



things you  
don't know  
about your  
child's  
digital life.

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**BEAU BIDEN FOUNDATION**<sup>®</sup>  
FOR THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN

**Our children are spending more and more time on their devices. They have at their fingertips access to more information than even imaginable 15 years ago.**

**This connectiveness is incredible. And also frightening.**

Think back to when your parents first handed you the keys to the car so you could drive to work or to school for the first time – by yourself. How many hours had you logged behind the wheel with an adult in the passenger seat? Your parents were probably pretty confident you knew the rules of the road.

When you hand your child a phone or tablet for the first time, you're essentially handing them the keys to their first car. How confident are you that they know the rules of the road? And more importantly, how confident are you that you know everything they're doing online?

**This ebook is here to help you.**

This ebook will help you understand what your kids are doing online. It will help you have smarter conversations about their digital life. And, hopefully, it will help you help them make smart decisions about their digital footprint.

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**In this ebook, you'll learn:**

1. [That your child is likely involved in bullying.](#)
2. [That digital advertisers are tracking your child.](#)
3. [That predators use online gaming platforms to groom children.](#)
4. [That your child's accounts are not really "private".](#)
5. [That your child likely has accounts you don't know about.](#)
6. [That your child is oversharing \(ok, you probably know that - but you'll learn why, and what harm it may cause\).](#)
7. [That your child has probably seen pornography online.](#)

At the Beau Biden Foundation, we realize keeping on top of your child's digital life can seem overwhelming. The phone never stops buzzing. The popular apps are constantly changing. You do a good job checking your kid's profile and reviewing their friends – but you worry you're missing something.

This ebook might not answer all of your questions, but it will answer many. And it will help you have healthy conversations with your kids about their digital life.

**As a bonus, we've included three tips to help you talk to you child about [sexting](#) and a really helpful [electronic device contract](#) you can print out and have your child sign.**

# Chapter

## BULLYING

**Bullying has been a fact of life for children and teenagers since the beginning of time. Over the last few years, most studies show about 25-30% of kids are bullied. And that 30% of children admit to actually bullying someone else.**

**» Most staggering? More than 70% of school aged children report seeing bullying happen – in school and online.**

The simple fact is this: even if your child isn't bullying or being bullied – they see it happen. And more and more often, it's happening online.



Think back to when you were a kid. If you were bullied regularly at school, when you stayed home sick, you didn't get bullied. In the past, most of the time a bully had to look you in the eye before saying something hurtful or crude.

**Not so for your kids today.**

Shaming in group texts, negative hurtful comments on Instagram®, sharing of doctored pictures or memes – the tools of the modern bully extend far beyond the playground or school hallways. Bullies can quite literally follow your child into their bedroom.

Bullies desire attention and need an audience — the Internet and social media platforms provide an audience we could never contemplate when we were growing up. With the ability to anonymously bully someone (think fake/burner Twitter® accounts) and bullies now feel less blameworthy.

## How can you know if your child is being bullied?

Unfortunately, many of the signs could also be called “being a teenager” – sleep difficulties, moodiness, anxiety, sadness, decline in academic performance. But keep an eye on how your child’s social network changes. Is she avoiding certain groups of people or events she used to enjoy?

## How do you tell if your child is a bully?

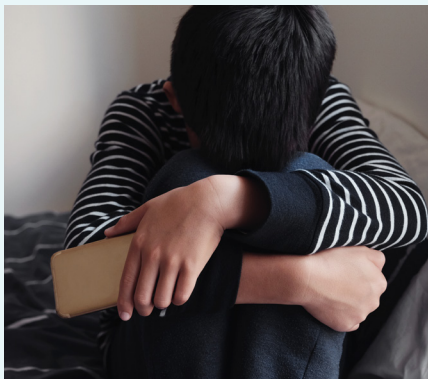
Again, many of the signs sound like typical teenage behavior: impulsiveness, a tendency to test limits or break rules. Many bullies are quite adept at manipulating situations or people – and most bullies have very little sympathy for kids who are being bullied.

It’s far more likely your child is a witness to bullying. So what can you do? As a parent the most important thing is this: Talk to your kids. Empower them to stand up and speak out when they see bullying happening. Most often, when a bystander intervenes, bullying stops in 10 seconds. Makes sense, right? What kind of bully likes to be confronted?



