology is to talk to your child about what they are seeing, hearing and doing. What are other kids doing? What do they think about that? Have they seen or heard of other kids being bullied? Have they been bullied?

It's also a good idea to show them news articles about what can go wrong when kids use technology. It's one thing to hear it from you, but to see it happen to someone their age can be more powerful.

For more information:
Your Guide to Kids and Cell Phones
Texts, Tweets & TV

You may also be interested in these related Tips for Parents:
Tips for Parents: Children and Media Violence
Tips for Parents: Girl Cyberbullying