

# MONITORING THE MEDIA –

## 10 Things Parents Can Do to Protect Children, Teens, and Family Life

As parents, there are many ways you can guide your children and teens to develop positive media habits. The following tips are to help you and your family use the media prudently.

### 1. Set limits.

Limit your children and teen's use of TV, movies, video and computer games to no more than 1 or 2 hours per day. Do not let your children of any age view media while doing homework and do not allow a TV in the bedroom. "Teens whose parents don't set rules on media usage typically spend about three hours more per day with it." (Generation M2: Media in the lives of 8 to 18-year-olds," A Kaiser Family Foundation Survey as cited in *Raising Pure Teens, 10 Strategies to Protect or Restore Your Teenager's Innocence*, Jason Evert and Chris Stefanick, p. 119.)

### 2. Plan your children's TV viewing.

Instead of flipping through channels, use a program guide and the TV ratings to help you and your children choose shows. Turn the TV on to watch the program you chose and turn it off when the program is over. Choose programs that benefit your children and your family.

### 3. Watch visual media with your children.

Whenever possible, watch visual media (TV, movies, video games) with your children and talk about what you see. If your children are very young, they may not be able to tell the difference between a show, a commercial, a cartoon, or real life. Explain that characters are make-believe and not real. Help your children notice that some programs present lavish family life styles with no visible means of support. Some "reality-based" programs may appear to be "real," but most of these shows focus on stories that will attract as many viewers as possible. Often these are stories about tragedy and violence. Much of their content is not appropriate for children. Young children may worry that what they see could happen to them or their family. News broadcasts also contain violent or inappropriate material. With scheduling conflicts arise, videotape programs and watch them later with your child.

### 4. Help your children and teens evaluate commercials.

Don't expect your child to be able to resist ads for toys, candy, snacks, cereal, drinks, or new media programs without your help. When your child asks for products advertised on TV or the internet, explain that the purpose of commercials is to make people want things they may not need. To limit the number of commercials, watch public television stations (PBS). You can also tape programs and fast forward through the commercials or buy or rent children's videos.

### 5. Give other options – it is a matter of life and death!

Watching TV, spending time on the internet, texting or playing video games can become a habit for your children and teens. Help them to balance media involvement especially with family time and other activities:

- Participating in outdoor recreation
- Reading
- Enjoying activities with family, friends, or neighbors
- Learning a hobby, sport, instrument, or an art

Why is this so critical for parents to consider with much prayer and to persevere with vigilance?

"...Of the television programming most frequently watched by adolescents, 82 percent contains some sexual content. Yet only 10 percent of these shows include some mention of risk or responsibility associated with sex. While many have argued that such entertainment is harmless, the medical journal *Pediatrics* stated that teens who are exposed to more sexual content in the media are more likely to initiate early sexual activity

and become pregnant. According to research on more than 1,700 teens, ‘youths who watched the most sexual content acted older: a 12-year-old at the highest levels of exposure behaved like at least like a 14- or 15-year old.’ Without question, teens who ingest massive amounts of sexual content on TV develop more sex saturated thinking patterns, and they tend to live accordingly.

Unfortunately, the TV is practically given the position of a shrine in most homes. Not only does it have primacy in its location, 8 of 10 teens report that their family leaves the TV on ‘some’ or ‘most’ of the time throughout the day, even if nobody is watching it! Even during meals, nearly two-thirds of teens report that the TV usually remains on. Seventy-one percent of teens have a TV in the bedroom, too. Teens with a TV in the bedroom spend nearly 400 hours more per year sitting in front of a screen!” (*Raising Pure Teens: 10 Strategies to Protect or Restore Your Teenager’s Innocence*, Jason Evert and Chris Stefanick., p. 117-118. Note: Citations from national studies are found in this book)

## **6. Find the right message.**

If it happens that your children or teens accidentally watches an inappropriate program, turn it into a learning experience by helping your children discover the underlying message. Some forms of media may portray people as stereotypes. Talk with your children about the real-life roles of men and women, the elderly, and people of other races that may not be shown on television. Discuss ways that people are different and ways that people are the same. Help your child learn appreciation for others. Does the program show a respect for human persons and the family? Does it show a respect for life? Does it affirm compassion, reconciliation, thanksgiving, and moral responsibility? Does the program reflect biased views or present inaccurate information? Remember, if you don't approve of the subject matter, you must turn off the media or, at least, explain why you object.

