

Technology and Kids: What's a parent to do?

Karen DeBord, Ph.D., & Andrew Behnke, Ph.D., Extension Specialists
North Carolina State University Cooperative Extension

Picture This: Family members are home from work and school. Each person retreats to his/her own space. One is online, one in front of the TV, and one is playing video games. Is this family time? An occasional email to a family member or an Instant Message sent from one room to the next? Is this what family time has come to?

Using email or chatting can actually be a good entry into a conversation with a teen who may be feeling school or peer pressures. But once the ice is broken, face-to-face works best to address issues and be supportive to a child's emotions and growth. What are the concerns of parents with adolescents and teenagers? What does the research say? And what should parents do?

Here are some comments from parents:

"What did we do before cell phones? How did we keep up with our kids?"

"The internet is good for homework assignments, but bad since there is so much bad stuff out there for kids to be exposed to."

"Video games often feature females in compromising roles and both females and males as violent and aggressive."

"Television seems to have so many sexual undertones."

"Why are these music stars creating lyrics with sex, drugs, and abuse? Are there no regulations?"

"How about www.myspace.com? Kids can network with their friends and upload a profile and photos. It's a growing craze with kids. Yet it seems like a dating site for adolescents and teens!"

Though technology has many benefits to families, it also increases the risks to families.

The following table demonstrates current research and ideas for improving technology use in the home.

Parent's Say	Research Says	What's a parent to do?
Video Games		
<p>My child is hooked on video games.</p> <p>Should I allow video games for my child?</p>	<p>Video game violence exposure with men 18-21, was found to "negatively affect a players' blood pressure and lead to uncooperative behavior, permissive attitudes toward violence, alcohol and marijuana use, sexual activity without condom use and hostile social information processing."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Think twice before investing in video games at all. * Limit time on games * Disallow games with violence and profanity. * Preview games before allowing child to use them.

(Continued)

Parent's Say	Research Says	What's a parent to do?
Television		
<p>I have the full cable package and I am concerned about what my children are watching.</p> <p>I changed my cable package to the most basic and there are still shows on that are violent and show poor role models.</p>	<p>More than half of all parents say they always limit what their children see on TV, but almost three-quarters admit their children still see televised violence at least once a week.²</p> <p>There are more television sets than people in the average American household. Excessive television viewing has been shown to lead to aggressive and violent conduct, obesity, early sexual behavior, and use of drugs and alcohol. In fact, children with televisions in their bedrooms and children that watch more television, both do worse academically.³</p>	<p>The American Academy of Pediatrics calls for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * limiting all media use to no more than two hours per day * watching television with children * removing television sets from children's bedrooms * monitoring all media exposure, including video games and movies.
Internet Perils		
<p>My kids chat with their friends and have this special language such as POS and LOL!</p> <p>How do I know what websites will be safe?</p>	<p>Symptoms that your child may be at risk online:⁴ Child spends large amounts of time on the computer, especially at night Child quickly turns off screen or minimizes when adult enters Pornography found on computer or inordinate amounts in computer history Child receives mail or gifts from unknown friends Phone calls come in from unrecognized parties to your child. Child becomes withdrawn from the family.</p> <p>Other recent research shows:⁵ 81% of parents of online teens say that teens aren't careful enough when giving out information about themselves online and 79% of online teens agree with this. 65% of all parents and 64% of all teens say that teens do things online that they wouldn't want their parents to know about.</p> <p>The Pew Internet and American Life Project⁶ showed that: 19% of a U.S. sample of 1,501 youths aged 10–17 stated that they had received an unwanted sexual solicitation in the past year. 20% of youth 14-17, intentionally looked for and viewed pornography 67% of youth who viewed pornography did so primarily in their own home.</p> <p>Two recent studies⁷ show that parental monitoring, checking of history, and using of filters were not effective at reducing youth pornography use and frequency of meeting strangers online.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Keep computer in family space and walk through the room now and then. * Learn the special chat language. POS means parent over shoulder and LOL means Laughing out loud! * Check the computer history for recent activity including chat rooms. * Talk to child about internet dangers including predators and file exchanging. * Spend time with your child online, have them show you how to work new technology. Instruct your child never to give out identifying information, photos or addresses to strangers or new friend they have never met. * Keep lines of communication open and spend time together. Becoming disconnected due to technology can be one of the most damaging things for a relationship with your child or other family members. * Encourage positive uses of the internet.

1 Brady, S. S., & Matthews, K.A. (2006) Effects of media violence on health-related outcomes among young men Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine. 160, 341-347.

2 Escobar-Chaves, S. L., Tortolero, S. R., Markham, C. M., Low, B. J., Eitel, P., & Thickstun, P. (2005). Impact of the media on adolescent sexual attitudes and behaviors. Pediatrics, 116, 303 - 326.

3 Borzekowski, D.L., & Robinson, T.N. (2005) The remote, the mouse, and the no.2 pencil: The household media environment and academic achievement among third grade students. Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine, 159(7), 607-613

4 Retrieved from: www.safekids.com

5 Mitchell, K. J., Finkelhor, D., & Wolak, J. (2005) Protecting youth online: Family use of filtering and blocking software. Child Abuse & Neglect, 29(7), 753-765.

6 Retrieved from: www.pewinternet.org/

7 Ybarra, M. L., & Mitchell, K. J. (2005). Exposure to Internet pornography among children and adolescents: A national survey. CyberPsychology & Behavior, 8 (5), 473-486. Liao, A. K., Khoo, A., & Ang, P.H. (2005). Factors influencing adolescents engagement in risky internet behavior. CyberPsychology & Behavior, 8 (6), 513-520.