

Technology Seminar

Navigating your family through a Digital World

Thank you for investing in your family! We are so incredibly blessed to have families like yours: Families that want to get better and be all that God calls you to be. We want to help your family make **informed decisions!**

Technology can be incredibly positive.

- Connect us as a church beyond the 4 walls.
- Technology is a ministry tool.
- Builds community.
- Brings families together.
- Brings organization to families and reinforces health rhythms.

Technology has a negative side as well.

- **Highly Addictive/time consuming** *kids 8-18 years spend an average of 7.5 hours a day looking at screens*
- **Cyberbullying** *the use of electronic communication to bully a person, typically by sending messages of an intimidating or threatening nature) Sending mean or threatening messages*

32.7% of U.S. middle and high school students (age 13-17) reported experiencing cyberbullying in the past 30 days. Adolescents who've been cyberbullied are **more than 4x as likely** to report suicidal thoughts or attempts compared to those who haven't.

Sexual content refers to any media—such as images, videos, text, or audio—that depicts or describes nudity, sexual acts, or sexually suggestive behavior meant to cause arousal or express sexual themes.

70.9% of tweens and 87.9% of teens encountered nudity or content of a sexual nature.)

97% of 4th-6th graders reported exposure to porn in one study.

Video games lead to porn sites: In a recent PornHub report, Playstation and Xbox were the most popular portals to porn with a combined 86.2% of game console traffic.

Predatory Behavior online is when someone, often posing as friendly or trustworthy, uses the internet to manipulate, exploit, or harm others—especially children and teens.

1 in 9 children ages 10–17 has been **sexually solicited online**, according to the Crimes Against Children Research Center.

Self Harm or Suicidal Content/Ideation refers to any online material or behavior that:

- Promotes, encourages, or glorifies hurting oneself (self-injury, cutting, etc.).
- Discusses or depicts suicide, suicidal thoughts, or methods.
- Shares or spreads images, videos, or messages related to self-injury or suicide.

41.4% of tweens and 66.6% of teens were involved in a self-harm/suicidal situation.

Anxiety is a persistent feeling of worry, nervousness, or fear that interferes with a person's ability to function.

Teens who spend **more than 3 hours a day** on devices are at a significantly higher risk for **anxiety and depression**, according to the **National Institutes of Health**.

Depression is more than just feeling sad. It's a serious mental health condition that causes a deep, ongoing sense of hopelessness, emptiness, or disinterest in life.

Instagram knew it was causing low self image among young girls, yet didn't do anything about it. In a 3 year study conducted by Facebook, They found it exacerbates negative body image, low self-esteem, anxiety, depression and, in extreme cases, suicidal thoughts

Violence in the context of technology includes exposure to or involvement in harmful, aggressive, or threatening behavior through digital platforms.

88.5% of tweens and 94.1% of teens expressed or experienced violent subject matter/thought

Sextortion is a serious form of online exploitation where someone threatens to share explicit images of a person (often a minor) unless they provide more images, money, or favors. It often starts with online grooming, where predators build trust—then turn to manipulation, blackmail, or threats. From a recent survey of 1,200 young people aged 13-20, **20% of teens** reported having experienced sextortion.

Victims are typically targeted through social media, gaming platforms, or chat apps.

(Students using inappropriate pics of each other as leverage or cyberbullying.)

AI Companion Bots artificial intelligence programs designed to simulate emotional conversations and relationships — acting as a digital friend, romantic partner, or support system through chatting or voice.

Replika – A customizable AI friend or romantic partner

Character.AI – Chat with AI versions of fictional or real people

Anima – An AI chatbot for emotional support and flirting

Snapchat's My AI – A basic AI companion built into the app

Chai – A mobile app for chatting with AI characters, many of which are sexually suggestive

ChatGPT

A recent study showed that 70% of kids have used an AI companion bot, and half of them use one regularly.

We can't unsee what we now understand, it's time to protect our kids.

2022– US Surgeon General wrote an Advisory on the Mental Health of Kids in the US. Technology use is cited as one of the known factors contributing to increased issues with mental health in kids.

