

Digital Safety

The priests of St. Mary's present an introductory guide to the moral use of technology, including an overview of the most prevalent media and internet dangers, particularly for young people, as well as practical suggestions and resources for responsible cell phone use.

Expanded Version

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Table of Contents

Overview – safety from what?	2
Neuroplasticity - Addictions.....	3
Danger to our mind, health, and soul	5
What about my kids?.....	8
Social Media.....	10
Pornography	13
But not MY children	20
Safety How To's and Internet Resources...	22
Phones Without Internet	24
Best Case Scenario.....	26
Good Reads	27

Safety From What?

General Overview

Accidental shootings, terrible car accidents, diseases, tornados, fires, drowning, kidnapping... these are the normal things that we think of when we are considering “safety”. Gun safety, driving schools, traffic laws, hygiene, medicine, and safety plans are just some of the measures we take to respond to those dangers and keep ourselves and our families safe.

Without warning and in the guise of advancement and convenience, many of us today are beginning to realize that our digital devices bring their own sort of danger. Technology of course is a tool, or perhaps it is better described as a machine: its purpose is to help us accomplish things, as any tool does, but it moreover has a power that is far beyond what a normal human being or an average tool can produce (think of a gun compared to a sword, or a truck compared to walking shoes). And so we must use it with caution, because misuse of a powerful machine is dangerous. It is our concern that the new dangers of the technology world are vast and mostly unknown – and they require a new sort of safety!

The goal of this publication is to outline the dangers that come with the use of our information/communication machines (smart phones, tablets, etc.), then to state clearly the morality of their use, and finally to offer guidance and resources to aid that prudent use.

What are the dangers in our digital devices?

- 1. Danger to our health: physical and mental*
- 2. Danger to our social life*
- 3. Danger to our soul*

Just because something is dangerous does not mean that it can never be used, but it does mean that it must be used with prudence in proportion to its danger.

Where does the problem start?

Grooves - Neuroplasticity

Growing up in a Northern state means sledding in the winter, but sledding isn't necessarily as easy as getting on a toboggan and rocketing down a hill like Calvin and Hobbes. Sometimes, after a deep and heavy snowfall, the kids need to take some time making sled runs in the snow before they can really get going. By sitting on one's sled and inching along slowly down the hill, the powdery snow becomes compressed, and a track is made. The more this is repeated, or the heavier the passenger, the deeper and slicker the groove made into the hillside becomes, until the sleds are flying down it with no resistance. Sometimes the kids will compete and sabotage another's sled run by getting on it with their sled and intentionally carving a new path into slower territory... or into trees and fences (only the naughty kids did that).

Carving grooves for easy travel is exactly how our brain is designed to work. Instead of snow, we have what is called 'neuroplasticity,' which is our ability to form new connections and habits between the things we sense and choose, and what we do practically. It's thanks to our brain's grooves that we can perform such feats as walking in a straight line or eating spaghetti or remembering who our children are and playing baseball with them. Without our neurological transmitters we would be unable to learn anything by heart, gain any sense of safety or danger, or perform any action as if it were not the first time; and, just like the snow tracks, the heavier the impact and the more times the track is repeated, the deeper and more fine-tuned is the groove.

Addicting?

This groove-carving, habit-forming quality of our brain is powerful, and without it we would not be able to live as human beings. However, this power can also become hijacked, making it the very reason for some terrible issues. Conditions like PTSD and anxiety, or problems like addictions, whether they be of drugs or gambling, all are caused by the tracks in our brain being connected to the wrong things, and then repeated or impacted so heavily as to make travel along those routes impossibly easy, often extremely

damaging, and almost hopelessly hard to stop.

Because of their design, impact, and frequent use, our smart phones tap into our neuroplastic brains so well that we form almost immediate addictions, not only to the things we use them for, but even to using screens in general.

The smartphone was brilliantly designed to go hand in hand with our habit-forming brains. Its ease of use even in innocent things like texting and scrolling is the perfect groove maker. More insidiously, apps like Twitter, YouTube and TikTok were designed based on the science of gambling addictions: using an unexpected reward to form a deeply graven habit of repeated behavior (pull down to refresh).

Now, hopefully the idea of a device that is designed and controlled by someone else with unknown but doubtful motives forming an addiction in our brain should give us cause to worry about using these devices safely, but unfortunately this is where the danger starts: the danger to our health, both physical and mental, is much deeper than might be realized.

