



Department of Health The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region

Smart e-Team (Parents)

The main principle to help our children to achieve healthy use of Internet and electronic screen products (including computers, smartphones and tablet personal computers) is to develop and empower their awareness and self-control. Hence they can gradually equip with relevant knowledge and skills to be selfregulatory. We need to educate our children about the potential negative effects of inappropriate computer use and ways of prevention. We may adjust our degree of supervision and delegate autonomy to them according to their maturity and demonstrated self-control of usage.

Pre-schoolers (especially those under two) are at the stage of rapid development. They need plenty of time to interact with parents and to explore the world through real life experiences. Televisions, computers and smartphones are definitely not on the top of the list of their needs. In case they need to use electronic screen products, only age-appropriate educational programmes should be used, and under the guidance and supervision of parents.

For primary school students, we should actively involve in their computer use. We may ask about their favourite computer activities and choose some beneficial programmes for them according to their interests. Moreover, we have to maintain direct control on what kinds of software to be installed.

For secondary school students, computer use has become a common tool for their schoolwork. We should talk with our children about their computer use and stay open to their questions and curiosity. This facilitates frank communication and allows us to give advice on their current and future computer use.

The following are suggestions for parents aiming at helping children to use Internet and electronic screen products safely and healthily. These include the "General Principles (SAFE ACTS)", "Frequently Asked Questions" as well as "10 Health Tips".





General Principles (SAFE ACTS) :

1. Show

We need to act as role models and show our children about activities we may do on our computers and the concerned safety measures.

2. Aware

In order to provide proper guidance to our children, we need to educate them to be aware of inappropriate messages and content, e.g. elements with violent, obscene and gambling content, etc.

3. Facilitate

We may make active use of various social networking sites to connect with our children and monitor their daily activities. We have to facilitate our children to adopt a positive manner in using computers.

4. Empower

Greater autonomy may be delegated when children have demonstrated satisfactory self-regulatory abilities. It is essential to enhance their skills on time management, handling of negative emotions, communication and refusal when they are small. This will increase their self-control and improve their self-esteem.

5. Agree

We should discuss and agree with our children some rules in using computers, e.g. duration of use, prohibition of use in certain occasions such as preexamination period, etc. We have to give rationale to them when banning inappropriate use so as to reduce ill feeling. This will facilitate their cooperation.

6. Communicate

We should adopt an open, caring and non-judgmental communication with our children regarding the use of Internet and electronic screen products. Try to understand your children's concerns and this will help them to talk with us genuinely. When they have queries, we can give them guidance from time to time.

7. Trust

We should show our trust and respect to our children when they have demonstrated appropriate behaviour in using computers. Recognition should also be given to strengthen their good behaviours.

8. Seek

We have to seek help from experts and professionals when necessary.

Frequently Asked Questions

A. Let your children use Internet and electronic screen products appropriately

Question 1

Young children can be easily engaged when playing with tablet personal computers or smartphones. Why can't we let them use these products?

Answer

- 1. As young children are still immature in growth and development, engaging a long time in Internet use and electronic screen products will have negative impacts on the physical health including musculoskeletal growth and vision. It will also hinder all-round development of young children by taking up the time they need for social communication, cognitive and physical development.
- 2. If possible, spend as much quality time with our children as possible, e.g. talking, reading, playing and engaging in physical activities together, etc, to replace screen time in order to promote the cognitive, physical, social and emotional development of children.
- 3. Be careful in choosing the content of the electronic screen products. The products should be kept by adults. We have to accompany our children and give proper guidance when using these products.

Question 2

My one-and-a-half-year-old boy often whines. Recently I find smartphone helps to calm him down instantly and feeding him has also become an easy task. Should I continue to do this?

- 1. A one-and-a-half-year-old boy is capable of learning to feed himself instead of relying on watching or playing with a smartphone to keep him eating his meal. In fact, watching and using any electronic screen products distract children from enjoying eating, thereby defeating their motivation and interest in learning to eat. Their participation during mealtime will then become passive.
- 2. We need to be careful not to fall into the trap of giving unintentional "reward" to an undesirable behaviour, in your case, giving the smartphone whenever your boy whines, resulting in him learning to get the smartphone by whining.
- 3. To handle problem behaviour like whining, use effective behaviour management strategies such as withdrawing total attention to him until the problem behaviour stops or putting him in quiet time for a short duration.

