



The horse bolts sooner than you think

By Matthew Faulkner, *Headmaster Parsons Green Prep*

Be in total control of the device

If you do find yourself handing over the hardware, make sure that multiple strings are attached to it. Make it clear that you—and not your child—are the owner of the device. Make sure you know the password, have restricted the available content and have established the times it can be used. The latter two can all be done through your broadband provider, but if you want to go further then install one of the many apps which mirror onto your phone exactly what they see on theirs. For example, www.ourpact.com gives you 360-degree control of what your child sees and does. If your child does not want to be part of this arrangement, then the answer is simple; no phone.

In an ideal world, all this is achieved through conversation and negotiation

As we know children are creative debaters when it comes to tech: it is easy to fall for the argument that nobody else is subject to such restrictions, that his or her conversations should remain private and so on, but you concede at your peril. If you can win the argument with a 10-year-old, you will have a much better chance with a 16-year-old. Don't lose it.

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Every school worth its salt will advise parents about the pleasures and perils of the internet. The message should be a clear one to all: talk to your children about their usage, agree a plan and then enforce it. But what is it like having the conversations with our children so urgently recommended to us? Children can be wily negotiators and in matters of technology they fight their corner with passion. Many are the parents who have been outgunned and outmanoeuvred by savvy and determined offspring. Technology, and social media in particular, is central to many of their lives and ground is not given lightly, especially by teenagers. They can bat you away with facts and figures, dismay and denials, emotional entreaties and hand-on-heart promises to self-monitor.

Have those e-safety conversations while you can

My daughter is now 16. She has grown up in step with the internet and social media. In the infancy of the web, she was an infant. She is now almost fully grown, and the internet is likewise a sprawling adult. We have had conversations over the years about what, when and how she goes online, but it has really been a game of catch up. Just when I thought we

had a rough agreement about The Sims, along came Facebook. When I thought we saw eye to eye on Instagram, along came Snapchat, and then Whatsapp, and then Depop, and so on.

Turning a teenager to your way of thinking is difficult but not impossible. If you are the parent of a 10-year-old, however, the advantage is yours. And this is my point here. We—the parents—hold all the power at the beginning of our children's technological journey. The power—to decide what technology they have access to, and when and how they use it—is ours to keep or to give away. Give them a free rein early on and they will challenge any attempt to pull them up. Keep the rein tight and you stay in control, but you have to apply the stops early.

Access to technology should be a privilege rather than a right

You do not have to buy your child a fancy phone or tablet just because they claim to need one. Only once they are travelling a lot on their own, or going to a school where it is the norm to have one, need you start to feel the pressure to provide. Until that point, they should just use yours—at the times and in the place you decide.