

# **Guidelines for Parents: Technology and Teens**

## ***First Guideline: Set the example!! It is important to build trust in this area!***

Model any guideline you would like your teen to practice. Limit the amount of time you spend watching TV, using cell phones in the house, texting or accessing the internet. Some have called this generation of children **GENERATION M (for media)**! It is pretty clear that increased technology use has added to the anxiety of the necessity to constantly be in contact with peers and social groups.

**Parents also need to set the example on media use.** Walt Mueller of The Center of Parent/Youth Understanding writes that media should be evaluated on a three step process:

1. **Discover**: filter any media by asking what the piece is attempting to make the participant to feel, think or do.
2. **Discern**: evaluate the media in regards to standards—biblically looking at content and validity.
3. **Decide**: if the media has value and if you are going to engage with it.

## **Establish clear and consistent expectations *early* for technology use:**

Recognize that there are ***Time*** issues and ***Content*** issues!

- When it comes to cell phone use or any electronic communication (texting, email, etc), adults should model the behavior that they desire to see in their teenagers. When a call comes to an adult during dinner or family time, use statements like, “The people I’m with now are more important than any outside call,” or “We don’t take calls during dinner.” Turning the phones off during dinner or family or study time is a habit or possible family policy to establish.
- Provide cell phones to kids only with clear conditions and expectations.
- It’s good to set a “curfew” on calling and texting so teens don’t stay up all night texting and calling. Have teens surrender their phone for charging in the parents’ room overnight. This can be one of the conditions for having a phone from the start. Communicate clearly before the agreement to allow ownership of a cell phone that any password, messages, or texting is open for parental review and not adhering to the guidelines will result in loss of use. Establish a “No Zone Time” where no one in the family uses cell phones, TV, computer, iPods, etc for two hour block of time (including the dinner hour). Designate this as family time. Also emphasize that any texts/pictures could be viewed by parents.
- In this dangerous time, it is imperative that parents have a clear, loving conversation of the dangers of “sexting” (sending sexual phrases and pictures over the phones or e-mail). Clear warnings of online predators needs to be understood by all underage youth who engage in conversations on the internet. Downloading of movies, music, and pornography have caused some serious damage to families, and proper enforcement of guidelines would have saved a great deal of pain.
- Many people “say” things in texting and email that they would not say in person. Remind them that these communications can be forwarded right away with serious consequences.
- Restrict recreational computer/TV use to a set amount of time. (30-60 minutes per day: this does not count school related assignments).
- Be aware of what TV shows and movies your teens are watching—watch TV shows & movies with your youth.
- Place computer in an open, central living area such as a family room or kitchen. If teens have laptops, parents should have full access to laptop at any time. Parents could also designate a time when the laptop is turned off and charged in the parents’ room.

- Use available parental internet filtering applications and programs on all your kids' computers (see additional resources). It's good to let your teenager know that you have the right to review any messages (text, phone calls, emails) before they run free with the system.

## **Manners and technology**

- Due to the abundance of technology available to our children, it is easy for them to grow up lacking social skills because they are always communicating via cell phones or computers. Therefore, discourage the use of computers when visiting in one another's homes and encourage more social interaction. For example, games, conversation, etc.
- Avoid talking on your cell phone or texting while visiting with someone else. It's simply rude.
- Teach them to be present with people they are with.

## **A suggestion for router setup**

- Parents should learn to set up their wired and/or wireless routers themselves or they should have someone come into the home to do it for them. The computer-savvy child should not be given de facto administrator privileges to the system. Parents should keep the password private and change it often. Pet names and anniversaries are discouraged for passwords.
- Routers can be set to limit on-line access hours independently for each device in the home – Xbox, iPhones, laptops, desktops. They can all be set to run for certain hours in the day (each with its own hours, if desired). They can also be set to reject any device not specified by the administrator. So, the children's friend's laptop can be rejected by default.