### Quick Tips for Parents:

- Bullying is a behavior, not an identity
- Empower your kids to stand up and speak out when they see bullying behavior
- Teach your kids to say no when they feel pressured or uncomfortable
- Support your kids when they speak up



» **What is bullying?** According to [StopBullying.gov](https://www.stopbullying.gov): Unwanted, aggressive behaviors that are repeated or have potential to be repeated and which create a real or perceived imbalance of power. Verbal and social bullying take place any time of day or night and can even occur in our child’s bedroom, when they’re online.

# Chapter

## PRIVACY

**We've all been there: you're having a conversation about something – the latest iPhone® or a new recipe – and then bam, you see an ad for it on Facebook® or while surfing the web.**

Advertisers and companies have direct access to consumers like never before. Internet users must understand they are a highly sought after commodity. When we allow access to the microphone or camera on our electronic devices, or our location, a gateway to our lives and buying habits is opened.



Think about how often this happens to you and now consider how often it is happening to children. According to a 2018 survey conducted by the Pew Research Center, 95% of children 13 to 17 years old report having access to a smartphone and 45% of that same group claim to be “online constantly.”

That “constant” interaction online – a click, a like, a share – creates data points. With each Google® search or YouTube® video viewed, information is collected, and ad trackers are attached for marketing purposes.

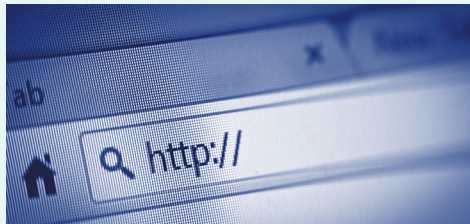
Children and teens are the most sought-after

demographic. They're being marketed to in ways most adults never were. Our society is on the cusp of science fiction tales like *Minority Report* and *Blade Runner* becoming a reality – direct, personalized, in-your-face digital marketing.

## How do we combat this?

First, by recognizing that it's happening. Second, by taking a few extra steps to ensure our privacy and safety – and that of our children.

Talk to your children about clearing browser cookies and cache, about not sharing location and not granting access to an electronic devices' microphone and camera unless they are being actively used. [Sign an electronic device agreement](#) with your children and make sure you are modeling good digital citizenship.



»» **What is a cookie?** Cookies are little snippets of code or information websites store in your web browser. They're not inherently evil – but they enable marketers to know what sites you've visited and advertisers to know your interests.

## »» What are Facebook Pixels?

Facebook allows companies to add a bit of code to their website. This code allows the company to track users who click thru an ad the company places on Facebook. The company learns a lot by tracking what a user does after they click an ad: if you add something to virtual shopping cart, but don't make the purchase, the company can show you a specific ad for that item in your Facebook feed.



# Chapter

## GAMING

You can probably picture the PSA video from the 80s. A young girl is walking to school. A shady looking guy pulls up beside her and offers to give her a ride to her school.

The voice over: “Talk to your children about not talking to strangers. Do it today.”



Chances are your kids know better than to get in the car with a stranger. It’s as engrained in our culture as buckling your seatbelt (those PSA’s worked!). But predators have become smarter and their tactics have shifted.

What is the modern version of a predator cruising a neighborhood, offering rides or candy to kids? It’s the predator sitting in the comfort of his or her home, in front of a screen and gaming online.

**39% of online gamers are over the age of 35.** The explosion of Massive Multiplayer Online Games in the last few years has given predators what they’ve always wanted – a huge audience of young people, a way to quickly and easily communicate, and a shared experience.

It’s hard to imagine, because as adults we’re innately skeptical of people’s motives. But most kids still believe the person on the other end of that chat in *Call of Duty*® is the person they say they are.

How does it work? Predators offer children the game’s version of currency to help them improve their character (weapons in Fortnite®, for example). They begin to pair up for missions and share resources. The conversation in game turns from tactics in completing the mission to seemingly mundane topics – school, life, interests outside of gaming.

If you’ve talked to your children and teens about online predators and their grooming tactics, chances are your kid recognizes the creep and that ends the conversation.

But if your child chooses to engage, the predator begins to escalate the conversation. Perhaps the predator shares a phone number and a conversation begins offline. Then the conversation turns again – this time sexual. The predator asks for a picture – eventually a provocative one.

