



Talking with kids about
USING MEDIA





USING MEDIA

Teenagers are completely at home in the world of social media (Facebook, Whatsapp, Instagram etc.). They have been socialized with media (books, films, newspapers, television, internet...) since their early childhood years. Schools use E-learning as part of their curriculum and equip students with tablets and computers. The digital revolution moves forward so quickly that generations of parents feel completely helpless and overwhelmed.

Media shape identity and gender identity; they inform and manipulate, and global networks penetrate our private sphere. Many parents are sceptical and take a critical view of these developments.

Teenagers are constantly communicating online while, paradoxically, communication with their parents is increasingly marginalized or, in the worst case, has ceased to exist.

So how is it possible to educate teenagers about the risks, as well as the opportunities, that the media offers, and to guide them in the responsible use of media? We have put together for you a selection of tips, strategies and useful information applicable to the following key terms:



*Reflecting on one's own media habits
([page 3](#))*



*How to start a conversation with
teenagers ([page 4](#))*



Establishing rules together ([page 6](#))



*Recognizing problematic behavior
([page 8](#))*

Further information in the internet:

www.jugendundmedien.ch Information portal for promoting media competence (Languages: German, French and Italian).

www.schau-hin.info. Media guide for families. Provides information about the risks and possibilities.

«Golden Rules» The most important tips for the safe use of digital media: <https://www.jugendundmedien.ch/de/angebote-beratung/bestellung-publikationen/flyer-in-16-sprachen.html>



Reflecting on one's own media habits

Although you may increasingly feel that your teenage sons or daughters no longer attach any value to your opinions and attitudes in the course of their puberty, you should not underestimate your influence on their opinion-forming process. You have been their key reference person all through your children's formative years, essentially a compass to rely on and to guide them forward. Your children learned and learn from you how to orient themselves in the world, distinguish between right and wrong, and how to interact with other people, media and machines. This role does not simply disappear overnight.

Thus, you continue to fulfill an important role model function, even though your teenagers are beginning to loosen the bonds in your parent-child relationship. Therefore, it is important that parents know their own attitude and habits. Here, you have the opportunity to recognize and reflect on your own media behavior. Perhaps you recognize yourselves in your teenagers' seemingly "impossible" media behavior?

Observe yourself:

- How do you communicate with real people?
- How do you communicate online? Do you make a distinction between these two?
- When, and at what time do you use the media?
- How often do you use the media in a day?
- How often do you unlock your handheld device to quickly check on the weather, e-mails, or answer a WhatsApp message?
- For what purpose do you use the media?
- Do you reach for the cell phone while eating or during conversations?
- Is your TV set turned on during other leisure activities?
- Are your computers or mobile devices constantly on to receive messages?



How to start a conversation with teenagers

One possible form of communication with teenagers is engaging them in discussions of topics that interest them. Instead of venting your displeasure about your son's or daughter's use of electronic devices, take an interest and ask for the purpose of their using the media.

- For what purpose do you need your laptop, tablet/ smartphone?
- What kinds of communication channels do you use?
- Which apps do you use and for what?
- Can you show me how pictures/texts/videos are being disseminated and altered in different networks?

Engage your teenager in a discussion about individual media use. For that purpose, you and your child may decide to maintain a media diary¹ for an agreed-upon period of time. The media diary is a digital document which has to be filled in on a computer. You can find the document on our [homepage](#)

- Compare your own use of media with that of your teenagers'. Who uses which media and for what purpose?
- What importance do these media have for both parties?
- Who is bothered or disturbed by what? Why?
- What kinds of wishes do you and your children have?
- Agree to a mutually acceptable media fast or holiday.

By keeping a media diary, you can simultaneously strengthen your teenage children's self-regulation: Do you feel that I am wasting my time, or does my use of media further me personally? After all, the main goal of media education consists in my children's learning to adopt a deliberate and conscious utilization of the media.

Utilize the media together, thereby engaging your sons and daughters in conversation. You may wish to consider the following possibilities:

- Examine closely one of your favorite TV shows, soap operas, or an online game: how do the creators work? Which objectives do the programs or games pursue? How are the actors or contestants presented? How are the viewers to be influenced? Does it occur openly or covertly? How real are the "reality shows"?

