

ThinkUKnow e-Newsletter - Volume 4 Issue 1

Back to School advertisements were already in stores before the new year, reminding parents of all the things they need to prepare for the new school year. Whilst you may be sick of hearing about choosing the right school shoes or having someone else collate your stationery, very little has been said about technology for the new school year. In the first ThinkUKnow e-newsletter of 2013 we're going to look at some key points around preparing for a digital school year.

Find out your school's policies

Schools are required to have a policy on anti-bullying and ensure that parents and students are aware of their rights and responsibilities. Make sure you have a copy of the current policy and that you and your child understand what to do if cyberbullying occurs. If cyberbullying isn't referenced in the policy, speak to the school about any other relevant policies that may cover this issue.

At the beginning of the school year, you and your child may also be asked to sign an IT Acceptable Use Policy or Agreement. This covers the use of school IT equipment, including school PC, laptops, tablet devices and the school-provided internet. It may also cover the use of personal devices, such as mp3 players, mobile phones and tablets, at school. Sit down with your child and discuss what is contained in the policy so that they are aware of the rules they are agreeing to follow. You may even find this policy a useful template for creating family rules around the use of technology.

You may also wish to find out how your child can set up a meeting with the school counsellor or other staff trained to deal with online incidents. Find out what steps the school has taken to create a positive online environment for students and staff and if there is any way that you, or your child, can become involved.

Time2Talk

In this section we look at ways to start talking with children and young people about their use of technology.

What are you most looking forward to at school this year?

What devices do you want to take to school and why?

How can you secure your devices at school?

What do you think is a reasonable time for using technology for fun at home?

What's a reasonable time for doing your homework?

Is there anything you've learned from your experience with technology in 2012?

Discuss with your child what devices they take to school

Although they may have received lots of brand new devices at Christmas, that doesn't mean they need to bring them all to school with them. When discussing with your child what devices they can take to school there are three things you need to consider: school policies, distraction and theft.

Each school will have a different approach to what devices are allowed to be used at school so it is important that you find out what is and isn't allowed. Many schools restrict the use of mobile devices for various reasons and it is important that you enforce these restrictions with your child. Should you need to contact your child during the school day, it may be more appropriate to call the school to pass the message on, rather than have your child using their mobile phone during class.

Devices can, at times, be a distraction from school work and interaction with peers, and at other times, they can benefit school work and social interaction. It can be difficult to find a balance between the two, but it is useful to speak with your child about what devices they want to take, how they will use them and why. For children with a long commute to and from school, devices can help them to pass the time productively.

Finally, devices can be tempting to thieves within the school or on public transport. Speak with your child about ensuring their devices are in a safe place when not being used and the importance of not showing off new devices too much.

Establish family rules

With the new school year comes new homework. At first, encouraging your child to do their homework after weeks of holidaying can be a struggle but it's important to set rules early on and enforce them. Establish rules around when devices can be used for play and homework and keep these balanced with exercise and free time. Young people will often use their devices for work and play simultaneously but it is important to speak with them about prioritising and managing their time.

Also think about how you balance your own use of technology. Your child will see how you interact with technology and balance that with competing demands such as work, exercise and family time. Identify those areas you struggle with and make a resolution to try and fix those areas this year.

Reflect on what 2012 provided

Finally, sit down with your child and talk about the year that was. Encourage them to reflect on their use of technology, both the highs and lows, and identify areas where they would do something differently next time. Also help them to identify their strengths with technology and encourage them to nurture these strengths. By reflecting on 2012, you can assist your child in making strategies to promote a better 2013!

