



Helping Parents Understand Technology

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## Do your kids have too much freedom with technology?



If Norman Rockwell were alive today and asked to paint a 21st Century teenager, undeniably this teen would be sitting somewhere, oblivious of their surroundings, completely engrossed by their mobile phone.

When most of us were kids, we had a TV, an Atari and a phone attached to the wall. Today's young people have all those features and more in a nice little mobile device that fits neatly in their pocket.

Technology changes so fast, sometimes parents feel like it's difficult to keep up. For example, a few years ago the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) released a study recommending parents "recognize the importance of the media, exert control over their children's media choices, and keep their children's bedrooms free of TVs and Internet connections..." These doctors weren't alone in their findings. The Kaiser Family Foundation released a similar report studying the effect of entertainment media on 8-18-year-olds, concluding, "We need to pay full attention to anything that takes up this much time in young people's lives."

Now fast forward just a few years later and over 70% of 13-17-year-olds have a smartphone in their pocket with access to TV programming, movies, Internet, social media, music videos and more. How many parents do you know who stand outside their kids' room with a bucket, kindly requesting, "Please deposit your phone in this bucket before going into your bedroom?"

Sadly, the majority of parents feel overwhelmed and literally just "give up." In a study last summer the Internet security company McAfee discovered 74% of parents said, "they don't have the time or energy to keep up with everything their kids are doing," and 72% said they are "overwhelmed by modern technology and just hope for the best."



So how should parents, who don't want to "give up" on their kids, respond?

**1. Engage in frequent conversations about Media.**

It's the one common denominator every parenting expert agrees on: dialogue between parent and child. Don't try to block every image your kid encounters (it's impossible). Create an environment where your child feels free to ask you about the video they saw on the screen at Wal-Mart or the song they heard at their friend's house.

**2. Co-View.**

The AAP, mentioned above, recommends parents co-view entertainment with their kids. Yes, this takes time. Don't let your kids watch random programming by themselves. Sit down with them and say, "Let's try this show together."

**3. Don't be afraid to set realistic boundaries.**

Sure, you don't want to be that parent that tries to swoop down and save them from every worldly message or image they encounter, but at the same time, it's okay to say, "Sorry, this doesn't belong in our house."

Do you know what your kids have on their phones? When is the last time you talked about the messages and images they encounter each day?

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