- Together, utilize apps from the smartphone (e.g. for digital image processing, making videos). Creating something meaningful and working with “sophisticated” games and apps leads to a conscious mode of dealing with smartphones and media in general (e.g. creating an e-book, photo novel). Another positive effect of the collaboration between parent and children in creating a digital product is the resulting enhanced critical view of media contents. If I know from personal experience how a film is made, and pictures are altered, etc., I have a different view of what I see on the internet.
- Searching for traces on the net: together with your teenagers, look for information about yourselves or acquaintances and relatives. Discuss what you found and what this information might mean for the individuals in question. Are privacy rights violated? How can I protect my personal privacy? How would I like to present myself on the internet? What kinds of information about myself should never ever get onto the internet?



Establishing rules together²

A general prohibition of media use (internet, television, smart phone, etc.) is not advisable and probably not strictly implementable. The media are part of our daily life and offer, among risks, also many benefits, such as learning opportunities, contacts with friends, play and fun, information, enlightenment, and thus contribute to the foundation of our democratic societies.

Therefore, it is important to agree on common rules for media use. These rules are set forth in a joint agreement, which is easily accessible to everyone (e.g. affixed to the door of the refrigerator). Include your teenagers in the discussion of the following points. Negotiate a common position and record it in writing. The possible consequences of any particular rule violation should also be captured in writing. Like any other contract, this media agreement must be signed by all parties and include the place and date.

Specifically, what would such a contract look like? On [page 11](#) you will find a sample contract for smart phone use³.

In what follows, you will find the topics set forth in the contract and derived in a commonly defined form:

- Time frame: How much time do you spend daily or weekly with media consumption (especially meaningful with older children). Try to differentiate as follows, if possible:
 - Printed media
 - Surfing the internet
 - Playing (using the internet/with electronic devices)
 - Talking on the phone with friends/relatives
 - Chatting with friends/relatives
 - Watching films or videos
- Data protection:
 - Refrain from carelessly disclosing your own personal data
 - Only pass on private data, like photos, to trusted known persons. First, always consider: will you perhaps be annoyed later about the content? If doubtful, refrain from publishing/passing such data on.
 - Only create and pass on data of others (e.g. photos, videos, etc.) with the express consent of these persons.
 - Only switch on location services (e.g. GPS), Bluetooth or NFC (Near Field Communication) when needed.

- Mobile phone:
 - Covering costs: Who pays how much for what?
 - App installation and administration: who is responsible?
 - Unlock codes and settings for the protection of children and young persons: install together and verify from time to time to determine if the settings are still appropriate.
 - Agree on cellphone free times/places and respect institutions like churches, hospitals, etc.
- Internet:
 - Use and frequently change adequate passwords.
 - When using content derived from the internet: discuss the protection of intellectual property with your child in age-appropriate terms, as well as how to properly attribute the sources in homework assignments and presentations.
 - Regularly verify together your privacy settings with messenger services and social networks.
 - Observe copyright laws: do not disseminate content like music, videos, etc., which normally cost money.
 - Internet rip-offs: Should your children have been duped with rip-offs (e.g. unintentional purchase or subscription), do not blame them, and try to clear up the situation together.
 - It is indispensable to obtain prior parental approval for purchases and orders.
- Video and TV:
 - Observe age-appropriate TV offerings.
 - No TV watching on the side when doing homework or engaging in other common activities like eating or conversations.
 - Watch TV programs and films together as a common activity and let individuals take turns in deciding which programs to watch.
- Games:
 - New games and consoles: do not acquire without previous parental agreement or adherence to an established monthly budget.
 - Observe age restrictions.
 - Parents should not simply shut down their teenagers' online games without affording them an opportunity to save them.
 - Observe adequate volume control.
 - Play together.
- Parents must make it clear to their teenagers: If anything looks strange to you, or if you are upset about certain content, if you are shocked or traumatized about something, if you are ashamed, or if an unknown person asks you for highly personal information, please feel free to contact me anytime!



Recognizing problematic behavior

In discussions with your teenagers, make sure to emphasize the risks of using the media, particularly digital media. Maintain the contact with your children and take an interest in their activities. Observe notable behavioral changes and remain vigilant.

If your teenagers should show a dramatic performance decline in school or completely isolate themselves socially, if poor physical or emotional well-being is a daily occurrence, contact other reference persons, such as their classroom teachers. Ask them for their assessment and help.

How to recognize cyberbullying?

Indications of cyberbullying are not clearly recognizable, as perpetrators, victims and spectators are often reluctant to make themselves known. However, cyberbullying certainly changes the affected children's behavior. They tend to

- ... withdraw socially, dislike going to school. Their classroom performance declines and their interests change significantly.
- ... exhibit physical and psychological symptoms (e.g. lack of appetite, sleep disturbances, despondency, feelings of inferiority and depression).
- ... no longer enjoy using the internet. They drop out of chats if someone else looks at the screen, or they appear distraught and evasive after reading new posts and messages.
- ... consistently block any conversations about behavioral or other conspicuous changes, downplaying them, or they appear to react with shame and evade the questions.

