

From Goo-Goo to Google

Battery manufacturer Duracell compiles a list every year of the toys children want for Christmas the most. Of the top 10 most coveted gifts in 2010, only two were traditional toys. The other eight were tech "gadgets," ranging in size and price: iPhone 4, iPod touch, iPad, Xbox Kinect, Flip cam, PlayStation Move, Lego Harry Potter Years 1-4 video game, and the Barbie Video Girl.

Statistics paint a picture of digital saturation in childhood. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, kids (ages 2 to 18) spend an average of five hours and 29 minutes per day using media. Larry D. Rosen, professor and research psychologist at California State University (Dominguez Hills), found 35 percent of children ages 6 months to 3 years have a TV set in their bedroom; 10 percent of kids ages 4 to 8 have a computer in their bedroom; and 51 percent of those ages 9 to 12 have a cell phone.

Children ages 2 to 6 are just as wired as their older siblings. Market data firm NPD concluded in their 2007 report, "Kids & Digital Content," that close to 15 percent of 2- to 5-year-olds use cell phones. Children in this age group don't own these portable devices; they share them with a parent or older sibling. Soon-to-be tech-savvy toddlers are crawling through the nursery at a church near you.

(Matt Guevara group newsletter)

The following report is a summary of the collaborative research by the Rethink (Think Orange) group and Barna examining how families interact with the media along with some useful tips.

A Note from: David Kinnaman/Barna Group

"There is a debate occurring about technology. Are the tools and techniques of a digital culture making it easier or harder to have a healthy family?"

Its advocates point out that technology is facilitating some helpful values: staying connected, learning about the world around and expressing one's self. For parents, it enables keeping tabs on teens and tweens. Today's movies and television provide remarkably compelling content for families to be entertained, transported to another era or place, learn about history and create shared experiences.

At the same time, technology gives its users space-age tools to create – everything from mere documents, to videos, blogs, websites and beyond. Technology seems to have been at least partly responsible for the current appetite to make the world a better place, by shrinking the entire world down to an easily digestible "window pane" of content.

But the critics have their concerns, too. Technology, they say, feeds narcissism. Entertainment is mere escapism. It is taking families and making their members even more isolated from one another. Together, media and technological tools are giving us a feeling of control, of instant gratification, of education. But, as the naysayers describe it, technology is really disconnecting us from what it really means to be human. Some have suggested that the bite-sized, image-drenched techno-society is robbing people of their

attention spans - of the ability to think deeply, to contemplate, to reflect on important issues beyond just repeating the clichés offered by today's powerful media influencers.



Where is the truth in the debate? Probably not on either extreme. This research suggests that the reality falls somewhere in the middle. And the story of technology's impact on families may be much more positive, or at least neutral, than most imagined.

Yet, it's not all roses and rainbows. You will discover how today's families are so busy using these tools, they seem to be exercising very little in the way of the needed judgment and sensitivity that would make technology serve them, rather than the other way around. For example, most parents are so dependent on technology themselves they are poor models for their children of how to think and pursue the proper stewardship of today's tools and content. Therefore, when it comes to technology, today as always, what is most required is discernment."

A note from: Reggie Joiner, Jared Herd and Carey Nieuwhof, Orange

The changes in technology in the last decade have been breathtaking. From the advent of **Facebook** to text messaging to the emergence of smart phones, technology is impacting family life in whole new ways. Many parents are asking questions about the impact all of this is having on their kids and on family life. That's why we commissioned this study.

- What if technology is neither good nor evil, but simply reveals and amplifies the relational and character patterns that are already there?
- What if our children are not so much blazing the trail technologically, but following our lead? And what we don't like in them is actually a reflection of what we see in ourselves?
- What if our struggle with technology is not the problem, but a symptom of a deeper problem that centres on the quality and depth of family relationships?

The rhythm of the family life is shifting as technology changes the way we communicate with each other. And what we see in this report is that well-established patterns of family

life suggest some significant changes in the ways families communicate are advisable. To be clear, technology didn't cause the problem – the issue was there long before smart phones, **Facebook** and text messaging became pervasive in our homes and in our middle school and high school ministries.

In the Orange analysis section of this report, we'll talk about the impact of technology on the rhythm of family life and on what parents and students can do to fight for each other's hearts.

