

# Raising Digitally Responsible Kids:

A close-up photograph of a white smartphone lying flat on a silver laptop keyboard. The phone's screen is black and turned off. The laptop's keys are visible in the background, slightly out of focus.

## A Family Contract for Digital Devices

Young people today are fortunate to grow up in an age of incredible technological advances with unlimited information at their fingertips. They can be in immediate and constant contact with friends, family – and just about anyone else on the planet. Such easy accessibility is commonplace for the younger generation, but it can raise red flags for parents who may be concerned that their children are sharing too much information over social media or spending too much time using their devices at the expense of school and family time. The reality is that there are risks and responsibilities associated with modern digital devices and helping kids learn to use them properly is an integral aspect of raising children in today's world.

Open dialogue between parents and children and, specifically, the creation of a family contract can promote responsible use of digital devices. Pitcairn frequently recommends family contracts as an effective way to set mutual expectations, clarify responsibilities, and minimize future conflicts. When families work together to prepare a contract, it promotes trust, incorporates multiple perspectives, and makes it more likely that younger family members will follow the terms of the agreement.

Pitcairn developed the following discussion guide to help you engage in open dialogue and create a “Digital Device Contract”, customized specifically by and for your family. We are proud to be the first and only family office to develop such a powerful resource for all to use.

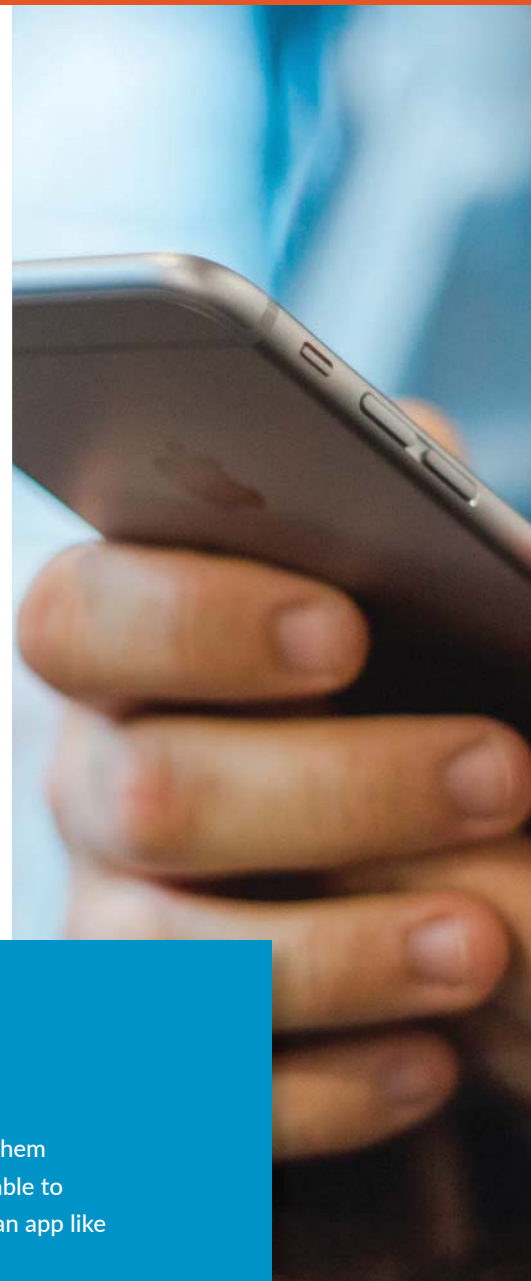
### What is a contract?

A contract is an enforceable agreement between two or more people or groups of people. It lists the responsibilities of each person or group who signs the contract, outlines acceptable and unacceptable actions, and spells out the rewards or consequences of certain actions. A contract is usually signed and dated by all who are involved and may also include a date when the contract expires or will be renegotiated.

## A Message for Younger Family Members

Growing up surrounded by laptops, smart phones, and iPads, you are probably more comfortable with these than you are with riding a bike. You have faster access to information and greater ability to connect with people all over the world, more than your parents could have ever imagined when they were your age. That's exciting for you, but it can be unsettling for your parents who are concerned about how to help you manage this "power."

