

## Dear Parents

With the growing importance of ICT in our modern era, raising awareness of the risks that might face our children as ICT users has become increasingly essential.

Hence, we would like to share with you some important information that will enhance your children's ability to utilize the ICT tools without exposing them to potentially dangerous risks.

Today's ICT world is attractive to children of all age groups, and provides a new way of interacting with others, giving them a lot of useful and entertaining experiences through which they feel safe and free. It is an easy and accessible means for fun and pleasure, search for information, doing school homework, getting acquainted and communicating with friends.

What some parents may not expect and children are unaware of, is that there are challenges and risks associated with children's use of different ICT tools as such tools allow users to access the virtual world with all its advantages and disadvantages and enable them to communicate with people from all parts of the globe without knowing their real identities. This made it easier for unscrupulous people to target and lure children using methods to obtain sensitive information or data to blackmail or exploit children in any way such as sexual exploitation or physical abuse. Such risks include, but are not limited to:

- Accidental exposure to others by giving sensitive information.
- Accessing inappropriate content or dangerous websites.
- Exposure to cyberbullying.
- Exposure to fraud and grooming that may lead to abduction.
- Most importantly, health and psychological hazards faced by children specially teenagers, such as:
  - Tension and anxiety.
  - Depression and sometimes suicide.
  - Sleep disorders and lack of concentration.
  - A drop in grades.
  - Neck and back pain.
  - Obesity.

Dear parents

To keep your children safe, you must know that when they use the different ICT services like the internet and voice calls their thoughts and behaviors are expectable given their level of perception, as they are:

- More inclined to add strangers and getting to know others.
- Think bad things will never happen to them.
- Think their today's friends are their friends forever.
- Believe they can say whatever they like on social media.
- See no problem in their friends knowing the details of their real world.
- Believe it is better to keep inconvenient issues over the internet confidential when they use different ICT devices. They think they may lose the privilege of using telecom devices if they tell one of the parents.



Now, we come to the most important question:

What do I do as a parent to protect my children from such risks?

The Guidelines depend on the child's age and the type of devices they use. However, parents should generally adopt the following key objective:

“Use the various ICT devices while limiting children's exposure to their potential risks or challenges”.

The Guidelines comprise of three golden rules to be followed by parents. These are:

Responsibility, Follow up and Communication.

## **The Responsibility Rule**

### **“Your role comes first, so be the Guardian”**

- Reinforcing your children with good manners and religious upbringing, enhancing self-confidence and skill motivation help to keep them away from making mistakes, as the child will be a guard of their own self when they browse the internet or use ICT devices.
- Child “technological upbringing” i.e. to explain to them the potential risks of communicating by the various ICT devices and the correct ways for usage, and encourage them to protect themselves by being cautious when using telecom devices.
- Strengthen your knowledge and share it with your child. Learn, as much as possible, how to use the latest in the telecom field and smart devices to be able to impose controls and restrictions on your child’s usage of them. Take into consideration that children’s technological knowledge in most cases far exceeds your knowledge.
- Continuously keep abreast of the features and characteristics of telecom devices that are used by children. Can they for instance download pictures from the internet, use instant messaging or access services that enable others to determine their location? These features may be a cause for concern according to the condition and maturity of your child.
- Search for the applications that could be used by your child before downloading and using them. Remember that there are kids-friendly applications such as kid-safe browsers and search engines.
- Before you give your child a smart phone, ask yourself is he/ she physically, mentally and emotionally ready to use it? Does your child need a smart phone? What are the legal, health and social implications borne by the two parties resulting from the child’s use of a smart phone?
- Use the technical filters and time control tools on your children’s devices.
- Set basic rules for usage, such as agreeing on clear rules when smart devices are used taking into consideration the child’s growth, their age and the usage time.
- Agree on download principles like the type of music allowed and the type of games they can download.
- Set times to use the electronic devices and games in a balanced and fair manner to protect them from the health hazards of excessive usage. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that usage hours should not exceed 2 hours a day.
- Explain these rules to your child, and emphasize that you do not intend to control them as much as you like to reach a suitable agreement on their usage.
- Visit the websites that highlight the risks involved online, use anti-virus software, firewalls that are periodically updated for telecom devices.
- Report any unlawful practices that children might encounter when they use telecom devices by calling child protection line 1100.
- Teach children how to protect themselves by maintaining their privacy and not to disclose their personal data such as names, photos, date of birth, addresses and phone numbers to avoid abuse.
- Ensure to fill the child’s free time with useful and guided programs like sports, social and cultural programs.



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### **The Follow up Rule** **“Parents are not the last one to know”**

- Observe children’s behavior and thinking while they use telecom devices, with the attendance of a parent during their internet use, if possible.
- Supervise the child’s use of ICT media according to the specified rules.
- Allow a certain extent of trust and freedom according to age, to be governed by the same rules agreed beforehand.
- Give confidence to your senior children and assign them the responsibility to direct their junior siblings.
- Help them to choose an unreal username that reveals no personal information if it was a requirement for registration.
- Directly supervise your children’s download of materials online and monitor their compliance with the agreed rules, or use filtering and parental control apps to monitor and filter unwanted apps.
- Beware of relationships which develop over social media web pages as such relationships may be negatively exploited by the other party.
- Set timings for using mobile devices and internet. Intervals of 10 minutes should be observed after each 30 minutes of use.
- Develop your children’s social relations by encouraging them to create real relations and allow them to go out with friends under parental guidance.

### **The Communication Rule** **“Be your child’s friend”**

- Talk to your child on the advantages and disadvantages of ICT devices and in particular the smart phones. Make it a quiet and logical talk on the best ways to use ICT devices to achieve maximum benefit.
- Browse the internet together with your child and share their experience.
- Discuss openly the challenges that could face your child, and in particular accessing the internet given the dangerous effects encountered in the absence of parental openness and guidance.
- Provide psychological and moral support by creating a safe environment. This could be achieved through joint dialogue and communication between parents and children. Listen to them, avoid embarrassing them and give them the necessary care and attention to help build their personality.
- Make a deal with your child not to give any personal information about themselves or their friends to strangers online via voice calls, SMS or instant messaging.
- Encourage your children to share their internet experiences with you by surfing together. Get into their world and open communication channels and family dialogue. Ask them of their interests and concerns and direct them to educational websites.
- Encourage them to inform you of the consequences of unethical content they may encounter while using mobile devices that allow them to access the internet.
- Get to know how children think when they use ICT devices and internet.
- Use dialogue to find out the best possible ways to use devices and internet to achieve maximum benefit.



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