

ELECTRONIC CONTRACTS:A Note to Parents/Care Givers

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Most of us have a favorite activity that we'd love to engage in more often. Instead, work, housekeeping, parenting, and other responsibilities relegate that activity to a few spare minutes each day or week (or even more infrequently). That's how "real life"

works! Most of us have learned that we need to finish our work before we're able to "play," or that our hobbies need to be built in as rewards along the way, and should not interfere with our ability to meet our responsibilities.

Unfortunately, many individuals are not being given the opportunity to learn this important lesson! For a variety of reasons, many children, teens, and adults today, along with people with autism and Asperger Syndrome, tend to be more likely to avoid "real life responsibilities" in favor of engaging in favorite activities, often playing video games, watching television, surfing the Internet, or texting. Let's explore why it happens, why it's a problem, and what we can do to help:

- 1. One of the characteristics of autism spectrum disorders (ASD) is "special interests" that are unusual in their intensity and focus. While their peers may have favorite activities, objects they collect, and topics they like to talk about, people with ASD engage in these to the point of "obsession" or "perseveration." If left to their own devices, they could spend almost every waking moment with it. Not only does ASD tend to "wire" their thinking and responses in this direction, but because social interactions naturally tend to be more difficult for them, they gravitate toward these solitary activities which are within their "comfort zone." Taking them away from these favorite activities often leads to a "meltdown," which can be so intimidating to a care giver that attempts become increasingly less frequent over time. Or our sensitivity to their special needs (sensory, social, language and communication, etc.) can lead us to make more frequent exceptions for them and allow them to slip farther into their comfort zone. NOTE: Frequently teens (without ASD) display many of the same characteristics!
- 2. By allowing people to spend excessive amounts of time engaging in their obsession, we rob them of opportunities to face their areas of difficulty, to learn valuable skills for being successful at real life obligations and expectations, to make friends, to give their peers opportunities to know them and to interact successfully with them, and to engage in active pursuits which improve their overall health and well-being. They risk becoming adults who are not driving, not going to school, not working, not interacting with other people, not contributing to household responsibilities, and/or not willing to comply with their parents' attempts at changing the situation to assist them in becoming more independent. (If this sounds too extreme, simply join a "support group" of parents of older teens and adults and listen to their stories—they're out there!) In addition to this, time spent with television has been shown to lead to negative behaviors. I highly recommend taking a moment to view the summary of research on this site: http://www.med.umich.edu/yourchild/topics/tv.htm.
- 3. If this describes someone in your life, you may already be feeling that it's impossible to make necessary changes to help that person head in the right direction. I know from my own parenting, consulting, and coaching that it is not impossible, although it will not be easy! Because the individual is not setting his or her own healthy boundaries, you will need to set and enforce them yourself (which will not likely be initially welcomed). Depending on the severity of the problem, the age and functioning level of the individual, and other circumstances, you might need to completely remove the option of engaging in these activities until healthier patterns are established. (Considering that it has become a type of addiction, "abstinence" may be the best way to assist them in moving on to other activities and responsibilities. In my own home, I have frequently instituted a "TV-free Week," or a "video game-free month." Each has begun with symptoms of "withdrawal" as my children complained and tested the boundaries, but ended with their willingness to find and pursue other worthwhile activities). Others may need to have their time strictly limited. (In my house, no video games are allowed during the school week. On weekends or during the summer, each child is allowed 40 minutes per day—I've provided an electronic timer so that they can monitor their own time and know when they need to stop. Watching TV is restricted to occasional special treats, often as a family activity on weekends. If this sounds too strict, consider the fact that my children are excelling academically, have friends, and are involved in a variety of extracurricular activities. This is in spite of the fact that if I allowed them to, one or more of them would spend every waking minute watching TV or playing video games). As my children get older, we've moved to developing and adhering to contracts like those that follow. Not only does this allow us to be "deliberate" in stating expectations and consequences (and following through as needed), but it also gives them an opportunity to be involved in the development of those (they help write the contract), and provides an opportunity for them to be exposed to a simplified contract similar to what they might encounter someday in purchasing a vehicle, leasing an apartment, or even becoming employed.

