

Children & Technology

A PARENT'S GUIDE FACT SHEET

Today's kids are surrounded by technology, both during and after school. It is important for kids to learn how to responsibly use the many tools available on computers and smart devices. But unsupervised access to technology can create risks for children. Just as schools have rules for the acceptable use of technology by students, it is also important for parents to think about how to exercise supervision over children's use of technology in order to preserve privacy and avoid problems such as sexting and cyberbullying.

Today's parents may not have grown up with email, social media, text messaging, and smart cell phones with cameras. In addition, technology is constantly changing and evolving. It can be hard for parents to keep up with new developments. Here are some suggestions to help parents develop their own rules for safely monitoring and setting limits on the use of technology by their children.

Teaching Children About Technology

- Technology is in the classroom to stay, and the use of computers is now part of basic literacy.
- Schools have "Acceptable Use Policies" for the use of technology by students.
- Talk with your child about their use of technology.
- Bookmark safe child-appropriate sites that your child can find easily later.
- Encourage your child to develop critical thinking skills to evaluate information they find on the web.

Monitoring Your Child's Computer Use

- Parents can monitor the content a child is viewing on the internet.
- Many internet browsers contain parental controls that can help filter the content to which your child has access.
- There are family safety computer programs available to help parents monitor and track internet use, restrict content, set time limits, and control access to certain features.
- Parents should not rely entirely on automatic controls.
- Children can also access the internet from a smart phone, gaming system, or other electronic devices.

Setting Limits on Technology

- Just like with TV, there is some content on the internet that is not appropriate for children.
- Set time limits to ensure that children have enough time for physical exercise, play-time with friends, homework and rest.
- Set limits on what sites your child can visit, whether they can post pictures, use a webcam, and whom they can communicate with online.
- Consider limiting computers to a common area of the house.
- Create rules that reflect your values as a parent and that develop over time as your child grows older and matures.

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Online Privacy

- Make sure your child knows never to give out personal information over the internet – address, telephone number, passwords, bank accounts or credit card numbers.
- Use privacy settings for social media accounts, or other applications.
- Ensure that your child does not share passwords.
- Help your child understand that once information is posted online, it is very difficult to control who will have access to it. It can easily be copied, forwarded, shared or reposted by others.

Social Media

- Social media sites can be accessed on the computer, gaming systems, smart phones and other devices with internet access.
- If your child uses social media, know your child's password to review their online profile.
- "Friend" your child to monitor the content they post.
- Ensure that privacy controls are used to limit who has access to information posted online.
- Limit your child's online friends to people they actually know.
- Children don't always know what is appropriate to share and what is not. Encourage your child to think before they post.
- Remind your child not to post anything that they wouldn't want to be made public. Once it is posted online it can easily be shared by others.
- Delete inappropriate content.

Sexting

- Sexting means sharing sexually explicit text messages, photos, or videos. It can include sending, receiving, or forwarding content.
- Make sure your child knows that once an explicit message or photo is sent, there is no way to control who has access to it. Today's friends may share it tomorrow, or they could lose their phone or computer. There is never a guarantee of privacy.
- Sexting can cause serious embarrassment, humiliation and emotional harm – far into the future – and lead to bullying or harassment.
- Even applications that automatically erase a shared image after a few seconds are no guarantee of privacy. It is easy for recipients to capture the image and share it.
- Encourage your child not to send anything they would feel uncomfortable seeing in public or sharing with others.
- Consider reviewing and granting permission before allowing your child to post photos online.

- If your child receives a sexting message, make sure your child knows:
 - Don't respond – whether they know the sender or not.
 - Don't forward the message.
 - Tell you about it.
- Report the sexting message to school officials or law enforcement.

Cyberbullying

- Kids can be bullied, humiliated, threatened, or harassed online – just like they can be in person.
- It can happen through email, text messages, social media, or other forms of electronic communication.
- It can cause serious emotional pain, depression, anxiety, low-self esteem, problems in school, social isolation, and in some cases has even been the cause of teen suicide.
- Make sure your child knows that if they are ever threatened, harassed, sent any messages that make them feel scared, unsafe or uncomfortable:
 - Don't respond.
 - End contact with the sender.
 - Tell a parent or trusted adult right away.
- If your child is subject to cyberbullying by classmates, report it to the school administration.
- If your child is being harassed online, report it to law enforcement.
- Save the message so there is a record of the communication.
- You can often block future messages from certain senders using a blocking feature in an email program or social media application.
- Encourage your child to stand up and support any friends that have become victims of cyberbullying.
- Encourage your child to treat people with politeness and respect online, just like they should in person.

Online Predators

- Explain to your child that people online may not always be who they say they are.
- Online predators may use a false identity and pretend to be closer in age to attempt to communicate with a child about inappropriate things.
- Make sure your child understands only to accept "friend" requests on social media, or enter into online communication with people whose identity they already know.
- Have your child tell you right away if someone they met online requests photos or tries to set up an in-person meeting.

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