Left to their own devices?

Confident parenting in a world of screens

Care *for the* Family

Confident parenting

There are lots of areas to consider as we help our children navigate the digital world and deal with questions about screen time, social media or other aspects of today's culture. We've included many practical ideas, but here are three broad principles that keep family at the centre of our thinking.

Be intentional

We can choose to set limits and boundaries within our family, particularly with issues such as managing screen time. We can make clear, appropriate choices that take account of our children's ages and maturity that also reflect our values as a family. One way to communicate these choices is to create a family media agreement with a few simple 'house rules'. We have made some suggestions of how to start inside this leaflet and you can add anything that is important to you.

Be together

Technology, social media and the smartphones many of us carry everyday can all enrich family life. Find ways to use and appreciate them together, drawing out the benefits of communication and connection they can bring. We can capture and remember family moments, keep in touch with friends on social media, share our photos or videos, stay in contact with messaging or simply watch a film together through a streaming service such as Netflix.

Be positive

It would be easy to focus only on the challenges and problems that digital media and technology can bring. For our children and, increasingly, for us it is an ordinary part of everyday life and so we need to embrace it, helping them to make the most of its benefits and opportunities.

"As parents, we must help our children make full use of all the advantages of digital technology, as well as safeguarding them from the potential dangers."

Rob Parsons

"We don't just have to leave our children to their own devices. We can teach them to manage their freedom well and to make wise choices in a world where all choices are possible. We do this by placing values in their hearts that will be a compass for their lives."

Katharine Hill

Do ✓

Do create safety nets

Take ownership of when your children get access to online devices. Make use of apps, software or parental controls to create a safety net for them.

Do promote healthy usage

Make the most of the all the positives and opportunities of the digital world. Relationships, communication and education can all be supported by healthy use of technology.

Do set online limits

Think about how often your children go online and set appropriate limits or boundaries. Many families choose to have a 'no phones' rule at mealtimes or close to bedtime. You could also have 'unplugged' days or other times when everyone avoids using their smartphones or browsing social media or the internet.

Do stay engaged

Like any other aspect of parenting, taking an interest and staying involved with how your children use media and technology is the key to helping them. You may not fully understand the digital world they live in or be familiar with all the apps or social media they like to use, but you can keep engaged with them.

Don't ✗

Don't set a bad example

Children will do as you do and if you set a bad example, they are likely to follow it. Instead, model for them good habits in your use of technology, smartphones or online media and let them see how to use them positively.

Don't leave phones by the bed

Phones can be a massive distraction at bedtime and can potentially disrupt sleeping patterns. Rather than automatically allowing children to keep phones by their bedside, decide where to keep and charge them at night.

Don't be ruled by notifications

Phone apps and social media are designed to capture your attention and use frequent, regular notifications to keep themselves visible. One of the easiest ways to stay in control is to turn most of these notifications off and make use of any 'do not disturb' settings on your phone. This way you've eliminated many of the cues for attention and you no longer get pinged unless you choose to be.

Other resources

There is a wealth of helpful information available online, including the following websites:

General advice and information

- bbc.co.uk/webwise
- commonsensemedia.org
- parentzone.org.uk

Phone and screen time

- offtime.co
- freedom.to
- inthemoment.io

Online safety and children

- childnet.com
- getsafeonline.org
- saferinternet.org.uk

Care for the Family provides help, resources and events to strengthen many areas of family life. You can find out more on our website. **cff.org.uk**

Katharine Hill
UK Director, Care for the Family

Katharine Hill explores the impact of devices and the digital age on our children. Practical advice is given on screen time, social media, gaming and consumer culture as well as more serious issues such as cyberbullying and pornography. Look out for an event tour and a new resource for schools and parents, all based on Katherine's book.

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Family Media Agreement

One of the best ways to be deliberate about the use of media and devices in your family is to create a media agreement. These are some simple 'house-rules' that could be written down, but the main thing is to have a conversation together. Instead of us just imposing rules, this helps everyone understand important values or choices.

What should we talk about?

Positive and open questions can start the conversation but it is also important to talk about any concerns from either parent or child.

- **How are we doing as a family with our media use?**
- **What do we enjoy about media and technology?**
- **Does anything cause us concern? Is anything a problem?**
- **What would make good choices in our use of media and technology?**

Remember, this is not a 'once for all time' conversation. As your children get older or a particular challenge emerges, you will need to continue to talk and stay engaged with them.