- *For more information on our how brain's neuroplasticity works, read Irresistible, by Adam Alter, an excellent explanation of addiction and how it is used by the tech industry. Also, Our Plastic Brain by Rommy von Bernhardt for the science behind neuroplasticity, and How to Break up with your Phone by Catharine Price.*

The Danger to our mind and health

“Praying is very hard for me, Father, it seems like as soon as I start, I am distracted by something...”

The effects of tech use are not felt at first, but they become gradually known. First, we start to realize that we are not managing our time well, then it becomes evident that we are not getting as much done as we feel like we need to be doing. Feelings of restlessness come just as often as fatigue, and it becomes harder and harder to concentrate.

What is happening in our brains is a fireworks show of firing synapses, released hormones (like dopamine), and overall an overworking in certain areas, all streamlining our attention and care to whatever is on the screen. This affects us both mentally and physically, and the reason is that it is actually damaging our brain.

Daily use of technology is beyond the energetic ability of our brain and it therefore results in mental fatigue, less productivity, and (becoming alarmingly common) anxiety disorders. When we work our body beyond its limit, we get cramps, fatigue, and sickness. When we work our brain beyond its limit, we are unable to regulate stress, think clearly, rest normally, or react reasonably. Since our brain is the source of our mood-setting chemicals and dispositions, its overuse in turn creates the perfect scenario for medical depression, which is characterized by a lack of motivation and feelings of sadness because of low amounts of hormones like serotonin. What feels like an answer to our anxious or sad mood in fact is increasing our dependency on the very thing which is a major contributor to that depressive state in the first place....

Why does it seem that most young people all of a sudden struggle with anxiety and depression?

Inevitably it becomes difficult to pray, because prayer requires that we make good, long efforts in the ‘groove’ that connects our soul with the Father we are trying to focus on.

Our phones are meant to capture our time and attention addictively because that is what makes money. The people out to make money do not have our health or sanity at heart, and the dangerous effects are increasing!

“The Shallows”

It is no longer a debate in the research world that internet use is changing the way we think. Some even praise this change as a new and improved evolution of the human brain. We are changing from a thought process that is normally considered ‘linear,’ i.e., a progression from one point to another point to a conclusion, to a thought process that is ‘fragmented.’ Fragmented thinking looks like this: instead of reading a book from beginning to end about how to raise poultry (linear thought), we may Google search ‘raising chickens,’ then watch sections of a YouTube video about it, click on a link to a supply store which leads to a blog about favorite breeds, which leads to a video about adorable kittens snuggling with chipmunks... this reminds us to check our email, and during the process we have responded to several texts, one of them with a link to a video of someone’s baby hiccupping, meanwhile we check the bank account and then back to chickens – Amazon once again has the best price. And so on. To some, this is stellar multitasking, but to others, it may indicate something more concerning.

As it turns out, this change in the way we think may not be as much of a blessing as some would have. Increased use of searches and shallow knowledge lead to a dependency on the source of quick answers and cause a major lack of ‘deep minds’ in our society. This in turn leads to a loss of arts, be they boat-making or education. ‘De-skilling’ is the basis of our growing society comprised of untalented and unmotivated citizens with very little to add but their common participation in similar tasks.

“I hate my job. I don’t even feel like a human being.”

Take this schema and extend it to the business world and we are startled to see a bustling hive of deadline-based meetings and workplaces which substitute quality product for ‘efficient productivity,’ and productivity for busyness: whatever requires less

of us intellectually and virtuously.

The workplace norm is now the long face with tired eyes, filling up the third cup of coffee, always being ‘so busy,’ drowning in emails and meetings, and all this coinciding with a lack of demand, interest, or ability in the true arts or the production of quality work that is unique and adds something to the world. We struggle instead with trying to find meaning in jobs that can easily be replicated by anyone with a brain and an email address, and even then, the advent of AI is quickly making even that unnecessary.

This state of decline of our intellectual life, which in turns affects the business and social world, has been called by author Nicholas Carr “The Shallows.”

‘We are the Shallow Men.’