Do I really need to sit with my children when they are using computers?

Answer

- 1. When our children are young, we have to sit with them when they use computers and electronic screen products.
- 2. Actually seeing what and how the children are doing with the computers facilitates us to provide appropriate and timely advice.
- 3. We need to establish open and positive communication with our children since young age for appropriate computer use.
- 4. It is especially important when the computer is connected with Internet because something inappropriate, e.g. gambling elements, violent and sex-related messages, may come up to the computer after just a few "casual clicks". Besides, sharing and discussing with our children about the fun and enjoyment of computer use also require us to join their activities.
- 5. After the children have demonstrated appropriate degree of self-control, awareness of healthy use and willingness to seek help from us, our direct support can be modulated and more autonomy can be granted for their computer use.

Question 4

I do not have much time to surf the Internet together with my kid. Is there any quick fix?

- 1. To cope with the limitation of time, grandparents and other suitable adults may also take turns to surf with children and talk with them about their computer use.
- 2. Building desirable parent-child relationship during other occasions offers us the advantage of efficient and direct communication with our children for computer use.
- 3. Owing to the constantly changing nature of modern technology, we should talk and check, at least periodically, with our children about their computer use so that timely advice and guidance can be provided to our children. Still, children need our care, guidance and support from time to time and we should be ready for help when required.

How can I talk to my children if they do not like to talk to me about their computer use?

Answer

- 1. Apprehension of banning, scolding and punishment from parents are common reasons for children to avoid open communication with parents.
- 2. We can cultivate an atmosphere of open communication by staying calm, recognizing their acceptable needs and granting permission for appropriate use.
- 3. For banning of inappropriate use, showing our genuine concerns for their own benefits and giving reasonable explanation can reduce hard feeling due to rejection.
- 4. Letting them know we are caring and sensible actually gains credits for effective parenting too.

Question 6

How can I talk to my children if I know nothing about computer?

- 1. If we are more familiar with modern technology, we will be more confident and capable of supervising our children about their computer use. In fact, most modern computers are designed for easy usage. Given time and willingness, many parents can learn that well too.
- 2. Some children like to act as experts in their favourite areas, we may let our children teach us and enjoy the advantage of positive communication with our children by showing curiosity to their interested activities.



I suppose the school will teach my children proper ways to use computer. Why should I bother?

Answer

- 1. Parents and school staff are collaborators and both are indispensable in the promotion of healthy growth of children. We have to understand what our children have learnt at school to reinforce their consistent practice at home.
- 2. We can browse the websites of the school or talk to teaching staff to check with news and policies released about the use of electronic screen products. Taking initiative to make inquiries and suggestions for improvement to school enhances communication between us and school too.

Question 8

Are there tips for me to set a good model to my children in using computers or smartphones properly?

Answer

1. Set boundary for usage

Put aside our smartphone while having family time with our children e.g. having family meal or leisure activities, etc.

? Ignore incoming calls or messages that do not require immediate attention

When we go to sleep, take measures to prohibit possible disturbances of your smartphone, e.g. turn it off or set it to flight mode

Solution Buy new smartphone when we need instead of following technology trend or commercial gimmicks

- 2. Strengthen family rules and accommodations
 - Comply with family rules for computer use that we require our children to follow

Follow rules consistently and explain valid reason to our children in case they have special need for exception

Talk to our children and review rules periodically to meet changing circumstances

3. Set up alternatives

Maintain personal contacts for social interactions whenever appropriate, (e.g. face-to-face conversation and personal gathering, etc.)

Develop a wide range of personal interests other than electronic entertainments like cooking, reading, model building, hiking, playing football and fishing, etc.

What is "digital footprint"? What should I be aware of?

