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Guide Children's Media Choices

With the explosion of technology now available, it seems like children are always plugged in, zoned out, or wired for sound. They spend less time outside, have shorter attention spans, and are exposed to online dangers such as pornography. On the positive side, technology has expanded children's knowledge and opportunities. They learn teamwork, problem-solving, and communication skills. Technology has also boosted activism among today's young people.

Although children may seem like "experts" when it comes to technology and new media, parents are still responsible for supervising what their kids are exposed to—and for how long. Two keys are moderation and interaction. These tips can help you limit and monitor what your kids see and hear:



Strategically set up your equipment and schedules. Keep televisions out of children's bedrooms, and place the computer in an accessible family area. Make media time contingent on the completion of chores and homework. Plan alternate activities, including physical ones.

Establish digital-free zones. Agree on days and times (such as dinner, family night, Sundays, etc.) when no one—including adults—is allowed to check e-mail or use any form of media.

Watch and listen to TV shows, movies, and music together. Talk about the issues that come up. Tie them into faith and provide a biblical worldview for children to consider as they use technology.

What's Up in Our Wired World?

- The average young American spends nearly every waking minute in front of an electronic device. Kids ages 8 to 18 spend more than 7.5 hours a day using computers or smart phones or watching TV. And because they multitask, they pack almost 11 hours of media content into that time. (Kaiser Family Foundation)
- 87% of parents play video games with their kids at least occasionally. (Yahoo! Shine)
- 20% of young people admit they've engaged in "sexting"—emailing or receiving nude photos or videos. (Associated Press-MTV)

PowerSource



Ask God:

1. For wisdom as you oversee your children's media "diet."
2. To help your kids make good decisions about technology.
3. To show you ways to use technology in positive, family-building ways.

Parenting Insights

In *Children's Ministry Magazine*, online expert Tracy Carpenter explores some ways that technology is impacting young hearts and minds.

1. **Shifting relationships—** Although kids still belong to social groups, the emphasis is no longer on face-to-face gatherings. Preteens, wired for relationships, now think in terms of their "audience" rather than their peer group.
2. **Trying on identities—** Children express their developing personalities through social-networking sites and online role-playing. Preteens, emulating "cool," may try to outdo one another with suggestive images.
3. **Providing "TMI"—** Young people still forming judgment and boundaries are sharing too much private information in very public ways.

OpenTheBook

"Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in. ...Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit."

Revelation 3:20, 22

God may not be able to IM or text us, but he wants a relationship that goes beyond weekly worship. God is available 24/7 and—best of all—no special device is needed to talk to him!

Teachable Moments

1. The Wired Word—

Challenge children to think how the Bible would be different if technology had existed in Jesus' time. How would a Twitter version of your favorite Scripture verse read? How would you describe one of Jesus' miracles to a friend via text message? If Jesus had a TV ad campaign, what would it look and sound like?



2. Tech Commandments—

When you're establishing rules for media usage, involve children in the decisions. Ask them what "commandments" God might have set for online behavior and how we interact with others using technology. What would he have made off-limits, and what would he have encouraged? What age requirements or time constraints might he have established, and why?



"So commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these words of mine. Tie them to your hands and wear them on your forehead as reminders. Teach them to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are ON THE ROAD, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up." Deuteronomy 11:18-19, NLT

Open the lines of communication about media and technology by asking your children these discussion-starting questions:

1. How does technology make life easier for you? How does it make life harder or more complicated?
2. What's a good number of hours to spend in front of electronic devices each day? How can you tell when you've overdone it?
3. What's your favorite way to use technology, and how would you cope without it?
4. What are some ways we can honor God with our media habits?

Family Experience: Say What?

Encourage your family members to stay in constant communication with God by using these experiences from Group's Hands-On Bible:

- **Listen Up**—Read aloud Exodus 19:1-9, 16-25. Say: "God spoke to Moses in a powerful voice. But most people would never say they've heard God speaking aloud." Brainstorm ways God speaks to us today; for example, through the Bible, through other Christians, to our hearts. Read aloud John 16:13-15. Have family members each take a Bible to a place where they can be alone. Say: "Pray about school, home, a problem—anything! Open your Bible and read. Ask God to help you hear what he wants you to say." After 10 minutes, share your experiences. Say: "Sometimes God will speak to you loud and clear. Sometimes you won't even know God said anything until later. But God is talking. Just keep listening!"
- **"Excuse Me..."**—Talk about ways we get other people's attention these days and how it feels to fail to "connect" with someone. Then play this game to help you start thinking about God's voice. Have family members each think up a line from a movie or TV show. Then take turns saying the line using the same voice the character has. See who can guess the movie or show, as well as the character. Then ask: "How did you recognize the voices and programs?" Read 1 Samuel 3:1-10. Ask: "Why did it take Samuel awhile to figure out who was talking? What are some ways God gets our attention? How can we recognize God's voice?"