The lack of ‘friction’, brought on by the ease of the tech gadgets, in turn saps our strength of personality. The easier it is for a person to purchase something, sell something, or get a date, the weaker he becomes in self-motivation and accomplishing challenging tasks. Is it any wonder that our ease-fed teens are not motivated?

On top of it all, this system streamlines our brain to *need* the immediate, bite-size chunks, while weakening its ability to concentrate for long periods of time... and so the tracks get snowed over altogether.

This Danger from Tech use is truly insidious. It is affecting our culture as whole, and forcing a flimsy foundation for the generations to come.

-For more information on the hijacking use of technology read Cal Newport’s So Good They Can’t Ignore You.

-For a very interesting source of information on how the internet is changing our brains, read The Shallows by Nicholas Carr.

-An excellent read on the topic of shallow intellects falling for the trap of busyness and connectivity can be found in Cal Newport’s Deep Work.

What about my kids?

The reality of neuroplasticity and our habit-forming brains is evident more than anywhere else when it comes to child formation. Have you ever tried to draw a picture of a human face only to have it turn out looking like the sketch of a six-year-old? Or perhaps you've gotten on a bike for the first time in decades only to find that you still know how to ride? Who hasn't been charmed at the ways kids pick up the antics of their parents and siblings from the earliest ages?

Children are designed by God to be the ultimate receptors. Their brains are like massive hills of snow, ready to receive whatever imprint is put on them. This not only provides the incredible possibility of mental growth in a child (like absorbing languages), but also the terrible possibility of lifelong wounds inflicted by abuse. Whatever makes the first and deepest rut lasts the longest. In the springtime, the last snow to melt was the first snow to fall and get packed by the heaviest sled runs on the hill...

Now we add these two facts together: machines that are designed to be massively addicting due to their effect on our malleable brains, and brains that are more malleable than at any other stage in our life. The result is a hopelessly common scenario. **It does not take a bad child to become addicted to anything harmful in technology, it only takes a child and a screen.** There have been more than enough studies that show that children raised in the tech world become increasingly adept and reliant in the technical realm, while at the same time they become strangers to the natural world they live in, with an inability to use their senses and ill-formed motor skills to confront problems in the real world. It is not *just* a question of 'ruining their imagination' by overloading it with imagery and fast-moving pictures. It is a question of short-circuiting their ability to use all their senses, their intelligence, and their will to become motivated and stable adults. This reality is even measurable. **Just as an unused muscle atrophies and shrinks with unuse, so do the parts of our brain measurably atrophy during a childhood with screens and without imagination and natural contact.**

This means that device use is dangerous for children because it can permanently deform parts of their brain that

they will need for creativity, problem solving, and higher reasoning.

Screens are bad for children! And that's just on the basic level of screen use. Add to this problem the inevitability of contact with even more addicting and immoral content and digital activities, and we get a child robbed of its chance of a fair shot at a normal and moral life by dangers that are all too easy to be trapped in.

Want to see the overwhelming effect of digital imagery on a small child's brain? Watch their face during a movie.

Want to see the beginnings of addiction? Turn the movie off halfway through when it's time for Rosary.

Parents take it very much to heart that they put good food, friends, and activities before their children, because they know that the child does not know enough for itself yet. But are we missing the fact that the child is passively receiving in an amplified way everything he sees on a screen? Attitude, dress, style, morality, spirituality.... all things he cannot distinguish.

This general idea will apply to all of the following topics.

*For more information on the effect of the screens and the formation of the mental health and education of children, see: **Jean Twenge**, the author of ***iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids...***; **Screen Schooled** by Joe Clement & Matt Miles; **Alone Together** Sherry Turkle; **Virtual Child** by Cris A. Rowan; **Glow Kids**, Dr. Nicholas Kardaras*

More particularly dangerous Dangers:

1. Social Media

“Social Media” are the apps and websites that are designed to easily share information, pictures, videos, stories, and any other communications with friends or acquaintances. They have quickly graduated into other uses as well, like platforms to buy and sell, etc.

While being an incredible source of resources as well as a very convenient way to stay in touch with friends and family, the negative effects of Social Media are multiple, and over time become catastrophic.