As an organization, there are five values we hold close to the heart of family life:

- Value one: Widen the Circle – pursuing strategic relationship for our kids.
- Value two: Imagine the End – focusing our priorities on what matters most.
- Value three: Fight for the Heart – communicating in a way that gives the relationship value.
- Value four: Create a Rhythm – increasing the quantity of quality time families spend together.
- Value five: Make it Personal – putting yourself first when it comes to spiritual growth.

In our view, it's the third value (Fight for the Heart) and fourth value (Create a Rhythm) that have been impacted most by technology. We want to take the timeless issue of family life and offer practical strategies for the impact that the timely issue of technology is having on it. We hope the practical tools and steps we offer in this report will help parents and church leaders enhance the quality of time we spend together and the quality of the relationships we forge in family.

In the end, we hope the insights in this report spark a healthy dialogue among church leaders, but our ultimate goal is to create new conversations and deeper relationships between parents and teens.

The Positive Impacts of Media and Technology on Children

(Source, Warburton and Braunstein, Growing up Fast and Furious, 2012)

- ***Pro Social and helping Behaviour***

-Children who watched pro-social content on television behaved significantly more helpfully or help significantly more helpful attitudes than others both in experimental settings and at home.

- **Education**

-Age appropriate educational television has been linked with improved scores on vocabulary tests and enhanced achievement in reading and mathematics in children three and older. Video games are used to teach some professions for example pilots, soldiers and surgeon's skills and techniques.

- **Spatial cognition, coordination and fine motor skills**

Video game playing improves spatial cognition and fine motor skills.

- **Pain Management**

Television, video games and music have been successfully used to distract or soothe children during painful procedures and recovery.

- **Social Networks**

A range of media can be used for social interaction and is also important to a child's developing identity. Media that helps children and teenagers develop positive self-identity can have a positive impact on healthy development

The Negative Impacts of Media and Technology on Children

(Source, Warburton and Braunstein, Growing up Fast and Furious, 2012)

- **Links with poor general health**

Screen based media uses have been positively correlated with health complaints, physical aggression, cigarette smoking and alcohol use. Screen based media was also modestly associated with individuals perceptions of poorer quality of life and quality of family relationships

- **Sleep Deficits**

Increasing Media use is strongly linked with sleep deficits and sleep disturbances. Delayed bedtime and shorter total sleep time were the sleep problems most consistently related to media use. Children watching three or more hours of television per day was associated with sleep problems that persisted into early adulthood. Violent content, bedroom access to television and evening media uses have also been linked to sleep problems in younger children aged 3-5. Television viewing and the playing of computer games in the two hours leading up to bedtime seem particularly problematic being linked to sleep disturbances, poorer quality sleep, resistance to going to bed, difficulty falling asleep and less sleep time overall.

- **Addiction**

Video game addiction is a serious and growing problem. It is clear that many children play video games at pathological level that causes damage to family, social, school or psychological functioning.

- **Mental Health Problems**

High consumption of media has been associated with unhappiness, problems in social adjustment, post traumatic stress disorder and anxiety and depression related disorders.

- **Attention deficits and education problems**

There is growing research evidence linking levels of television exposure and video game exposure with attention deficits with children. There are also links between levels of media consumption and poorer school performance.

- **Unhealthy Lifestyle choices**

High levels of media use have been linked with obesity, poor cardiorespiratory fitness and raised cholesterol. These issues have long-term detrimental consequences for later adult health.

- **Fear, anxiety and phobias**

Children's exposure to frightening media can have significant short and long term effects on children. Between 25 to 35% of adults have significant fear that originated from childhood exposure to frightening media.

- **Susceptibility to persuasion by advertising**

Children and adolescents are highly vulnerable to the influences of advertising and are not able to distinguish between advertisements and other media content. Children also learn more quickly from medial contents and are able to recognise brands even if they don't understand the content of the advertisement. Children are firmly in the sites of producers and marketers. George Gerbner says that "For the first time in human history, Children are born into homes where mass mediated story tellers reach them on average more than seven hours a day...These stories do not come from families, schools, churches, neighbourhoods, and often not even from the native countries. They come from a small group of distant conglomerates with something to sell." (Harvesting Minds: How TV commercials Control kids").