What parents can do:

- Offer support: Children should feel assured that they can talk with their parents anytime about their experiences on the internet and that confiding in them does not present an insurmountable obstacle.
- Show understanding: React sensibly and sympathetically to possible changes in the child's behavior.
- Take things seriously: Children must know that they and their concerns are taken seriously and that they will receive help. If parents want to take concrete steps about certain issues, it is useful to include the child in their discussions and attempts at a solution.

- Do not punish: Prohibiting cell phone use or an internet ban is not useful. Cyberbullying is generally not caused by a child's misconduct; contents about the affected person can be published independent of a person's use of internet or mobile devices.
- Contacting the school: It can be useful to address the issue with the child's school to suggest that cyberbullying become the subject of a classroom discussion.
- Help your teenagers with collecting and saving screenshots as evidence of cyberbullying. If the perpetrators are known, ask them to delete the pertinent content. If this does not happen, ask the platform provider to take appropriate action.
- Serious cases of cyberbullying should be reported to the police. It may also be advisable to obtain prior legal consultation.
- For additional information about bullying in general, see the document ["Talking with kids about bullying"](#).

How can you recognize addictive behavior⁵?

In the case of online-addiction, the center of a person's life shifts increasingly from real life to virtual reality. Affected individuals often refuse communal meals, preferring to live in darkened rooms in front of their PC, rather than pursuing outdoor activities with others, and they are totally fatigued by constant sleep deprivation. Other consequences are decreasing performance in school, social withdrawal, loss of interest in activities with peers.

What parents can do:

- Watch out for compliance with age limits with computer games.
- Maintain contact with your children, make them show you the games they play, and talk with them about their online activities and their preferred websites.
- Consider how a thirst for adventure and the need for belonging, recognition and success can also be satisfied in the real world.
- In cases of excessive consumption of internet and game activities: reduce the time limit per day or week and develop ideas for alternative leisure activities together with your child. As previously suggested (see [page 6](#)), a contract for media use might be helpful in this regard.
- If you are no longer able to get through to your child, seek expert advice. Regional addiction advice centers are frequently staffed with specialists in the area of "online addiction".

Depiction of violence on the internet⁶

Violence is very much present in the media today. Digital media in particular carry the inherent risk that adolescents are exposed to numerous depictions of violence. Moreover, the circulation of images of real violence is increasingly widespread due to self-made videos on smartphones. The consumption of violent material can have negative effects on children and adolescents: rage, fear, irritation are feelings that many consumers experience. Likewise, the consumption of violence can affect their behavior. With the presence of certain other risk factors, adolescents are more prone to violence if they watch numerous depictions of violence.

What parents can do:

- Make sure that your teenagers only consume games and videos that are approved for their age groups.
- Improve the technical protection of your electronic media (e.g. with a child protection filter).
- Restrict the media consumption of your teenagers.
- Talk with your teenagers about their feelings and potential fears concerning their media consumption.

Pornography on the internet⁷

If adolescents surf the internet for information about certain topics, they will sooner or later encounter pornographic images. The interest in sexuality and one's own physicality is entirely natural and belongs to a healthy development. However, strongly sexualized images can have a disturbing or even frightening effect on adolescents. Pornography frequently has an intimidating effect on teens without previous or only limited sexual experiences in real life. This is why it is against the law in many countries to show or provide pornographic images to minors (children under 16 years old).