Screen time
Talk about the time limits, screen-free zones or device curfews you want to set. Should the limits be the same for weekends as for weekdays?

Keeping safe online
What do I do if someone makes me feel uncomfortable, pressured or bullied? What personal information should I never share? How will I keep my passwords or other account details safe?

Understand privacy and security
What private information such as personal data or passwords should never be shared? How do I change privacy settings? What accounts can I set up with or without permission?

Friends and strangers
How do you know who is talking to you online? Talk about the different ways you might respond to people depending on their relationship to you.
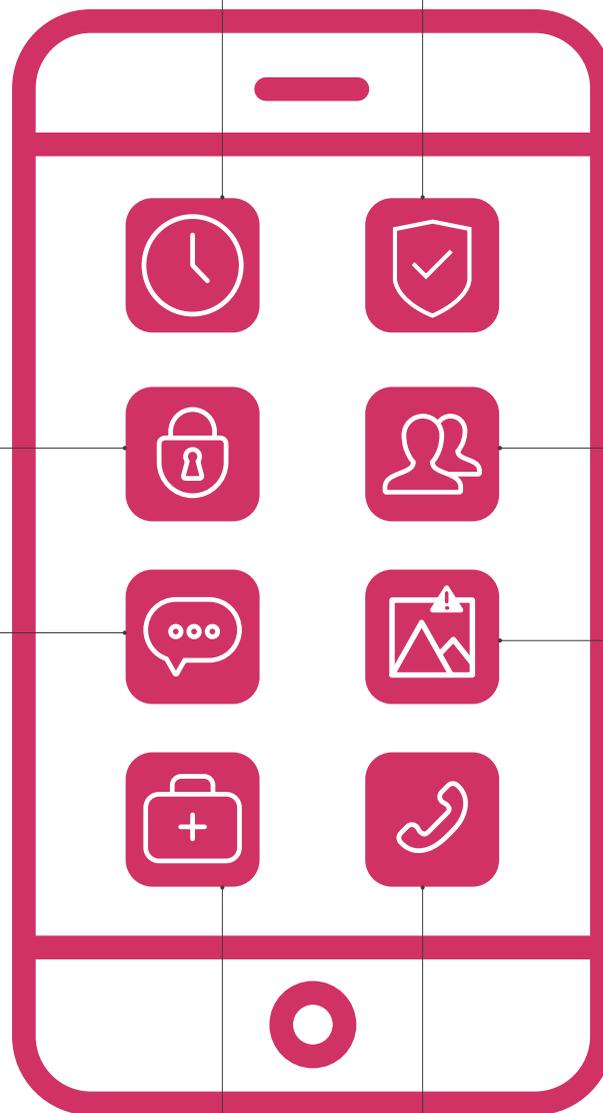
Talking and sharing online
Talk about how to behave online and how to deal with others respectfully in social media. Who will see the content I put online or on social media? How should I respect boundaries and privacy when sharing videos or photos?

Suitable images and content
Think about parental controls, software or other tools to limit access to only suitable images and content. Let your child know they should speak to you if they come across anything that makes them feel uncomfortable, upset or unsafe.

Getting help or advice
Help your children set up any new device. Reassure them that they can talk to you at any time if they need help or are worried about anything. Make sure they have contact information for you or other family members on their devices.

Staying in touch
How can we stay in touch as a family? Should my phone always be switched on when I'm out? What app or group messaging do we want to use to keep in contact? What about Find Friends or other location services?

Three main areas to consider

Conduct
We can talk about what it means to behave well online and help them understand issues of respect, kindness or other values that guide how they interact through social media. Conduct is also about when and how we use smartphones in everyday situations such as at school, bedtime, mealtimes or when crossing the road. Consider setting limits to screen time and having device curfews or talk about how inappropriate use of phones can get in the way of face-to-face conversations.

Contact
Help children understand what contact is appropriate online and place boundaries on the conversations they have or the information they share. Certain information such as personal details, passwords or other sensitive information needs to be kept private. This is also the opportunity to let them know that they can talk to us if anyone online upsets them, makes them uncomfortable or they feel in any way unsafe.

Content
Filters and controls can only do so much to protect our children from inappropriate, distressing or harmful online content. As our children grow up, we can help them find and choose media that is appropriate, useful or fun as well as avoid inappropriate or pornographic material. We can talk about other issues related to content, including understanding social media settings and what happens when personal content is shared online. For older children, pointing out that not everything online is true or has the same value as a source of reliable information is also helpful.