



# Becoming MediaWise

*Don't let technology replace the human connection*

## Are you really connected to your kids?

Parents, here's a short test for you. What is your child's favorite TV show? His favorite movie and musician? Her favorite magazine? What sites does he visit on the Internet? Who are her three best friends? Name his favorite teacher, and his least favorite teacher. So... how are you doing? Could you answer all of those questions? Could you answer even half?



The point is, to be connected to our kids, we have to enter their world. We need to know what they like, who they like and what has their attention. So get involved. *Start asking questions, and get connected.*

[www.AllProDad.com](http://www.AllProDad.com)

Use media together and talk about what you see, hear, and read. Whenever you can, **watch, play, listen and surf** with your kids. When you can't be there, ask them about the media they've used.

**Practice media literacy—help kids question and analyze media messages.** Let them know how you feel about solving problems with violence, stereotyping people, selling products using sex, or advertising to kids in schools and theatres.

**Help your kids connect what they learn** in the media to their activities (such as art and playing sports), in order to broaden their understanding of the world.

[www.CommonSenseMedia.org](http://www.CommonSenseMedia.org)

### Cell Phone = Internet

Accessing the World Wide Web has never been easier. Most new generation cell phones allow you to navigate the Internet. Kids can now access their MySpace profiles, send emails, upload pictures to YouTube and surf the Web from their phones. While it is still expensive, sometimes slower than traditional Internet access, and sometimes hard to surf the Web on a small screen, every year the service is faster and cheaper.



#### What to watch out for:

- It can be expensive to access the Internet—resulting in cell phone bills kids and parents weren't planning on. If you do allow Internet access on phones, set limits to online time.
- Kids can download inappropriate messages or pictures off the Internet and send them to their friends. Be sure to talk with them about "netiquette."
- Although not common, teachers report a growing trend of Internet-enabled cell phones being used to cheat on tests.
- Constant access to the Internet can be very distracting.

### Cell Phone = Television

Leaders in the industry, including Sprint TV and MobiTV, are bringing music videos, news, weather, and sitcoms to a phone near you. For a monthly subscription fee, mobile users can get access to up to 30 channels. The service rings in at about ten dollars a month, but without a high connection speed there are dropped signals, long buffering time, and highly pixilated pictures. We can expect to see clear, live TV shows as a standard feature within a few years.

#### What to watch out for:

- We know that too much screen time isn't good for kids. Being able to access TV anywhere, any time only increases the number of possible hours kids can be glued to screens instead of plugged into school, family, or friends.
- It's harder to monitor the shows kids watch when they are tuning in to small, personal hand-held devices.
- TV can be very distracting—it's hard for teachers to compete with football games broadcast live.

[www.MediaWise.org](http://www.MediaWise.org)

### Vocabulary Corner



Do your kids' electronic messages look like Greek to you? Do you wonder and worry about what they mean? Here are some common phrases to help you be aware of what's being communicated:

- AOTA** all of the above
- BFF** best friends forever
- CYA** see ya
- IHAIM** I have another instant message
- NAZ** name, address, zip
- NOYB** none of your business
- PAW** parents are watching
- ROTFL** rolling on the floor laughing
- SPST** same place same time
- TOY** thinking of you
- WTG** way to go

See *f@stcht/A Quick Guide to the Abbreviated Language of Instant Messaging* for more chat abbreviations.

# Peace and Quiet



From a spiritual perspective, all the constant input we experience nowadays (telephones; MP3 players and headphones; the bang-and-clatter of lockers, bells, and shouting in the halls at school; honking horns and loud music when driving, etc.) tends to numb kids out, disconnecting them from

their hearts, minds, and intuitive wisdom. When over-stimulation is a way of life, quieter moments may seem empty. Most teens haven't been exposed to extended periods of quiet so inactivity feels uncomfortable. Or, they might be used to zoning out and have a fear of stopping and actually thinking, feeling, and taking stock of their lives.

Our jobs as parents is to gently invite our teens to remember that quiet doesn't have to equal bored or asleep or deep thinking. We can help them reconnect to the extraordinary experiences that can happen in ordinary moments, and reawaken what may seem like a sleeping sense of wonder. We can encourage our sons and daughters to "stop already" and "center down," as the Quakers call quieting ourselves.

The common rooms of your home can counteract the busyness of your teen's other environments, offering them a sanctuary. Factors like subdued lighting, relatively low noise levels, and a sense of order can contribute to creating peace. As one mother and stepmother of two teenaged boys says: "When our boys go to their friends' houses, they get a lot of stimulation. In one house, people interrupt and talk over each other. In another, there's a TV on all the time, even during meals. We try to be more serene here, with conversation instead of electronics."

*Try one of these strategies and notice a little more peacefulness in your home:*

- **Move the TV to a location other than the rooms where your family congregates for meals and/or conversation.** You can take this a step further. I know several families who neither have TV reception nor subscribe to cable. They have one TV in the basement that is used for movies.
- **Turn off unnecessary light in living areas.** Not only will this save energy, it can be relaxing. We often associate bright lights with noise and busyness, so try creating the opposite atmosphere in your home.

- **If you like to listen to music in the background, experiment with the difference between music with vocals and instrumental recordings.** Some people find that background instrumental music is soothing, while vocals can create tension unless you listen attentively.

- **Create a room in your home where every family member can sit comfortably with lights conducive to reading.** My family realized recently that our pets used the living room furniture more than we did. So, we invested in some great reading lights, rearranged the



furniture, placed coasters around to accommodate drinks, and dug out our throw blankets to entice napping. The serenity I feel when the four of us are all together reading in silence, pets on the floor where they belong, is deeply grounding.

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## TIME-OUT FROM TECHNOLOGY

Does your family have any "tech-free zones"? You know, places or times where all cell phones, TVs, video games and computers are in the "off" mode?

One parent we heard from made the time he spent with his daughter tech-free. They took no calls, sent no text messages and checked no email when they were spending time together in the car, eating out, or doing something together (such as shopping). If you can't go tech-free cold turkey, try not taking any calls the first 30 minutes you and your kids are together after school. And definitely make the mealtime a tech-free zone.

[www.iMom.com](http://www.iMom.com)

## Remember when the phone was just a phone?

Today's phones have become more like a vital body part. People talk on the phone and text while they drive in traffic, have dinner with their families, go to the movies, sit in church or visit with friends. Think about the time you spend on the phone, and whether you're neglecting, disrespecting or even endangering someone else. *Know when it's time to turn off the phone and turn your attention to others... it's not just good manners, it's good sense.*



[www.FamilyFirst.net](http://www.FamilyFirst.net)