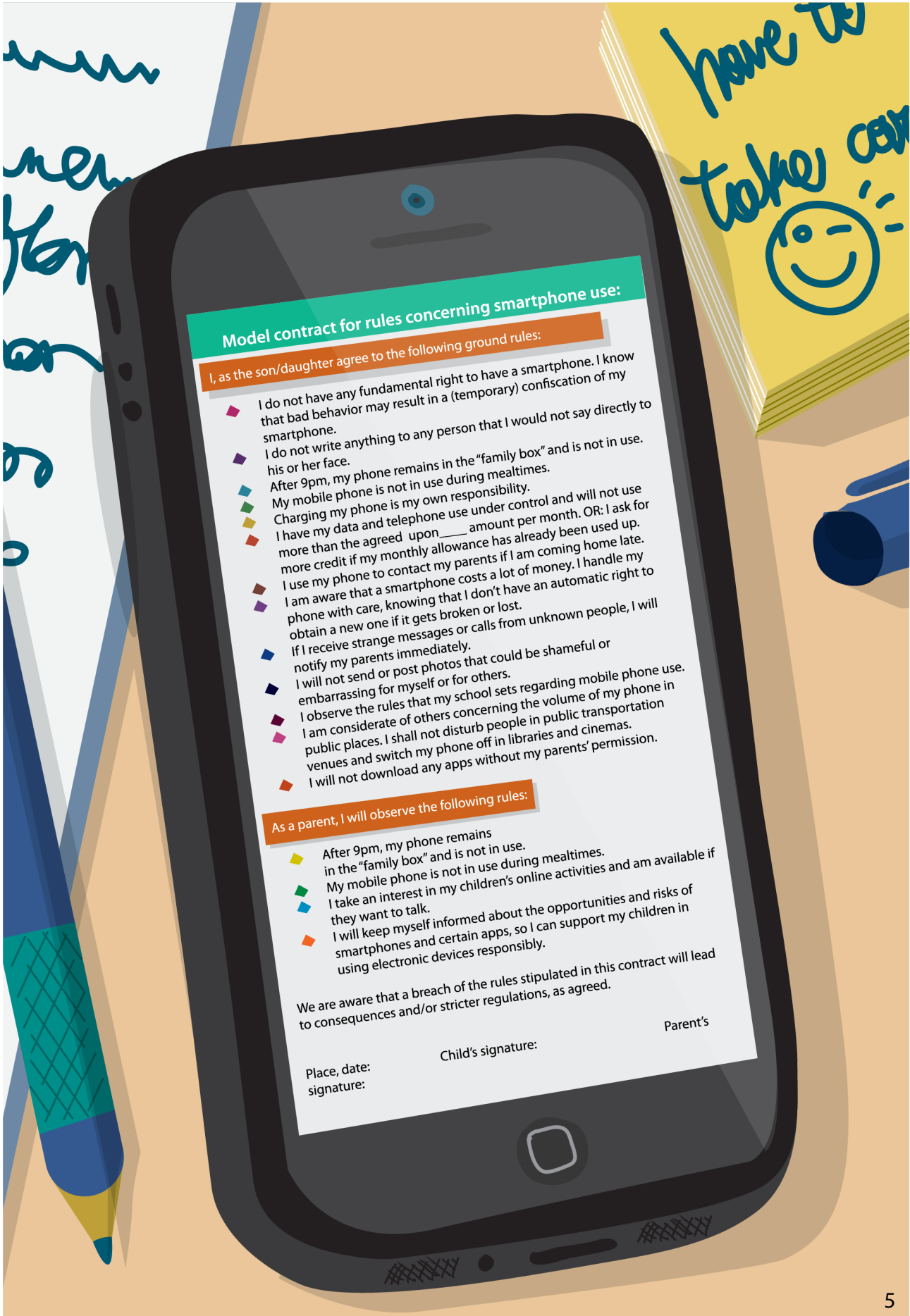
If adolescents create material of an erotic nature on their own (photos or videos) and forward the material to their love interests (or even groups of friends), this is called sexting. Special caution must be exercised in this respect. For one, the receivers of such materials can misuse it in numerous ways (compromising pictures may be circulated without consent of the sender). For another, minors may be liable to prosecution if they produce

and transmit pornographic materials. Parents should inform themselves about their country-specific statutory provisions.

Cyber or online grooming occurs when adult persons approach children or adolescents on the internet for the purpose of eventually engaging in sexual acts. The anonymity of the internet facilitates such befriending, thus allowing paedosexual perpetrators to present themselves as peers in seeking contacts with children and adolescents. In so doing, it can quickly lead to sexual abuse: exhibitionism, mailing of pornographic content, shocking expressions and actions.

What parents can do:

- It is very important that parents provide their children with age-appropriate discussions about the topic of pornography and be available to answer their questions or clarify previously viewed content. Sex education is very important for a healthy development. For further information about the topic, consult the documents [“Talking with kids about their body and sexuality”](#) and [“Talking with kids about sex and love”](#).
- It is possible to block X-rated content on your computer, but be aware that your teenagers will probably receive pornographic content via PC from their friends. Thus, encourage your children to discuss provocative content with a person whom they trust.
- Be aware of the age rating of videos and computer games.
- About the topic of “sexting”:
Talk with your child about the subject of self-portrayal on the internet: How would you like to be perceived by others? Can you live with the fact that compromising pictures of yourself are passed around in school or circulated elsewhere without your knowledge?
- About the topic of “cyber grooming”:
Make it clear to your children that they can immediately turn to you if there is anything that appears “creepy” or disquieting to them on the internet, particularly when chatting. Notify other users, block them or delete the chat contact if infringements occur. Adolescents should be urged to be careful with their contact data on the internet. Likewise, they should not imprudently send photos of themselves or turn on their web cams on the computer. Your teenagers should never let anyone persuade them to meet a chatroom acquaintance somewhere alone.