- 1. Digital footprint consists the sum of history of everything a person has done via the Internet or related electronic products, e.g. any online behaviours, search results, comments made, images shared, content created, people with whom the person has interacted in the web, etc.
- 2. We should explain to our children that once digital messages and images are stored or shared online, they may never be completely removed and could be found almost without time and geographical boundaries. Therefore, they need to be prudent to avoid getting into trouble in the future. For instance, taking and sharing intimate pictures with lover via social network may be romantic but become awkward when the intimate relationship has changed years later.
- 3. We may be part of our children's digital footprint when we share their daily activities or pictures, such as nude images of our lovely baby or upload their activities, we are actually exposing their personal data. We may not aware that it may lead to embarrassment of our children when they are growing up.
- 4. Educate our children to be responsible digital citizens. Encourage proper manner for communicating online including email, messages and chat groups.



How do I teach my children to maintain "cyber-safety"?

Answer

Teach and remind our children as follows:

- 1. Do not release sensitive personal information, such as personal name, telephone number, address, identity card number or name of school, in Internet and social network to prevent others' possible misuse.
- 2. Set social networking profile to "Private" to ban strangers to browse, download or copy their personal information for improper use.
- 3. Only chat and interact with people they actually know in real life; do not add strangers as friends in Internet.
- 4. State clearly to friends that they need to ask for permission before uploading or tagging your children's photos or sensitive information on their social networking profiles, and vice versa.
- 5. Protect their computers and smartphones by setting up password and change periodically. For important materials or application software containing sensitive messages, multiple passwords are essential and keep them private. Do not save the passwords in computers or smartphones.
- 6. Avoid using public computer or Wi-Fi to log in personal account. Avoid giving personal information into computer intended for public use. If using a public computer, switch off the automatic recording function of the computer for browsing, and log out properly to prevent their personal account from others' misuse.
- 7. Install and update antivirus software and firewall to the computer and smartphone to ensure protection against virus and malicious programmes.
- 8. Never open suspicious or unidentified emails, attached files or download software from unofficial source to avoid possible attacks from spy or malicious programmes.
- 9. Tell children to get our permission before making purchase through the Internet. Choose reputable agents and platform for transaction. Pay attention to detailed information of the products, money amount and way of payments.
- 10. Do not regard Internet as an anonymous environment and act recklessly. Beware of the wide coverage and everlasting nature of Internet world, think for the consequences before sending out messages, and understand that all persons need to hold responsibilities for their acts in the Internet world, behave decently, respect others and comply with the laws.
- 11. Seek help from us if they encounter problems or queries.

B. Limit the time of usage and make agreement

Question 11

What should I do when making agreements with my children for their computer use?

- 1. Establish rules for computer use at the initial stage: before permission of using computer is granted.
- 2. Get their participation: Discuss with them the rules in details and they will cooperate simply because their interests, at least partly, are accommodated. Discuss with them while setting up the agreement increases their sense of responsibility too.
- 3. Specify websites and application software that are prohibited to avoid argument.
- 4. Specify time frame for usage: Clear cut of time use reduces subsequent argument too.
- 5. Allow special arrangement: Time of use needs to change under special occasions e.g. more / less use may be granted during holiday / examinations. Be open to facilitate their approval seeking from us to accommodate special circumstances; this reduces chance of violation too.
- 6. Set relevant and practical consequences for misuse. Cutting time use on the other day or doing extra house chores can deter overtime use. These measures are more rational than scolding.
- 7. Set token for cooperation and favourite rewards to increase their motivation to comply with agreement. Rewards may be healthy snack, arranging their favourite outdoor activities and extra play time at weekend, etc.
- 8. Get other family members as witness to enhance effective supervision.
- 9. Post the contract in conspicuous place. This reminds us to follow the agreement.
- 10. Set date for evaluation. New agreement should be reviewed within one week as amendments are expected to be the most suitable arrangment for both parties.

Agreement on Using Computer

I, _____, will only use computer from _____ to _____ every day. I also agree that I will not navigate websites with gambling, violent, sex or obscene elements.

For special occasions, we can have special arrangement together. If I violate the agreement, I have to _______ as compensation. If I can comply with agreement for a week, I can receive as reward.

This agreement will be reviewed by us on _____.

Signature:

Son / Daughter:	
Parent:	
Witness:	
Date:	

Question 12

What should I do if my children only want to play video games and have no other interests?