- **Detriment to family relationships**

Time spent with multi media is linked to poorer attachment to parents. Given that the core of attachment relationships involves beliefs about ones self worth and the trustworthiness of others it is not surprising that media use, which is linked with distrust and fear would undermine key attachment beliefs as well as take up time that could be spent in warm and supportive interactions with one's caregivers, family and peers.

- **Prejudice and misogyny**

Children internalize and adopt attitudes and beliefs expressed in the mass media. These attitudes (for example those seen in Grand Theft Auto) are often stereotyped, prejudices and misogynistic in nature. Games and TV shows often stereotype women as props,

bystanders, damsels in distress or victims. Video games have mostly white characters and heroes and tend to portray minority characters as athletes, street thugs, victims and criminals. Childhood exposure to stereotyped material in media can increase both gender stereotyping and traditional gender role attitudes.

- **Premature Sexualisation of Children**

Media is a key medium by which children learn. There is evidence that age inappropriate sexual content is linked with early sexual activity and teenage pregnancy. Premature or inappropriate exposure to sexualized material can have a negative impact on children's mental health. In addition exposure to age-inappropriate sexual material in the media is associated with disturbances to sexual identity development and eating disorders.

- **Aggressive Behaviour**

Children exposed to violent media results in an increase in aggressive behavior, an increase in beliefs normalizing aggressive behavior, an increase in behavioural scripts normalizing aggressive behavior and emotional desensitisation to violence.

Advice for Parents and Carer/s -

WE ARE MODELING THE WAY; OUR KIDS ARE FOLLOWING OUR LEAD

When it comes to technology and its effects, we often approach the issue as if kids are the outlaws and as if parents are the sheriffs. But as the Barna Group research shows, that is a false dichotomy, and the enemy is not our kids' use of technology or even technology itself. In fact, it is not kids who have brought the widespread use of technology into the home, it is us.

What to Do?

- 1. Make sure you follow the house rules you set.**

If you want your kids to stop texting during dinner, make sure you don't take calls or answer emails. If there are screen-time limits, make sure you have defined the boundaries for yourself as well as for them.

- 2. Delineate in your own mind and in the mind of your kids what is personal and what is work.**

If they are sensitive to ensuring they have your attention when you're home, let them know that just because you're on your smart phone doesn't mean you're working.

- 3. Model effective tech-use by avoiding mindless multitasking such as texting while talking.**

- 4. Ensure devices at home are kept and used in public spaces to encourage accountability and discourage inappropriate use.**

5. **Avoid doling out technology to keep kids compliant while having coffee or on a long drive.**
6. **Collect phones, tablets etc, and put them in a secure safe place during sleep hours, family time etc. Remove all forms of media from the bedroom and unplug the modem at night.**
7. **Consider imposing media free “Sabbaths” as part of your regular family routine**

**TECHNOLOGY ISN'T GOOD OR EVIL.
IT REVEALS AND AMPLIFIES WHAT'S ALREADY THERE.**

Parents and teens have rushed to embrace technology and have a reasonably positive view of it. We love movies and entertainment, and technology gives us new ways to access them and to communicate with people around us. Parents use smart phones more heavily than their teens and match or exceed the level of use of their teens in almost every category except music and gaming.

Inasmuch as we raise some concerns about the quality of family relationships in this report, it's also our view that it's unlikely that technological changes of the last decade have caused significant deterioration in our relationships. It may simply reveal and amplify trends that were already there.

What to do?

1. Teach character, not just limits.

While limits on Internet use are not a bad idea, parents might try to instil self-regulation as well as parentally imposed regulation. At an early age, it would be appropriate to have regular conversations with your tween about:

- The good and bad available online.
- What is acceptable and unacceptable content in your home? Talk to your children about the pros and cons of tech use and agree on a basic code of conduct.
- Limits on privacy settings. (Decide whether you will allow passwords and who gets access to accounts.)
- How to be analytical readers of the digital world. Teach them to be sceptical about chat room identities and critical of the source and quality of information
- What is sexualised media, its effects and how to combat it.
- The impact of what they say and do on their character and faith.

2. Prepare them for independence.

Appropriate use of technology in the teen years can help your children get ready to be on their own. When they leave home, the content they view and the time they spend online will be 100 percent subject to self-regulation. Letting them know that you're trying to help them make the journey to independence can be a big help as they get ready for the day. By parenting with that end in mind you can:

- Help them develop their character early in life.
- Help them see the rewards that come from self-discipline and self-control.