Model contract for rules concerning smartphone use:

I, as the son/daughter agree to the following ground rules:

- ◆ I do not have any fundamental right to have a smartphone. I know that bad behavior may result in a (temporary) confiscation of my smartphone.
- ◆ I do not write anything to any person that I would not say directly to his or her face.
- ◆ After 9pm, my phone remains in the "family box" and is not in use.
- ◆ My mobile phone is not in use during mealtimes.
- ◆ Charging my phone is my own responsibility.
- ◆ I have my data and telephone use under control and will not use more than the agreed upon ___ amount per month. OR: I ask for more credit if my monthly allowance has already been used up.
- ◆ I use my phone to contact my parents if I am coming home late.
- ◆ I am aware that a smartphone costs a lot of money. I handle my phone with care, knowing that I don't have an automatic right to obtain a new one if it gets broken or lost.
- ◆ If I receive strange messages or calls from unknown people, I will notify my parents immediately.
- ◆ I will not send or post photos that could be shameful or embarrassing for myself or for others.
- ◆ I observe the rules that my school sets regarding mobile phone use.
- ◆ I am considerate of others concerning the volume of my phone in public places. I shall not disturb people in public transportation venues and switch my phone off in libraries and cinemas.
- ◆ I will not download any apps without my parents' permission.

As a parent, I will observe the following rules:

- ◆ After 9pm, my phone remains in the "family box" and is not in use.
- ◆ My mobile phone is not in use during mealtimes.
- ◆ I take an interest in my children's online activities and am available if they want to talk.
- ◆ I will keep myself informed about the opportunities and risks of smartphones and certain apps, so I can support my children in using electronic devices responsibly.

We are aware that a breach of the rules stipulated in this contract will lead to consequences and/or stricter regulations, as agreed.

Place, date:
signature:

Child's signature:

Parent's

„Talking with kids about using media” is based on the following references:

¹ Informationsportal «Jugend und Medien». *Medientagebuch*. retrieved 05.06.2018.

<https://www.jugendundmedien.ch/jugendschutz/elterliche-begleitung.html>

² Landesanstalt für Medien NRW. *Mediennutzungsvertrag*. retrieved 20.03.2019.

<https://www.mediennutzungsvertrag.de/>

³ Fritz, Bianca. 2014. «Mustervertrag für das eigene Smartphone» *Das Schweizer Elternmagazin Fritz und Fränzi*, Dezember, 69.

⁴ Initiative «SCHAU HIN! Was Dein Kind mit Medien macht». *Cybermobbing: Das verbirgt sich hinter den Begriff*. retrieved 20.03.2019.

<https://www.schau-hin.info/artikel/cybermobbing-terror-im-netz/>

⁵ Informationsportal «Jugend und Medien». *Internet und Computerspiele können süchtig machen*. retrieved 22.03.2019.

<https://www.jugendundmedien.ch/de/themen/onlinesucht.html>

⁶ Informationsportal «Jugend und Medien». *Gewalt im Netz*. retrieved 05.06.2018

<https://www.jugendundmedien.ch/chancen-und-gefahren/gefahren-im-ueberblick/gewalt.html>

⁷ Informationsportal «Jugend und Medien». *Sexualität und Pornografie im Netz*. retrieved 22.03.2019.

<https://www.jugendundmedien.ch/de/themen/sexualitaet-pornografie.html>

Fritz, Bianca. 2014. «Smart mit dem ersten eigenen Smartphone» *Das Schweizer Elternmagazin Fritz und Fränzi*, Dezember, 66-69.

Informationsportal «Jugend und Medien». *Jugendschutz. Tipps und Hinweise für Eltern*. retrieved 05.06.2018.

<https://www.jugendundmedien.ch/jugendschutz/elterliche-begleitung.html>

Initiative «SCHAU HIN! Was Dein Kind mit Medien macht». *Papa, leg das Handy weg! Eltern als Vorbild*. retrieved 20.03.2019

<https://www.schau-hin.info/artikel/papa-leg-das-handy-weg/>

Initiative «SCHAU HIN! Was Dein Kind mit Medien macht». 2018. *Regeln finden zwischen Helikoptereltern und Handysucht*. retrieved 20.03.2019.

<https://www.schau-hin.info/news/regeln-finden-zwischen-helikoptereltern-und-handysucht/>