“Ok,” you say. I’ve talked to my kids about being cautious about who they talk to online. They’d never do something like that. Good. But not all predators hang out in online gaming platforms or on social media networks. Very often, the first person to solicit your child for a nude or semi-nude image of themselves is a classmate or peer.

**A step-by-step guide on what to do if your child has been victimized is on [page 17](#)**

**»» 15 Apps Parents Should Know** Potential harm can come from anywhere — some social media apps can open doors to predators. Please review these 15 apps with your family and have open conversations with your children and teens about how they spend their time on their smart phones and tablets. (Courtesy of the Sarasota County Sheriff’s Office - updated July 2019)



**MeetMe** - Dating app that allows users to connect with others based on geographic location



**Badoo** - Dating and social media app for sharing photos and videos



**Holla** - Video chat app that allows users to meet people all over the world



**Grindr** - Dating app geared towards LGBTQ community that uses phone’s GPS location to find others



**Bumble** - Similar to Tinder, but requires females to make first contact



**Whisper** - Anonymous social network that promotes sharing secrets with strangers



**Skout** - Location-based dating app that lets users share private photos



**Snapchat** - Photos and videos shared to the app typically disappear within 24 hours



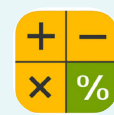
**Ask.fm** - Encourages users to allow anonymous people to ask them questions



**WhatsApp** - Messaging app that allows users to connect worldwide



**KIK** - Anyone can contact and direct message other users on the app



**Calculator%** - One of many secret apps that is used to hide photos, videos and browser history



**TikTok** - Popular app for kids that allows users to create and share short videos



**Live.Me** - Streaming video app that broadcasts users exact location



**Hot or Not** - Users can rate profile photos and chat with strangers





# Chapter

## “FRIENDS”

Let me tell you about my friend Kevin’s\* 7th grade daughter – Stacy\*. A few years ago, Stacy was showing Kevin a video she made on the app Music.ly® (now rebranded as TikTok®). Kevin noticed Stacy’s video had over 100 likes (called “hearts”).



“Stacy, who are these 100 people who liked this post? You don’t have 100 friends!”

Kevin went through her profile with Stacy, and asked how she knew each person. Some were friends from school (that’s ok), some were siblings of friends from school (hmmmmm), some were friends of friends whom Stacy had never met. (“Houston, we have a problem.”)

The fact of the matter is this: children yearn for approval. They yearn for acceptance. No doubt you provide oodles of that at home; but online, kids want hearts and likes, shares and retweets. This is the currency of popularity.

One easy way to get more hearts and likes? More shares, more retweets and more followers. (We’ll dive into another way, pushing the envelope with the



\*Names changed to protect identities.

content they post a bit later). Your kid’s account is private, you say? They have to approve all follower requests? Good, but are they discriminating between who they let in? Whose requests will they accept?

An account isn’t really “private” if every follower request is accepted, is it?

Here’s another thing to consider. Have you asked your child how many people they’ve shared their SnapChat® password with? A recent study showed 42% of children share their passwords with friends.

Children share passwords for a number of reasons. Some include building trust with a friend (remember the conversation you had with yourself before giving a key to your home to a neighbor?), keeping their “Snap-streak” alive on SnapChat, and earning rewards and badges on online games. Often, they may do this when their device has been taken away.

**Is an account private if someone else has the password to it?**

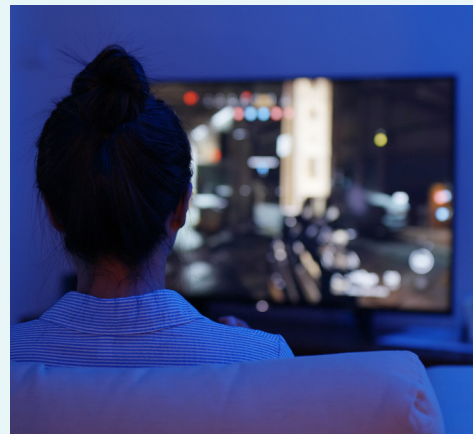
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## What’s the solution?

Well, as my friend Kevin did (a bit too late, truthfully), you need to regularly review all of your children’s friends and followers. Talk to your kids about the importance of keeping private things private. Give them examples – because clearly a lot of adults struggle to remember this. Remind them that there’s more to life than likes and followers.

