



Becoming a Tech-smart Family

SIX YEARS AGO MY CELL PHONE only made voice calls. My latest phone is my computer, camera, calculator, diary, Bible, lesson quarterly, library, shopping assistant, bank manager, entertainment system, map, and so much more. My smartphone helps me organize my complex diary and stay in touch with my husband when plans change. We can chat by Skype when I'm traveling, see our grandchildren, and watch inspiring sermons and videos. We've even experienced our own personal marriage seminar through www.toucanttogether.com.

DANGEROUS DEVICES

But there is no doubt that our intensive use of technology, apps, games, and social media also carries incredible risks. Preschoolers are accidentally accessing pornography. Dangerous strangers are grooming our children. Teenagers are depressed and anxious because of the intense peer pressure exerted by social media, cyber-bullying, shaming, and sexting. The Internet is babysitting our children, and it has absolutely no interest in their well-being.

INTO THE UNKNOWN

Our pocket-sized devices have the power to take over our lives, create addictions, feed anxieties, destroy our innocence, drain our joy, and distract us from our relationships with God and each other. We don't have the wisdom of previous generations to help us navigate the ever-changing terrain of these incredibly helpful, yet highly dangerous, gadgets. It's hard to stay ahead of our children so we can guide and protect them because they're already running down the road ahead of us, exploring new possibilities beyond our imagination. We're living inside a huge social experiment with technology. And, by the time the scientists understand the complex consequences for our minds, health, relationships, and spiritual development, it will be too late to reverse the potentially catastrophic damage.

TAKING STOCK

We need to be wisely informed so we can protect ourselves and those we love from the invisible dangers that are tumbling out of the "Pandora's box" of hand-held technology. Start by reflecting on the effect that Internet/screen use is already having on your home, and discuss your ideas and concerns together.

- How many hours does each person spend on their devices (computers, phones, and tablets) daily, apart from work and homework?
- How do your family's devices enrich or damage your family life, relationships, well-being, spiritual life, ministry/service activities, and studies?
- What negative effects is your device usage having on your own life? What are you doing to address these effects?
- When is device usage most likely to be a problem in your home? What effect is this having on each person? What changes might be needed?
- In what ways are you managing the devices in your home well? What helps you to do this?
- How do your devices help you to live out your Christian values? How do they distract you from living out your values?

SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE

Here are some biblical values to help us set wise boundaries around our devices.

- Philippians 4:8: Positive values help us evaluate which activities are true, pure, just, noble, lovely, virtuous, and worthy of our time and effort.
- Isaiah 26:3: Does our screen usage help us to experience peace and focus on God, or are many of our activities time-consuming, worrying, and overstimulating distractions?
- Romans 12:9-18: The wisdom in these verses gives us positive guidance for healthy relationships. How does our device usage affect our ability to love well, respond empathically to other people's emotions, show respect, and be kind and hospitable?
- Galatians 5:22, 23: How do our device activities enable us to live Spirit-filled lives?

TIPS FOR MANAGING SCREEN USE IN YOUR HOME

- Stay informed. Read helpful books by Christians, such as *Left to their Own Devices? Confident Parenting in a World of Screens*¹ and *The Tech-Wise Family*.²
- Access www.covenanteyes.com and download the free e-book *Parenting the Internet Generation*.
- Visit <http://www.vodafone.com/content/digital-parenting.html/#> for tips and ideas about helping your child to be strong and resilient in an online world.
- Research the games and apps that your children are using so you are familiar with the content and can help them make good choices.



Becoming a Tech-smart Family

- Check out parents' reviews of apps, videos, and games on www.pluggedin.com (Christian perspectives) and www.common sense media.org.
- Talk about the dangers of online pornography with your children as soon as possible. Use the book *Good Pictures, Bad Pictures: Porn-Proofing Today's Young Kids*.³ This book explains the dangers of pornography in child-friendly language and offers a simple procedure for helping children respond appropriately if they accidentally access pornography.



