



Becoming MediaWise

Don't let technology replace the human connection

Examine your use of technology. Do you rush home from work to check your email and phone messages before sitting down to hear about your child's day? One father was devastated to receive this email from his 8-year-old daughter: "Dad, I know how busy you are, but do you think you would have time to read me a story tonight?" He was on his laptop in the family room, and she was on her computer upstairs in her bedroom.

Take time to connect as a family. Dazzling technology can diminish human worth, but coming together through a shared activity grounds and unites us. Just have fun together, or learn something new with your kids.

Make sure your kids are connecting with friends in real time, not just through the computer. Encourage them to invite friends to your home.

Be available to listen to your child's worries and questions. According to a recent national survey by Kaiser Family Foundation, 39% of preteens are getting information about their big questions via TV or the internet. Wouldn't you rather your kids come to you?

Talk to your kids about what you believe in. "We only allow programming in our home that treats people respectfully—that goes for websites, CDs, video games, and TV shows." Then discuss why you feel that way, rather than just levying rules and consequences.

Come up with ways to extend computer interests into real-world interests. If your child loves sending greeting cards online, stock up on art supplies so he can create some by hand.

Don't let screen time substitute for lap time with your young child, and don't expect books on CD-ROM to substitute for a loving parent's voice.

Whenever possible, make computer use a social experience: Put the computer in a central place in your home, and put two chairs there to encourage sharing. Get to know what programs interest your child and join him. An added bonus: older kids are apt to use technology more responsibly when it is out in the open rather than in their bedrooms.

Mimi Doe is the author of *10 Principles for Spiritual Parenting—Nurturing Your Child's Soul*. Her online newsletter, "Spiritual Parenting Thought for the Week," has thousands of subscribers from around the world.

Want a great way to spend more cherished time with your children?



Have a policy not to use your cell phone (hands-free, of course) when your kids are in the car. Use that time instead to chat with them about anything and everything. When you take a call while they're with you, you're sending a message of what is more important. Your children in the back seat will one day be driving on their own, so take the opportunity you have now to steer them down the road of attentive listening and safe driving.

Family Minute with Mark Merrill at www.FamilyFirst.net (adapted)

While the perils of the Internet pose serious risks for kids, it is also a great resource—as long as we help them understand how to use it responsibly and monitor their use.



Vocabulary Corner

Do your children's instant 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:

- b/f (also BF)** boyfriend
- F2F** face to face
- g/f (also GF)** girlfriend
- IM** instant message
- LYLAB** love you like a brother
- newbie** a person who is new to an area or technology. (Also **nube**, **nooby**, **nubie**, **nb**, etc)
- POS (also POTS)** Parents over [the] shoulder ("I can't really talk")
- SN** screen name; the name selected to use in an IM or chat room
- SPST** same place, same time
- WTGP?** Want to go private? (move to a private chat room, or talk by phone)
- ?^** what's up?

From *f@stcht/A Quick Guide to the Abbreviated Language of Instant Messaging* available at www.mediafamily.org

Internet Safety Tips for Kids

- ▲ **DO** spend more time with real life friends than virtual friends
- ▲ **DO** tell an adult if someone online bullies you or wants to talk about sex
- ▲ **DO** cut off contact with anyone who pressures you for personal information
- ▲ **DO** be careful of strangers who promise to be a friend but try to turn you against your family
- ▼ **Do NOT** exchange photographs with strangers
- ▼ **Do NOT** open emails, IMs or download attachments from people you don't know



- ▼ **Do NOT** fill out forms to win free things
- ▼ **Do NOT** go to meet someone you don't know in real life

www.webwisekids.org

cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is just what it sounds like. It can mean sending derogatory insults or threats in messages, often many of them. Sometimes it involves the circulation of humiliating information or pictures, or demeaning postings on web sites. Whatever form it takes, cyberbullying is incredibly hurtful to the people it targets.

