CYBERSMART PARENTING

INTRODUCTION TO CYBER PARENTING

Kids today are growing up in a compulsively connected world. Information is incessant, smartphones are ubiquitous, and with a click or a tap young people have 24/7 access to a never-ending digital conversation.

Connectivity comes at a cost. Social media has a message of its own—a message that sounds good, but is inherently dangerous. It is becoming louder, stronger and constant. And young people are drinking it in.

This is the message of expressive individualism—the belief that 'identity comes through self-expression, through discovering one's most authentic desires and being free to be one's authentic self'.

This is the follow-your-heart, believe-in-yourself, chase-your-dreams catechism of our culture. It is what our youth are learning. You are the creator of your identity. You are free—even obligated—to be whomever or whatever makes you feel good, no matter what anyone says.

And the cyber world is where your children live this. (For more on this topic: Jaquelle Crowe, 2017, 'How youth like me learn expressive individualism', *The Gospel Coalition*, https://www.thegospelcoalition. org/article/how-youth-like-me-learn-expressive-individualism.)

This social media–induced self-aggrandisement goes from airbrushed selfies on Instagram and Snapchat to 'killfies' (taking selfies in extreme, potentially life-threatening situations) and more recently to the 'Blue Whale Challenge' following the popular series '13 reasons why' (for more on this topic: Chris McKenna, 2017, 'Blue whale challenge, 13 reasons why, killfie explained', *Protect Young Eyes,* https://protectyoungeyes.com/blue-whale-challenge-13-reasons-why-killfie-explained/).

Like it or not, your child is a citizen of the cyber world. You need to be a cybersmart parent. A 'social media mentor'. Or, as it is sometimes designated, an iParent.

What does it mean to be a social media mentor?

Social media (Digital) mentor parents spend time with their children. They discuss the pros and cons of different apps and sites and explain why they need to use both filtering and accountability software on devices. They talk with their kids about how to use apps, technology and the internet responsibly. They discuss the choice of video games and streamed movies.

Here are some general tips for good cyber parenting:

1. Support and surround your children with prayer.

2. Explain to your children that your actions and concerns are based on love and not on limiting their involvement and activity.

3. Be actively involved in your child's life, especially their social media experience. Know your child's user name and password for each app. Ask your child to let you know who they have as friends on their social media accounts.

4. Disable the GPS location setting on mobile devices. Check privacy settings.

5. Research and really understand the social media apps your child is using (including their terms of use).

6. Develop a list of apps you are comfortable—and uncomfortable—with your child using.

7. Teach your child not to disclose private information, because nothing is really private on social media, despite 'privacy' settings.

8. Talk with your child about *why* (s)he shouldn't be using a certain app, as well as the reasons other apps are 'OK'.

9. Apply the same level of parenting oversight and diligence online that you do with your kids offline.

10. Safety-enable the digital devices you allow your child to use.

11. Ensure there are no devices in bedrooms at night. Kids often find it difficult to turn off their connection to friends and social networks. Make it a rule to charge all devices in a general area and not in the bedroom.

12. Help your kids find a healthy amount of social media interaction. Work with them and help them develop healthy habits.

13. Warn kids about sexting or sending selfies.

14. At this age, don't allow your children to have personal email accounts—all kids should use a family account so that parents can monitor correspondence. If you want your kids to have their own email account, make sure you set it up and keep the password so you can regularly monitor messages. (This can nip a lot of peer problems in the bud!)

15. Having taken all the precautions, be there to walk with your child. Support and love them. And if (or when) they do something unwise, help them to sort things out. Base your response on forgiveness and grace, just as God forgave us (1 Timothy 1:15–16 says, '*Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life.*')

BASIC TOOLS FOR INTERNET SAFETY

1. **Filtering** Filtering proactively detects and blocks objectionable content. (For example, if your child does an internet search for 'naked girls', it will block the search; if your child mistakenly clicks a link to a pornographic website, it will block access to the site.) A good article on filtering software can be found at: https://www.esafety.gov.au/education-resources/iparent/online-safeguards/filtering-software

2. **Accountability** Accountability software tracks websites visited from different devices and then prepares and delivers regular reports. (For example, if your child visits a pornographic website or performs a search for 'naked girls', the accountability software will note this and include it in a report emailed to you.) Commonly used accountability software include Covenant Eyes (http://www.covenanteyes.com/) and X3watch (https://x3watch.com/).