- Be active together. Go for hikes, swim, row, or ski. Walking together in nature is a great way to have family adventures, learn practical skills, talk together, and be filled with wonder at God's real-life creation.
 - Be a good role model. Use your own devices with integrity. Let children see that you shut down all your devices at a set time each evening.
 - Be transparent. Spouses need to share passwords, and parents need access to children's phones and screens at any time to keep them safe.
- Monitor and review each person's usage. Keep bedrooms screen-free. Focus on developing internal values for managing screen activities rather than imposing external restrictions.
 - Try some of the Get Real ideas in this issue's children's pages. Make these kinds of activities a regular part of your family routine. Spend time just hanging out together.
 - Set ground rules as a family. For example, phones are gathered together in a charging zone when everyone comes home, and an hour before bedtime. In order to earn one hour of screen time each person must do a chore well, complete all homework assignments to the best of their ability, prepare and eat a meal together, have family worship, spend 15 minutes in physical activity and 15 minutes in a non-screen activity, such as a hobby. When all of these have been completed, the phones can be accessed for a set amount of time, but all the devices must be "put to bed" at least one hour before bedtime. See <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/media/Pages/default.aspx> for how to create a family media plan. **J**

1 Hill, K. *Left to their Own Devices? Confident Parenting in a World of Screens*. Muddy Pearl, 2017.

2 Crouch, A. *The Tech-Wise Family*. BakerBooks, 2017.

3 Jenson, K. A. and Poyner, G. *Good Pictures, Bad Pictures: Porn-Proofing Today's Young Kids*.

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Living FOR REAL!

DO YOU LOVE PLAYING on a computer, tablet, or phone? Technology is very useful. It helps us learn, work, connect with each other, and share the good news of God's love with others. But, like many other good things, it can also stop us from learning, working, helping others, having fun family times, and worshipping God. When time with our gadgets gets in the way of time with God or family and friends, then we need to show them who is in charge! Put them down and have some real fun in the real world!

KEEPING DEVICES UNDER CONTROL

Have a meeting with your family and decide together on the best way to manage all the screens in your home. Some families say that children can use their devices for up to one hour a day, and only when they have done their homework, had dinner together as a family, had family worship, done at least one chore, and spent 10 minutes tidying their bedroom. Other families put all their devices "to bed" overnight, on a tray in the kitchen or locked away in a cupboard, so that everyone has a healthy night's sleep. What rules would help your family to stay in control of your screen time?

Here are lots of fun things to do FOR REAL—in the REAL WORLD, with REAL PEOPLE—because that's so much better than experiencing life through a small screen!





TREASURE HUNT

Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-11. Hunt through your house and gather up all the loose coins. Ask the adults in your home to add their loose coins. Count them up and see if you have enough to pay for an ADRA gift at <https://giftcatalog.adra.org>. When you have enough money, ask an adult to pay for the gift. Then pray for the people who will receive your gift.



GRATITUDE RAINBOW

Read Psalm 100 or 107. Ask each person in your home to find six things they are grateful for. Each object must be a different solid color from the spectrum of the rainbow: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and purple. Lay all the items out in rows of color to make a rainbow. Not enough? Go and hunt for more! Then take a photograph.

HEAVENLY HOMES

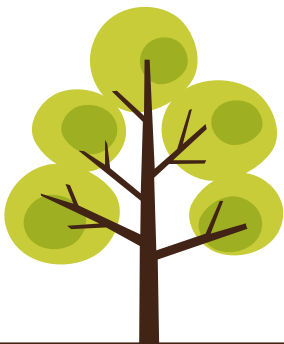
Read John 14:1-3. What do you think your home will look like in heaven? What do you have in your home on earth that you will still need in heaven? and what won't you need? Work together as a family to create an imaginary heavenly home in an old shoebox. Use your best glittery scraps and craft materials to decorate it.

GROWN UP SKILLS

Ask an adult in your home to teach you a useful life skill—something you need to know to be a safe and successful grown up. Make a list of important skills together and see if you can learn a new one every month.