## **7. Look for quality videos.**

There are many quality videos available for youth that you can buy or rent. If you have questions about children's videos, the United States Bishops have a movie rating guide at [www.usccb.org](http://www.usccb.org), click on movies. You can also go to [www.screenit.com](http://www.screenit.com) for reviews of movies in great detail. It is not necessary to join and pay the fee, simply click “No Thanks” at the bottom of the page.

## **8. Set a good example.**

You are the most important role model in your children and teen's life. Remember, that while your children are present during family time, you can limit media usage and choose programs that depict people of good character, who are positive role models, and show respect for the dignity of each person. Your example will help your children do the same. A helpful exercise is to avoid watching TV for a week. Then re-evaluate: by asking yourself what is good entertainment, how does it stimulate your mind, and is it a good use of your time.

## **9. Recognize the usefulness of the Internet but know the dangers to the soul!**

“The average American youth spends more than 7 ½ hours per day with various forms of media (television, music, video games, Internet, etc.). If you account for the time they spend multitasking (using more than one form of media at a time), they pack in a total of nearly 11 hours per day! And this does not even include the 2 ½ hours young cell phone users spend texting and talking each day! Without question, young people spend more time engaged in these activities than any other, including sleep or school...Fifty years ago, consuming so much media content would have been more a waste of time than a danger to the soul” (*Raising Pure Teens*, p.117).

Pope Benedict XVI shared “reflections on the emergence of the internet as a network for communication,” entitled *Truth, Proclamation and Authenticity of Life in the Digital Age*....As with every other fruit of human ingenuity, the new communications technologies must be placed at the service of the integral good of the individual and of the whole of humanity” (Message for the 45<sup>th</sup> World Communications Day, June 5, 2011)

The following bullets focus on the strongly-possible risks that arise from using the Internet. The text that follows each bullet is from the Holy Father’s reflections, providing explanation of the importance of vigilance.

- The idea of friendship can easily be distorted and misunderstood and service to others can be neglected  
“True friendship has always been seen as one of the greatest goods any human person can experience. We should be careful, therefore, never to trivialize the concept or the experience of friendship. Friendship is a

great human good...Friends should support and encourage each other in developing their gifts and talents and in putting them at the service of the human community.” (Message for the 43<sup>rd</sup> World Communications Day, 24 May, 2009)

In view of the Holy Father’s message, let’s examine the true importance of friendship.

Many people say they have lots of friends. But how many are true friends? “True friends are an irreplaceable aid to one another in living out the Christian vocation, most of all because they encourage and inspire one another to become better...A true friend will encourage and inspire us to be good and to lead virtuous lives. To help another toward virtue, we have to be virtuous. You are only capable of true friendship to the extent you are virtuous. True friends strive to be truly unselfish, to look for the good of the other person and work for their good. True friendship, properly practiced and understood, is a path that can lead us to true happiness – happiness in the classical sense of the word – fulfillment of one’s nature as a child of God. The art of being a true friend helps us to be able to live in friendship with Christ. When in John 15:15, Our Lord says, ‘Now I call you friends,’ if we haven’t experienced true friendship, what does that mean to us? If our notion of friendship is from Facebook or if we hang around with people for having a good time, it probably won’t mean much. The challenges in our technological world – things like Facebook and texting – are so pervasive and often a negative influence in our relationships. They tend to replace deeper and richer forms of communication. Anyone can have a superficial conversation. But deeper conversation has to be cultivated. There’s something irreplaceable with face-to-face conversation. When developing a true friendship, seek opportunity for rich conversation in sharing a love of God, of virtue... and the meaning, purpose and goal of life. What is our Christian vocation? What are our responsibilities as parents? As students?

True friends need to have a deeper sense of accountability to one another. It is not true friendship when we just accept sinful, harmful behavior and don’t challenge the other person to change. In true friendship, there is correction out of love. And it’s not easy to offer fraternal correction...A true friend helps you to live the right kind of life – helping each other to get to Heaven.” (*True Friendship: Where Virtue Becomes Happiness*, John Cuddleback, Epic Publishing, as quoted in article entitled “True Friends” National Catholic Register, June 19-July 2, 2011.