“Catastrophic” is a serious word, but to put it succinctly, here are the inherent problems that can validly be described by such a woeful term:

1. Social Media is addicting. There is no doubt about it, and not just figuratively. The endless source of content triggers our brain and pushes constant use, constant checking. These lead to not only chronic overuse, but also deeper disorders, like the anxiety-based, chronic connectivity, depression, and obsessive disorders.
At its most innocent level, because it is made to be addictive, Social Media is a thief of time. Especially time which children need for normal life, and time which parents owe and steal from their family.
2. Social Media breaks down our actual social life. The more time spent on a phone, the less time spent in real, human interactions. Who hasn't witnessed the youth becoming increasingly bored and unable to spend fun times together? Or the oft-seen doleful image of a family eating together at a restaurant, all looking at their phones.
3. The Social Media platforms are designed to take our time and money, to be used as much as possible. They were programmed to trigger the reward centers in our brains to keep us looking and needing to stay in touch.

4. It becomes the standard of self esteem and happiness because it is a channel of materialism, by display and comparison with others' material possessions, image, or worldly achievements. It touts popularity like divinity until it becomes a need. Its messages, feeds, and culture start to feel more important than the real world and real worth.
5. Social Media is chock full of pornography. There is not a common platform that does not have easy access to impure content and feeds, and what's worse, the algorithms are set to suggest such context on a regular basis. This is just as true for Snapchat as it is for Pinterest.
6. Social Media is the podium for the 'lowest common denominator.' Lack of accountability, rampant dishonesty and uncharity, political manipulation, sex trafficking, and predatory dangers are all easy and relevant conclusions for an open-access and anonymous digital world.

A team on the film "Childhood 2.0" ran a test on sex-predation on Snapchat. They created a fake account of a teenage girl with all the normal descriptions and pictures. Within ten minutes of finishing it, "she" was contacted by a man asking for a video chat. His profile picture was already sexually explicit.

7. Social Media is the death trap for teenage girls.

This needs to be addressed: The normal teenage girl is understandably insecure and naïve, trying to fit in and worrying too much about her image and social status. Social Media is effectively putting her in a room with an impossible array of sexually attractive comparisons, while simultaneously putting her at the mercy of criticism, shamming, and endless pressures. Is it any wonder that disorders related to bodily dysmorphia (e.g. anorexia) are rampant today? Would you let your daughter go to such a place?

According to the CDC stats, suicide rate for girls aged 10–14 had the largest percent increase (200%) during the time period following the dawn of Social Media, tripling between the years 1999 and 2014.

*According to the National Center for Injury Prevention, suicide is the second leading cause of death for ages 10-24, and more teenagers and young adults die from suicide than from cancer, heart disease, AIDS, birth defects, stroke, pneumonia, influenza, and chronic lung disease, **combined**. (protectyouneyes.com)*

Multiple studies show a clear link between low self-esteem, cyber-bullying and shaming, self-harm and suicide, all with Social Media.

The conclusion of experience is that Social Media is as damaging to young girls as pornography is to young boys.

These effects are truly catastrophic! The morality of regular use of Social Media is imprudent at best, and gravely sinful at worst when allowed to young people, at least without serious restriction and accountability. The further problem is that it is so hard to regulate.

The best way to use Social Media is, ‘not at all.’

For more information on social media and its effects it us, see “Alone Together” and “Ten Arguments for Deleting Your Social Media Accounts Right Now” by Jaron Lanier.

For studies on the connection between Social Media and teenage depression and self-destructive tendencies, see the ProtectYoungEyes blog and the study, Social Media and Suicide: A Public Health Perspective by David D. Luxton, PhD, Jennifer D. June, BA, and Jonathan M. Fairall, BS.

There are many other studies to be found by a simple internet search.

2. Pornography

Pornography is easily the greatest danger that the digital world brings. It can be defined as any use of sexually explicit imagery, video, audio, or writing for the sake of sexual excitation. It is the great insidious plot of our times, claiming close to 2/3 of all the digital contents downloaded every day on all the smartphones across the world, and grossing more income than the NBA, NFL, and all of Hollywood with \$97 billion a year.

Although we mostly understand that any sort of use of pornography is gravely sinful, many people do not understand much more about this particular temptation.

The days of people having to sneak around for bad magazines are long over, and pornography is unbelievably accessible. Any simple internet search will bring it up and it is lingering in the social media platforms. Even if someone's internet is restricted, it's accessible through texting apps with Gif and meme suggestions. Even if all the bad websites are blocked, it can be received through emails and compressed files. If a device is connected to internet in any way, it is nigh inescapable.