There was a time when cigarettes were new. No one knew the health risks associated until time had gone by and people developed cancer. We now know the aspects of technology that can be harmful to our kids. Not cancer, but definitely has an affect on kids' mental health. It is our responsibility to be knowledgeable and protect them from potential harm.

We believe that giving your child a smartphone should be more than just a hand-off or opening a gift.

Parents, at some point you will be making these decisions:

1. When (or at what age) will I allow my child to have a smartphone?
2. When I allow the smartphone, what kind of access and to what content will my child have access to? How will I make sure my child is safe? How will I protect my child's mental health?

Reasons to wait to give your kid a “smartphone” until age 14 or 8th grade

- Smartphones are addictive
- Smartphones can be a distraction to academics
- Excessive smartphone use is altering children's brains
- Smartphones impair sleep
- Smartphones interfere with relationship
- Smartphones increase the risk of anxiety and depression
- Smartphones put your child at risk of cyberbullying
- Smartphones expose children to sexual content
- According to a New York Times piece, many technology executives wait until their child is 14 before they allow them to have a phone. While these teenagers can make calls and text, they are not given a data plan until 16.

Establishing Digital Trust with Your Kids

Look at Your Digital Habits—Do you want your kids using their technology just like you do?

Whether you intend to or not—you ARE modeling for them how to use technology.

- a. On your phone in your bed?
- b. Playing mindless games or scrolling as much as you do?
- c. As a Christian, is the content you look at something you would be ashamed of if Jesus was sitting next to you?

Side by Side—

- a. If your child already has a device, spend time with them shoulder to shoulder
- b. Sometimes for kids, when their thumbs move, their mouth moves.
- c. This together time helps you understand how your child uses technology.
- d. Be interested in what your child is interested in. (You don't have to love it....cat videos, toy unwrapping videos, video games, etc.)
- e. Yes, this takes time— may not be fun for you—but it is making deposits into your child's trust bank!!

Digital Curiosity

- a. Instead of being condemning and negative— be positive, calm and patient.
- b. Be curious about YouTube and what they like to watch. If you find something troublesome, don't freak out. This will shut down the line of communication.
- c. Ask them to teach you something new about an app.

Conversations

- a. Talk to your kids about all the awkward things that no one talked to you about. "If you don't— Dr. YouTube, Dr. TikTok and Dr Google will- and their offices are open 24/7."
- b. You ALWAYS want your kids to know that you are a safe place to land if anything goes sideways or horribly wrong in the digital world.
- c. Remind them OFTEN that you will always be a safe place to land.
- d. Along with the Side by Side— ask them how viewing what they view makes them feel?

5. Coaching

- a. Introduce Parental controls as Caring control.
- b. Bark— an app that helps parents ensure kids are safe online.
- c. Covenant Eyes- app to protect from porn
- d. Gryphon Router— this router actually stops the porn from even making it into your home!

The Over Protective/Dictator Parent (Digital Trust Erasers)

- a. If you are too protective or authoritarian, you will turn your kids into digital ninjas, who quietly defy you.
- b. Avoid these:
 - i.Spying- doesn't teach kids how to use tech well
 - ii.Fear— bubble wrapping them doesn't prepare them for the real world
 - iii.Control— my way or the highway— good luck
 - iv.Helicopter parent— if we never let them venture out with guardrails, they won't develop digital resilience.

Parents who Avoid the whole Tech Thing

- a. The opposite of over protective is avoiding it.
- b. DO NOT be: passive, silent, ignorant or apathetic or Just “hope” the kids make the right choice.
- c. Do not assume the porn of your youth (magazine) is the same as viewing HiDef, streaming, Tube porn that exists today.

Teach Digital Resilience

- a. Allowing kids to grow thick skin in tough situations
- b. Allow kids to fail at things now and encourage them to talk about worrisome topics.
- c. They need to know you are a safe place to land when they fail, when they see something they shouldn't, when they click something they shouldn't.

Establishing Trust takes Time

- a. Look for little windows of opportunity
- b. With older kids— approach them with humility— apologize for being behind the 8 ball. Let them know you aren't going to go crazy or take all things digital away.
- c. Invite older kids to help you with developing a plan.

