



Be in Touch

PRACTICAL DIGITAL PARENTING

Digital Family Alliance Guideline

At *Be in Touch*, we believe that open communication is the best long-term solution to the digital dilemmas facing families today. Strict regulation of time and content might work in the short term, but often results in children searching for loopholes or hiding their digital behaviour. This sets up the next problem - when they are exposed to inappropriate or disturbing material, they can't ask for the support and guidance they need. So – how to combine both approaches into the best combination, designed by your family, that will work for your family?

This checklist will take you through the basics of how to create a **Digital Family Alliance** with the inputs from your whole family.

Before you start the conversation:

Think of your family's digital diet as something like its nutritional diet – it needs to be balanced and healthy to enable you as a parent, to nurture your children into fully functioning adults. Embrace the positive benefits that technology brings us, but also understand the effects of the digital world (both the amount and the type), on your children's brains, eyes, ears as well as social and physical development.

Consider how the different members of your family (including yourself) may be detrimentally impacted by the digital world – be it the **amount** of gaming, social media or TV that goes on, or the **type** of games, apps or websites visited. Be clear in your mind about what your concerns are, why, and what you would like to change.

Remember, forming a *Digital Family Alliance* is just the start of an ongoing conversation, which you will need to check in on every so often, to ensure you keep strengthening it, and that it is built on trust, transparency and inclusion.

The cornerstone of this alliance building process is that you, who holds the **license to parent**, must first model vulnerability in talking about the challenges you face in your own digital life, whilst conveying a sense of confidence that you don't need rescuing but are taking responsibility for your own desire to improve or change your habits.

This need not be dramatic nor disempowering for you - it is simply to open a conversation about how the *whole family* relates to digital media, not just the children. Everyone needs to understand that **consciously managing digital devices instead of being controlled by them**, is going to be a real challenge with ups and downs along the way, that there will be different agreements for parents and siblings of different ages, and that that's ok.

Building a *Digital Family Alliance* is an ongoing process and must fit YOUR family. Enjoy the process of opening up the conversation with your children, and help them to understand that this is not the end of their digital lives, just the start of a healthier digital lifestyle based on good choices and decisions, which will stand them in good stead for their lives as they grow.



Step One - prepare the way:

Let your children know beforehand that you are going to have a family meeting.

Ask them to think about how their digital devices affect them in both a good and bad way, and what they think would be fair boundaries to help the whole family use them in a healthier way.

Giving the children time to prepare for the talk will increase their ability to get 'on board' with the process and not feel surprised. Also, any family alliance needs to be approached in a moment of calm and clarity in the home, not in reaction to a specific situation.

Step Two – have the conversation:

Depending on the age of your children, share with them to an appropriate level why you are having this conversation. Talk about the real psychological and physiological effects that you are concerned about, about what you want and miss in your family interactions, and what you are no longer ok about in relation to your own or your children's use of digital devices.

Discuss how you, as individuals and as a family, are using digital devices, and all the important and fun stuff you are all missing out on because of too much time on devices.

Step Three - create your unique family agreement:

Create your own agreement, or use the template below as a guide, and write down your own family commitments, describing your unique home space, family rituals or routines and using nicknames and special words to describe the behaviours you want to see more of those you want to see less of.

Step Four – have regular follow up conversations:

Understand and explain to your children that you are not expecting perfect behaviour, but that you will be trying out the new agreement for a week and will then have another family meeting to talk about what is working and what is not, and how everyone is feeling. Some rules in the agreement will be flexible, and some are not, and when you meet again to discuss them, you should be open to suggestions from your children. But ultimately you as the parent should have the final say. Remember YOU have the license to parent, and while your kids might not like having their habits reset initially, keep firm, keep going and watch the difference it will make in your family!



Be in Touch

PRACTICAL DIGITAL PARENTING