



The Rule

By Ana Nelson Shaw

(Based on a true story)

"I will only read and watch things that are pleasing to Heavenly Father" (My Gospel Standards).

For family home evening, we'll review our computer and game rules," Dad announced.

"Dad, I already know the rules!" Joseph said. He was 11 and had been using the computer for years now.

"You do a good job following the rules," Dad said. "But a review is still good."

Joseph plopped down on the couch. He wished they would talk about something new instead.

Dad held up a poster board and marker. "OK, let's see what we already know," Dad said. "Joseph, what rules do you know?"

"Crash and tell," Joseph said.

"That's right. If you see something inappropriate on the computer, like swearing or people not wearing clothes, close the screen or turn off the computer. Then tell Mom or me right away." Dad wrote **CRASH AND TELL** on the poster.

"What else?" Mom asked.

"Don't give out your information," Aaron said. "We just talked about that in school."

Joseph looked at Mom and Dad. *That* wasn't one of their rules! But Dad smiled and nodded.

"Good," Dad said. "We haven't talked about that before, but it's really important. Don't give your name, your age, where you live, or where you go to school on websites or to people online. Some people use that information to hurt others." He wrote **DON'T GIVE OUT INFO** on the poster.

"How about keeping the laptop in the living room or kitchen?" Joseph suggested. He was paying attention now. Dad wrote, **COMPUTER IN FAMILY AREAS ONLY**.

"You can't use the computer without asking," Elizabeth said.

"Excellent, and you have to take turns," Mom reminded them. Dad wrote **ASK PERMISSION AND TAKE TURNS**.

Review

“What about games?” Simon asked.

“Thank you, Simon. The rules for the computer are the same for video games and the phone and tablet too,” Dad said. “We need to avoid bad language, violence, disrespect for others, and anything that makes wrong seem right.”

Dad wrote **NO SWEARING, VIOLENCE, OR DISRESPECT IN GAMES.**

The family thought of several more rules and put the poster by the computer. As he went to bed that night, Joseph tried to remember everything Dad had written.

A few days later, Joseph went to his friend Darrin’s house. Darrin brought out his new video game to play. It seemed awesome at first. Then the characters went to battle, and Joseph started to feel uncomfortable. It was pretty violent. He didn’t want to play this game any more.

What if Darrin thinks I’m just a chicken? Joseph wondered. Then he remembered the rules, and it helped him feel brave.

“Hey, Darrin,” he said, “I don’t play violent games.”

Darrin looked surprised and paused the game. “Oh. I didn’t think it was that bad.”

“I just don’t feel good playing it,” Joseph said. “Can we play something else?”

“I guess,” Darrin said.

That wasn’t that bad, Joseph thought as he and Darrin picked out a new game. When they finished that one, they went outside and rode their bikes.

Joseph was smiling when his mom picked him up.

“How was it?” she asked.

“Fun,” Joseph said. “And I kept our family’s rules.” ♦

The author lives in Montana, USA.

FAMILY RULES!

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