

Technology Contracts (including Social Media and Video Game Contracts)



Image credit: Adobe Stock

Summary: When used properly, technology can be useful in our lives. Social media can help people connect. Video games can be provide as entertaining diversion from real life. But when used improperly, technology has the potential to harm as well. It is recommended that should you allow your children to use social media or video games, that you have limits. One way to set limits is by having a technology contract.

What is a Technology Contract?

On one hand, using technology can bring many benefits. Social media offers the promise of connecting people. Video games can be extremely fun and enjoyable to play.

Unfortunately, when used improperly, technology also has the potential to cause great harm to people.

For this reason, it is recommended that parents use a technology contract, to help children and youth make better choices around their use of technology.

There are various websites that have examples of technology contracts

- Common Sense Media has technology contracts such as the Family Media Agreement: Kindergarten to Gr. 5, Gr. 6-8, Gr. 9-12
<https://www.commonsensemedia.org/sites/default/files/home/ementalhealth/ementalhealth.ca/frontend/uploads/research/familymediacontracts1.pdf>

Video Game Contract

Video games can be extremely fun and entertaining. However, they can carry risks, for example:

- They can be addictive, leading to video game addiction.
- They can lead to children/youth connecting with unhealthy individuals online.
- Playing video games that are excessively violent or have sexual content can have negative effects on children.

For this reason, it is important for parents to have limits with their children around video games.

There are various websites that have video game contracts such as:

- Parent U Video Game Contract
<http://www.gvpd.net/wp-content/home/ementalhealth/ementalhealth.ca/frontend/uploads/2014/10/Video-Game-Contract.pdf>
- AllProDad
http://www.allprodad.com/wp-content/home/ementalhealth/ementalhealth.ca/frontend/uploads/2011/10/apd_video_game_contract_color.pdf
- Red Land Baptist Church in Maryland, USA
<http://www.redlandbaptist.org/wp-content/home/ementalhealth/ementalhealth.ca/frontend/uploads/2015/10/Video-Game-Contract.pdf>

The following template is compiled from various sources including the above. Feel free to use the following template and customize for your specific family situation!

Sample Parent-Child Video Game Contract

I want the freedom to be able to play video games. In order to so, I need to earn my parent's trust. My parents want to be able to keep me safe and help me make safe choices while playing video games.

This contract will allow me to play video games and help my parents do their job in keeping me safe and healthy.

We agree that:

- Video games are a privilege, not a right. In order to earn this privilege, I must meet expectations which include:
 - Being peaceful and kind to other family members (i.e. no violence or aggression)
 - Contributing to the family through chores and responsibilities
 - Contributing to my future through attending school and doing homework
- Video games can be really addictive, and without limits, people can easily spend the whole day playing video games. So my parents will have a schedule for when I can play, and I will follow that schedule without complaining. If I complain, I will lose the next day's video game time.

Weekday limit _____

Weekend limit _____

- Sometimes my parents may ask me to stop playing even sooner; if this happens, I will finish my game without complaining.
- I will not play any game with a rating higher than _____ unless given permission by my parent(s).
- If a family member wants to play a video game with me, I will stop my game and let them join in.
- I will get permission from my parent(s) before communicating with other players via text or voice.
- I will never give out private information, including my real name, address, phone number or passwords.
- If someone online says something that makes me feel uncomfortable, I will tell my parents. They might tell me to stop playing with that person and block them.
- As parents, they have the right to change these rules -- If they do so, they will inform me.

If I can follow these rules... I will earn my parent's trust, and they will give me freedom to play video games. It also lets me avoid arguments, lectures and consequences that aren't fun at all.

If I do not follow these rules... I will lose my parent's trust, and I will face the consequence of losing the privilege of playing video games for whatever time my parents feel is appropriate. This could range from a short period of time, to forever -- depending on the situation.

Youth's name Signed Date

Parent's name Signed..... Date

Social Media Contract

The following sample contract is compiled and summarized from various sources, including www.lindastade.com and www.verywellfamily.com.