The single most important point about all this that must be remembered, is that pornography is not just about vice.

Pornography is first and foremost a neurological problem. This means that it can and will affect even the 'best of us,' just as long as we are human.

God designed our sexual nature fearfully and wonderfully. He designed it in such a way as to firstly be the source of new souls that are meant to be brought to heaven, but also as a firm bonding and support for the spouses responsible for those souls. For such an end he fitted it with a unique and intense pleasure. Sexuality goes far beyond that though, as a whole stack of different hormones, nerves, mirror cells, etc. are in play to create a bond between husband and wife. Just like the other aspects of our physiology, however, this

great and powerful gift can also be hijacked. Most people have heard of the hormone called dopamine which is considered a reward hormone and brings a pleasurable feeling. But sexual pleasure goes far beyond dopamine, it includes other pleasure-bringing hormones and chemicals such as Dopamine, Testosterone, Norepinephrine, Oxytocin, Vasopressin, Opiates, mirror cells, and Serotonin.

Through God's incredible design, intimacy literally physically binds spouses to each other on a hormonal and cellular level.

Pornography then is the intentional use of that design outside of God's plan. The conclusions are obvious: the intensity of the pleasure, the manipulation of all of the hormones and nervous system, and the object of it being something disordered in itself, all lead to a devastating set of results.

This problem is especially problematic for young boys and men, but women are not exempt from this temptation, having fallen human nature themselves.

Pornography is absolutely addictive in the true sense of the term.

- Because of the massive amount of chemicals and physiology involved, it causes immediate neurological streamlining, and every time it's used, those grooves are made deeper and deeper.
- It is nonerasable, because of how sharply it affects our memory and mirroring cells.
- It restricts our pleasure receptors increasingly each time, and so in a short amount of time, even normal pleasurable activities (like listening to music or spending time with friends) become less and less desirable, until nothing else bring joy.
- Eventually it becomes not only the sole source of satisfaction, but an actual physical need, just to feel normal.

In the meantime, it lowers our ideal of human love, and objectifies not only women but anything that has to do with a design that God created sacred in itself. This is the antithesis of love.

Because of this, pornography is becoming an increasingly

common source of marriage breakdowns.

Furthermore, addiction to pornography is an impediment to a religious vocation.

All of this may be clear enough, but where we usually fall short is the realization of how easy it is to become addicted to pornography.

Again, the fundamental principle here is that it is first and foremost a neurological problem, not ‘merely’ a vice. Anyone who has a brain, human nature, and a screen can become easily addicted to this source of neurological dependency and this applies to children tenfold.

Pornography is equatable to the sexual abuse of minors.

Everyone understands the terrible consequences of sexual abuse. Because it is a manipulation of innocence, and a manipulation of a nature that has not yet formed virtue, the results from abuse can be lifelong wounds, tendency to sexual disorders, clinical depression and anxiety, self-hate, self-harm, and suicide.

The unfortunate reality of pornography is that this exploitation of a child’s sexual nature has the same effects on their body and brain as does the sexual abuse from an actual person.

Because of the chemical impact of pornography, a child's brain can become instantly hijacked, far beyond what his natural capabilities of regulation can control. This means that even the sweetest and most innocent child can become instantly enslaved beyond his control, simply because of the overwhelming amount of neurological and chemical effects in his system.

If this isn't checked and healed, a child will become increasingly dependent, eventually becoming unable to ever regulate certain aspects of their nature.

This means that a young boy of 12 can already be definitively blocked from pursuing a religious vocation, due only to the negligence of an older sibling or parent in leaving their unfiltered devices around the house.

The addictive effects of pornography cannot be over-emphasized. In many cases, it can be more neurologically demanding than alcoholism and is comparable to an addiction to heavy narcotics.

Again, the reason why so many continue to fall into it, is because we believe it is merely a sin that can be controlled with willpower and prayer.

Pornography cannot be overcome by willpower and prayer only.

It can only be overcome by practical abstinence, and sometimes additional therapeutic methods, certainly with the aid of prayer, but starting with the practical choice of denying oneself access to content in the first place. Without the practical disposition that arranges avoidance at all costs, grace is blocked from working in a soul.