One of the things we've learned is that a family contract can be a valuable tool to help families build trust and avoid conflicts. We've also found that for a contract to work well, everyone who signs the contract should have a say in how the contract is written. That doesn't mean you will get everything you want and, as you probably expect, your parents still have the final say on family rules. However, if you and your parents work together to prepare a "Digital Device Contract" you can both live by, your parents might be willing to give you a little more freedom and you might not give them as many gray hairs. In the end, knowing what to expect will make everyone's life a little smoother, and hopefully, with fewer disagreements all around.



### Tips for Young People

1

**Tell your parents about your experience with digital devices.** This will help them understand how devices make your life better or easier. For instance, being able to Facetime with your best friend that moved across the country or how using an app like Quizlet helps you study for tests and quizzes.

2

**Tell your parents what your friends are and aren't allowed to do with their devices.** Your rules may differ, but sharing information will give your parents a clearer picture of how you really use your devices – not just how they think you may use them.

3

**Remain calm.** Show your parents you are mature enough to not only have a discussion about responsible device use, but also that you can carry out the agreement as a responsible young adult.

4

**Understand that in the eyes of your parents, your safety truly is the most important factor.** They make rules they believe are in your best interest, even if in the moment, those rules may not make sense to you.

## Steps to Develop Your Family Contract

Depending on the age range of your children, you may want to personalize the conversations and customize the contract based on their ages and responsibilities. For example, a teenager who is driving requires a no texting rule when on the road; compared to an elementary school child who requires WiFi to be turned off an hour before bed.

Set aside uninterrupted time to talk about your contract. You don't have to finish everything in one session, but it's better not to drag it out too long. The best results are likely if you finish the steps within a week.

1. **Prepare:** Parents should introduce the idea of a contract, emphasizing the benefits of setting mutual expectations. Read through the discussion guide with your child and highlight topics you want to discuss together. Set a time for everyone to sit down and talk. Preparation should take about 15 minutes.
2. **Discuss:** Everyone should share their thoughts about topics selected in the Discussion Guide and come to agreement on key issues. This could take 30-60 minutes.
3. **Personalize Your Contract:** There are many sample contracts available. Use one of Pitcairn's samples or view additional resources listed on the back page. Personalize it for your family's needs and sign it. This may take another 15-30 minutes.

## Be Good Communicators

1. Allow only one person to speak at a time.
2. Give all family members enough time to express their viewpoints.
3. Respect others' opinions even if yours is different.
4. Be fully engaged. Eliminate outside distractions during your conversations.
5. Pay attention to other people's body language for a better understanding of how they feel.

### Tips for Parents

1

**Parents don't always agree with each other, but try to avoid conflict in front of your child.** Reach an agreement ahead of time and present a united front to your child.

2

**Depending on your child's age, use a simplified contract for now and expand it in the future.** Create the contract to include age appropriate responsibilities, approved usages and limits. Revisit the contract annually as the child gets older.

3

**Be open to your child's comments about how friends use devices.** Ultimately, you make the rules for your family, but familiarity with other families' boundaries will help make sure your rules are reasonable.

## Discussion Guide

### Topics for Consideration



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#### Usage:

- ☐ What devices will be permitted? How and for what purposes can children use devices? What information can they access on devices?
- ☐ Where may devices be used? For example: bedroom, dining table, school, etc. Think about where and why using devices in certain areas is important or inappropriate.
- ☐ Are there times when it is very important for the children to use devices? At what times do parents think devices should be off-limits? Bedtime? Family meal times? Will limits be different on weekdays, weekends, and school vacations? Is there a daily amount of screen time?
- ☐ Do you plan to discuss how dependencies on digital devices can be unhealthy (digital addiction)? And how that changes the way we interact with others? Or how it can impact one's mental health?
- ☐ Will children listen to music, play games, watch movies, etc. on devices? Do parents want to restrict any activities? For permitted activities, how will parents and children decide what content is appropriate? Age-based guidelines or some other criteria?
- ☐ Which apps are allowed to be downloaded? Do children need to get permission from parents?
- ☐ Does your household model respectful communication when using virtual assistants like Siri and Alexa?
- ☐ Do parents plan to use technology tools to monitor device activity? Do the children have to share all passwords and accounts with parents?
- ☐ How and when will you respond to contacts (call, text, email) from each other, another family member, or other authority figures?
- ☐ May children share devices with others? If yes, is the child responsible for devices and content if someone else uses them?