1. *If you are not willing to parent through technology— when you hand a kid a smartphone with no coaching, no involvement or accountability, you are essentially handing keys to a kid who has never driven and wishing them luck as they take the car out for a spin everyday. You are just hoping they don't crash and burn.*

Pornography is sexually explicit content—images, videos, or text—created to cause sexual arousal. It's widely available online and often targets young users, either by accident or design.

The average age of first exposure to pornography is now between 11 and 13 years old. (Source: Common Sense Media, Barna Group)

Kids can learn basic defenses against pornography.

1. A **definition**, so they'll recognize what they're seeing.

For children 7 and younger (or before the sex talks begin): "Bad pictures show the private parts of the body we keep covered with a swimsuit. These parts are meant to be kept private." Teach young kids that pornography can be pictures, videos, or even cartoons.

For children after they have learned about sex: "Pornography is material specifically designed to arouse sexual feelings in people by depicting nudity, sexual behavior, or any type of sexual information in any media." "Any media" includes videos, still photos, characters in video games, erotic lit, anime cartoons, manga books and song lyrics.

2. A **warning**, so they'll have reasons to reject it.

A warning that pornography is unhealthy and dangerous. Kids deserve the truth about pornography. Study after study finds that children are harmed in the following 5 ways:

1. Porn **influences pop culture and drives kids to objectify themselves** in sexual ways.

2. Porn **disrupts normal childhood development**. Kids who are drawn into pornography often fail to spend enough time channeling their energy into important non-sexual skills and learning. Addiction is a real threat to a child's developing brain.

3. Porn **teaches toxic attitudes about sex**. Instead of love, trust and intimacy, kids learn that sex is degrading, violent and focused on performance.

4. Porn **increases sexual violence in users** and predicts earlier sexual activity among teens.

5. Porn **use can lead to increased risk of child-on-child harmful sexual behavior**.

3. A **plan**, so they'll be ready to respond and not get caught off guard.

Every child needs a plan for a rapid response to porn exposure. This plan should include specific steps to:

- Deal with the initial exposure to porn, and
- Minimize the shocking memories that keep popping back up in a child's mind. Some families come up with their own plan--that can be a great way to engage kids to reject pornography!

When not if your child is exposed to pornography, they need a plan in place to help them respond calmly and wisely.

Teach kids that porn can be:

- Become addictive, it is addictive and not God's standard!
- Lead people to treat others as objects
- Encourage harmful and even illegal behavior.

That plan should include:

- What to do immediately
- How to deal with lingering images or thoughts
- Ongoing open conversations

Simple Tools for Families

1. **Technology contract for kids and parents.**
2. **Apple Family Sharing**
3. **AXIS.org**
4. **Bark.us**

Online safety experts, nonprofits, and government agencies

- Pedimom — Child Safety Expert Dr. Free Hess
- Protect Young Eyes
- Childhood 2.0
- Child Rescue Coalition
- National Center for Missing and Exploited Children
- CDC: Preventing Child Sexual Abuse

If you're a parent with a child who doesn't have a phone yet: *make up your mind ahead of time.*

If you're a parent with a child does have a phone: *make sure you have a plan and password.*

If you are a teen/kid who does NOT have a phone: use this time to build trust and learn to build healthy habits now. Enjoy your freedom of no phone!

If you are a teen/kid who does have a phone: think before you tap, swipe, and be safe because your choices matter more than you think.

Challenges and Action Steps:

- **Talk as a family.** Use the phone contract and convo guide.
- **Evaluate your own tech habits.** Are you modeling what you want them to imitate?
- **Choose one tool** to install this week (Bark, Covenant Eyes, etc.). Handout with website names.
- **Create your family's digital plan:** when, how, and why your child will use devices.
- **Join the conversation ongoing.** Sign up AXIS.org free newsletter. Smartphone Stewardship sheet (charter)

Don't give up — gear up. It's never too late to reset the rules, rebuild trust, and reclaim your influence.