Morally speaking:

- Having unfiltered internet without accountability on a smartphone is imprudent at best.
- If even once or twice a device has been intentionally used for explicit material, continuing to have it unfiltered and without accountability is gravely sinful.
- To allow children access to devices without strict filtering, accountability, and strict vigilance is a mortal sin of neglect on the part of the parents.

Practically speaking, what do we do about this?

- Addicted: If the reader finds itself already in the throes of this addiction, you must know that overcoming it is definitely possible, but only with an intense desire to be rid of the vice

entirely, and a will to overcome it no matter the cost.

- The first steps are going to be in removing from one's life *any* possible source of temptation.
 - If use continues, the addiction continues.
 - If the possibility of open access is present, the falling to the addiction is inevitable.

1. Step one is to make a change, choosing a device that cannot access impure content. See the resources section for options that can provide some digital access without open access to everything else.
 - a. Free blocking apps or cheap accountability software is entirely insufficient.
2. Step two is to actively fight against the addiction.
 - a. This is done by intentionally seeking out other forms of entertainment with physical and mental activity.
 - b. Study and exercise.
 - c. Intentionally changing our ideal of love to the reality of God's creation must be practiced.
 - d. The guidance of a therapist and a regular confessor are often helpful and sometimes necessary.

- *For more information on overcoming Pornography addiction, see FightTheNewDrug.com, PurityIsPossible.com and the resources on CovenantEyes.com.*

- If the reader is not currently in a state of dependency or regular sin by use of pornographic material, then to maintain a virtuous life, they must consider it incumbent upon themselves to treat this question seriously, not pretending to themselves that they are above this sort of temptation. *Such an ideal is impossible.*
 - There ought not to be a smartphone without some level of accountability and filtering, even if someone has never fallen to the sin.
 - We must push across the line of mere necessary prudence.
 - We are the only ones in control of what we watch, what we listen to, and what we read.
 - If we are sloppy and too allowing with basic improprieties and immodesty from movies and

songs, we will be responsible for the lowering of our standard which is disposing ourselves to greater temptations down the road.

- **For parents**, no degree of monitoring and vigilance is too much in this regard. It's true that in this day and age your child will certainly be exposed to something pornographic eventually. But that doesn't mean that sheltering children heavily from any accidental exposure is not worth it, especially in their first 15 years.

The greatest thing parents can do for their child is not prevention. It is communication and the building of trust.

*The greatest thing parents can do for their children as regards the danger of pornography is to love them positively and practically: communicating with them to **build a firm foundation of open trust, making it easy for the child to confide in them.***

Because exposure is inevitable, and virtue requires knowledge, planning, and prudence, a parent does their child a much better service by having trustful conversations ahead of time with them, and frequently. ✓

Children must be armed with reasonable, practical, frank, and above all *sacred* notions of our sexual nature before they must come into contact with disordered content, bad conversations, or the developments of their own body.

For an excellent presentation of how to educate your children and prepare them for the dangers of impurity, read "Parents, Children, and the Fact of Life" by Fr. Henry Sattler.

(It is an excellent book, despite the banal title.)

“You can tell me anything”

Encourage your children positively every time they entrust you with some doubt or question, especially as far as purity goes. Avoid at all costs making them afraid to admit something to you.

Children should be rewarded, for example, if they tells their mother or father that they saw a bad magazine while they were standing in the grocery store. We want them to tell us, and then we can helpfully explain to them why something like that is considered bad, even something to be confessed, but in a spirit of protection and confidence, and something they can always talk to their parents about.

PYE recommends a parent mantra with the words, “Put it down and tell someone,” to teach children what to do when something unexpected comes on to the screen. This is a good catchphrase especially if the child is commended for telling his parent.

Prevention and Vigilance

As far as prevention goes, to allow access to internet connected devices without monitoring, must be considered morally unacceptable. It is literally worse than leaving a loaded gun, safety off, sitting in the living room for the kids to get at.

Parents must understand that having a simple password combination on their phone is entirely insufficient... 4-year-olds can pick up on that seeing it even once or twice. What can burningly curious, hormonal teenagers pick up on?

Children are often way more capable with technology than their parents suspect – even the very tech-savvy parents!

Educate!

As they get older, children are best helped through their teenage years by positive attention from their parents, and encouragement, with plenty of frank but trustful education on the mysteries of life, and the vices that try to distort them.

