Help Guide: Parenting In the Digital Age[1]

Articulate WHY

Start by articulating a "__why__" for your approach to technology. Why informs how. A "Why" enables you to (a) make good decisions and (b) explain them to your children – which is crucial for helping them move from following rules to making the approach their own. For consideration:

1. **Intentional:** we want to act based on thoughtful decisions, rather than impulse.
2. **Interior freedom:** we avoid addiction to technology to be intentional and present in the moment.
3. **Social skills and empathy:** these are crucial to our happiness and developed through in-person conversation and socializing.
4. **Our devices are tools:** to be used as such, not entertainment devices.
5. **Entertainment is legitimate:** when healthy, limited and timely. Seeking it constantly significantly retards maturity.
6. **We protect our heart:** so that we can truly love (our spouse, children, friends and God). Sexually explicit images and messages can destroy our heart.
7. **I decide because I love you, and I am responsible for you.**
8. **A thoughtful approach is important:** technology is addictive and often harmful, so we (parents too) follow a thoughtful approach.
9. **Helpful not controlling:** this approach does not imply a lack of trust or a desire to control, rather it acknowledges both the use and allure of technology and provides guidelines that help you (and us) develop.
10. **We maintain open lines of communication**: we explain our decisions and welcome our children to talk to us about anything – if they wish – without fearing our judgement.

Articulate WHEN

When - and if - you provide a smartphone to your child is a distinct decision from when (if) you permit access to social media. Consider access to the phone in stages. For consideration:

1. **When can you get a smartphone? When you are ready.**
   a. A smartphone is a tool. You can have one when you are ready to use it as such.
   b. Using a smartphone well requires a high level of maturity and self-control. Signs you have reached this maturity are:
      i. <u>Material order:</u> in your room, bed, clothing, book-bag, etc.
      ii. <u>Manage schedule:</u> Do you procrastinate or are you diligent in doing what you ought? (wake up on time, ability to focus, homework well done, test prep planned and done in advance)
      iii. <u>Moral toughness:</u> Do you do what you want or what you should?

      Not having this maturity is normal in high schoolers. It's not a sign they are "failures" but simply that they still are growing up.

      In our experience, many high schoolers do not achieve this maturity until several years of high school – some achieve it earlier.

2. **When can you have Social Media (Youtube, etc.)? When you are ready.**
   a. Social media easily becomes addictive, anti-social and self-focused. Also, they deliver appropriate content. You can have it when you show you are ready to use it for intentional communications and connections. Signs you are ready:
      i. *All items above, plus*
      ii. **Emotional control:** You handle anger and mood swings well. You don't retaliate – both at home and with friends.
      iii. **Control of your comments.** You don't gossip or speak ill of others; you don't make fun of others.
      iv. **Desire for acceptance.** What your peers want or think does not exert a strong influence on you.

      In our experience, most of us do not achieve this maturity until college (or later). That is normal.

Develop Family Rules

Establish age-appropriate rules for your family. For consideration:

1. **Time**
   a. Only after homework, chores, and other responsibilities complete
   b. Not after a certain hour of the night (neither computers nor phones)

2. **Place**
   a. Common areas only - not in the bedroom
   b. Not at dinner table (parents too)
   c. At night and when not in use (eg, before homework): all devices left in specific place (e.g., charging station by the door or parents' room)
   d. Car: have an approach

3. **Duration**
   a. No more than certain amount of time per day. Consider:
      i. Weekdays: 1 hour / day
      ii. Weekends: 1.5 hours / day

4. **Consider your consequences**
   a. What happens if rules are broken (loss of screen time is a typical consequence)? How should you (parent) react when this happens?
   b. How does your child earn more screen time as he matures?

Obviously, we parents need to model the behaviors we want our children to live.

Should I use a contract? Our perspective: They can be a helpful crutch as a start or if you're feeling desperate. Find a possible template [here](). The risk with a contract is the focus on the rules rather than the child making decisions. In addition, it puts power in the hands of your child and removes your flexibility in assigning the degree of consequence appropriate.

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How to Setup your Home and Devices:

Guidelines

1. Home
   a. Internet is filtered
   b. Parental controls turned on for each home device (TV, Xbox, etc.)
   c. Laptops: have accountability software installed
2. Smart Phones / Tablets: if you give them to your child
   a. Parents (only) know the ID & Password for each device
   b. Screen time is limited
   c. Parents approve all apps
   d. Monitoring and filtering software installed
   e. If you allow an internet browser: Accountability software installed

Best Tools

How-to guides: ProtectYoungEyes.com
www.protectyoungeyes.com
Excellent instructions on how to set up iPhones, Androids, and most home devices; also provides a great guide to vetting apps before you approve them.

Home internet filtering & device limits: Netgear with Circle By Disney
https://www.netgear.com/landings/circle/default.aspx

Don't purchase the stand-alone Circle direct from Disney; the Netgear router with the Circle built into it combines filtering & device limits. Setup is user friendly.

Monitoring of text, social media, email: Bark
https://www.bark.us/
Monitors all social media, text messages and email

Accountability (and filtering): Covenant Eyes
https://www.covenanteyes.com/; or www.qustodio.com
Sets safe-search filters on devices and monitors for porn. Reports are sent regularly to an accountability partner (parent, trusted adult, etc.). Why use? Much porn bypasses internet filters (Google images, YouTube), or can be accessed in other ways. Install app on computers, phone and tablets.