### »» Your Netflix® Password:

Does your child use your login and password to watch Netflix on their device? Have they shared that with a friend? Do you use that same login/password combination for other accounts you have?





# Chapter

## SECRET ACCOUNTS

**Let's get something out of the way quickly – chances are pretty good your child has some type of social media profile you don't know about. It could be a second Instagram (a Finsta) or Twitter account. It could be an iPhoto® album they only share with a small group of friends. If you're not regularly checking your child's phone, it could be a platform they use that you didn't even know about.**

This makes sense, if you think about it. In an age where likes, hearts and retweets are the currency of popularity, your child scrutinizes almost every piece of content for its perceived value to their followers. Ever wonder why your daughter takes eleven different selfies, then spends 10 minutes editing the best of the bunch before sharing it?

But children still want to share who they really are – warts and all – with their closest friends. Maybe they want to try on different personalities as they settle in to who they truly are. Maybe they're trying to hide something, but more than likely they're simply trying to share who they really are with those closest to them.

Thus, there are profiles or accounts they closely guard. [The Today Show recently looked in to Finsta accounts](#), and their conclusion hit the nail on the head:

Ultimately, using Finsta is a way for teens to manage their own personal PR campaign. And they are pretty savvy at it. They can control the picture-perfect profile they show on real Instagram while sharing their “this-is-the-real-me” personality on Finsta.

There's nothing inherently wrong with your child shrinking their social network, so to speak, and limiting some of their digital life to a smaller group of friends. Where things can turn for the worse is when those profiles are meant to hide things from you. So, what do you do?

If you're already checking your child's phone regularly, and have approved the apps they've installed and the platforms they use, double check to make sure they don't have additional accounts they can log in to, or that apps aren't hidden in folders. [You can read about 15 apps law enforcement recommends you should know about.](#) Calculator% (and it's knockoffs) is fairly common.

Take a look at your child's push notifications. If you notice a notification for an account or username you don't recognize, ask them about it.

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## Here's another question we get all the time: What do I do if I suspect my child has a second phone?

Second phones are usually used to conceal something (a relationship) or circumvent something (your rules or your monitoring of their communications). **Bluntly: this is a problem.** If your child no longer protests too much when you take their device, they probably have a burner phone. If you notice an increase in WiFi usage, even when you've confiscated your kid's phone, they might have a burner.

### » Burner Accounts Gone Wrong:

In 2018, the General Manager of the Philadelphia 76ers®, Brian Colangelo, resigned because he was linked to a handful of anonymous Twitter accounts that had posted critical comments about players, coaches and executives. Three of the accounts were linked back to his wife.

In 2017, NBA star Kevin Durant forgot to switch from his public facing Twitter account to a private one and caused a stir.



# Chapter

## OVERSHARING

I'm sure you've had this experience. You're reviewing your child's Instagram. There's a picture of her lunch with a caption "#PizzaDay!" and one of her field hockey stick – "#OldFaithful!"

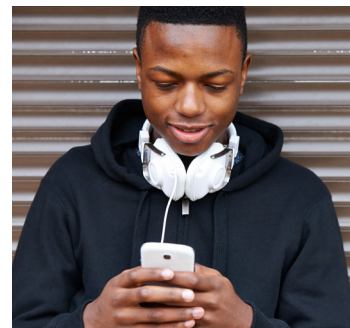
You probably ask yourself, "Who cares about pizza day? What makes this worthy of sharing?"

It's helpful to think of the concept of oversharing in two ways. First, there's the harmless (if incomprehensible to most parents) oversharing of the mundane details of your child's life. But there's a second form of oversharing, one that could have a profound impact on your child's future.

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### First, personal information.

As discussed in chapter 3, children are perhaps a little too trusting of the people they meet online. Sharing where they go to school, what their interests are – these can all be data points predators use to gain a child's trust, build connections and groom them for future abuse.





## Second, like adults, children sometimes overshare their feelings and emotions online.

Sometimes it's a cry for help, or it could be an attempt to get attention and garner sympathy (“I’ve studied for five hours – absolutely about to break down!”). Occasionally, in an attempt to push the limits and test the waters, a child could share something much worse – illegal activities, a threat, a picture of a red plastic cup on a Friday night.