Mere restrictions when it comes to this topic are not only insufficient, they are often damaging, because the child will inevitably have to struggle with these things, but will be afraid to address it with their parents.

They will be greatly helped if, especially in their teenage years and increasingly towards the end of their high school, they are given confidence and clear conversations about the dangers to be expected, and how best to navigate them. This includes all the realities of today's world, with all of its disorder and access on the internet.

But not MY Child?

ProtectYoungEyes.com has multiple articles and posts on a topic they call "NMK Syndrome." That is: "Not My Kid."

The difficult but clear reality that we must navigate is that the danger inherent in the use of technology has very little to do with a child's formation or family life.

Once again, please remember their extra-open plastic brains, just waiting to absorb, then remember that those brains have not yet finished developing. Their choices are poor and short-sighted, they are unreasonably motivated by pressure, vanity, curiosity, and their developing passions.

Screen time, Social Media, and Pornography will all have the same overwhelming effects on our children...

...or worse.

Worse because we often have too much confidence in our children's faith and honesty, and neglect to take all the necessary precautions. This is not fair to them!

Final thoughts for your children:

1. *Remember they are children.*
2. *If you want to give your children the best chance of not falling into the vice and addiction of pornography:*
 - a. *Absolute Vigilance*
 - b. *Confident Trust*
 - c. *Positive Education*
3. *These have to be initiated by you – don't wait for them!*
3. *Remember that your children will never be more virtuous with their phone usage than you are.*

Conclusion

This new world of technology came quickly and overwhelmingly, and so did the dangers with it:

The dangers of overuse and addiction affecting our health, mind, and prayer, the danger of shallowness and weakness, the danger of stealing time from the souls that rely upon us, the dangers of insurmountable temptations.

No one would leave a loaded gun out for the children to get at, but a smart phone is worse! No one would let their child try drugs in order to build up virtue for adult use – letting them have a smart phone is worse! No one would let their teenagers wander through a shopping mall known to be full of pornographic posters and known child predators – letting them have Social Media is worse! No one would let their daughter write letters and send pictures in the mail to any unknown person, much less a boy, much less a grown man – letting them have unsupervised texting and calls is worse!

It is time we must face new dangers in this new world and respond with new safety.

Many of us feel that it is too much to stop and end up saying, ‘why bother?’ But it is not impossible, as long as we are willing to work, and work on our own tech use too! It is much easier to help our children if we are not stuck on the screen ourself.

Pray, communicate, and help one another in this fight for safety – Digital Safety – which is nothing other than the safety of our souls.

Safety How To's and Resources

Here are some recommendations to use devices with prudence for you and your family.

- **Websites worth checking out:**

- **ProtectYoungEyes.com** (PYE). PYE is currently one of the best resources available. Dedicated to raising awareness of digital safety threats and to providing practical instructions for device protection from inappropriate internet material and social media abuse, they offer:
 - a free website and weekly email that include thorough up-to-date information regarding the latest apps and games that parents should be concerned about.
 - an app with easy-to-follow instructions and information for digital protection.
- The SSPX does not have any official affiliation with PYE, and we might not agree with everything that they present regarding parenting, in general. Nevertheless, PYE is a very valuable resource for internet safeguards.

- **FightTheNewDrug.org**

- **TruthAboutPorn.org**

- **CovenantEyes.com**

- **Phones**

- The best method for families (and friend groups) is to have shared filtering and accountability. If we make our devices an openly used tool and not a private world, many pitfalls can be avoided.
- **Covenant Eyes** is the best app to date. It is worth the money.
 - It is a major company that is constantly staying up to date on the sources of impure content.
 - Its screen monitoring cannot be turned off and

- works even when not accessing the internet.
 - Their website has tons of free reading resources.
- **Have a family policy**, for example:
 - No phones in the bedroom
 - No phones on family outings or at meals.
 - No phones after a certain time in the evening, and all phones charge together in the same spot.
 - One, shared family internet device
- Even an app like Covenant Eyes isn't foolproof. Additional apps like Bark can always add further protection.
- Children and teenagers simply should not be given smart phones. Perhaps the best method is to give seniors in high school a majorly restricted smart phone with plenty of guidelines in order to give them the chance to form good habits before graduation.
- Also see **Boomerang, Qustodio, Accountable2Me, and EverAccountable.**
- **Home Wi-Fi**
 - Bad websites can be blocked at the very source by having a router like **Gryphon.**
 - Passwords should be changed frequently.
 - Don't fall for 'innocent' devices like Alexa, MP3 players, or Kindles. Any internet device can be used for problems.
 - Nor for tablets, etc. that don't have data. All it needs is a walk to the coffee shop or to sidewalk in front of the neighbor's house.
 - **OpenDNS,**
 - **CleanBrowsing.org**

