How to Establish A Healthy Technology Diet

Have you ever heard of a technology guideline? If you grew up in the generation of restricted TV time, think beyond that scope. A technology guideline is a comprehensive set of rules and recommendations to guide your family's use of tech devices and platforms. The best part is that everyone in the family contributes to it, so mutual respect and understanding are at the core of the policy. However, the adults/caregivers/parents maintain authority - including development, monitoring, and consequences. This collaborative, authoritative approach is key to dolphin parenting and a stark contrast to permissive "jellyfish parenting" and authoritarian "tiger parenting."

Why create a Technology Guideline?

There are many benefits of a technology guideline. It can help keep kids safe from online risks, balance their time between recreation and school, and guide which media, games and apps your family considers appropriate. It can also prevent arguments over tech time boundaries — if everyone has agreed to the guideline, they're more likely to listen when someone points out they've broken one of its rules. A family technology guideline is also a useful way to keep your tech use in check as a parent. Role modelling appropriate technology use will help your kids learn good habits.

What should a family Technology Guideline include?

The best family technology guidelines mirror the qualities of great workplace and government policies. They're researched, clear, and adaptable.

Start by asking your family members why they want to develop a technology policy. Connect your motivation to your core values as a family. This will guide what you include.

Next, define any terms that need clarification. What is considered "educational" screen time? If you say no screen time before bed, when should the iPad go away?

Watch this short video for tips on talking to your family about technology:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WdbcqZTbCnw

The key is to try and establish a "healthy tech diet." Just like the food we consume impacts our physical and mental health, so to does the technology we consume. A healthy diet comes from consuming healthy tech (i.e. creative, educational), limiting junk tech (i.e. certain video games & social media), and avoiding toxic tech (i.e. cyber-bullying, pornography).
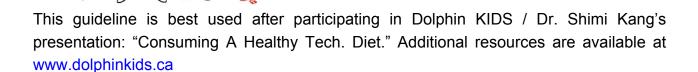
Enforcing the guidelines:

Be sure to include clear consequences in your guidelines so everyone knows the outcome of ignoring or breaking them. You can decide as a family what fair consequences are & they can be an opportunity to strengthen your relationship. For example, if you are going to withhold devices as a consequence, why not arrange a family outing during the device-free time so you can bond face to face.

Make room for change:

After launching your family technology guideline, check in with everyone to see how it's working. Just like we constantly evaluate our food diets and make changes, we can do the same for our tech diet. You may need to make adjustments while everyone gets used to it. The most important thing is that you're talking about technology use, and working toward improving your diet as a family!

Family Technology Guidelines
Dolphin Kids Template

This guideline is best used after participating in Dolphin KIDS / Dr. Shimi Kang's presentation: "Consuming A Healthy Tech. Diet." Additional resources are available at www.dolphinkids.ca

The United States National Education Association suggests that an effective family technology policy contain the following elements:

Motivation: Why you/your family has developed this guideline (i.e. connect your family's core values such as balanced lifestyle, respect, etc. to technology and online behavior)
Definitions: Clarify key words (i.e. "recreational" vs. "educational" use, "junk vs. "healthy" tech. "limits" & "consequences")

Acceptable Use: i.e.
- Passwords on personal devices must be shared with parents
- Only accept "friend" and "follow" requests from people you've met in person

Unacceptable use: i.e.
- Cyber-bullying and intimidation must be reported to parents
- Personal devices must not interrupt family conversations or outings
- Do not use hurtful or inappropriate language online
- New apps should not be downloaded without parental permission

Consequences: i.e.

- Family discussion striving for evaluation and resolution of any difficulties
- Loss of device privileges for a predetermined time period

Acknowledgement:

Signed by the _____ Family:

(Family name)

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

(First names)

Resources:

Common Sense Media: Parent Concerns https://www.commonsensemedia.org/parent-concerns

Common Sense Media: Advice Videos
https://www.commonsensemedia.org/video/advice#

Endeavour Sports High School: Student Internet AUP
https://endeavoursportshighschool.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Student-internet-acceptable-usage-policy-2011.pdf

Langley School District https://www.sd35.bc.ca/students-parents/student-resources/learning- with-technology/online-kidz/

Protect Kids Online http://protectkidsonline.ca/app/en/

Virginia Minnesota Public School Board http://www.vmps.org/technology-services/internet-use- policy/