- 1. We should recognize and respect our children's needs and preference to enjoy video games according to agreement.
- 2. Paying attention to their daily lives, usual topics of discussion with friends, favourite music, songs, comics, movies, and sports, etc. all give us clues to further develop their other interests.
- 3. Arranging and encouraging them to enjoy personal hobbies. Avoid coercion, placing undue emphasis on achievement or performance which reduces enjoyment.
- 4. Adolescents change their interests from time to time. If those activities are healthy, parents may keep an open mind and encourage their children to explore and enjoy.

C. Limit access to inappropriate content

Question 13

If I find out my children receiving or sending out "sexting" messages, what should I do?

Answer

- 1. "Sexting" involves increased risks of embarrassment, distress and emotional trauma. Taking or sharing an image can have a long-lasting impact because digital photos and videos sent privately can easily be saved and later further forwarded to others.
- 2. We should remind our children to be cautious and decent about their online behaviour. Never send any sensitive messages, nude or semi-nude images should never be shared online. Existing images that may lead to embarrassment should be deleted as soon as possible.
- 3. We need to remind our children to avoid putting themselves at risks for bullying and blackmail. Sensitive images posted online can attract the attention of sex offenders to force the child to comply with malicious demands. Thus, they should be firm and say no to any invitation of "sexting".
- 4. Bullying, humiliation and blackmail may be too overwhelming for children to handle by themselves. We should show a caring and supportive attitude to our children so that they may feel comfortable and take initiative to approach us when they need.

Question 14

What should I do if my children breach what I ban them to watch?

- 1. We should stay firm for reasonable bans and we should also listen to our children to find out their reasons to breach agreements. Sharing with them about our own relevant experiences facilitates frank discussion and communication.
- 2. Surfing with them to appropriate websites to search for proper education can justify our reasons and reinforce our stand for banning.
- 3. We have to complain to relevant official department if we encounter websites with violent, sex and obscene content allowing underage youth to access.

If my children receive cyber-bullying messages, what should I do?

- 1. Cyber-bullying can cause emotional distress, lower self-esteem, social anxiety and damage of trust on people. Parents need to be serious and understanding when their children are confronted with these threats. Let the children know we will stand by their side.
- 2. Some children may avoid telling their parents about a cyber-bullying incident either fearing that parents may make things worse or negating their worries immediately. Therefore, blaming the child for possible misdeeds that attract bullying and / or underestimating their concerns should be avoided. Parents are advised to stay calm, support their children, encourage and accept their expression of feelings. The following are some suggestions to handle cyber-bullying with your children:
 - $\widehat{\mathbf{T}}$ Do not reply to cyberbullies, as this may stimulate further intimidation
 - Do not delete cyberbullies' messages which may be used as evidence later
 - To not post personal information, such as email address, telephone number and portrait photographs, to any websites, which provide further chances of bullying
 - Report the bullying incident to the Internet service provider or social network manager for their follow up
 - Accompany your children to seek help from school guidance staff and/or social worker if bullying is suspected
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D. Modulate ways of supervision according to children's need

Question 16

How can I limit my children's time use of computers, smartphones or other mobile electronic screen products?

- 1. It is difficult to monitor children's use of smartphone or mobile electronic screen products. They may have some sensible justifications for using them. Parents may allow children to use these mobile electronic screen products during idle time such as waiting for transport or during short break after study revision.
- 2. We should remind and enforce regular break to their children. Sometimes, simply staying aside with their children or politely asking what they are doing with the smartphone can interfere their continuing use.
- 3. Switching off Wi-Fi network or restricting its usage late at night, such as keeping their smartphone will help to limit their time use. Again, enhancing children's understanding and cooperation are more advisable than restrictive measures.
- 4. We should be prepared to take actions to confront their children's improper computer use. Parents should remain calm and firm while enforcing rules of computer use. Prolonged scolding and criticism which, usually lead to escalation of negative emotions and greater conflict, are not recommended.



My children will enter secondary school soon and start to argue with me. How should I adjust my ways to supervise their use in these electronic screen products?



