



TECHNOLOGY INTEGRATION

Creating a Family Media Agreement: How to Have the Conversation

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One of the best and most important approaches to take in handling media use among children is for families to sit down together and create a family media agreement.

The virtue of this approach is that it enlists all stakeholders in a conversation and empowers and invites kids and parents to think about what they do with media, when they are on media, how they engage with media and how often they use media at home.

And, perhaps most importantly, the conversation creates space for dialogue about family values around media.

Here are a few quick tips and questions to ask when setting up a family media agreement.

"How are we doing as a family with our use of media?"

This can lead the conversation in any number of interesting directions. It gives kids the opportunity to tell their parents, "Well, we see you using media all the time," whether it's texting, emailing or reading on a device. It can sometimes be alarming and illuminating for parents when their children hold up a mirror to their own behavior. It can also be quite humbling. Often, parents can fall into the trap of following the mantra, "Do as I say, not as I do." It's important for parents to be accountable.

"What should our rules be for use of media during the school week?"

This question gives families the chance to talk about the importance of focusing on schoolwork and even when homework is completed. Parents might also suggest that there are a variety of ways to spend the extra time, whether it's reading a book, playing a board game, or engaging in a building or design activity. Or, depending on the family, the response might be that it's okay to use media after all homework is complete.

"Are weekends and holidays different?"

For some families, the weekends and holidays give kids the opportunity to consume a lot of media and get it out of their system so that when they go back to school, they are ready to unplug and focus on school. For other families, this type of free-for-all on weekends and holidays can be crippling and present challenges for re-entry into the regular routine of the school week. It is up to each family and parent to figure out what is best, based on the needs and personalities involved.

"What happens when something goes wrong, such as breaking a family agreement or doing something inappropriate with media?"

It is critical to script these types of scenarios so kids understand that there might be consequences for transgressions. The last thing families want to do is shut down the conversation when something goes wrong.

"How can we have fun together with media?"

This question can give a family the opportunity to think of ways to engage positively with media, whether it's to make a movie together, play an online game like *Words with Friends* (3) or *Scrabble* (4), or have a family competition with *Temple Run* (5).

"What happens when you go to a home with a different set of rules?"

This is one of the trickiest spots for parents to handle, and is the age-old issue of surrendering control of what kids might be exposed to. One option is to call the friend's parents ahead of time to let them know where the family comfort level is. Another option is to say that each family has their own set of rules and guidelines, and that when you go to a different home, you need to abide by that family's rules, even if those rules do not coincide with your own family's rules.

No matter what the end result of the agreement is, the most important thing is having the conversation as a family.

What tips can you suggest for having a family conversation about media use?

Source: www.edutopia.org/blog/creating-a-family-media-agreement-matt-levinson

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