3. Encourage a wider circle. (Intentionally place mentors in your child's life)

It's natural for children not to talk to you about everything, but as a parent you can ensure that they have a responsible adult they trust and can talk to in their lives. That's where a small group leader in a student ministry can be so valuable. If your son or daughter is having struggles with content, having someone in their life that would say the same thing a loving parent would say can be a life line for them. As a parent, you can try to cultivate those relationships through your relational network or by ensuring your child gets involved in a youth group that values that kind of relationships. Those relationships can be a pivotal link as your child heads into his or her college years.

WE ARE VERY CONNECTED, BUT PERHAPS TO PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT IN THE ROOM.

Families use technology to build memories and relationships. Whether it's watching movies, watching the Super Bowl or texting back and forth, technology can facilitate some great experiences and conversations.

But technology can be deceiving too. It can give you an illusion that you are connected when you are really not. If you look at how technology is used in today's families, much of our shared time is focused on people who are not present with us. Between time spent watching television or movies and **Facebooking** or texting friends, a lot of our screen time is spent with people we're not sharing the same physical space with. It is more than possible to be in the room with your family and be relationally disconnected. Almost half of parents and teens admit to emailing, texting or talking on the phone while eating.

We are more widely connected than ever before, but not necessarily more deeply connected to the people across the table from us.

What to do?

1. When your kids withdraw, make sure you don't.

It can be easy to step back when your kids take a step back relationally or would rather *Facebook* a friend than talk to you as a parent, but one of the most important decisions you can make is to pursue a relationship with your kids whether they appear to want one or not. Fight for their hearts.

2. Cultivate activities and conversations that are not technology-dependent.

Take time to have conversations about life, faith, relationships, goals, dreams and hopes. Encourage your children to spend more time outdoors playing with friends and involved in outdoor activities

3. Be willing to have uncomfortable conversations.

As you find common activities, you can begin to have more in-depth conversations. Another great way to begin more meaningful conversations is on longer drives in the car. While it still may be uncomfortable, sitting next to each other or in front of each other can make a conversation less intimidating than sitting across the table from each other. Once you have a bit of a track record in having meaningful conversations, they will become less awkward over time.

CONVERSATIONS CAN BECOME TRANSACTIONAL, BUT NEED TO BE RELATIONAL

While technology is a well used vehicle for communication, the types of communication that we use it for was of high interest in the research. Much of the communication that is happening over text messaging is what we would call “transactional”. Transactional communication is centred on the mere passing of information or permission between two people. It is simple, non-intrusive, and it is “need to know.” Where technology is very helpful for transactional information (e.g., when your teen needs to be picked up, what time she’ll be home, the time the game is over), it is often an inhibitor of “relational” communication. While we certainly need transactional conversations and they are a part of our daily, life technology is forcing us to work harder than ever to have deep relational communication. Furthermore, text messaging (transactional communication) can fool us into thinking that we have deep connection, but what our sons and daughters need is not quantity, what they need is quality.

This, perhaps more than anything else studied, shows that the rhythm of family life is changing. In many ways, kids and parents are “talking” more, and the beauty of technology allows a constant connection. However, what can be conveyed over the mediums that exist to us cannot take the place of a face-to-face conversation.

What to do?

1. Use the transactional as a springboard into the relational.

Don’t leave the conversation at “pack your lunch and remember to take out the garbage before you leave,” take the conversation further.

2. Use open-ended questions and keep asking even when you get shorter answers.

3. Make time to simply be in each other's company with nothing on the agenda.

Create a rhythm that increases the quantity of quality time you spend together.

TECHNOLOGY CAN FOSTER EGO-CENTRIC LIVING

With the advent of text messaging, **Facebook**, instant messaging, and other forms of fast communication, we have created a world that is in many ways a dream scenario for an early- to mid-adolescent.

The world of an 11 to 17 year-old is highly egocentric, meaning their primary concern is themselves and how the world can revolve around their interests. In this world, the primary forms of approval must come from social influences, not mum and dad. In this state of transition, naturally the role a parent plays in the life of their son or daughter will change.

