Technology and Childhood

'Don't blink or you'll miss it!'

This phrase could almost be the motto of our modern society. We live in such a fast paced, ever changing culture that it is difficult to keep up with our own generation, let alone the next. It seems that virtually overnight childhood has changed and the challenges of parenting children towards maturity are significantly different. On a personal level I can see this even within my own family. The temptations and pressures on my 8 year old son were hardly, if at all, in existence when my 18 year old son was that age.

Many of us enjoy the great advances in technology which offer us better communication and access to information. Mobile phones (with camera, video and internet options), computers, internet services, DVD's, computer and video games are just a few of the products which have enhanced our lives in many ways. They come, however, with a price and not just the price tag which requires our credit card. We may well be sacrificing vital aspects of our offspring's childhood if we are not careful.

Children today are under enormous pressure to 'fit in' and 'be cool' and one of the ways to do this is by owning and operating many of the mod-tech gadgets that are on offer. Parents today are often time poor and it may simply seem easier to 'give in' and buy what they want, or let them have more time in front of the TV, computer or playing the games. As a parent I know how subtly these influences can creep in and take more and more of our time and money without us even being aware of the influence or the dangers. We may even say to ourselves, "It is better that my child is here at home where I know they are safe than out on the streets getting into trouble."

Not all technology is bad or harmful, but much of our modern technology has inherent dangers, and as parents wanting to raise godly men and women of the future we need to be fierce gatekeepers in order to protect our children in this challenging climate. It would be far more convenient to 'bury our heads in the sand' but as responsible parents we cannot and we must not!

Mobile phones are great for communication, but can also be vehicles of inappropriate messages and images. The media has highlighted recently the issue of 'sexting', the sending of sexually explicit images of a person from one phone to another. This act not only has legal ramifications, but can also be highly damaging to a person's life – child and adult.

Computers are indeed a wonderful invention, but porn sites exist in rapidly growing abundance and are just 'a touch of the finger' away from our children and teenagers as they access the internet. They may not even be looking for these sites, but be assured

these sites are looking for them.

Video and computer games are highly entertaining, yet hidden behind the glossy cover is an array of activities that involve killing, prostitution, and other perverted and questionable activities. Do we as parents really know what is involved in the games our kids are playing?

Movies and TV series are easily accessible in our culture and provide easy and enjoyable entertainment. Sexual and violent material is so commonplace within our viewing diet these days, however, that there is a danger parents can become so desensitized they fail to filter what their children are watching so that it is age appropriate and God- honouring.

As I have thought about these issues lately it has been a wake-up call to me as a parent. I do not suggest it is easy to stand against the technology tide that threatens to consume us and our children. I do suggest, however, that we need to be aware and vigilant in order to help our children grow to healthy adulthood.

Here are some suggestions that I have read or thought about that you might find helpful:

• Encourage the simple indoor and outdoor activities of childhood that involve adventure, curiosity and imagination.

• Encourage communication as a family with the TV off, especially around the meal table.

• Be aware of, and filter what your children are watching, accessing and/or playing.

• Make sure children using computers with internet access are in public areas, not in bedrooms.

• Have a cut-off time each night when all mobile phones are switched off or placed in a shared area.

 Establish a period of 'time out' each week when TV's, computers etc are turned off and family members can spend time doing something not related to technology.

As we live in this ever changing society, it is important that we do not blink and miss it. We need to keep our eyes open so that we see the dangers and act appropriately as parents, for our children's sake, and for God's sake.

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