<u>**How to Setup your Home and Devices:**</u>

<u>**Implementation Steps**</u>

A. Home setup

1. **Computers in common areas**
    a. Move them where they are positioned so parents can see what is on the screen

2. **Home internet: setup a filter**
    a. Recommended: [Netgear with Circle By Disney](#)
    b. Set up a basic level for general use by everyone on the network
        i. Note: recommend a "white list" approach for the basic level, meaning block all sites and then unblock specific sites as needed.
    c. For teens: when they are ready, setup a specific profile for him/her with appropriate level of filtering (e.g. Teen setting on Circle) and assign their devices to this profile.
    d. For adults: set up a filter level for yourself and assign your devices
    e. Make sure to limit access to search engines and to force safe search on accessible search engines.

B. Home device and computer setup

1. **Make list of devices with internet access**
    See example below. Don't forget your smart TVs and xBox (a common porn delivery vehicle).

2. **Configure the parental controls on each home device**
    a. Use the steps in www.protectyoungeyes.com, see "Devices"[2]
    b. Set a Password/PIN that your child does not know
    c. Go through the individual settings within parental controls

3. **Install accountability software on laptops**
    Recommended: [Covenant Eyes](#) or [Qustodio](#)

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[2] They omit the Amazon Fire TV Stick. Click [here](#), or google "Fire Stick Parental Controls."

C. Setup phones and tablets (if your child has one)

1. **Configure the parental controls on each phone and tablet**
    a. Use the steps in protectyoungeyes.com, see "Devices"
    b. Recommended settings: *(Protect Young Eyes tells you how to do these)*
        i. **Set Screen Time limits** (with a Pin/Password your child doesn't know)
        ii. **Turn off the ability for child to add or delete apps**
        iii. **Limit texting to contacts**
        iv. **iPhone: Limit Airdrop to Contacts Only**

2. **Install accountability software on each device**
    Recommended: CovenantEyes.com or Qustodio

3. **Consider removing browsers (like "Safari" or "Chrome")**
    a. Disable until your child is mature enough to handle
    b. When mature: allow along with accountability software

4. **Utilize a monitoring service**
    Recommended: bark.us

5. **Turn on parental controls for various apps**
    These are typically off by default. Eg for Netflix, Youtube, Google – go app by app.
    See protectyoungeyes.com for step-by-step instructions

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Resources for Parents[3]

Of the many out there, we've found these the most helpful

Articulating the WHY of your family's approach

- "Letter from the Headmaster – Smart Phones," by Alvaro de Vicente: heights.edu/smart-phones/
- *Digital Minimalism*, by Cal Newport (tech philosophy of Georgetown computer science professor)

Device Setup How-Tos

- protectyoungeyes.com (practical materials on parental controls, app safety, etc.)
- cmgparent.org (video course on internet safety)

App & Content Reviews

- protectyoungeyes.com (practical materials on parental controls, app safety, etc.)
- commonsensemedia.org (app, book, and movie reviews)

Guiding Children: General

- *Father-Son Accountability: Integrity through Community*, by John and Lucas Fort (helping dads speak to their sons about these issues)
- *Screen Strong Solution,* by Melanie Hempe (A step-by-step guide to reducing screen access)

Guiding Children: Pornography

- purityispossible.com (online training from Harvard psychiatrist on mastering cravings, anxiety, and distraction) and FightTheNewDrug.com (well done resources)
- *Good Pictures, Bad Pictures*, by Kirsten Jenson and Gail Poyner (ages 7-12) (children's book explaining dangers of internet pornography)
- Chastity Project – guide to dating and moral topics related to dating & porn

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[3] Compiled by Rob Dunikoski with substantial contributions from Conner Reilly.

- *Pandora's Box is Open*, by Gail Poyner (practical guide for parents whose child has been exposed to pornography)
- *Integrity Restored*, by Peter Kleponis (guide book for Catholic families dealing with pornography addiction)

Parents' General Knowledge

- *iGen*, by Jean Twenge (research by San Diego State psychology professor)
- *Irresistable*, by Adam Alter
- "The Flight from Conversation," by Sherry Turkle, https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2015/10/reclaiming-conversation-sherry-turkle/409273/. See also this video of her lecture.
- "Worry Over Kids Excessive Smartphone Use Is More Justified Than Ever Before," by Jean Twenge https://www.mercatornet.com/mobile/view/worry-over-kids-excessive-smartphone-use-is-more-justified-than-ever-before

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List of Devices with Internet Access – Example

Take an inventory of all of the devices in your house by filling out an inventory sheet as follows:

1) Device Name – List the type of device and who it belongs to;
2) Accessed By – List who uses the device;
3) Wi-Fi Filtering Devices – Wi-Fi filters like Circle often permit you to create profiles with customized levels of internet filtering. In this column, list the profile that the device is to;
4) Parental Control Configured – In this column, check off when the parental controls have been turned on and configured; and
5) Accountability Software Installed - In this column, check off when the accountability software has been turned on and configured.

Example

Device Name	Accessed By	Wi-Fi Filtering Level	Parental Controls Configured	Accountability Software Installed
Home PC	Everyone	Pre-K	Unavailable	✔
Home Laptop	Everyone	Pre-K	Unavailable	✔
Amazon Fire - Home TV	Everyone	Pre-K	✔	Unavailable
Xbox	Everyone	Pre-K	✔	Unavailable
Paul's iPhone	Paul	Teen	✔	✔
Paul's Laptop	Paul	Teen	Unavailable	✔
Elizabeth's iPhone	Elizabeth	Teen	✔	✔
Elizabeth's iPad	Elizabeth	Teen	✔	✔
Elizabeth's Kindle	Elizabeth	Teen	✔	Unavailable
iPad for Digital Art Lessons	Everyone	Pre-K	✔	✔
Mary's iPhone (Parent)	Mary	Teen	✔	✔
Mary's Laptop (Parent)	Mary	Teen	Unavailable	✔
John's Work iPhone (Parent)	John	Teen	✔	Not Permitted