

First Steps for Crafting a Family Tech Plan

Establishing a plan for technology use and online safety can be a daunting task, especially when we wait until after problems occur. Breaking the task into bite-size goals has been most effective with the families we work with here at CARES. Below are some tips for getting started.

1) Recognize that you need a Technology Plan - Begin with your END GOAL

- Begin with your END goal in mind – what do you most want to achieve? (e.g., clear guidelines, balance, safety online, etc)
- What is it that you most dislike, and would like to minimize (e.g., too much time online, fears about safety, unkind online behavior, etc.)
- What are your own foibles? (e.g., constant text/screen watching, answering/texting in car, too much time online, ect.)

An intentional decision to have a plan for **gifting, monitoring** and **managing** technology in your home will help guide each choice you make, and prepare you and your kids for challenging situations that arise seemingly out of nowhere. Establishing baseline goals and rules gives you a baseline to return to as a family, particularly as infractions occur, or the rules need to change, either to allow for more flexibility or more restrictions.

2) Talk about BOUNDARIES and CONSEQUENCES together – BEFORE beginning

- Establish a few (5-10) **CLEAR, REALISTIC** and **ENFORCABLE** guidelines as parents that you want your family to follow (refer to attached Behavior Contract and Screentime Contract)
- Be sure your kids can **identify** the rules
- Be sure you enforce them **consistently**
- Assure your kids that negative consequences WILL follow POOR CHOICES
- Some ideas:
 - cell phone usage at **certain hours** in the evening or **curfew** at night
 - **after homework** has been completed
 - **balance** time spent connecting with people & time outdoors
 - all devices charge in **central location at a given time**
 - you have their **username and passwords**
 - they have to **friend** you if they have a social networking account of any form
 - no tech at the **dinner table**
 - no tech in **bedrooms**
 - **Hands-up rule** – when you wish to see what your kids are working on, they need to put their hands up – no hiding history or what is onscreen

3) MODEL your best technology behaviors and boundaries

- Adults set the bar for family media usage – consider the quantity and intensity of your tech use. Kids believe they are faster and stronger in this arena, and will quickly try to override your tech use
- Online shopping, texting, emailing, games...what's your online weakness? Share it with your kids so that you can support one another in reining it in when it goes overboard
- Consider the example you are setting – Kids see, and then mimic and model
 - Do you text and drive? Are you frequently on your phone during family time? Do you answer your phone in the middle of a conversation?

4) Accept that you will need to RETOOL, REVAMP often

The road to a sound and effective family tech plan has many bumps and turns. Success will depend greatly on your staying power – consistency, oversight of their behavior, enforcement of your rules, and healthy communication.

Recognize the need to revisit your plan, especially as kids mature, expand social groups, and move out of your constant purview.

Building rewards into your plan– such as increased minutes, a new game/app, music download, additional texting minutes - helps kids to abide by the rules, and recognize the need for consequences to poor behaviors.

Look for Basics of Monitoring in our February newsletter, and check out the BEHAVIOR and SCREENTIME CONTRACTS linked here.