I once told a nine-year-old client that the job of a child is to "learn and practice." This happens at school, as a student learns about science, math, reading, writing, computer skills...and also the important responsibilities of following directions, interacting successfully with others, meeting expectations, etc. The learning and practicing needs to continue at home and in other social contexts, through both failure and success, as they hone valuable skills for being successful in real life.

As parents, teachers, and other care givers, we need to be modeling good choices—if we're spending too much time surfing the Internet, watching TV, playing video games, or engaging in some other passion, we are sending conflicting messages (which is especially dangerous when working with individuals with ASD). Remember that our children learn more from watching what we do than listening to what we say!

While we need to be sensitive to their unique needs (providing sensory breaks, making sure that they have comfortable or familiar activities interspersed with more challenging ones, taking into account their age, functioning level, etc.), we also need to acknowledge that being exposed to areas of difficulty, and being given the supports and skills necessary to navigate them successfully, is often the only way they will "broaden the horizons" of their abilities, interests, and social success! This is an important component of "parenting deliberately!"



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P.S. I hope you find this information and the following contracts helpful as you "parent deliberately." I recognize that this is an area that may be too difficult for some parents or care givers to tackle successfully on their own. Consider engaging the assistance of a supportive family member, friend, teacher, or other person who can encourage you and help you along the way. Professional help (such as the coaching and consulting services available at www.socialincites.com) may also provide the necessary support to make and adhere to healthy changes. Social Incites, LLC also has several helpful resources listed on our web site.

SAMPLE CONTRACTS (Blank contracts follow)

The goal of the following contracts is to help your children learn to use these devices responsibly! These contracts can be used as a springboard for valuable discussions with your children. They allow you to define the purpose of these various electronic tools, to set and communicate appropriate guidelines for your family as they use these tools, and to be deliberate in determining (and following through with) appropriate consequences. Be sure to have discussions about Internet safety, and your family's values as they pertain to which movies you watch, the language you use, who you connect with, etc. Evaluate your own use of these devices—is the television on constantly at your house? If so, consider what your children are being exposed to, in terms of violence, mature themes, values that may differ from your own, and even potentially overwhelming sensory input. Do you have filters on your computer? Do your children have a television or computer in their bedroom, or are these an integral part of the family living space where their use can be monitored?

Remember that as the parent or care giver, you reserve the right to give approval for exceptions to the guidelines you have, set; especially those which give additional freedoms that go above and beyond the "baseline" agreements set in these contracts. For example, if your contract specifies that your child is allowed only one hour of television per day, you might have a family movie night which adds two hours that night, without it being a violation of the agreement. Your child might also come to you and request additional time on the Internet to complete some research on a particular topic, or request more time on the phone to talk with a friend who has been ill. These contracts are not intended to be "black and white" absolutes of what is and isn't allowed; instead, they provide a basic understanding of what is expected in your family, and establishes the parents'/care givers' authority over these and any modifications that are made.

You will be more successful in using these contracts if you also respect the rights that they provide to your children. These create some room for them to make independent decisions provided that they are within the stated guidelines. Be sure to also allow them to experience the consequences—both positive and negative—that result from the choices they make!

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SOCIAL MEDIA CONTRACT: SAMPLE

I, (name)
PURPOSE
As defined by me and my family, the purpose of Facebook, or any other social media site, is to help me connect with people I know and trust, to help me stay connected with them, and to help me connect with new people who share my family's values, interests, and other social connections. Each of these people will appear on my account as my "friends."
GUIDELINES
I agree to follow these guidelines as a requirement of using Facebook or any other social media site:
 Mom will be added as a friend, and will have access to my password, and will remain on my account as long as I have an account, or until I no longer live at home. Mom and Dad will have the authority to make me remove a friend or friends from my account (or to do this for me) due to concerns for my physical or emotional safety, or my reputation. I will not request or confirm "friend" requests from people I do not know personally, or who my other friends do not know personally. I will only view or post to my account at the following times: 7:30 a.m. to bedtime, NOT during school hours or during homework time. I will never post "personal" information, including anyone's phone number, address, social security number, or information about where I am going or where I am, or when my family will be on vacation. I will post only a reasonable number of posts (5 per day) about the following topics: Things I'm thinking about, projects I'm working on, encouragement for other people (always using clean language and avoiding saying unkind things about myself or others, or other things I might someday regret).
I agree that if I make choices that are not consistent with the guidelines above, I will incur one or more of the following consequences: - Loss of the privilege of viewing or posting to my account for one day, one week, or one month - The removal of one or more of the "friends" on my account - Deletion of my account
SIGNATURES of AGREEMENT
I agree to abide by the above purposes, guidelines, and consequences until this agreement is amended or revoked in writing by both of the following, or until
Signed:
Signature of the other person completing this contract:
Date:

