

# Technology

## **You, Your Son and Technology**

Computers are now a part of everyday life for nearly all members of our society. Adults and children alike have access to internet-enabled devices at every turn; whether it be a mobile phone, computers at school, our televisions or gaming consoles.

This article explores questions posed both as a teacher and as a parent and the answers suggested serve as guidance only. They may not fit in with everyone's family ethos and are given in a spirit which will perhaps start a dialogue at home about the use of technology.

### **When should I give my son a mobile phone?**

Quite simply, when you think they will need it; it is not a fashion accessory but a functioning practical communication tool. An obvious answer, but when would that be?

If boys are travelling to school by themselves then a phone is useful for calling or texting parents or carers in an emergency to let them know when a coach is, for example, late back from a trip.

Boys are not permitted to use their mobile phones in the Junior or Lower Schools during the day and hence must have them switched off and stored away securely. The Junior School has a 'Phone box' where they are signed in and out.

A mobile need not be the latest iPhone but something smaller such as the Vodafone Alcatel OneTouch with a pay-as-you-go Sim

card. The advantages are that they are small, not valuable (from about £5 upwards) and robust. Pay-as-you-go has the advantage that boys can be taught the cost of a text and a phone call – so a spending limit or plan is useful.

As boys get older they may want to receive emails on their phone and have use for a wider variety of apps, both for socialising and school. Whatever upgrade is chosen, the parental controls and restrictions the technology offers should be considered. For example, an iPhone (and indeed all the Apple products) has options to restrict boys' abilities to install and use apps on the device. The content the device will accept from the Internet can also be age-rated. It would be useful to discuss these options with your son. Having a degree of control - and hence not sharing the restrictions PIN with your son - is essential.

### **Should my children have computers or tablets in their bedroom?**

When children are young a computer in their room is not advisable as you should be in a position to be able to limit screen time. A "family" computer in a public area is ideal so everyone can see the screen; you will know who is using it and what they are doing. Ideally, every family member should have their own and different login to the machine, reserving the administration of the machine to a parent or parents.

Children like their own device as they get older and eventually a computer or laptop per child

is inevitable. Increasingly homework requires research and a word processor and consideration should be given to children having a laptop or PC in their bedroom if that is where they work. However, restriction and monitoring are still key.

A good family rule to think about is the “charge at bedtime” i.e. all mobile devices to be on charge and out of bedrooms at bedtime. This practice ensures that there is no use once in bed and parents may want to set the example. An hour or two of no screen before bed has also been shown in research to be good for children – not always practical but sensible.

### **How can I restrict my son’s use of a device and access to the internet?**

Eventually boys will have access to all kinds of material on the internet; to them it is the norm. What they describe as “banta” on social media is akin to what was said solely in the playground - the difference is that it is recorded and can be misinterpreted. There are several ways in which parents can help children make good choices about how they use technology and can help guide them down a path which will keep them safe from harm and allow them to use these fantastic inventions for the better.

Your broadband provider will most likely have provided you with a router. Routers are generally configurable. Internet Service Provider (ISP) offer parental controls which allows for filters on the home system and blocks undesirable material to particular devices, including TVs. If in doubt about how to configure the settings, it is advisable to leave it with its default settings and ask an expert. (You may decide not to allow your son to have access to your router settings, no matter how technically competent he may be).

Mobile phones and portable devices often come with parental controls which are much easier to set. Once the parental controls on the device are set, parents should also ensure they

are in control of the App Store of any device – it should connect using your email address and your private password. This will restrict boys from downloading any app without asking parents first. It is worth noting that an App put on one Apple device may well install on all devices – so check each device and make sure the apps are age appropriate to the user.

There are also software packages which are available to download and install to monitor the use of laptops and desktop machines. These attempt to prevent access to inappropriate content or using software which is age inappropriate. Some can restrict the amount of time the machine is used per day. For example, Microsoft offers Microsoft Family Safety software. It is advisable to discuss this as a family - and particularly with respect to safety - and as children grow older you will feel more confident about increasing the number and types of applications accessed.

Education and dialogue are key. At school boys are regularly given lessons and assemblies with regard to safe use of digital technologies. Open discussion about online behaviour and talking to an adult about events which make them feel uncomfortable are the best ways forward.

There is no question that we are living in changing times and in some respects we can only react to the new technology out there. It is our collective responsibility to do our best to ensure that our boys use digital technologies in a sensible, enjoyable and productive way.

### **Glossary of Terms**

**SIM Card** – the card in your phone which connects to the phone service provider.

**Internet Service Provider** – the company which provides your broadband connection.

**Apps** – applications or software. Most mobile phones have apps such as a web-browser so you can look at webpages and an email client. Apps can be downloaded from some kind of "App Store" depending on the flavour of the

phone you have. Some apps are free and some apps you pay for.

**Router** – the box between your computer and the telephone line. One end is connected to the telephone line the other to your devices. It is responsible for routing communications to and from the Internet to each device.

