Parenting Strategies for Managing Technology

Computers are powerful tools, we have consciously chosen to have them be a part of our education at Eastside Prep. It is a safe bet that the vast majority of our students will use computers for work and other things for the rest of their lives and we believe that developing healthy, productive habits now is of immense value. However, as valuable as they are we acknowledge it can make your job harder as a parent, it certainly makes being a teacher more complex. While computers are amazing tools, they can also be objects of distraction; making it difficult to focus on one task at a time and they can allow your students to access more information than you would like them to have. To manage these machines effectively, students need your assistance. Effort put in at this juncture to help them build good computer habits, will pay off for the rest of their lives. As your partner in this effort, we have gathered a list of strategies to help your child manage their online lives as well as assist them and you in helping them use these machines in a way that is most productive to their education and well-being. Keep in mind this is an ever evolving list and it will change and grow over time. In addition, we hope to hear from you about ways you have helped your student (or yourselves) maintain balance in an ever changing technological landscape.

Of course, there are no sure-fire ways to prevent your child from being irresponsible on their machines or stumbling upon things you don't want them to see. Additionally, all students are different – we anticipate these suggestions will work for about 90% of you. If your child is in the 10% and you need more severe ways to manage your child's computer use, we ask you to come see us about some other ideas. Finally, as with all parenting issues, partnership with your child is key. If issues with the computer become too adversarial, it will likely lead to rebellion or behavior that goes underground. Unfortunately, we can't compete with the time and ability students have to get around blocks we put up.

Below is a list of strategies, we offer them as ideas and ways of thinking about managing technology in your home. In most cases you'll want to try one or two and see if behavior shifts. You know your family and children best so choose things that you are confident in. If we could offer some observations after many years working with adolescents it is that "you are the only parent who won't let me do X, Y or Z" has been the go-to argument for teenagers since the dawn of time and that despite all evidence to the contrary, teenagers do want some firm but reasonable and consistent boundaries from you.

BASIC STRATEGIES

- Restrict computer and cell phone use to public spaces – keep in mind that a smart phone is the equivalent to a computer in terms of access and procrastination and doesn't have the benefit of a computer's productivity.
- Insist on a clean slate for each activity in which they engage. All programs need to be closed except the ones they need to complete the task at hand.
  - Despite popular belief, we are not good multi-taskers so when students are Skyping, Facebooking or texting while they are doing their homework, they are not giving any of those tasks their full attention. Both homework and socializing would improve if they did one first and the other afterward.
  - One way to manage this is to provide an outlet with structured "free time". For example, 20 minutes of Minecraft after homework is completed or answer texts after the paper is written, etc.
- All computers and cell phones charged in the kitchen. This is the best way to ensure these machines are not in rooms and away from your supervision.

INTERMEDIATE STRATEGIES

- Install computer monitoring software. Our current favorite is Qustodio.
  - Make sure to discuss the software with your student in a way that doesn't make the software akin to a spy, but more something that keeps him or her safe and gives you both information about their level of productivity.
- Have students give you their passwords to their computer and cell phones, along with apps associated with both.
- Make it policy that computer histories cannot be deleted.
- Put a vacation light timer on your router so it goes off at bed time – kids are bound to be more productive if they know they will lose internet connection at a specific time.

ADVANCED STRATEGIES

- Take away administrative privileges on your student's computer
- Uninstall everything on the computer that is not needed for school work

SAFETY

- Don't install computer programs on your machine without consulting with you or the tech department.
  - There is no such thing as a "free lunch". Downloading some of these free programs on the internet is like someone handing you a sandwich off the street. You want to know more about it before you put it in your body.
  - If your student does get a computer virus, please see the tech department right away.

- Limit the number of friends on social media
  - Each person your student is friends with on social media is another person that has intimate details about his or her life. No one really has 800 friends in real life, so they shouldn't on social media either.
- Teach your student about the digital tattoo.
  - Colleges and employers regularly check social media to do reconnaissance on their applicants. Keep that in mind whenever you post anything anywhere.
  - Assume what you post will be there <u>forever</u>. Things don't go away on the internet.
  - Apply the grandmother rule to all computer posting. If you would be too embarrassed to have your grandmother read it or see it, you shouldn't be posting it.
- Strangers on the internet are still strangers.
- Don't give out your passwords to anyone except the tech office and your parents.
- Be thoughtful and deliberate about location trackers on your phone. If you DO have 800 friends on Facebook and you have location trackers on that means 800 people will know where you are when you post and possibly at all times.

ENSURE BALANCE

- Make sure students have lots of face time – when friends come over to your house encourage them to engage in activities that require face to face interaction in addition to playing on a computer or video game console.
- Provide good role modeling. Take a look at your own technology use – do you check your phone while talking to other people? Do you text during dinner? Children are far more likely to do what we do, rather than what we say.
- Set limits on computer use. The American Academy of Pediatrics suggests that "Children and teens should engage with entertainment media (this includes computers and television) for no more than one or two hours per day, and that should be high-quality content." (note that as entertaining as EPS homework can be, you can safely consider it as not counting against those two hours)

It is our hope that this document provides you with some ideas and resources should you need them. If everything is well balanced in your home that's fantastic, if you did some smart things to get it that way, let us know and we might include it in a future version of this list. If things are starting to feel out of balance, we hope that these ideas might help you shift things positively. Perhaps most importantly, if you are trying things and they just don't seem to be working, let us know. You certainly won't be the first parent who has come to us for advice and you certainly won't be the last.