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#### Safety:

- ☐ How will you protect children's privacy, family's privacy, and the privacy of others? May children share photos of themselves or others? What are the privacy policies of apps or games your children use and what types of data do they collect? Are location settings turned off? May children share details of when and where the family is traveling? Talk about safety concerns related to these questions.
- ☐ Are the children's passwords strong enough to thwart hackers? Do the children know the danger of public networks and how to connect safely to them? Do the children understand what a Phishing email is and what happens if they click on a bad link?
- ☐ How will passwords be protected? Do parents reserve the right to access devices at any time? Are children allowed to delete texts, instant messages, browsing history, or other content without parents' permission?
- ☐ Who may children contact – friends, family members, friends of friends? Are they forbidden to communicate with strangers or people they know little about?
- ☐ What should children do if contacted by an unknown user? What if children see or receive inappropriate information or experience something that makes them uncomfortable?
- ☐ What is proper etiquette for using devices?
- ☐ How can children be good citizens while using their devices? How will parents and children handle cyber bullying?

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#### Costs:

- ☐ Who is responsible for paying for all or part of the costs associated with each device?
- ☐ Who is responsible for paying for in-app purchases?
- ☐ If a device breaks, is lost, or not functioning, who pays to repair or replace the device?
- ☐ If the children go over talk, text, or data limits, who pays?
- ☐ Will there be extended warranty or device protection?



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#### Consequences:

- ☐ What are the consequences of the children not following the contract?
- ☐ Will parents restrict their children's device use for behavior, grades, or other factors not directly related to the device itself?

## Discussion Guide

### Topics for Consideration



#### Other Concerns:

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#### Notes:

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#### Parking Lot:

If family members bring up topics other than digital devices while you are developing your contract, note them here for future discussion.

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After discussing the topics in this Guide, you can adapt one of our sample Digital Device Contracts, use another example available online, or develop your own.

You may obtain electronic copies of Pitcairn's sample contracts at [www.pitcairn.com/digital-device-sample-contract](http://www.pitcairn.com/digital-device-sample-contract).

**Additional sample contracts can be found here on these sites by searching for “sample cell phone contracts”:**

**Pinterest**

[www.pinterest.com](http://www.pinterest.com)

**Between Us Parents**

[www.chicagonow.com/between-us-parents](http://www.chicagonow.com/between-us-parents)

**Very Well Family**

[www.verywellfamily.com](http://www.verywellfamily.com)

**Additional information and resources about age-appropriate games and apps, online security awareness, and cell phone safety can be found at these websites:**

**Common Sense Media**

[www.commonsensemedia.org](http://www.commonsensemedia.org)

**Institute for Responsible Online and Cell-Phone Communication (IROC2)**

[www.iroc2.org](http://www.iroc2.org)

**KnowBe4**

[www.knowbe4.com](http://www.knowbe4.com)

**NetSmartz**

[www.missingkids.org/NetSmartz](http://www.missingkids.org/NetSmartz)

**Uknowkids.com**

**(subscription required)**

[www.uknowkids.com](http://www.uknowkids.com)

## About Pitcairn

Pitcairn is a true family office and leader in helping families navigate the challenges and opportunities created by the interplay of family and financial dynamics. Through Wealth Momentum®, an experience-based family office model, Pitcairn helps families and single family offices achieve a more effective and complete experience. Since its inception, Pitcairn has partnered with some of the world's wealthiest families to meet their needs and drive better outcomes – year to year, decade to decade, generation to generation. Today, Pitcairn is recognized as an innovator, guiding families through generational transitions and redefining the industry standard for family offices. The firm is located in Philadelphia, with offices in New York and Washington, DC and a network of resources around the world. You can learn more about our family office services as well as find additional articles, news, and events on our website at [www.pitcairn.com](http://www.pitcairn.com).



**PHILADELPHIA**

One Pitcairn Place, Suite 3000  
165 Township Line Road  
Jenkintown, PA 19046-3593



**NEW YORK**

*Representative Office*  
99 Park Avenue, Suite 320  
New York, NY 10016-1501



**WASHINGTON, DC**

Tysons II, Suite 220  
1750 Tysons Boulevard  
McLean, VA 22102-4228

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[www.pitcairn.com](http://www.pitcairn.com) | 800 211 1745