

YOUR MOBILE PHONE CONTRACT

BETWEEN PARENTS AND THEIR YOUNG PERSON

Introducing the contract

A contract is a great way to open a conversation about mobile phone use, digital footprint, reputation, bullying, cyberbullying, text driving, etc. Below is a basic agreement that can be adapted to your family, as well as reasons for why this is important.

Discuss each item with your young person, hear their suggestions and reach an agreement. If the whole family is on board, a contract will be much easier to enforce.

SINGLING OUT SPEECH...

YOU CAN'T USE
INTERNET AFTER
10PM

is more difficult to enforce than:

SPEAKING AS A FAMILY...

AS A FAMILY, WE
SHUT DOWN OUR WIFI
AT 10PM.

YOU CAN'T HAVE YOUR
MOBILE PHONE AT
THE DINNER TABLE

is more difficult to enforce than:

AS A FAMILY, WE DON'T
HAVE OUR MOBILE
PHONES AT THE TABLE.

YOU CAN'T USE WIFI
UNTIL YOUR CHORES
ARE DONE

is more difficult to enforce than:

AS A FAMILY, WE
CAN ACCESS THE
WIFI PASSWORD FOR
THE WEEKEND ONCE
CHORES ARE DONE

FAIR USE POLICY

Young people often need to know that family 'rules' are fair and responsible before they are happy to 'buy in'. This theme is expressed throughout the points below. This is your family contract, so add or remove anything that doesn't relate to you and your family. To get the most out of your family contract, remember to use it as a guide, not a weapon. As a guide, it will strengthen family relationships; however, if it is used as a weapon to pull out and wield whenever there's a breach, family relationships will suffer.

PRIOR TO HANDING OVER A PHONE, HERE ARE SOME QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- Q Is your young person ready to care for an expensive device?
- Q Are they aware how calls and data usage can result in big bills?
- Q Have they shown through other responsible behaviours that they are ready for a mobile phone?
- Q Have you provided them with the information they need to be aware of the risks?
- Q At this age and stage, would they be better off with a basic calls only phone, instead of a smart phone?
- Q Are they mature enough not to use their phones for mischief? Do they have a history of mischief?

A CONTRACT GIVES PARENTS THE OPPORTUNITY TO COACH THEIR YOUNG PERSON AND MAINTAIN OVERSIGHT.

HERE ARE SOME THINGS TO THINK ABOUT BEFORE YOU DISCUSS THE CONTRACT:

- Q Will they own the phone, or will it be a 'family' phone? A family phone is great intermediate step to phone ownership, particularly when your child is too young to get a job to help cover expenses.
- Q Are they aware that you bought the phone and therefore, own it? Ensuring your young person knows they are entrusted to use this device, rather than 'gifting' it, is helpful for ongoing monitoring.
- Q Will you be paying for all their texts and calls, or will they contribute? If you require them to have a phone for safety reasons, it seems fair that you would pay for at least some of the costs, which also gives you more authority over how they will use it.
- Q It is standard practice for schools to have internet safe filtering software for young people's safety and to prevent access to harmful sites. Is it the same at your home?
- Q Will you permit them to purchase data? Controlling access to unsuitable material is a lot harder if they access data over a mobile network; however, there are apps that you can set up on the phone to filter harmful content.
- Q If you are installing apps to assist with monitoring, time restrictions and harmful content, what type of app is right for the age and stage of your young person?

COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR YOUNG PERSON

Dropping a contract on your young person with no discussion will not make it a 'done deal'. Perhaps the most valuable aspect of this exercise is the discussion you will have together as you work out the details. Ensure that, as well as the rules, your young person understands why you are concerned for their safety, and the consequences if they fail to honour the contract (such as, relinquishing access to the phone for a period). It may be their phone; however, they are still accountable to you for their behaviour.

Does your young person already have a mobile phone?

Establishing good foundations prior to set up makes it much easier than trying to back track after the event. However, many parents who read this may already have a young person using a mobile phone. If you choose to implement new rules, you will need to offer an explanation as to why things are changing. You could express that "due to recently becoming better informed, I've realized that for safety reasons, things need to change". These changes may be more favourably received if implemented for your whole family, not just your young person.

Reasons behind 'rules'

1 CHILD SAFETY When discussing child safety, former FBI agent, Brett Lee, indicates that in most cases he's dealt with, a predator will ask a young person:

- Do they have a good relationship with their parents?
- Are their screens private? (in their room etc.)
- Do their parents have access to their device and password?

Predators want to know they are talking to someone less likely to be monitored. Ensure your young person knows that if they are asked "who is watching?", they should respond that their screen is monitored by parents.

SOURCE: Brett Lee, Internet Safe Education. Bullying & Cyber Safety in Education Conference, 2017, personal communication.

2 SEXTING Sending photos, producing or receiving naked photos (without deleting straight away), is illegal. A person may be charged with possession, production and distribution of Child Exploitation Material. In Queensland, from 2006-2016, 1,470 young offenders, aged 10-16, were cautioned by police or referred to a restorative justice process. 28 young offenders were sentenced and will hold a criminal record for life as registered sex offenders. Victoria is the only state that has changed its laws to focus on penalties for non-consensual sharing; however, in other states, possession is still illegal. Parents can help their young person understand consensual sharing of images by always asking for permission to share family photos online. It's important that they gain autonomy over their images and they are respected when they don't want them shared online.

