

Help Kids Evaluate the Latest High-Tech Trends



Technology changes so quickly these days that it's challenging to keep pace with all the hottest sites, devices, and fads. But the Internet, cell phones, and iPods have become such an integral part of youth culture that parents need to stay in touch with them in order to stay in touch with their kids.

Two-thirds of America's teenagers say, "Digital technology is an essential part of how I live." Consider these developments: Social-networking sites have led to an explosion of interconnectedness. Blogs allow kids to reveal their innermost thoughts throughout cyberspace. Camera and video phones permit everything to be

documented and posted for the whole world to see. Text-messaging is now the primary communication method for almost half (44%) of all teenagers.

All this technology has significant impacts on impressionable, developing young people. Kids are expressing themselves more than ever, friends can almost always reach one another, and teenagers can access lots of inappropriate material. Despite some potential dangers, the Internet and high-tech tools are here to stay.

So it's up to parents to provide oversight and guidance. But you can take that one step further by helping your teenagers think critically about high-tech influences. When kids learn to evaluate technology and media from a Christian perspective, they can make wise decisions about what they "consume."

Text messaging (or "texting") might be the most surprising cultural development of the last decade. Despite the tiny buttons, small screens, and cost involved, texting has flourished. Here's why:

- 1. It's convenient and inconspicuous.** Texting lets kids be expressive even in situations where other forms of communication aren't appropriate (classrooms, middle of the night, etc.).
- 2. It allows "micro-coordination."** Kids no longer have to plan their get-togethers; they can do it on the fly. Texting lets kids change last-minute details about where and when to meet.
- 3. It provides gratification.** More than half of all text messages are "singles," with no response. Researchers say texting allows kids to subtly re-establish their significance.
- 4. It fits into kids' "hookup" culture.** Technology has contributed to the obliteration of sexual boundaries. Underage kids, with the perception of anonymity, are now texting (or "sexting") explicit photos of themselves, which spread quickly.

PASTOR BEN'S BLOG

I often talk to teenagers about filters. We all know that filters separate what they are designed to separate. Air filters in your car, home or work are designed to separate impurities in the air. They accomplish this because they were designed to. I think every one of us has designed a cultural filter. This filter helps us decide what will and won't influence us from culture. As followers of Christ our filters often look much different from the rest of the world because the design of our filter has been altered by the Holy Spirit. Living a life in surrender to Christ means that our filters are based on the principles Christ employed in his life. That's a high standard I know, but we've been given the Holy Spirit to empower and equip us as we walk in this world without being of it.

As a parent you've had a lot more time to design your filter to separate the things that you feel belong or don't belong in your life or family. The question is how did you arrive at those conclusions? You'll need to have an answer to this question because your teenagers will press you. As a parent I believe it is your responsibility to help your children develop strong Christ-centered filters. This only happens through discussion and experience.

Great Questions to Ask Your Kids

How often—and well—do you communicate with your kids about their communication methods? Get started by discussing these questions together:

1. What's your favorite communication method, and why? How long could you go without using it?
2. Does technology simplify or complicate your life? Explain. Which device would you "uninvent," and why?
3. What's your favorite thing to do online? Is it easier to make friends in cyberspace? Why or why not?
4. Do you like being always reachable? Why or not? How open are your communication lines with God?

PRAY THAT:

1. Your teenagers will make wise decisions about what they do online and with other technology.
2. God will strengthen your teenagers to resist harmful influences.
3. Your teenagers will evaluate cultural messages and seek to honor God in everything do.
4. Your teenagers will be as eager to communicate with God as they are to communicate with their friends.



Focus on Prayer

PASTOR BEN'S BLOG cont.....

I'm sure you've experienced times when you thought that your kid's filter was totally broken and felt discouraged. Don't be, see it as an opportunity to help them design a more mature filter. The best thing you can do is be intentional about taking opportunities to help them design their filter when they aren't in trouble. Watch a music video or movie together and help them to think critically about the message or theme of what you've just watched. This will sharpen their filtering skills. Be aware, along the way you'll probably feel challenged yourself about the filter you've designed. It will lead to growth for both of you.