- There can be the loss of true presence and real friendship with another person when there is instant messaging, such as responding to 1,000 "friends" on Facebook. Pope Benedict explains that “When we open ourselves to others, we are fulfilling our deepest need and becoming more fully human. Loving is, in fact, what we are designed for by our Creator. Naturally, I am not talking about fleeting, shallow relationships. I am talking about the real love that is at the very heart of Jesus’ moral teaching.”
- There is a serious danger with the widespread availability of pornography and pornographic music that can be downloaded. Sexting originates in an atmosphere of competition between people to post their photos in order to have more "friends". Along these lines, the Holy Father calls us to “*respect* the dignity and worth of the human person. If the new technologies are to serve the good of individuals and of society, all users will avoid the sharing of words and images that are degrading of human beings that promote hatred and intolerance, that debase the goodness and intimacy of human sexuality or that exploit the weak and vulnerable.”

### **Don’t Be Overwhelmed: Ask for Help!**

For those parents who have no experience of the latest technology, they could tend to be overwhelmed - but the answer is not to bury your head in the sand. It is important to be technologically proficient in a technological world with these means of communication. If you need help to know where to start, talk with the Youth Minister, Director or Coordinator of the Faith Formation Program at the parish or the principal at the Catholic school. As with everything, there is a responsible usage and there has to be balance. Use the good of technology but be aware of the temptations and risks, and do not let it replace reality. Use it appropriately in the context of the greater good – the true perspective of the purpose of our lives and our ultimate goal of Heaven.

“While the Internet can be a great tool for research and social networking, it also poses a grave and imminent moral danger to your family. The Internet hosts more than four million pornographic Web sites. Ninety percent of 8 to 16 year olds have viewed porn online, most while doing homework! Parents must take measures to secure the family computer(s): make the computer more public; learn to check the history files; put a filter on your computer to block out impure Web sites; if your teen uses social networking sites, such as MySpace or Facebook, make sure his profile is set to private; if you have a founded suspicion that your teens may be harming themselves or others, you have the ability and the right to monitor their e-mail and text messages; be aware of what kinds of video games are being played in your house.” (*Raising Pure Teens*, p. 119-123. More information provided on each of the points in the book. See the Resource section at the bottom of this page).

- The risk of addiction to "what's new" could take the place of truth, in particular the Gospel “The dialogue must be rooted in a genuine and mutual searching for truth if it is to realize its potential to promote growth in understanding and tolerance. Life is not just a succession of events or experiences: it is a search for the true, the good and the beautiful...We must not allow ourselves to be deceived by those who see us merely as consumers in a market of undifferentiated possibilities, where choice itself becomes the good, novelty usurps beauty, and subjective experience displaces truth.”

### **10. Place limits on Cell Phones and prohibit Sexting**

Consider whether or not your child needs a cell phone, and if so, at least give the device a curfew! “48 percent of teens admit to having received a sexual message through text, e-mail, or Instant Messaging... Remind them that any pictures they send of themselves can never be retrieved. Years later, an employer may pull up an image while doing a background check.” (*Raising Pure Teens*, Catholic Answers)

### **Poison in the House**

The use of media without careful vigilance can be compared to having poison in the house. No careful adult will leave poison on the counter and merely talk about how dangerous it is. A reasonable adult will place the poison in a cabinet with a lock on it or take it out of the house so there is no chance of a family member ingesting some of it. Please know that as God has blessed you with your children and given you responsibility to help them get to their lasting home of Heaven, it is your duty to protect them from every danger and help them develop common sense and logical thinking. God has given you the grace for the task, embrace it with love and dedication. You will be greatly rewarded.

### **Internet and Media Safety**

- *Brickhousesecurity.com* offers a number of products, including one known as “cell phone spy elite” that allows you to retrieve deleted text message from certain cell phones.
- *Bsecure.com* is an Internet filter that can send you e-mails letting you know which Web sites people in your house have attempted to visit.
- *Decentfilms.com* offers movie reviews and wholesome recommendations.
- *Filterreview.com* is an excellent resource for choosing from a variety of Internet filter programs.
- *Internetsafety.com* offers a program called “safe eyes” that monitors your child’s instant messaging. It also can monitor his or her social networking sites, and set limits on online minutes.
- *Parentstv.org* educates parents about television content, aims to improve the quality of prime time television, and promotes family values. It uses a rating system to measure the moral quality (or lack thereof) of broadcast television programs.
- *Pluggedin.com* is an online resource from Focus on the Family. Here, one can browse reviews of thousands of movies, television shows, video games, and musicians.
- This list of resources is taken from *Raising Pure Teens, 10 Strategies to Protect or Restore Your Teenager’s Innocence*, Jason Evert and Chris Stefanick. Additional resources in this excellent book.