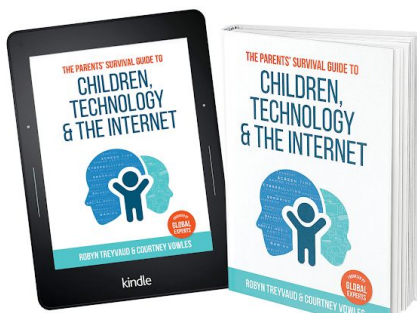




A Guide For Developing A Family Media Agreement

Many parents are seeking effective, empowering and inclusive ways to manage digital technologies with their family. Guidelines about the use of the Internet, digital devices and social media can support your child as they navigate online environments, and for the family to have conversations about what should be included, why and what the consequences will be if they are not followed.

A family media agreement is a set of formal or informal guidelines that a family agrees upon to guide behaviour when it comes to device and Internet use. When guidelines are clear, they help your child learn where the limits are and understand the family's expectations of them. They also help parents develop consistency and fairness in the way they treat their child's use of digital media. By empowering each family member to contribute to the ongoing development of a family media agreement, you can help your child feel positive ownership over the guidelines, making them more likely to behave responsibly online.



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When to start using a family media agreement

The ideal time to introduce a family media agreement differs for each family, but a good rule of thumb is to begin the discussion when your child starts to use technology without your supervision. Ultimately, family media agreements are a good idea when you would like to:

- Help your child learn to use technology responsibly
- Build a proactive plan to manage cyber safety risks, with clear procedures for what to do when a danger arises
- Encourage a healthy balance between digital and offline activities
- Strengthen family bonding with collaborative activities using technology

The most effective family media agreements are collaborative, involving input from each family member. Your family media agreement may encompass any digital technology you choose, from computers, laptops and video games to tablets and mobile phones.

It's important to note that a family media agreement needs to be revisited regularly, to see if the guidelines remain appropriate or need updating.

How to involve your child in the creation of a family media agreement

#1 Listen first

The first step is to listen. Before brainstorming ideas together for the agreement, seek to understand how your child currently uses or would like to use digital media. Talk about the experiences your family encounter online and whether they feel these are positive or uncomfortable. This encourages a more meaningful engagement so that you can have greater insight into what your child is watching, listening to, or

playing online. By participating actively, you can learn what emotions, thoughts, questions, concerns, and interests they are discovering.

#2 Encourage thoughtful discussion

Invite each family member to think about their digital media habits at home – how, when and how often they engage with their devices or media more broadly. Use this conversation to pave the way for a healthy dialogue about family values around media which will form the foundation for your family media agreement. As your child grows older, their attitudes, beliefs and uses for media will likely change and you will need to update your family media agreement to reflect this.



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What to include in a family media agreement

#1 Transparency and trust

Transparency and trust are integral to creating an environment where a child can feel comfortable talking to their parents about the issues they encounter online. If you decide to monitor your child's digital devices and activities, avoid doing this without their knowledge, as it both conveys and creates distrust. It's best to be honest and clear about what you will be accessing and why, then talk through any emotions or concerns that your involvement may cause them, and use this

information to establish a media agreement that is appropriately balanced between safety and privacy.

To foster mutual transparency:

- Decide whether passwords will be made available to you
- Set clear guidelines for safe and respectful social media use, including guidelines for the treatment of others, privacy settings and talking to strangers
- Discuss which social media sites or apps are allowed and which ones are not, and establish a criteria to inform conversations regarding future apps
- Set clear expectations for how your child will use their mobile phone
- Create a process that allows a child to request the use of a new social media account

Listen to and consider your child's desires and needs, and wherever possible, find a compromise. For example, if they enjoy video chatting, steer them toward safe video chatting apps with strong privacy settings where they can talk to friends and family, instead of strangers.

To encourage trust, ask your child for feedback on your own digital behaviour as a parent or carer. Sometimes parents can accidentally fall into the trap of "do as I say, not as I do", which can send confusing messages about responsible online behaviour. Listen to each child's feedback and consider including guidelines in the family media agreement for your own behaviour. Ultimately, this will promote accountability and equality, and help them feel comfortable that you hold yourself to the same standards.

#2 Online safety

Your family media agreement should detail clear steps to follow in order to stay safe online. Decide on a problem-solving method that promotes connection and support in challenging times. Guidelines may include:

- How to keep the family computer safe from viruses, spyware and malware

- What to do if you are a victim or culprit of cyberbullying
- How to manage privacy risks
- What to do if an online friend asks to meet in person
- How to handle sexting, pornography or inappropriate photo sharing

Your child should have a basic understanding of privacy risks and what information they should not share online when they begin to go online independently and use social media platforms.

#3 Balance

A family media agreement is an ideal tool for fostering a balanced approach to technology use in your home. A collaborative approach is best when deciding what this balance looks like for your family.

Clarify as a family how much screen time is appropriate each day and why, but be sure to account for both academic and recreational screen use. This will help your child to understand how many hours a day they can spend using a computer, tablet, or gaming consoles, and teach them to ration their time responsibly. It will also help your family balance digital use between siblings in a fair way, and help you schedule calming activities for a balanced, healthy lifestyle, such as family walks, listening to music, time outdoors, reading a book, sports or creative activities.

#4 Consequences for breaching the family media agreement

If your child breaches your family media agreement, try to respond in an open, patient and non-judgmental way. In the case of a deliberate violation of the rules, there should be immediate, logical, and fair consequences (which are proportionate to the misbehaviour). Encourage your child to speak up if they encounter something upsetting or offensive online, and let them know they will not face punishment if the

breach is a genuine mistake. Consider emphasising honesty as the most important value, so you can encourage continued open conversation.

It may be helpful to think about potential scenarios together to ensure they understand when and why there may be consequences to their behaviour.

#5 Create fun family activities

Creating a family media agreement is an excellent opportunity to consider ways your family can use digital media for fun collaborative activities. Encourage family engagement by playing an online game together, learning a new skill, making or watching a movie, or hosting a friendly family competition.



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Final thoughts for parents

Family media agreements encourage a more positive approach to manage the use of digital technology. Having ongoing conversations about online safety and collaborating in the creation of these guidelines, you can promote healthy media habits, help your child navigate online environments safely, and empower them to take ownership for their online behaviour. With clear and consistent guidelines for behaviour, all family members will feel more adept at managing online safety risks.