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These are the types of posts that can impact a child’s future in a way they may not totally understand. It seems like every August, there’s a story in on the news about a handful of teenagers who have their acceptance to college rescinded because of their digital footprint. A couple of years ago, a softball team was dismissed from the Little League World Series because of social media posts that taunted their opponent.

Talk to your children and teens about the long-term implications of everything they post. Remind them that “send is forever” and to “think before they tweet.” It’s also helpful to stress to children that schools and employers will often check an applicant’s social media profiles. Modeling good digital citizenship yourself is an important part of teaching your children good behavior.

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## Two final points about oversharing.

**First, have a conversation with your child about location services and the geotagging of their posts.** While it may seem safe to “check in” or geotag their location, your child is opening themselves up to potential danger – unless the account is private, predators can begin to build a profile of the places your child frequents. Try this yourself – open your Instagram and search for “Dewey Beach” or another vacation spot you and your family visit. Chances are the first 10 photos are of young women posing on the beach.

**Second, do your children frequently livestream? Do they upload videos to TikTok, YouTube or Vimeo?** Ask your children what personal information they may be inadvertently revealing. For example, in the background of their live stream, are there posters of their favorite bands? Trophies or other knickknacks that might reveal their interests? These are all data points for predators to use when attempting to build common ground with children.

# Chapter

## PORNOGRAPHY

**Children and teens are naturally curious about sex. It's completely normal that they probably don't feel too comfortable talking to you about it. And it's completely normal that you probably don't feel too comfortable talking to them about it.**



But it's even more important in today's world to have honest – and age appropriate – conversations with your kids about sex. Because if they're not asking and you're not offering, they'll find the answers they want online. And more likely than not, the answers they're finding are not the answers you'd give them.

**Let's get to the obvious point first: there is pornography all over the internet.** Through hashtags, nude and sexually explicit images can be easily searched on Instagram, Twitter and just about every social media platform. There are numerous websites that offer hundreds of thousands of pornographic videos – for free.

With the explosion of free pornography online, the content has become more graphic, more violent and more deviant. Your 12 year-old son isn't looking at an old Playboy – he's watching graphic, hardcore porn. This may significantly influence his understanding of healthy relationships.

You believe your child's devices have strong filters that prohibit them from watching explicit content. That's good. But other than watching porn, children learn about sex in chatrooms and while gaming online, in Reddit® threads and other anonymous platforms that may not be caught in all parental screening filters. These forums allow children anonymity to ask questions, try on new personalities and explore their curiosities.

These platforms also allow predators to spread misinformation and identify and build relationships with potential victims. Predators will offer to "coach" curious teenagers in sex so they can be ready and "good at it" when the time is "right." Sometimes they'll offer links to your kid to download or view pornographic videos. Predators will share photos or ask for photos. Photos your child shares may end up being used to exploit them for more illicit images or sexual acts.

**This is so common that it now has a name – "sextortion."**

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## **"The Talk" is more important now than ever.**

[A recent study found that most American kids first encounter pornography at age 11.](#)

The pornography they're exposed to is more violent and impacting their sexual interactions with their peers.

It can feel overwhelming. But don't fear. There are many helpful resources for parents to broach this important subject matter. From the time they're in preschool, children should be learning about their body, learning the correct names for body parts and appropriate boundaries. They should be learning it from you. The conversation should continue and graduate to more sophisticated topics well into the teen years when dating and healthy relationships become more difficult to navigate. So there's not just one "Talk." Rather, it's a series of conversations that help children and parents trust each other.



# Conclusion

The Internet and social media platforms have fundamentally changed the way we live and work. Our children are growing up in a world more connected than ever, and keeping them safe from predators and themselves can sometimes feel like a full-time job.



We hope this ebook helps you have a clear understanding of what your children and teens are doing online. If you're interested in learning more, please visit our website:

[www.BeauBidenFoundation.org](http://www.BeauBidenFoundation.org). We have more resources there, and share even more valuable content on our blog.

I hope you'll print out the electronic device agreement on the next page. Please, review it with your child and sign it with them. In my experience, having rules and expectations written down really helps. My daughter is an adult now — I wrote an earlier version of this when she got her first cell phone in 2001. So much has changed since then, and it's even more important than ever that children understand their responsibilities as digital citizens.

Our team is always here to answer any questions you might have. Feel free to email me at [pdl@beaubidenfoundation.org](mailto:pdl@beaubidenfoundation.org).