- 1. We need to adjust our ways of supervision according to children's degree of maturity and demonstrated self-control.
- 2. For primary school students, computers, smartphones and other electronic screen products should be locked, password-protected and prohibited for use while we are not at home. Placing the computer in some open areas and positioning the screen at conspicuous places can facilitate easy monitoring. Installing safety software tools can filter out some websites that contain content inappropriate for children, monitor their online activities and limit the amount of time they spend online. Generally, enforcing the use of these products according to mutual agreement between parents and children can effectively rectify misuse.
- 3. For secondary school students, open communication and empowerment are important. Surfing with and talking to them about their favourite activities and interests for computer use can enhance our understanding of how they are using their computers. Parents need to be patient to find out whether there are reasonable explanations for their children's violation of rules. Rules may be revised to allow for change of circumstances.
- 4. Despite the technologies are advancing rapidly, persistent use of effective parenting principles and skills can help to maintain good parent-child relationship and healthy growth of the children. Once entering puberty, it is normal for adolescents to have their own opinions. We need to understand and take it as an essential step of growth.

HEALTH TIPS

The following 10 health tips aim to serve as reference to encourage healthy use of the technology through minimizing the potential harmful health effects that may be relating to its use.

1. Be physically active, go outdoor

- Consecutive use for more than one hour of Internet and other electronic screen products including smartphones, tablet personal computers, video games, or televisions is discouraged.
- **Physical activities, including outdoor activities, are encouraged:**
 - Pre-schoolers: Accumulate at least three hours physical activities daily.
 - Under 2 years old:

Parents can give more opportunities for motor activities by allowing toddlers to run and walk instead of being carried or riding in a baby stroller.

 \bigcirc 2 to 6 years old:

Parents and teachers should encourage play (preferably outdoor), stretching, aerobic, muscle strengthening and group activities daily. At home, light intensity activities (e.g. playing with toys, dressing up, packing school bags, etc.) on top of more vigorous ones (e.g. brisk walking, riding tricycle, playing hide-and-seek, etc.) are the range of activities good for young children's health and growth.

- Primary and secondary school students (6 to 18 years old): Accumulate at least 1 hour of moderate - to vigorous - intensity physical activity daily.
 - Moderate-intensity physical activity e.g. swimming, cycling or playing volleyball.
 - Vigorous-intensity physical activity e.g. playing basketball, football or rope skipping.

2. Engage in interactive activities in real life

Play time and talking between children and parents, especially for younger children, is encouraged for emotional bonding and social development.

- Group activities are encouraged for development of social and communication skills as well as emotional management.
- Parents and teachers are encouraged to appreciate and acknowledge the importance of non-academic achievements in the holistic development of children and adolescents.

3. Limit screen time and choose screen activities wisely

- The following suggestions on screen time for children and adolescents are recommended.
 - **Pre-schoolers**:
 - Under 2 years old:

Your child needs a large amount of parent-child interaction before two years old. Avoid letting him in contact with any electronic screen products unless to do interactive video-chat with family members under parents' guidance. If you think the use of certain screen activity may benefit his learning and development, always accompany and guide him and set limits for him.

 \bigcirc 2 to 5 years old:

The daily accumulated time for your child to watch TV or use computer, tablet computer or smartphone should be restricted to within one hour. The screen activities should be interactive and educative, and to be carried out under your guidance.

Primary school students:

6 to 12 years old:

Limit recreational screen time to no more than two hours a day. Set rules to help children build up time management skills.

Secondary school students:

12 to 18 years old:

Adolescents should be trained to develop good time management skills and self-discipline to work independently and prepare themselves to be responsible adults. Regular breaks should be adopted if prolonged screen time e.g. for academic purpose, is unavoidable.

Interactive games and apps, chosen or approved by a parent, and playing together with parents is preferable to passive watching of TV and video programmes.

When watching TV and video programmes, parents are advised to watch and discuss the content together with children to offer guidance.

4. Blink, break and rest

- Rest for 20-30 seconds after every 20-30 minutes when using electronic screen products.
- **?** Change position, blink eyes and do muscle relaxation exercise.



Keep back and neck straight with elbow supported



Stretch fingers backward



Keep palm up and stretch wrist downward



Circle shoulder blade backward



Tuck chin in



Stretch neck sideway



Stretch chest wall

5. Adopt proper setting

Adjust brightness, font size and workstation.