Cut, paste and modify for your specific youth and situation...

Sample Social Media Contract

We agree that:

- Social media is a privilege not a right. I understand the using social media is a privilege and not a right.
My privileges may be removed by my parent(s) or guardian(s) at any time for bad behavior, uncooperative behavior, allowing my grades to fall, or for not helping out with family chores and responsibilities.
- My parents have responsibility to monitor. I understand that my parent(s) or guardian(s) are responsible for my safety, and have the right and duty to supervise my online behavior by having access to my password and accounts.

Do's

I will do the following:

- Remember what is important in life. Social media can be fun, but there are so many more important things in my life. Five more important things are:
 - 1.....
 - 2
 - 3
 - 4
 - 5
- Get permission before signing up. I will get my parent(s) or guardian(s) permission before establishing an account with a social media site such as Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram.
- Be respectful. I will think carefully about what I say on social media. I will be kind and respectful. I will talk about events and ideas, not people. I will not be involved in arguments. If I have an issue with someone, I will resolve it face to face, not online. "If you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all."

Think before posting. I will think very carefully about the images I post of myself.

- Get enough sleep. I will turn off all technology an hour before bed because sleep is important. My brain is growing and it needs rest. I will be a happier and more resilient person if I am not interrupted by technology throughout the night. All technology will be left in a shared family area overnight for charging.
- Take breaks. I will take breaks from social media when my parents think it's time. I understand that I might be upset about it, but I will also feel better after a bit of time disconnected. Sometimes it is nice to not know what the rest of the world is doing.
- Connect with real people only. I will only 'friend' people I have met in real life. Yes, I may get a friend request from someone my age who is friends with all my friends, but that doesn't mean they know him either! I understand that there are people with bad intentions create profiles to take advantage of people like me.
- Use privacy settings. My privacy settings will always be set on high. People can use clues from photographs, and the things I say, to work out the details of my life. What I post on social media is for friends and family only, not the whole world.
- Tell an adult if I feel uncomfortable. If I feel uncomfortable about anything while I am online (like bullying), I will log off and talk to one of these 5 adults:

- 1.....
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

Don'ts

- Don't post photographs of body parts like genitals or posing in a sexual way. I cannot guarantee who will see those photos or where they will end up, even if my security settings are on.
- Don't post embarrassing photographs. I will not post photos that could be embarrassing to myself, my family members, friends, or classmates. I wouldn't want any of these photos to prevent me from getting a future job, or into a future school.
- Don't use during family time. I will not use social media during family time. Family is important. They will love me and support me for years after all the social media platforms and online friends have been forgotten.
- Don't use in the bedroom. I will not use social media in my bedroom. I would not invite hundreds of people into my very private space in real life, so I will not do it online.
- Don't bully. I will never be involved in bullying online. Ever. I will never use social media to torment or harass a schoolmate, teacher, or any other person. I will not participate in online fights, threaten others, or encourage others to behave badly. If I witness bullying, or someone bullies me, I will save evidence and show it to an adult.
- Don't use location services. I will have all location services turned off. I understand that people can use these features to work out where I live, go to school and spend my spare time. It's none of their business and it's unsafe.
- Don't share passwords. I will never give my social media passwords to my friends. Although I love and trust my friends, boundaries are important. There are some details that shouldn't be shared with anyone, like bank details and definitely not passwords.

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Don't use inappropriate language. I will not use inappropriate language on social media that could be embarrassing to myself, my family members, friends, or classmates.

If I can follow these rules, I will earn my parent's trust, and have the freedom to use social media.

If I do not follow these rules, I will lose my parent's trust, and will face the consequences of losing access to social media.

Youth's name Signed Date

Parent's name Signed..... Date

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Written by the eMentalHealth.ca Team.

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Information in this fact sheet may or may not apply to your child. Your health care provider is the best source of information about your child's health.