

Importance of Family Agreements

The California Partners Project is engaged in a statewide listening tour with California mothers, parents and caregivers to understand how they are navigating the integration of technology and devices into most aspects of their children's lives.

A mother we spoke with described a disagreement with her husband about whether their son is allowed to play video games. Before the pandemic, her son was not allowed to play at all but, to cope with the limitations of the pandemic, her husband purchased some video games. She and her husband don't agree on limits around the games.

Even before the pandemic took hold in the US, two thirds of parents say parenting is harder than it was 20 years ago. Of these, many cite technology or social media as the driving forces behind this belief. ([Pew Research Center](#)) It's no surprise that parental disagreements about technology use and social media would also arise with these new parenting dilemmas. Here are some tips if this is also a challenge in your family.

Tips to reach agreement on games and devices:

TIP 1: Family rules need to be clear, consistent, and predictable.

According to the CDC, family rules help children understand what behaviors are expected. For these to work well, "everyone needs to know, understand, and follow the rules" within a family. If parents do not follow the rules or have different rules, it will be confusing to the children. ([CDC](#)) Kids learn best when the rules and expectations are clear and consistent across parents.

TIP 2: Discuss your approach to tech and media use ahead of time.

Consider a family media agreement to begin a discussion with your child's other parent (See Common Sense Media [Family Media Agreement](#)). These types of documents will help outline issues that might arise and provide an opportunity for discussion before you have to face the issue in real-time.

TIP 3: Collaborate on a plan to show a united front.

According to an interview with child psychologist Susan Wilkens, kids do best when parents reach an understanding about rules ahead of time. If a parent knows that some areas may cause friction, try to discuss and resolve these issues privately, outside of the presence of the child. As a child grows, incorporating their input into a media/tech plan is helpful and more likely to be successful.

TIP 4: Have compassion for each other.

During such a stressful year, we need compassion for our partners and for ourselves advises child psychologist Susan Wilkens. When approaching disagreements like this, start by validating your partner's love and concern. Acknowledging their feelings and care for your child first will make negotiations around areas of conflict easier to address.