One day your students won't have your filter in place anymore and I'm sure that you want to be confident that they have the tools and understanding to design a Spirit-led and Christ-centered filter for the things they will encounter. Take the time to read through the rest of this newsletter because it is full of great suggestions for helping you guide your teenagers as they develop their own filter.

What's Up With Kids

In his book *Jesus-Centered Youth Ministry*, Rick Lawrence discusses ways to teach your kids to "engage their culture, not adopt it or deny it." Here's an excerpt:

1. **Wake up.** Engage in kids' media influences firsthand. Find out what kids are into, and then Google their favorite shows, video games, and bands to find fan sites and reviews.
2. **Teach kids to think critically.** Encourage them to "push back" against cultural influences. For example, have your teenagers list five positive and five negative things about a particular video game. Ask: "If you had your own kid, which of these things would you want (and not want) to teach them?" Then explore Philippians 4:8 together.
3. **Regularly force kids to solve problems that require critical thinking.** These can be issues from the Bible, cultural debates, and relational problems. The key to making this work is asking many, many follow-up questions after kids give their first answers.
4. **Help kids slow down and think about "kingdom-of-God" truths.** Teach your teenagers how to summarize and evaluate the overall message of each media influence. What truths or promises does it deliver, and are they something that Jesus honors? Soon, when kids are listening to their iPods or watching a movie with their friends, they'll hear or see something that will flex their critical-thinking muscle—"Is this a Jesus truth or not?" When that happens, you'll have helped plant a Jesus-centered way of living life in them.



MUSIC SPOTLIGHT



Mainstream Artist

Background: Perry, a 24-year-old from California, is the daughter of two pastors. While growing up, she wasn't allowed to listen to secular music. She released a Christian album in 2001 as Katy Hudson but then pursued a pop career. Perry is also an actress, and her songs can be heard on numerous TV shows. Madonna is one of her many fans.

Albums: *One of the Boys* (2008), *UR So Gay* (EP, 2007), *Katy Hudson* (2001)

What Parents Should Know: Perry deals with rocky relationships, and her hit "I Kissed a Girl" is about sexual exploration. She also uses expletives and sexual innuendoes, masking these messages with a playful, sassy attitude. Perry's songs send the message that it's OK for kids to experiment.

What Perry Says: Perry admits she'll do anything to get attention and says she wasn't a typical Christian teenager. "I've done a lot of bad things," she says. "Use your imagination."

Discussion Questions: Why types of limits, if any, should kids have on their musical and lifestyle choices? Do limits only make kids rebel more? Can Christian parents do anything to ensure that their kids follow Jesus?

Christian Artist

Background: Dillon, 19, is from a small Ohio town. She credits her home life with nurturing her musical abilities, saying her family members "pray together, play music together, and are more than content to be together." In 2004, Dillon's single "All I Need" was the top-selling solo Christian debut. This spring, she married Christian musician Shane Barnard.

Albums: *So Far: The Acoustic Session* (2008), *Waking Up* (2007), *Imagination* (2005), *Bethany Dillon* (2004)

What Parents Should Know: Dillon is known for deep songs and a life lived for Christ. Her new album has been called "organic and stripped down," written with wisdom twice her age.

What Dillon Says: The singer admits that God "is probably able to speak better to you when everything's turned off." But her hope is that people who listen to her songs "are somehow overwhelmed by the reality of Jesus."

Discussion Questions: Do you enjoy spending time with our family? time with God? How can music help or hinder your worship? Are you ever "overwhelmed" by Jesus and what he's done? What impact do those feelings have on your worship—and life?

FILM WATCH

Movie: *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants 2* (Aug. 6)

Genre: Drama

Rating: PG-13 (for mature material and sensuality)

Synopsis: This sequel continues the story of four lifelong friends (Alexis Bledel, America Ferrera, Blake Lively, and Amber Tamblyn) as they begin college. The young women go their separate ways but stay in touch, sharing experiences with humor and honesty. As the women discover more about themselves through choices they make while on their own, they still cherish their bond of friendship.

Discussion Questions: What's your definition of a good friend? Are you able to tell your friends anything? Do your friends help make you a better person? What are some ways to keep friendships going strong, despite obstacles such as distance?

