

Is Your Teen Son Distracted?

4 Practical Ways You Can Help

“Describe today’s teen guys in one word,” the radio host said.

I wasn’t prepared for the question, but the answer came to me with no hesitation.

“Distracted.”

Blame it on their brains if you want; after all, the grey matter of a teen boy won’t be done developing until roughly age 25. Or blame it on the hyper-availability of entertainment media. The average U.S. home has at least two TVs, a game system, a tablet, four phones and several lingering devices like iPods that Mom and Dad forgot little Chris still has in his top drawer.

That’s a lot of screens.

How many do you have in your house?

Yes, our daughters are definitely distracted as well (especially with their Instagram feed), but they are proving to outpace guys in almost every area from maturity to brain development, college enrollment and even saying no to drugs. Visit your nearest college campus; you’ll surely find more girls. 2.2 million fewer males will be enrolled in college this year than females. Overall, women will account for more than 56% of students on campuses across the U.S. In the ’70s, those numbers were almost exactly the opposite, 58% men to 42% women. If you venture onto a Christian college campus, the gap only widens. The Christian school my girls attended had a 2 to 1 girl to guy ratio. Remember the Beach Boys’ lyrics? “Two girls for every guy!”

So where are all the Christian guys? That’s what the girls at

Grand Canyon University are asking, because only % of the school's students are guys. That's three girls to every one guy, not that the guys mind. That's a lot of girls with their act together ... and a few guys.

We're seeing the same disproportion in the job market. Millennial guys are dragging behind the rest. In fact, Bloomberg reveals, "10 years after the Great Recession, 25 to 34-year-old men are lagging in the workforce more than any other age and gender demographic." Why? We can't blame this on guys developing later; after all, the male brain is done developing in the mid-20s."

Economists cite two concerns: *video games and drugs*.

Distracted.

Stand next to me at the back of one of my parent workshops and watch me field questions from today's moms and dads. If they begin their sentence with, "I have a question about my son," I know exactly where the conversation is going: screens, sexual temptation or substances.

Let me put it another way:

"Fortnite, porn or weed."

I hear it every weekend from parents.

"If I don't monitor my son's screen time, he'll play Fortnite for 12 hours straight!"

"I caught my son looking at inappropriate images on his phone."

"My son thinks weed is 'no big deal,' and I have no idea what to tell him, after all, it's legal."

Why are these battles so much more difficult than a decade ago?

It has everything to do with smartphones and other mobile devices. In 2012 American crossed the 50% mark for smartphone ownership. That means Google, Snapchat, Netflix and all their other favorite apps are in right in their pocket. They have access at school, at soccer practice and in their bedroom. Think about this: This means *more access but less accountability*.

They have uncensored access to their favorite role model 24/7, a celeb they follow on Insta. What do you think young people are learning about sex, drugs or self-image from Cardi B or Post Malone? And typically, Mom and Dad don't have a clue who these "role models" are or the lifestyle they're flaunting. But their kids are soaking it in at an average of 9 hours a day.

More access. Less accountability.

How would you do if you had a bowlful of candy sitting on your bed right next to you? Would you be "distracted?"

Well, our sons are definitely being distracted by a different kind of candy: eye candy. In a recent Barna study asking young people age 13-24 about porn, they found 41% of practicing Christian males admitted to seeking out porn once or twice a month. They asked the same question to practicing Christian females and only 13% of them did. Males who didn't practice a faith, 72% admitted to viewing porn at least once or twice a month, compared to 36% females.

So what can a loving mom or dad do to help our kids fight these common distractions?

Here's four proven ways parents can help:

1. Delay screen ownership.

Most kids try to put the pressure on their parents as early as third and fourth grade: "Mom, all my friends have

smartphones.” Sadly, a lot of their friends actually *do*. The average age that a kid gets a smartphone in America is 10.3 years old; but most experts from Bill Gates to Common Sense Media (and myself) advise waiting till high school to give your kids a phone.

Does that mean iPads are safe? An iPad is just a iPhone without cell service. All those same video games and social media distractions are available on *any* device that can download apps. If it can download apps or connect to the internet... wait. Your son doesn't need Netflix or Fortnite in his bedroom at 11:30 at night. Waaaaaaaaaaaaay too distracting.

The answer isn't *no*, it's *not yet*.

But even when they get screens don't let them have “free reign”...

2. Limit screen time.

Every parenting expert from Dr. Jean Twenge to the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends some screen-time limits. If you have a son with a game system, you know this to be true, because if you *don't* limit him, he'd play Apex Legends or Fortnite till he passes out at 4 a.m. from sleep deprivation. So talk with your son about some realistic boundaries.

Mobile devices have recently provided parents with some really helpful ways to monitor and control screen time; in fact, Apple actually calls this feature “screen time” accessible through the settings on the iPhone. With this feature you can not only set content and time limits, but you can actually schedule “downtime” where apps are turned off.

But these aren't the only settings that help you minimize distractions.

3. Use porn filters.

Most devices offer ways to block inappropriate content through

settings like “screen time.” Netflix has a way to manage profiles where you can set the “maturity level” of the programming from “little kids only” to “teens and below.” Be sure to still co-view this media with your kids on occasion so you can get a taste of what Netflix deems appropriate for “teens and below.”

And don’t assume that any filters are foolproof. I love what Common Sense Media said in their article to parents about setting porn filters:

You can set all the blockers, filters and parental controls in the universe, and not only will your kids still see porn, you still have to talk to them about what porn is, why it exists and why it’s not for them. In fact, using tech tools to limit adult content works best when combined with conversations that convey your values about love, sexuality and relationships.

Which leads to my more important tip:

4. Nothing is as effective as meaningful conversation.

Don’t expect boundaries like screen limits and internet filters to raise your kids. The most effective porn filters can’t prevent your son’s friend from walking up to him, holding out his phone and saying, “Check this out!”

Your son needs a mom or dad who cares enough to walk through life with them as a coach, engaging in meaningful conversation.

In a world where celebrities are convincing our kids that marijuana is no big deal, your son needs you to talk with him about the fact that is actually a very big deal for a young man with a developing brain. Your son hears plenty of people talking in ignorance about issues that really aren’t even relevant to his situation—things like legalization or medicinal use of cannabis—when the one fact he *should* hear is that even “pro-pot” advocates admit that using weed young or

frequently hurts brain development. No one's even entering that debate. But chances are your son won't hear that unless a caring parent, youth leader or coach engages him in that conversation.

Your son doesn't need Kanye West walking him through life via his Insta story ... your son needs you.

Don't settle for letting your son be distracted by screens and other bad influences. Don't settle for lies. In a world overflowing with lies, your son needs someone who is living out the truth.

Are you engaging him in conversations about truth?

What does that look in your home this week?

Jonathan McKee *is the author of over 20 books, including the brand-new The Guy's Guide to Four Battles Every Young Man Must Face, The Teen's Guide to Social Media & Mobile Devices and other books to help parents engage their kids in conversations about truth. Jonathan speaks to parents and leaders worldwide all while providing free resources and help for families on*