Cyberbullies act just like bullies from past generations. They pick on kids or even teachers, trying to humiliate and intimidate them. But instead of waiting around by the door after school, cyberbullies do their damage via emails, text messages or Internet web sites.

Why do they do it?

- * **Anonymity**— no one can see them and they can't see the one they're hurting
- * It makes them feel **powerful**
- * **Easy**— it takes just a few clicks of the mouse
- * It feels like an **online game**
- * Bullies have **quick access** to private spaces like kids' emails, message boards or MySpace profiles
- * Some think it's the **cool** thing to do

Unlike bullying that used to take place under the watchful gaze of teachers and parents, cyberbullies are able to humiliate others behind closed doors with just a click of the mouse. The impact of cyberbullying can be even greater than bullying in "real life" because:

- ▶ Online bullying can be extremely vicious and mean
- ▶ Hurtful messages or words can be spread quickly to hundreds of others
- ▶ Kids may not know who is bullying them online, creating a culture of fear and distrust among peers
- ▶ Lots of bullied kids don't tell adults because they are embarrassed and/or don't want their online privileges to be taken away
- ▶ Cyberbullying can happen 24/7 so kids can feel inundated by threats and taunting
- ▶ Bullies have access to kids' private spaces, making it feel as if no place is safe

Signs and signals that your child is a victim of cyberbullying

- ✓ Your child seems upset and/or anxious (especially after using the computer or cell phone) when there doesn't seem to be an obvious reason
- ✓ Sudden change in group of friends or after-school activities
- ✓ Change in grades or school behavior
- ✓ Off-hand comments
- ✓ Frequent complaints of headaches, stomachaches, or other stress-related ailments

www.MediaWise.org

REALITY TV: REAL CONUNDRUM?

TV viewers can choose from among scores of reality programs (e.g. *American Idol*, *The Bachelor*, *The Biggest Loser*, *Extreme Makeover*, *Nanny 911*, *The Real World*, *Survivor*, *Wife Swap*). The unscripted and seemingly spontaneous exploits and tribulations of "real" people hold considerable allure. While Reality TV draws viewers from all demographic groups, it is disproportionately popular among preteens, adolescents and young adults. RTV poses a particular risk to 8 to 15 year olds, who are seeking and absorbing guidance for their rapidly evolving sense of personal identity as well as their relationships with family, friends and the opposite sex. Moreover, because children and adolescents may be less likely than adults to see the contrived nature of reality shows, they are more likely to take the messages at face value.



"The 'Reality' of Health: Reality Television and the Public Health," a discussion paper prepared for The Kaiser Family Foundation

How Young is TOO Young?

The electronic media marketed directly at the very youngest in our society has exploded with DVDs, computer games, and even special keyboard toppers for babies as young as nine months. The rapid changes in our media environment have not been accompanied by a similar growth in our knowledge of how media may impact children's development. Many experts have argued that this is especially critical to understand, noting that social and intellectual development are more malleable in these early years.

"Zero to Six: Electronic Media in the Lives of Infants, Toddlers and Preschoolers," a study by the Kaiser Foundation, documents the immersion of our youngest children in the world of electronic and interactive media. The impact that this level of media exposure has on their development is unknown, but it's an issue that demands attention from parents, educators, researchers and health professionals. **One thing is certain: no electronic media can replace the human connection at any age.**

Introducing Your Child to the Computer

Here are some tips to use when your child is ready for a computer:

- ☞ When you teach, let her set the pace. Don't grab the mouse or show her the "right way" - allow for exploration.
- ☞ Don't forget to make eye and physical contact—it will help you assess when he's stopped having fun.
- ☞ When incomprehensible software tests your patience or the computer crashes, consider the example you set. Take a break, read the instructions, call a toll free helpline... don't freak out.
- ☞ Remind your child that a computer is a tool we can use to learn more about the world—but WE do the feeling and thinking... and that's what gives life meaning.