

Technology rules for parents

It seems that no matter how much I try I can't compete with it. Technology rules for parents and kids. That's why technology also needs strict rules.

Technology is overrunning my children's lives. Sometimes it feels like it's bleeding me, robbing me and turning me into its servant. My kids insist on acquiring more of it.

[Computers](#) are like drugs, and they need more and more of them. My job is to manage their habits as if those iPads and Play Stations were really vials of drugs that they need but that is only healthy in small doses.

I remember my parents telling me they walked to school in the snow, uphill and both ways. Now I tell my kids, "We didn't have that when I was a kid." It's a phrase I use commonly when talking about electronics. But as was the case with my childhood, I'm finding my own children indifferent to nostalgia.

For many of us who grew up with no mobile phones and perhaps a shared family computer in the basement, it can be difficult understanding where to draw the line with kids wanting to use technology. Some parents offer their children use of unlimited electronics, but most of us are

looking for a compromise.

In my own home we have several computers, mobile phones, a video game system, and different handheld wireless devices that do things my kids know more about than I do. While our children are determined to spend as much time on electronics as possible, we set rigid hourly usage limits for them and dictate a "not at the dinner table policy" for all of them.

Rules for Video Game Use

1. Alternate days for gaming

Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturdays are electronics days. No games at other times.

2. No violent video games

Some people tell me they'll get it on television, anyway. Well, exactly!

3. Try to get the smart ones

Academic games allow your kids to build cities and strategize about how to organize journeys and quests that don't rely on killing creatures with knives, guns or poison. You might lose this battle, but it's worth fighting.

4. Fighting over video games ends them

When my children get in an argument over the console, I turn off the system and make them take a break. Sharing, negotiations and other family values should always be enforced with that which they treasure, so video games can be a good inspiration to them for getting along.

5. Set Time Limits

Two hours is the absolute limit, which means they're likely to finagle three out of me. That might sound like too much time, but I'm being realistic here.

It's amazing how so many things have changed since I was a kid. We were given free movement over our cluster of houses and businesses making up our small fiefdom. We were allowed to ride bikes all over town. Our curfew – which I thought wasn't fair – was to be home by dark. Our addictions were developing with technology, but the technology was low grade and without the addictive qualities of today. Nintendo could demand a few hours during the day, but nothing like the video games today which I can find my kids playing for days on end if I let them.

We have specific rules for our children regarding their mobile phones, too. For example, our children can't own a mobile phone until they are 16. They come to me complaining, "My friends have phones so why can't I." What does a third grader need with a phone?

Rules for Mobile Phone Use

1. No Unlimited Plans

Even if they have unlimited options, finite boundaries will help them moderate.

2. Only polite text and talking

A good way to enforce proper manners and etiquette is to use the phone as an example of how to communicate with compassion and respect.

3. Don't replace broken consoles

When they break the phone, make them suffer it for a while. These things are great tools for teaching careful use of expensive objects. You also might get a break once in a while.

4. Strict camera rules

Make sure you have a policy in place with reviewing pictures. Have a straight talk about how pictures don't disappear despite what the application implies.

5. Application Review

When they get new applications installed, make sure there's a review.

6. Social networks are a family value

For us, everyone has access to everyone's feeds. Monitoring goes on at all times with mobile phone applications that allow social networking.

Will these rules prevent technology overload for my kids? Probably not. But they may help them learn why [some technology can be educational and helpful](#), but only if approached responsibly. It may also help my children to learn about boundaries in life. The boundaries of balancing what matters to family with that which matters with work and fun. It's this balance with electronics and family life that we hope to create a life long discipline that they'll use with my grandchildren. I want them to be able to take that on with them to their children.

Children will think everything unfair the same way I did. They want to set their curfews, make their own bedtimes and create their own menus – no more chicken fingers! My children have even gone into arguing their own curfews by saying that an unfair early hour will impede their ability to grow in directing their own lives. Clever kids.