A review of this contract is scheduled for: ____

TELEVISION CONTRACT: SAMPLE

I, (name)	, confirm that my signature on this contract indicates
	of the television (and access to television programs, news,
or movies on the Internet or through some other form	n).
PU	RPOSE
	television, or any other means of watching movies or inment for my family, to help me learn more, and to help munity and around the world.
GUII	DELINES
I agree to follow these guidelines as a requirement of news, and other television shows:	Susing television or any other form of viewing movies,
- I will leave the television OFF when it is not bei	
- Before I may watch TV or movies, I must first c list.	omplete my homework and the other items on my chore
 I will only watch TV or movies on the television Mom and Dad request that) I will limit the amount of time I watch TV/movi 	- · ·
- I have permission to watch the following shows,	movies as long as I adhere to the guidelines above:
CONSE	EQUENCES
I agree that if I make choices that are not consistent v following consequences:	with the guidelines above, I will incur one or more of the
Loss of the privilege of watching TV or nLoss of other privileges, including:	novies for one day, one week, or one month de and how it violated one or more of the guidelines above
	S of AGREEMENT
I agree to abide by the above purposes, guidelines, are revoked in writing by both of the following, or until	nd consequences until this agreement is amended or
Signed:	_
Signature of the other person completing this contract	t:
Date:	
A review of this contract is scheduled for:	

CELL PHONE CONTRACT: SAMPLE

I, (name), confirm that my signature on this contract indicates
that I agree to the following terms regarding my use of a cell phone.
PURPOSE
As defined by me and my family, the purpose of a cell phone is to allow my parents to reach me when they need me, to help me receive emergency assistance if needed, and to help me connect socially with people I know and trust.
GUIDELINES
 I agree to follow these guidelines as a requirement of using a cell phone: The phone belongs to Mom and Dad I will keep the cell phone fully charged at all times. Mom and Dad will have regular access to my phone logs, messages, and texts The phone will remain in "cell phone central" (on the kitchen counter) whenever I do not have it with me outside of the house, and every night. Except for emergency purposes, I will only use the phone between these hours: 7:30 a.m. to bedtime I will not take the cell phone to school I will leave the phone off when I am at work, church, or the library I will limit the number of texts I send to: 6 per day, and calls to 5 per day unless I have special permission Except with permission from my parents, I will call only the following: Family members, employer, school staff, and the following friends: I will give the phone number only to the following people/groups of people:
CONCECUENCEC
CONSEQUENCES
I agree that if I make choices that are not consistent with the guidelines above, I will incur one or more of the following consequences: - Loss of the privilege of using or carrying a cell phone for one day, one week, or one month - Permanent loss of cell phone privileges - Blocking one or more people from calling or texting me - Paying part or all of the monthly bill for the phone that I use - Paying for replacement of the cell phone (up to \$200) if the phone is lost or damaged
SIGNATURES of AGREEMENT
I agree to abide by the above purposes, guidelines, and consequences until this agreement is amended or revoked in writing by both of the following, or until I purchase and maintain my own phone/phone bill.
Signed:
Signature of the other person completing this contract:
Date:
A review of this contract is scheduled for:

VIDEO GAME CONTRACT: SAMPLE

I, (name)	, confirm that my signature on this contract indicates
	arding my use of the Wii and/or any other video games.
	PURPOSE
	ourpose of video games is to give me an opportunity to relax, enjoy th eye/hand coordination, either alone or with other friends or family
	GUIDELINES
I agree to follow these guidelines as a r	requirement of using the Wii or other video games:
I will only use the video games beI will limit the amount of time I spI will not connect via the Internet	when they are not being used. I must first: Complete my homework and other items on the chore list etween these hours: 7:30 a.m. to bedtime, NOT during school hours bend on the video games to: 1 hour per day or any other means with players outside my home unless: I use the s' permission to connect with someone, and also adhere to the
	CONSEQUENCES
following consequences: - Loss of the privilege of usin - Permanent loss of video gan from my home)	not consistent with the guidelines above, I will incur one or more of the right or playing the video games for one day, one week, or one month me privileges (possibly resulting in the sale or removal of these devices arred to these devices or to other items through the use of these devices
SIG	NATURES of AGREEMENT
revoked in writing by both of the follow summertime isn't an excuse for sitting signal full-time video time. Be sure to	guidelines, and consequences until this agreement is amended or wing, or until I move out or get a job. [NOTE: In our household, around playing video games all the time. Nor will the end of school provide enough expectations that your child will be engaging in other ount of time for video games, movies, and Internet surfing even after
Signed:	
	ng this contract:
Date:	