Phones Without Internet

Past is the difficult time when it seemed like there were no options for a phone that could lead to falls. Here are our recommended devices:

1. **Wisephone**

- a. It looks like a smart phone but has no internet or social media capability.
- b. It has a basic maps/navigation app.
- c. It can be used with your family network provider.
- d. It has a **family portal for accountability**.
- e. Techless.com

2. **Lightphone**

- a. It is extremely simple, with no internet or social media capability.
- b. It has a basic maps/navigation app.
- c. It can be used with your family network provider.
- d. Thelightphone.com

These following phones are geared more for teenagers/starter phones. They generally include features such as text monitoring, contact white lists, restricted apps, very thorough monitoring. Recently, these companies have included apps for music, audiobooks, and GPS Navigation.

3. **Gabb**

- a. Gabbwireless.com

4. **Gabb watch**

- a. An independent cell-watch with up to 25 parent approved contacts that can be called or texted. That's pretty much it.

5. **Pinwheel**

- a. Pinwheel.com

6. **Bark Phone**

7. **Troomi**

8. **MM Guardian**

For Bark, Gabb, and Troomi, you can get discounts through the PYE website:

<https://protectyoungeyes.com/best-phones-for-kids-ultimate-guide/>

9. **Other options** that are available but have not been personally researched by the authors of this publication:
- a. Nokia 3310
 - b. Sunbeam F1
 - c. Blu Tank II T193
 - d. LG B470 3G
 - e. Kyocera DuraXV LTE
 - f. Plum Ram 7 – 3G
 - g. Samsung Galaxy J2 Pro
 - h. Samsung Rugby 4

Setting up a safe internet connection can be confusing and time consuming but considering the risks of real inevitable threats to our souls and to those entrusted to us, establishing preventative measures is well worth the effort.

We would advise something like this as a best case scenario in a family:

- One, shared computer or tablet for the family
 - Safe Router/ DNS
- One, shared smart phone for dad and mom, complete with an accountability app like Bark, and filtering like CovenantEyes
 - No social media except for work, if necessary.
 - Browser and videos disabled on the phone.
- One, shared internet-free phone with transparency (WisePhone good option) for the kids to use when necessary.
- As the kids grow up, frequently take the time to explain why the family rules are like this, what we are protecting, and what we are avoiding.
- Towards the end of high school, teens can be given an accountable, internet free phone or can share a filtered and accountable smart phone with their parents.
- Imagine the time regained and the peace of soul...

Good Reads

Cal Newport

- *Digital Minimalism* – Cal Newport
 - This book is fantastic, and everyone should read it.
- *Deep Work* – Cal Newport
- *So Good They Can't Ignore You* – Cal Newport
 - An expose on the insidious use of technology to exploit our attention for income.

Phone addiction / Kids vs. Tech

- *The Shallows* – Nicholas Carr
 - A very interesting read about how the internet is changing how we think (not for the better.)
- *How to Break up with your Phone* – Catherine Price
- Jean Twenge, the author of *iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids...*
- *Screen Schooled* by Joe Clement & Matt Miles
- *Glow Kids*, Dr. Nicholas Kardaras
- *Virtual Child* by Cris A. Rowan

Social Media

- *Alone Together* – Sherry Turkle
- *Ten Arguments for Deleting Your Social Media Accounts Right Now* by Jaron Lanier
- Watch 'The Social Dilemma'
- Watch 'Childhood 2.0'

Pornography

- See the loads of free informational books and essays on *CovenantEyes.com*
- *The Porn Myth* – Matt Fradd
- *ProtectYoungEyes.com* – see the Blog section:
 - *5 Ways Pornography Harms Children and Teens*
 - *Why Kids Look at Pornography (It's not their fault)*
 - *Pornography: Not Just For Boys (Teen Girls Struggle, Too)*