

# I can't control my child's use of technology. That statement and life choice needs to be revised

My child demands to play with matches – and I can't do anything about it.  
**Dr Ragnar Purje** thinks you can

**I** can't control my child's use of matches. Really? If your son or daughter insists that they want to play with matches, what do you do with the matches? You – of course – immediately, without discussion take the matches from the child. You then explain how dangerous this action is. The issue and the danger has been avoided and circumvented.

## **What if the child cries and presents a tantrum in response to this removal?**

You acknowledge the tears and possible tantrum. You then explain that matches are dangerous and you place these matches in a location the child can't reach. Does this action on the part of the parent/guardian become an issue of insurmountable



behavioural problems in the form of tears and tantrums? And if it did – which it never does – would the parent relent and give the matches back to the child to placate the child's temper tantrum demands? No! Of course not!

### And why not?

The answer is self-evident. The parent/guardian is educating the child to not only engage in safe behaviours, but also to provide the emotional and cognitive thoughtful means for the child to develop into a responsible thinking and responsible acting child, teenager and, of course, socially mature adult. What if there are tears and tantrums along the way? So what? Children and teenagers are always pushing to see where the boundaries of life are. That is how we learn and know what is safe and unsafe and what is acceptable and what is not acceptable. This is all a process of personal and social education. The prefrontal cortex develops as a result of circumstances being explored. The child in fact is genetically DNA hard-wired to play and explore and extend. That is how the brain and body (the *hólos*) advances in skills and knowledge. All actions however bring consequences, and as the child, the teenager develops, part of this process, by the mentor is to support, advise, encourage and when required admonish the learner (which does not equate with punishment).

### My child demands that they want to play in the middle of the road

If your child or teenager walked onto a road or highway, or stood in the middle of tram tracks or a railway line, as a train was speeding towards them, and, despite your directives, advice, warnings, pleading, screaming or attempted assertive persuasions the child or teenager refused to listen and refused to move, what would you do?

The self-evident truth is that you would – of course – take *immediate action* to remove your child or teenager from the dangerous situation they have placed themselves in; no matter what they said or how much they protested; or how much they screamed or how often they told you they hated you. You would do the same time and time again. With associated warnings and information, to help the child and teenager to learn that what they

are doing is dangerous and most certainly (and again self-evidently) unsafe.

### My child demands to use the computer – and – with the door closed

What if your child or teenager has walked into their room, and closed the door behind them to now spend hours on the computer, which is the signal to you – the parent/guardian – to stay away? The child has told you through their demands that this is their life. And you have no right to know what they are doing.

Now that is a most interesting scenario. You, as the parent/guardian, have no rights in your own house?

And why is that? Because that is the demand made by the child. And your response to that is: "I can't control the technology use of my child."

So? How come you are able to control the use of matches by the child? How come you are able to control whether or not your child plays in the middle of a road, tram tracks or railway crossing? And yet you can't control the use of technology, by your child, in your own home?

Is there a difference of principle here?

That's right. There is! It is dangerous to play with matches. It is dangerous to play on the road in the middle of tram tracks or a railway line. And because of this danger you believe, and know, you have the right to control what your child is doing.

But when your child demands to play with the computer, for some reason you assume you have no control? And it's safe!

### Actually, it is not safe

Actually, it is not safe. It is not safe neurologically. And neither is it safe developmentally or socially. The research is unambiguously clear. Socially, the children are placing themselves – and your family – in danger. This secretive computer engagement is as dangerous as a stranger coming to the door and asking you if it was okay if they could spend some time with them in their room. And while the door is also closed!

### Neurological rewiring is taking place

Self-evidentially this is dangerous. Neurologically it is also dangerous because the hours of computer use are rewiring

the brain and excluding real life social engagement. What is on the screen is not the same as talking face-to-face with your family. It is during this face-to-face time and via the social interactions that take place through talking that all-important social skills and insights develop. It is also when cognitive emotional neurological forging takes place. It is this engagement with another human being that makes us human; a healthy, functioning and social human.

The brain-based and social research here points out that children who are engaged on their computer for hours are not only losing social skills. This endless computer use leads to children and teenagers losing their capacity for empathy. When empathy is lost, the research indicates that there is much less capacity on the part of the individual to have a point of view which allows them to have a sense of positive regard for others, or for society itself. And when members of society don't care about each other, this most certainly is not good for anyone.

### Is there a solution?

What we are dealing with here is complex; and there certainly is no easy, quick fix solution. One of the most important parts in all of this is the process of personal engagement. Personal interaction has the potential for possibilities that may lead to an array of solutions. What this means is that during the course of these important person-to-person, face-to-face talks, solutions may begin to surface. Therefore, don't look for a single solution. Look for possibilities of potential solutions. Does that mean the child will dictate to the parent what they want, and the parent must then step aside?

Well, what if your child demands they want to play in the middle of the road, what would you do?

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**Dr Ragnar Purje**© is a Queensland based academic and writer, he has published and presented widely and has a focus on Indigenous education and issues. Look out for his work in future issues of *Education Today*