A review of this contract is scheduled for:

COMPUTER/INTERNET CONTRACT: SAMPLE

I, (name)	confirm that my signature on this contract indicates
	the computer and other ways of accessing the Internet.
	POSE
FUK	FOSE
As defined by me and my family, the purpose of a comgive me an opportunity to do the work required by my	-
connect to friends or family members.	
GUIDI	ELINES
 complete I will only use the computer/Internet between thes finish a homework assignment at the kitchen coun I will limit the amount of time I spend on compute I will not download any programs to the computer in the attached log and receiving signed permission I will make sure that Mom and Dad always have computed they have authority to check those accounts at any 	twices belong to Mom and Dad the Internet) at the kitchen counter unless I have ingroom or at the kitchen table. It is unpack my school supplies; homework can be surfing" has to wait until my homework and chores are the hours: 7:00 a.m. to bedtime, unless I get up early to ter ter/Internet to: 1 hour per day in addition to homework to or sign up for any services without first entering them in from Mom or Dad.
·	QUENCES
	Internet for one day, one week, or one month vices or to other items through the use of these devices
SIGNATURES	of AGREEMENT
I agree to abide by the above purposes, guidelines, and revoked in writing by both of the following, or until	
Signed:	
Signature of the other person completing this contract:	
Dotos	

A review of this contract is scheduled for: _____

COMPUTER LOG: SAMPLE

DATE	WEBSITE/LINK	PURPOSE	INFO REQUESTED	APPROVED	NOT APPROVED
8/8	www.ubuntu.com	Operating system for home computer	Name, email, home address, phone	Mom	

SOCIAL MEDIA CONTRACT

I, (name)	, confirm that my signature on this contract indicates
that I agree to the following terms re	egarding my use of Facebook or any other social media site, including:
	PURPOSE
As defined by me and my family, the	e purpose of Facebook, or any other social media site, is
	GUIDELINES
Logues to fellow those avidalines as	
I agree to follow these guidelines as	a requirement of using Facebook or any other social media site:
	ill be added as a friend, and will have access to my password, and will as I have an account, or until
account (or to do this for me) doI will not request or confirm "fr friends do not know personally.	ill have the authority to make me remove a friend or friends from my ue to concerns for my physical or emotional safety, or my reputation. riend" requests from people I do not know personally, or who my other count at the following times:
	ormation, including anyone's phone number, address, social security where I am going or where I am, or
- I will post only a reasonable nu	mber of posts (per day/week) about the following
	CONSEQUENCES
following consequences: - Loss of the privilege of v	e not consistent with the guidelines above, I will incur one or more of the riewing or posting to my account for one day, one week, or one month ore of the "friends" on my account
SI	GNATURES of AGREEMENT
	es, guidelines, and consequences until this agreement is amended or llowing, or until
Signed:	
	eting this contract:
Date:	
A review of this contract is schedule.	d for:

TELEVISION CONTRACT I, (name)______, confirm that my signature on this contract indicates that I agree to the following terms regarding my use of the television (and access to television programs, news, or movies on the Internet or through some other form). **PURPOSE** As defined by me and my family, the purpose of the television, or any other means of watching movies or television shows, is **GUIDELINES** I agree to follow these guidelines as a requirement of using television or any other form of viewing movies, news, and other television shows: - I will leave the television OFF when it is not being used. - Before I may watch TV or movies, I must first: - I will only watch TV or movies between these hours: - I will only watch TV or movies in these locations: - I will limit the amount of time I watch TV/movies to: ______ per _____ - I have permission to watch the following shows/movies as long as I adhere to the guidelines above: **CONSEQUENCES** I agree that if I make choices that are not consistent with the guidelines above, I will incur one or more of the following consequences: - Loss of the privilege of watching TV or movies for one day, one week, or one month - Loss of other privileges, including:_____ - Writing a report detailing the choice I made and how it violated one or more of the guidelines above SIGNATURES of AGREEMENT I agree to abide by the above purposes, guidelines, and consequences until this agreement is amended or revoked in writing by both of the following, or until Signed:_____ Signature of the other person completing this contract:

A review of this contract is scheduled for: _____

CELL PHONE CONTRACT

I, (name), c	onfirm that my signature on this contract indicates
that I agree to the following terms regarding my use of a ce	ll phone.
PURPO	SE
As defined by me and my family, the purpose of a cell pho need me, to help me receive emergency assistance if neede know and trust	· ·
GUIDEL	NES
I agree to follow these guidelines as a requirement of using The phone belongs to I will keep the cell phone fully charged at all times. will have regular access to my phone and every night. Except for emergency purposes, I will only use the phole I will not take the cell phone to I will leave the phone off when I will limit the number of texts I send to: per _ Except with permission from my parents, I will call on	e logs, messages, and texts never I do not have it with me outside of the house, one between these hours:
CONSEQU	ENCES
I agree that if I make choices that are not consistent with the following consequences: - Loss of the privilege of using or carrying a cell - Permanent loss of cell phone privileges - Blocking one or more people from calling or tell - Paying part or all of the monthly bill for the phone paying for replacement of the cell phone (up to	chone for one day, one week, or one month ting me ne that I use
SIGNATURES of A	AGREEMENT
I agree to abide by the above purposes, guidelines, and conrevoked in writing by both of the following, or until	_
Signed: Signature of the other person completing this contract: Date: A review of this contract is scheduled for:	

VIDEO GAME CONTRACT

I, (name)	, confirm that my signature on this contract indicates
that I agree to the following terms rega	arding my use of video games.
	PURPOSE
As defined by me and my family, the p	purpose of video games is
	GUIDELINES
I agree to follow these guidelines as a	requirement of using video games:
I will only use video games betweenI will limit the amount of time I specified	en they are not being used. must first: een these hours: pend on video games to: per or any other means with players outside my home unless:
	CONSEQUENCES
following consequences: - Loss of the privilege of usi - Permanent loss of video ga from my home)	not consistent with the guidelines above, I will incur one or more of the ng or playing video games for one day, one week, or one month ame privileges (possibly resulting in the sale or removal of these devices turred to these devices or to other items through the use of these devices
SIG	NATURES of AGREEMENT
• • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • •	s, guidelines, and consequences until this agreement is amended or owing, or until
Signed:	
Signature of the other person completi Date:	ing this contract:
A review of this contract is scheduled	for:

COMPUTER/INTERNET CONTRACT

I, (name), confirm that my signature on this contract indicates
that I agree to the following terms regarding my use of the computer and other ways of accessing the Internet.
PURPOSE
As defined by me and my family, the purpose of a computer or other means of connecting to the Internet is to
GUIDELINES
I agree to follow these guidelines as a requirement of using the computer or other sources of accessing the
Internet: - The belongs to
- I will use the computer (and anything connected to the Internet) in a public location (i.e. kitchen table or family room).
- Before I may use the computer/Internet, I must first:
 I will only use the computer/Internet between these hours:
 I will not download any programs to the computer, or sign up for any services without first entering them in the attached log and receiving signed permission from I will make sure that always has current passwords to all of my accounts, and I agree that he/she has authority to check those accounts at any time.
will have regular access to my search engine history; I will not delete that
information at any time
CONSEQUENCES
I agree that if I make choices that are not consistent with the guidelines above, I will incur one or more of the following consequences: - Loss of the privilege of using the computer/Internet for one day, one week, or one month - Paying for any damage incurred to these devices or to other items through the use of these devices
SIGNATURES of AGREEMENT
I agree to abide by the above purposes, guidelines, and consequences until this agreement is amended or revoked in writing by both of the following, or until
Signed:
Signature of the other person completing this contract:
Date:
A review of this contract is scheduled for:

COMPUTER LOG

DATE	WEBSITE/LINK	PURPOSE	INFO REQUESTED	APPROVED	NOT APPROVED