Thank you!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Patty".

Patricia Dailey Lewis, Esq.  
Executive Director

Beau Biden Foundation for the Protection of Children

## »» What to do if your child is a victim?

1. Tell your child you will help them, that they're safe, and that they're not in trouble. Remind them that it's always ok to tell a trusted adult when they feel uncomfortable with something they see or experience online.
2. Contact the police immediately.
3. Notify the social media or gaming platform and preserve any conversations (take screen shots, for example).
4. Most states or municipalities have an Internet Crimes Against Children task force that investigates these types of abuse. ICAC's work closely with law enforcement at all levels and outside agencies to track down predators.



## SEXTING

**Sexting** – the requesting or sharing of nude or partially nude images – happens in schools every single day. Remember: your kids are naturally curious. They’re searching for new types of relationships and seeking adventure in the relationships. Many teens believe sharing intimate details of their lives or intimate pictures of themselves can strengthen those relationships.

And once one of those pictures is shared, your child loses control over it. Pictures can bounce across their school in a matter of minutes – from one person, to ten people, to the whole school.

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### What can you do?

- **First, recognize your children will form all sorts of relationships – online and offline.** Talk to them about what healthy relationships are. Talk to them about boundaries. Remind them the person they’re talking to online may not be who they say they are.
- **Second, remind them they should never accept gifts – even of nominal value – from anyone they meet online.** That should be an immediate red flag. And if someone, (even a friend), asks for a provocative picture, they should tell you or another trusted adult.
- **Third, remind them that they can come talk to you when they think a relationship is moving in a strange direction.** If they’re not comfortable talking with you, help them identify another trusted adult (an aunt or uncle, coach, counselor).

**A step-by-step guide on what to do if your child has been victimized is on [page 17](#)**

# Electronic Device Agreement



This agreement is made between \_\_\_\_\_ (Parent/s) and \_\_\_\_\_ (Child) on \_\_\_\_\_ (Date). By signing this agreement, I agree to follow the rules set by my parent(s) and understand that they have the right to take away my privileges of using a device if I violate any of these pledges and rules. This agreement may apply to the use of a phone, tablet, gaming device, or computer/laptop. I understand that these rules are for the safety and well-being of my family, my friends, and myself.

## PARENT(S)

1. Parent(s) will provide the device and be the only owner of the device.
2. Calls/texts from parent(s) will be responded to promptly.
3. Parent(s) will advise child of plan limits including minutes of talk, texts, and data available. Parent(s) may set a separate limit on talk/text.
4. The device will not be used during family time, such as meals, or when prohibited under school, employment, or other rules.
5. When in the home, the device is to be given to parent(s) each night no later than \_\_\_\_\_ pm. Parent(s) agrees to return the device each morning by \_\_\_\_\_ am, assuming all rules are followed.
6. Parent(s) are to be immediately notified of suspicious, inappropriate, sexual or threatening messages or images.  
**No penalty will occur as a result of advising parent(s) of this circumstance.**

## CHILD

7. Child will keep settings at "private" and not share password to anyone besides parent(s), including friends.
8. "Send" is forever. "Post" is forever. Remember that once something is sent or posted online, it cannot be undone, even if deleted or hidden. The device will not be used in an improper or illegal manner, including:
  - a. Sending or forwarding messages, emails or any form of communication that is mean, uses offensive language or may hurt or embarrass any other person.
  - b. Taking or sharing pictures that are nude/semi-nude or that depict myself or others behaving in an inappropriate or illegal manner.
  - c. Using a device to engage in any improper behavior or behavior that violates family rules.
9. Devices may not be used before \_\_\_\_\_ am or after \_\_\_\_\_ pm, unless the child is out of the home and contacting parent(s) or for an emergency situation (911).
10. For safety, the child will not reveal the specific place they are at when they are there. For example, they will not post a picture saying, "At the park with my friend and now we're heading home."
11. Child agrees not to use any device until homework is completed, unless the device is being used for homework purposes.

## CONSEQUENCES

12. Failure to follow these rules may result in the following penalties:
  - a. Removal of device privileges, length of which is to be determined by the parent(s).
  - b. Amendment of agreement to provide stricter rules.
  - c. Loss of other privileges, such as spending time with friends.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Child Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent(s) Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date