

3 Truths About Teens and Technology

In my new book, *Screens and Teens: Connecting with Our Kids in a Wireless World*, I spend quite a bit of time debunking the lies that come to our teens because of our technology-saturated culture. But even within this technological world, I thought it would be helpful to focus on some truths about our teens. I offer three essential insights that help us understand teens' beliefs, motivations, choices and behaviors.

Truth #1: Teens Are Creative, Innovative and Entrepreneurial

Have you noticed your teens coming up with new and different approaches to ordinary tasks? Have they suggested unique solutions for dysfunction they're aware of in their community or elsewhere in the world? Their creative and innovative spirits are birthed in their desire to solve problems and their exposure to many different ideas on websites, blogs, videos and elsewhere.

Many are also entrepreneurial, especially turning these ideas into nonprofits and personalized volunteer opportunities. As film director Justin Dillon said, "It used to be the coolest thing you could do when you were a teenager is start a band. Now the coolest thing you can do is start a nonprofit."

How can we take advantage of these abilities and increase our teens' motivation? When discussing current issues and things that matter to our young people, we can consider how they naturally think and ask them, "What might be a better way to do this?" Help them put their creative gifts to the test! Making it easy for teens to bring up new ideas honors them and their unique contributions.

Realize teens may get bored quickly and frustrated easily when expected to do things the same way all the time. They may also

get frustrated when their ideas are constantly rejected. Of course, they need to learn how to communicate their ideas and ask questions with respectful attitudes. Otherwise, they may be appropriately judged as critical, arrogant, and prideful.

Teens have always been bright and have always had something to offer. But this generation seems uniquely aware of big problems and uniquely motivated to tackle them! Asking for their ideas and encouraging them to think is an important strategy in embracing their creative, innovative, and entrepreneurial spirit.

Truth #2: Their Security Is in Technology

I speak to a lot of parent groups. When I ask parents of teens to indicate if they're frustrated by how hard it is to get their kids to turn off their phones, stop listening to their music, and power down their screen, virtually every hand goes up. It's one of parenting's most consistent frustrations. And then I ask the parents if it's hard for them to turn off their own devices. Nervous laughter and looks around the room follow.

Today's young people are known to say, "You might as well cut off my arm if you're going to take away my phone." Technology is like breathing to the average teen. It's a normal, everyday part of life they don't even think about. A contemporary cartoonist might show a child clutching a phone instead of a security blanket. Teens associate comfort with access to technology.

Let's be honest: It's not their fault screens are teens' security. They've been raised with technology, their brains are wired to use and depend on these technological tools. It started young for them! Think about it: How many of us adults have handed even young children a handheld device to entertain and even soothe them?

But I'll say it again: No "thing" will ever meet young

people's legitimate need for security. They should find it in us, in others who are worthy of their trust, and in themselves when they have a healthy self-awareness and behave wisely. Most importantly, they should learn to place their security in God. But the reality is that technology is often a teenager's security.

Truth #3: They're Tech-Addicted, Tired, Stressed, Overwhelmed, Depressed and Escaping

If you've observed any of these emotional states in the teens and children you love, you're not alone. The problems you've observed may be why you picked up this book in the first place. It's hard to connect in healthy ways with anyone who is tech-addicted, tired, depressed, stressed, overwhelmed and/or lonely. This is especially true for teens, who don't have as many coping strategies as adults.

If you haven't observed these consistently in your children, thank God! But talk with your teens, and you'll find that many of their friends are struggling with tech-addiction, fatigue, stress, feeling overwhelmed, depression and escapism.

Where do all these issues stem from? The technology is not as perfect or as nurturing as our teens need it to be. The messages they've pulled from vast doses of screen time have been hugely influential, and they send widely varied messages.

All that conflicting data is stressful; our teens' subconscious beliefs may be very conflicted. And the less-than-real presentation of images on a screen can establish some disconnect with teens' reality. Why isn't their world as cool, as clever, as beautiful as the one they see on screen? Why aren't they similarly cool, clever and beautiful?

Parents have the unique role of being able to provide truth-training for their teens. We can provide feedback about who our teens really are. Our accurate assessment of their personal worth can help them not to be so hard on themselves.

We can help them assess the limitations of technology.

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