Age-old wisdom tells us that mum and dad want a deeper connection through the teenage years, while the teenager begins to see mum and dad as a source of permission and information. According to their felt needs, affection isn't high on the list. Therefore, a world that exists where the

tools in place conduct transactional communication is perfect for a student that has no desire for relational engagement. If our goal is to raise a healthy adult, not just to graduate a student from high school (not a bad goal!), then we must choose to swim upstream on this issue.

What to do?

1. Talk with your teen or tween about the important of living beyond themselves and their wants and desires.

2. Get them involved in something significant.

Teens will never believe their lives have significance (beyond themselves) until you give them something significant to do. Serve. Give. Do something beyond themselves. Let them see the parents modelling this others-oriented lifestyle.

3. Don't let them off the hook when they don't text you back about something important.

If you asked a relationally significant question, ask it again until you get a meaningful answer.

CHEAT SHEET FOR BABIES AND TODDLERS

TELEVISION

DAILY DOSAGE None if you can help it; at least hold out 6 months to 1 year and then only a half hour to an hour.

KEY CONCERNS Potentially stunting the development of the ability to focus.

REMEDY Low consumption; “real-time” paced programming; interactive programming and interactive parenting.

COPING STRATEGY Don’t wait for it to happen: Pre-plan other distractions.

MUSIC

DAILY DOSAGE As much as you’d like.

KEY ADVANTAGE Promoting development

CELL PHONES

USAGE WARNINGS Be on the safe side: Don’t let young children use them.



CHEAT SHEET FOR PRE-SCHOOLERS

TELEVISION

DAILY DOSAGE

Fewer than two hours, preferably one or less.

KEY CONCERNS

Educational television.

REMEDY

Become an expert on your children's programming; show only educational television; interact with your child watching television to maximize learning.

COMPUTERS

KEY CONCERN

Many, though currently with little research to support the large amounts of criticism.

KEY ADVANTAGE

Initially requires parental interaction; most preschool software is educational.

ADVERTISING

KEY CONCERN

Pre-schoolers are capable of watching ads, but not capable of understanding what their purpose is, and certainly not capable of critically interacting with advertising.

REMEDY

Use your DVR and other recording devices and "on-demand" services; interact and skip ads for them.



CHEAT SHEET FOR EARLY PRIMARY

TELEVISION

KEY CONCERNS Shows for your kids are starting to get more and more violent.

REMEDY Low consumption, interactive parenting.

KEY NEW SKILL Using the ratings system and V-chip controls to limit content.

SPECIAL TOPIC Be sure to limit adult content and be cautious introducing the news.

COMPUTERS AND INTERNET

KEY NEW SKILL Setting up filtering software and a safe public workspace for your computer.

SECONDARY SKILL Finding great websites and games for kids that are interactive and educational

VIDEO GAMES

KEY NEW SKILL Learning the video game rating system.

KEY CONCERNS Overuse.

CHEAT SHEET FOR PRE-TEENS

TELEVISION

KEY CONCERNS Wanting to be thin but possibly getting fatter, plus other messages from television.

REMEDY Inoculate preteens from messages and images.

COMPUTERS AND INTERNET

KEY CONCERNS Predators and bullying.

REMEDY Learn what is necessary to help your kids avoid these concerns.

VIDEO GAMES

KEY CONCERN Overuse and violence.

REMEDY Choose games wisely, moderate and mediate use.

ADVERTISING AND MEDIA LITERACY

KEY CONCERNS Advertising influence.

REMEDY Begin media literacy.

CHEAT SHEET FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL

TELEVISION AND MOVIES

KEY CONCERNS Sex and Violence

REMEDY Inoculation, open discussion with your children.

INTERNET

KEY CONCERNS Sex

REMEDY Inoculation; open discussion with your children; better filtering and oversight.

MUSIC

KEY CONCERN Violence and music degrading women.

REMEDY Oversight, open discussion.



CHEAT SHEET FOR HIGH SCHOOL AND BEYOND

TELEVISION AND MOVIES

KEY CONCERNS

Attitudes toward and use of alcohol.

REMEDY

Inoculation, open discussion with your children.

ADVERTISING AND MEDIA LITERACY

KEY CONCERNS

Media influence on values and thinking.

REMEDY

Advanced media literacy.