**HOSTS file** – Most modern operating systems use a HOSTS file to direct the computer to specific websites. Many people modify this file as a free ad-blocking software alternative, but parents can modify the file to redirect traffic from pornographic or other unapproved sites to whatever the parent wants (such as [www.Godtube.com](http://www.Godtube.com)).

## **Suggestions for Facebook, Twitter, and MySpace**

**Photos/GPS/Facebook** – Parents should set their personal smart phones and their children's smart phones so that they do not tag photos with GPS data. That data is almost permanently attached to the digital photos (as additional information), and it can be used for nefarious means by predators.

- Restrict access to Facebook until high school.
- Inform and caution teens of how public and accessible Facebook is to strangers, admission directors, and employers.
- Adjust Facebook setting so that only friends can see their profiles and pictures.
- Inform teens not to post contact information on profile: Phone number, address, etc.
- Advise children to only post information that they would want parents and the Lord to see, including no cursing.
- Consider having your own account to periodically check your teen's wall and activity. Make sure to inform your teen that you are doing this. Some youth have two Facebook accounts—one for their friends and one for their parents. Search for the other account and let your child know you know some youth are doing this.
- The Youth Staff recommends not allowing your teens to access MySpace. The universal access and frequent presence of unknown and unwanted contact does not make this site safe. There are now developing many social networks online. Communicate with your teen to discuss any other network they would like to be involved in and require access to it.

## Computer, Video Games, and iPods

- Be selective in the electronic games you allow your teen to use. (See Additional Resources, for video game reviews.)
- Most teens are downloading music through iTunes. Make use of iTunes parental controls.
- Consider having a shared family iPod rather than individual iPods.
- If you are alright with your teen having their own iPod, reserve the right to review theirs occasionally.

## **Additional Resources for Parents:**

**Social Networking Safety Resources** YouDiligence: A web-based service that gives parents the power to be proactive in protecting their children from online predators and cyber-bullies. YouDiligence scans your kids' MySpace and Facebook pages for inappropriate content without complicated software installation or downloads. [www.youdiligence.com](http://www.youdiligence.com)

### **Internet Safety Software Resources**

Bsecure™ Family Protection: an award-winning filtering and online security solution endorsed by more Christian organizations than any other. Choose flexible options on reporting, when the Internet can be accessed, what websites are visited, which social networking sites are allowed, filter and monitor IM conversations, and more. [www.bsecure.com](http://www.bsecure.com)

Covenant Eyes® Accountability and Filtering: provides internet accountability services with easy-to-read reports and filtering that allows you to block offensive websites and control how and when the Internet is used. This service will also monitor the websites visited and email reports to accountability partners you choose. [www.covenanteyes.com](http://www.covenanteyes.com)

Safe Eyes® Internet Parental Control: This software filters objectionable material including social networking, IM, email, and websites, while allowing you to receive immediate alerts if questionable activity occurs. [www.internetsafety.com](http://www.internetsafety.com)

### **Media Safety Resources**

Focus on the Family Plugged In Online: reviews of movies, videos, music, TV shows, and all types of electronic games (PC, X-Box, Play Station, and Wii) [www.pluggedin.com](http://www.pluggedin.com)

Christianity Today Movie Reviews: [www.christianitytoday.com/movies](http://www.christianitytoday.com/movies)

“Redeeming Social Life by Justin Buzzard:” Online article describing positive and negative aspects of Facebook. <http://www.gospelandculture.org/2008/12/redeeming-social-life-online/>

NetworkFleet/DriveCam/SmartDrive – Parents of children with licenses can use any number of commercial devices to monitor their location, driving habits, or speed. These devices come in a variety of types and purposes: some are just “black boxes” that track GPS location (through cell towers) and speed, while others come with inward and outward facing cameras that record their views leading up to and immediately following an event. One company even has a service that reviews the footage to identify and rate risky behavior and sends reports to the client based on predetermined thresholds of riskiness. Parents can also set “geo-fences” that notify the client when the vehicle has travelled outside of an acceptable area.

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