3. **Parental controls** Parental controls block certain functions of modern devices (for example, preventing the use of the internet browser on an iPod Touch; preventing the use of the Facebook app on a tablet). Set parental controls on all mobile devices. To make this effective on devices owned by your children, you will need to set a parental control password and use this password to ensure only you have access to the parental controls. For more information on parental controls: https://www.esafety.gov.au/education-resources/iparent/online-safeguards/parental-controls

4. **Communication** We cannot rely on technology to solve all of our problems, so the plan must also involve regular, deliberate and open discussion on these topics.

5. **Safe 'screen time'** This is a debated topic. Below is a link of recommendations from the Office of the Children's e-safety Commissioner, 'Keeping an eye on screen time', https://www.esafety.gov.au/education-resources/iparent/staying-safe/balancing-time-online/keeping-an-eye-on-screen-time

None of these measures offers complete protection, so the wise plan must use some combination of all five.

RESOURCES TO HELP YOU EVALUATE AND ACT ON MAKING YOUR HOME INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA SAFE

1. **Office of the Children's eSafety commissioner (Australian site)**

   https://www.esafety.gov.au/education-resources/iparent

2. **Net Nanny**

   https://www.netnanny.com/

   Originally created back in 1995, Net Nanny is consistently ranked among the best parental control software available. The current version enables you to block or permit specific websites, set screen-time limits, decrease exposure to profanities and set up alerts, so that you can have 'complete visibility and control' over your child's online activity.

   How to set parental controls for Android: https://www.netnanny.com/blog/how-to-set-parental-controls-for-android/

   How to set parental controls for Apple: https://www.netnanny.com/blog/apples-built-in-parental-controls/

3. **Protect Young Eyes**

   Protect Young Eyes have useful tips on creating an internet-safe home:

   Strategies: https://protectyoungeyes.com/strategies/

   Devices: https://protectyoungeyes.com/parental-control/

   Step-by-step guides for parental controls for popular internet apps and websites

   Internet safety cheat sheet: https://protectyoungeyes.com/internet-safety-cheat-sheet/

   Instagram: https://protectyoungeyes.com/content/instagram/

   YouTube: https://protectyoungeyes.com/content/youtube/

   Android: https://protectyoungeyes.com/content/android/

   iOS (Apple mobile products): https://protectyoungeyes.com/content/ios-iphone-ipad-ipod/

   Netflix: https://protectyoungeyes.com/content/netflix/

   Xbox: https://protectyoungeyes.com/content/xbox/

   Minecraft PE: https://protectyoungeyes.com/content/minecraft-pe/

   'Sex mods: Is Minecraft safe for our kids?' https://protectyoungminds.org/2016/11/03/sex-mods-minecraft-safe-kids/

   OpenDNS (www.opendns.com): uses filtering to automatically block objectionable websites for every device connected to your home network. It is activated by making a small change to the settings on your existing router: https://protectyoungeyes.com/content/wireless-router/

   They also have a downloadable book on communication with children, the 'Parent Tech Talks E-Book': https://protectyoungeyes.com/content/parent-tech-talks-e-book/

4. **Covenant Eyes**

   Covenant Eyes tracks the websites visited by your computers and mobile devices and sends regular email reports; it also offers optional filtering that can be configured specifically for each member of your family: http://www.covenanteyes.com/services/internet-accountability/

5. **EducateEmpowerKids.Org**

   https://educateempowerkids.org/

   Excellent, up-to-date resources on a variety of topics.

6. **Norton Family Parental Control**

https://family.norton.com/web/

The people at Norton software are determined that your child should be able to enjoy their connected world safely. The idea is to help teach children safe web-exploration habits and to help you to stay in the know about where they are and what it is that they are searching for and looking at online. This app is currently only available for use on child devices. Visit the website for a free trial.

7. **SafeKiddo app**

http://safekiddo.com/en_us/

Created by parents for parents, the SafeKiddo app 'provides comprehensive protection in the online world'. It suggests what content your children should and should not be looking at based on their age and allows you to manage their screen-time and access. Visit the website for a free trial.