- A Eyes should be slightly above the top of the screen and no less than 50cm from the screen.
- B Sit upright and close to the desk.
- **C** Forearms should be approximately horizontal and supported by the desk. A space in front of the keyboard to allow hands and wrists to rest when not typing.
- D Keep wrists straight when keying.
- **(E)** Position a mouse within easy reach so it can be used with a straight wrist.
- **(F)** Legs should have rooms to move under the desk.
- G Choosing a chair with round edge or curved cushion seat can avoid excess pressure from the edge of seat on the backs of legs and knees. A footrest may be helpful especially for children.



Keep reading distance no less than 50cm for a computer, 40cm for a tablet personal computer or 30cm for a smartphone.



6. Protect hearing, prevent accident and pay attention to hygiene

Adopt the 60 – 60 Rule: Listen at no more than 60% of the mobile product's maximum volume for less than cumulative 60 minutes a day. Prolonged use of earphones should be avoided to prevent accumulative noise induced damage.



- Sound with sudden rise and fall of noise level e.g. shooting, hammer, and firecracker in video games (impulse sound) and sound of noise level change drastically over time, e.g. road traffic noise, rock music (fluctuating sound) are more damaging than continuous noise with the same sound level. Adjust the output to a lower volume setting for music / game / film that include impulse and fluctuating sound.
- Use the built-in "smart volume" feature which help to regulate the volume and cap the possible maximum output in the products, if available.
- Avoid using mobile electronic screen products while doing other tasks requiring attention e.g. crossing the roads, etc.
 - Pay attention to personal hygiene, clean the surface of the screen regularly and avoid sharing the electronic screen products with others.

7. Ensure adequate sleep time and appropriate environment

- Adequate sleep time is essential for health. Babies and toddlers need two to three short naps in the daytime while 3-5 years old may need at most one daytime nap. Total amount of sleep in a day is different for different age groups:
 - Wewborns (up to 2 months): 12 18 hours
 - ✓ Infants (2 12 months) 13 15 hours
 - Toddlers 1-3 years old: 12 13 hours
 - 3-5 years old: 11 13 hours
 - 👽 5-12 years old: 9 11 hours
 - 👽 12-18 years old: 8.5 9.5 hours
- Fincourage a quiet, dim and comfortable sleeping place. Turn off the computer and keep other electronic screen products out of reach during sleep.
- Establish a soothing pre-sleep routine with a period of relaxing activities an hour or so before bed, e.g. take a bath, read a book, avoid stressful and stimulating activities such as video game playing as well as vigorous exercises.

8. Be aware of cyber-safety

- Once starting to use the Internet, children should be taught to protect their privacy and avoid exposing too much personal information.
- Children should be shown and learn how to set password and not to share with others, except parents, if it is found necessary.
- **Children and adolescents should not meet a "friend" only known online.**
- Children and adolescents should not respond to messages or photos that make them feel uncomfortable or scared, and they should report the incidents to parents or teachers and seek their help.

9. Behave oneself when using Internet and social networking sites

Children and adolescents should avoid gossiping, harassing or flaming others with mean or scornful messages that would harm other's reputation or relationship with friends or family. They should be respectful and polite online and avoid sending mean messages or making someone look bad, which may remain in the Internet for a very long time with damages out of imaginations.

10. Restrict access to inappropriate content

- Parents should frequently monitor the content, websites and activities that their children engage, as well as make use of Internet safety tools to restrict access to any inappropriate content.
- **Parents should choose age-appropriate video games for their children.**

Hotlines for Healthy Use of Internet

Name of Organization	Telephone
Education Bureau (EDB) & Hong Kong Playground Association (HKPA) – Healthy e-Generation Network One-stop Hotline	5721 4040 (Telephone/ WhatsApp/ WeChat) Monday to Saturday (except public holidays) 9:30am to 9:30pm
Hong Kong Christian Service – Online New Page – Online Addiction Counselling Centre	2561 0363 Monday to Friday 10am to 1pm & 2pm to 6pm
Tung Wah Group of Hospitals "Say No to Internet Addiction" Project	2827 1000 Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday 10am to 7pm & Tuesday and Friday 10am to 10pm
The Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups – Youthline	2777 8899 Monday to Saturday 2pm to 2am *WhatsApp : 6277 8899 Monday to Friday 7pm -10pm

The above list is not exhaustive.

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For further information on healthy use of Internet and electronic screen products, please visit website: http://www.shs.gov.hk/english/internet/health_effects.html



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