

3 Tips to Preserving Your Child's Online Life

While the Internet brings a wealth of information instantly to our fingertips, it also throws our children into an ocean of risk. Too often our kids navigate those waters without a life preserver and become bait for the enemy's piranha-like feeding frenzy to attack the weak.

Parents today have more than their neighborhoods, schools and kids' friends to worry about. The enemy is cleverly casting nets online fishing for their souls and God's men must be aware of where their kids are swimming.

For example, social media has brought the world together, while giving predators tools to connect while disguised in sheep's clothing. Online video gaming, once a harmless recreation (remember Atari?), now provides realms of obscene and violent behaviors. And with every online search, marketers of all kinds of dangerous material get closer to home.

The lesson from 1 Peter 5:8-9 is as true as it ever was, saying "Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings."

As our kids tune into social media from morning to night on any device, posting, tweeting, instagramming, snapchatting etc., and online gamers disappear from the "real world" to indulge in fantasy worlds, God's man must be alert, sober minded and resist the enemy.

Here are 3 tips to managing your kids' online lives:

- 1. Engage.** Your kids need you to "be alert" as "Big Brother"

online. Get engaged in their online worlds, whether it's social media or video games.

Find out what social media they are involved in. Friend them on Facebook, follow their Tweets, become Instagram friends so you can see who they are following and who are following them. And, you can monitor their posts. For the online gamers, spend 30 minutes or so a week to do your own "scouting" of your kid's "progress" in the game world.

2. Enlist Support. We need help. We need other people, including our kids, to watch out for us and who courageously confront us. It's mission-critical to have additional eyes and ears online, and who will bring issues to the table, help find Biblical answers and share Godly wisdom to sensitive parenting challenges.

Additional practical tips include monitoring their email, download parenting control software to prevent unwanted illicit material from showing up on screen, use privacy settings on your child's profiles, create safe screen names, keep the computer in open sight, limit data usage on mobile devices, and make sure your kids know what information to keep private i.e. Social security numbers, address, phone numbers and bank, credit card information.

Being of "sober mind" is not just talking about intoxication. It also means to have a "serious attitude or quality." Managing your kid's online life is serious business, not to be taken lightly.

3. Encourage Communication. God's man must nurture an environment where openness and honesty are welcomed, for good and bad behavior. It's best if ease of communication is established in your kid's early years, but it's never too late. Talk with your kids about what's going on online—good or bad. Make your values and beliefs a common topic, and compare them with behavior online.

At my house, our values are 1) love God, and 2) we help people. My kids know this. So it's easy to ask, "is what you're doing online accomplishing either of these values?" If so, that's great. Kudos. If not, then dive deeper into the values and why they are important, and imagine the risks created should those values be removed.

That's being alert, sober minded and resisting the enemy. If that doesn't help, try throwing a life preserver over the keyboard.

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