

HOME CONDUCT AGREEMENT

As you know, computer technologies require parental guidance and limit setting. We have observed that school-issued devices can greatly impact home life, especially when the devices are regularly brought home for homework purposes. We know this will mean more responsibility for both parents and students. We would like to share a few key strategies that will help create some stability during this shifting family dynamic.

One of the best things you can do as a family is to develop a Home Conduct Agreement. This is a written contract that lists how and when technology can be used. The most important thing about this document is that it is created as a family. Each family's document will look different because it is designed to fit your family's values and behaviors. The second most important aspect of the Home Conduct Agreement is it is shared with all care givers. In this way, parents, grandparents, nanny's, and others that are with your child(ren), know and understand the expectations for technology use.

Things to discuss that you might include in your Home Conduct Agreement:

General Usage - Device

- *Where stored* - Consider having a designated place that the device "lives" when it is not being used. This will help keep it safe (so it is not left on the floor and gets stepped on, or a table and things are piled on top of it), and it will assist your child in remembering to grab the device before leaving for school each day.
- *Where charged* – It is strongly recommended that the charging station is not in your child's room. Having the device in their bedroom late at night can be very tempting for some people to use it for playing games, chatting, and other activities when they should be sleeping.
- *Where can use it* – Again, it is strongly suggested the device not be used in the bedroom. Create a space in a common area where the device can be used for homework as well as for free time, if allowed. If the device is used in the bedroom, considering having them leave their door open, so you can come by and check on their use.
- *When can use it* – Technology can become addicting, especially when it is something new. Placing limits on when technology can be used, within the context of your family, can be very helpful and healthy.
- *Ergonomics* – Using an device or laptop repeatedly in positions like on the floor, on a bed, or even on their lap can lead to lifelong issues like carpal tunnel syndrome. Having a place where the device can be used on a table, especially during homework time, will limit these issues.

General use - Behavior

- *Not Private* – It is important to understand that what goes online is rarely private. Discuss and include in your Home Conduct Agreement what you as a family agree is okay to share online.
- *Being Honest and forthright* – Encourage not just honesty (admitting they did something when asked) but also being forthright (coming forward without you having to ask) about their technology use.
- *Healthy balance of time with technology and without* – Discuss with your family times that can be technology down times for everyone. When are these times? Are there agreed upon times each week where everyone on the family stops using technology?
- *Model good behavior* – It is important that you are modeling the behaviors you are looking for in your child. When talking with your child, put down the technology. During non-tech times, ensure you are off your technology too. During meals, turn off cell phones. If you show them you are doing it, they are more likely to have a healthy balance of tech use and non-tech times.

- *Should device be brought on vacation* – Our technology often becomes a part of who we are, but it is important to discuss this as a family and decide if the device (or other technologies) should be brought on vacation. Include this in writing in the contract, so there are no misunderstandings when packing up for vacation.

Homework Time

- *Location* – Where can your child do their homework? Is this place different than where they can use the device for free time, if allowed?
- *Breaks* – How often can they take breaks? Are breaks allowed to be on the device? Are breaks allowed to be using other technologies?
- *Focus Management* - What types of things help with focus and staying on task? Can the TV be heard from the area homework is being worked on? Should the TV be off during homework time?
- *Sequence* – When is homework completed? Is there a certain amount of “downtime” first, then homework? Is it homework right away, then downtime?
- *Use of social media tools during homework* – Are social media tools like iMessages and Facetime allowed to be used during homework time? Are they allowed to connect to other students and ask for homework help and / or work “together” using these tools? Or, do you want these tools turned off during homework time?
- *What is allowed during play time* – Are there limits on what your child can use during down time or play time? Can they use any technology (school device, gaming device, TV, cell phone, etc), or are there times designated for no technologies or only specific technologies?
- *Can they listen to music during homework*- Some students are helped with concentration and focus when they can listen to music, but for most students, music tends to be a distraction. Knowing your child, will you allow music during homework? Can this music be private (using headphones) or does it need to be on, so you can hear too?
- *Length of time on homework* – The average amount of homework time for 5th grade is 90 minutes and for middle school is two hours. Part of the Conduct Agreement might include the maximum homework time each night. Remember that average homework times mean the time spent on the homework. It does not include breaks, using social media, and other distractions. So, if you put a max time your student is working on homework, including time on homework and all the other times (breaks, social networking, etc.), it can help manage the time on the device.

Internet

- *What sites are appropriate* – It is virtually impossible to limit the sites your child visits. There are thousands of new sites that spring up every week, and although some of these are not appropriate for younger children, many are great tools and just fun sites. Have a discussion about using the internet and what your expectations are. Encourage your child to talk to you if they go to a site or see information / images they feel uncomfortable with.
- *Creating accounts* – Do you allow your child to create accounts online for email, social networking, gaming, other? What personal information do you allow them to use when signing up on line for these accounts? It is strongly recommended that you create accounts for your child, especially if they are under 13. This allows you to know what information they are including, and what sites they have accounts at.
- *Passwords / Privacy online* – Do you require your child to share their passwords with you? Do you go into their online accounts? If you do, you should have a discussion about when you will be visiting their accounts and what the purpose is. Another possible solution is your child puts their password in a sealed envelope. In this way, you don't know their passwords, and they have privacy. But if you ever need them, you have them.

- *Online Identities* – Some sites allow or even encourage creating a virtual identity or avatar. Do you allow this? Discuss with your child the importance of being honest online, but also the value of using a virtual identity when appropriate.
- *What should / should not be shared* – Sharing information happens online all the time. What are you allowing your child to share online in social media sites and gaming sites? Can they share their first name, their grade, their age, the city they live in, sports they play? Remember, that social networks are meant to be social, so putting a stop to all sharing will make it difficult to use these tools. A good balance, in-line with your family values, is the best approach.
- *Social Networking* – Are they allowed to use social networking tools (Facebook, iMessaging, Facetime, etc.)? What are the guidelines for use? Do you have to be there when they are using it? Can they be used during homework time? Can they use them to talk to people they don't know in real life?
- *What permission is needed before downloading* – There are tons of files online that can be downloaded. Ensure you have a good anti-virus program on any Windows-based devices. Discuss with your child what is okay to download and not to download. Include this in your contract.
- *Digital Footprint* – Creating a digital footprint is critical for the future. Many colleges and most employers are using an applicant's Digital Footprint in their decision making process. And, even some private high schools are starting to look at a student's online presence. Remind your child that everything they post online, from a simple iMessage to a Facebook post, to a gaming conversation, comes together to create their digital footprint. A digital footprint is permanent. Almost everything online is archived and can pop up anywhere, at anytime in the future. Think before posting is critical. Discuss what is okay for your child to post online and what is better to do in person or not at all.

Email

- *Audience* – Who are they allowed to email? Ensure they understand their audience. Emailing their grandmother or their teacher is very different than emailing their friend.
- *Type of Email* – Chain letters, mean comments, jokes, pictures, are often emails that students send out to “everyone” in their contacts list. Talk to them about when is it appropriate to send email. When is it appropriate to use reply all. What type of emails should they be sending out.

Gaming

- *What games are acceptable* – Are violent games, games rated mature, or games that have a social media component allowed?
- *How much time* – Addiction, especially to gaming, is a real problem. Placing limits of what and how often your child can play games on all devices (school provided device, computer, gaming system, cell phone), will help to limit the addiction.
- *Where can they played* – It is strongly suggested that all technology use, including gaming, be done in an open and shared area. Is your child allowed to play in their room?