SOURCE: Sentencing Spotlight on child exploitation material offences – Queensland Sentencing Advisory Council

3 PORNOGRAPHY Watching porn has serious effects on the brain and has been linked to a number of mental health symptoms including; depression, poor social integration, decreased emotional bonding and low self-esteem. It often affirms abusive behaviour as being acceptable or normal. Future relationships can be affected through a lack of genuine intimacy, less desire to pursue a partner, and impact on future sexual performance. Two-thirds of 15 - 17 year olds have viewed porn websites when they didn't mean to access them.

SOURCE: Statement of Research: Liz Walker, Sexuality Educator and Chair of Porn Harms Kids

4 JOB APPLICATIONS Data shows that 93% of hiring managers will review a candidate's social profile before making a hiring decision.

SOURCE: Jobvite: 2014 Edition of its annual Social Recruiting Survey

5 CYBER BULLYING One of the top reasons students don't tell their parents about cyber bullying is the fear that they would overreact or restrict digital access. Not reacting and blocking a bully has been proven to help in 76% of cases.

SOURCE: Reach out Survey (1000 Australian students interviewed 14-25 years of age) 2016. Reasons why victims of bullying don't tell.

6 ROAD SAFETY Research shows that people aged 17-39 years have the highest rate of claimed use while driving, and the greatest involvement in crashes where hand-held mobile phone use is a factor.

SOURCE: NSW road safety

7 SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS Conversations can be addressed and worked out, without harming (or defaming) another person. This is an increasing legal issue with one-off social media statements costing people their careers, sponsorship, reputation and future opportunities. Almost half of the defamation inquiries received by Slater and Gordon lawyers in the last year were related to material posted on social media.

SOURCE: The Australian, August 25th 2015.

8 BE INVOLVED Understand where your young person spends time online and what apps they use. Serious online bullying and inflammatory issues often reveal warning signs. Most 'dramas' benefit from intervention from parents who are aware of their young persons 'online life'. For young people growing up with technology, there is very little difference between online and offline life – it's all one and the same. It's important to keep watch for any signs of withdrawal, mood swings, depressive symptoms, anxiety or other mental health indications that could indicate online bullying or problematic internet use.

9 BETTER SLEEP A common objective from young people wanting their phones in their room is: "But I use my phone for my alarm". Alarms are less than \$5 at a cheap shop. Research has proven better sleep and less stress when mobiles are out of the bedrooms at night. It's important to negotiate with your young person. For example: "I will hand the phone to one of my parents promptly at ____ pm every school night and every weekend night at ____ pm. I will get it back at ____ am." Maybe the family decision is for the home WiFi to be shut off at 10pm, but texting is still allowed or there could be a docking station for every family member to charge their phones overnight. The important thing is to make a decision that is right for your family that enables maximum sleep.

SOURCE: This is what happens to your brain and body when you check your phone before bed, Business Insider

10 BUILD STRONG VALUES Andy Skidmore, CEO of Burn Brights says that "Often young people forget that behaviour that isn't acceptable offline is also not acceptable online. As a parent, focusing with young people on positive values and actions that exemplifies good character, instead of negative actions and consequences, in my opinion has proven to be the best way to change behaviour in young people."

SOURCE: Andy Skidmore, CEO. Burn Bright, speaking on character development, personal communication.

Parent and Young Person Mobile Contract

- 1** I promise that my parents will always know my phone passwords, and I won't share my passwords with friends. I understand that my parents have a right to look at my phone whenever there's a need for them to do so, even without my permission. This is based on my best interest and because they care for my safety.
- 2** I will not send or receive naked photos. I understand that there could be serious legal consequences including getting expelled from my high school, affecting my reputation, career opportunities and receiving unwanted attention from people in the future. I will never share anyone's image (no matter how benign) without first checking. I (Parent/Caregiver), will always ask for permission to share my young person's images online, and model consensual sharing.
- 3** I will never search for porn or anything else that I wouldn't want my parents finding. I will not lie about where I've been, I will show my internet history openly, and talk honestly about it. I will not delete history or use incognito mode.
- 4** I understand that my behaviour on my phone can impact my future reputation - even in ways that I am not able to predict (relationships, career, future education). This includes not making sexist comments, sexual jokes, racist or homophobic remarks. I will also seriously consider any religious or political statements before making them.
- 5** I promise I will tell my parents when I receive suspicious or alarming phone calls or messages from people I don't know. I will also tell them if I am being harassed by someone via my phone. I (Parent/Caregiver), promise I will not overreact if they tell me this, but will calmly walk through basics of; STOP, BLOCK & TELL (Report via Esafety Website).
- 6** When I am old enough to drive, I won't text/call and drive. I (Parent/Caregiver), will not text/call while driving (without hands-free) as I also know it is a major cause of accidents in young people and I want to set an example.
- 7** I will NEVER use my phone or social media to bully or tease anyone, even if my friends think it's funny. I (Parent/Caregiver), will not support 'mean spirited' behaviour (bullying) online or in person (over dinner table/ gossip etc).
- 8** I will show my parent/caregiver the apps I use, including how to use them. This includes showing them how to switch social media accounts on the same platform. I will also agree to not block my parents from seeing posts. I (Parent/Caregiver), will **1.** Download these main apps **2.** Learn the basics and **3.** Add my young person on the condition I will not comment on their comments or photos if my young person does not want me to.
- 9** The negotiated rules of having my phone at night time (depending on my age) are outlined below:

- 10** My phone is an extension of myself; my values & character. I commit to ensuring that my online activity reflects my offline life.

SIGN HERE: **YOUNG PERSON**

DATE SIGNED

SIGN HERE: **PARENT/ CAREGIVER**

DATE TO BE REVIEWED

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