KINDNESS WAS HERE!

Read Ephesians 4:32. Cut a stack of paper hearts, about 4 inches (or 10 cm) wide. Write on each heart "Kindness was here!" Give each person in your home 4-5 hearts. Whenever you do a secret act of kindness for someone, leave a heart to let them know. You could make a bed, clean shoes, tidy up, set the table, take out trash, etc.



FAMILY TREE

Ask your parents to help you make a family tree. Visit or call your relatives who are still alive. Ask them to tell you their favorite memories. Make a book of all their stories.





SLING SEVEN!

Read Hebrews 13:16. Find 7 good pieces of clothing or toys that you have outgrown or no longer need. Ask the adults in your home if you can give them to your younger siblings or donate them to a thrift store.



THANK YOU!

Write a thank you note or handmade card for each person in your family. Thank them for something they did that made you really happy. Tuck the card into their pajamas to surprise them at bedtime!



BIBLE OBJECT GAME

Find a small cloth bag or pillowcase. Hunt through your home for small objects that are mentioned in Bible stories (such as stone, seed, small piece of cloth, small coin, toy fish and bird, piece of net, toy sheep and cow, small candle, piece of wood, fake flower, small baby toy, toy tree, gold star, toy boat). Put all the small objects into the bag. Take turns pulling an object out of the bag without looking. Name a story that contains the object, put it back in the bag, and pass the bag to the next person. If objects are pulled out more than once, then a new story or Bible verse must be mentioned each time.



MAILBOX

It is more fun to get a real letter in your mailbox than a quick email. Write a proper, handwritten letter, in your best handwriting,

to an elderly relative. Include a picture you have drawn, a bookmark, a poem or story, or a collage of pressed flowers and leaves. You will make their day!

Writing letters to people can be a fun hobby, and maybe they will write back.

LOVE HUNT

Read Psalm 103. Search in your home for five things that remind you of God's love. Then show the items to your family and tell why you chose each one.

Build a hut together. Many Jewish families build outdoor huts and live in them when they are celebrating the harvest. Try building a hut with your family, outside or in your home. Make it big and strong enough for everyone to sleep in for at least one night, and try cooking out there too.



I LOVE
YOU :

SAY IT
ON THE
SIDEWALK!

Use sidewalk chalk to write an encouraging message or Bible verse on the sidewalk near your home. Decorate it so people will notice and read it. Maybe you could write a different message each week so that people look forward to seeing your happy messages.



HELP!

Do something kind. Talk with your family about a simple project you can do together to help others. You are being God's hands and heart in the world! This is much more exciting than anything you can do on a small screen.

ACTION
STATIONS!

Doing screen stuff stops us from moving our bodies in healthy ways. Make sure you move and stretch whenever you can. Play your favorite praise music and create your own lively actions to illustrate the song.

CREATIVE REFLECTIONS

When you read a Bible story or a verse you especially like, create something to express your ideas. Making something, or writing down your ideas, will help you think about the Bible story in a fresh way. It doesn't have to be perfect, because this is just between you and God. Make a collection of craft and recycled materials to use for your projects.



EXPLORE OUTDOORS

Use wax crayons and copier paper to make rubbings of tree bark. Lay the paper over the bark. Hold it still and rub the side of the wax crayon over the paper. It will reveal the pattern of the bark. Do this on several different trees to compare their textures. Or turn over a rotting tree trunk and look for all the creepy crawlies underneath. Mark off a small square of ground and see how many different plants, creatures, and stones you can find in the space. Look at the stars at night and see how many constellations you can find and name. Praise God for all the amazing REAL stuff He's made.

BIBLE SCENE

Use your construction toy sets to make a scene from a Bible story. See if you can guess each other's stories. No bricks? Use whatever you can find, or bits and pieces from nature.

Please email us (or write us a real letter!). Tell us your family's favorite ways to manage screen time. And what are your favorite FOR REAL activities?



Karen Holford loves having real fun with her three young grandchildren.