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Families: Better Connected but More Alone

Technology pundits tell us the information age is behind us, and we are now in the hybrid age, an age where the SMART phones our students carry contain more computing power than the Apollo 11 module that brought astronauts Armstrong, Aldrin, and Collins to the surface of the moon. Technology has been a wonderful blessing which has opened revolutionary, customized forms of learning with teachers' imaginations, not curriculum resources, as the new constraint in the classroom. Technology has also impacted the way we think and interact with one another, tweens and teenagers in particular, which is the focus of this month's LINK.

Proprietary, interactive applications and social media provide customized environments that cater to the preferences of individual students creating more



self-centered environments by deliberate design. As students' on-line dwell time increases, so does the amount of time they are in control of their surroundings, where they choose to go, and the conversations they choose to engage in. Those who study on-line behavior refer to this control as the "Goldilocks Effect," which empowers young people to keep relationships

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not too close, not too far, but "just right" according to their preferences, and thus the ability to be "with people" but at a distance they control. Upon initial examination, that may sound safe, but it also creates challenges parents should be aware of; let's examine two of them.

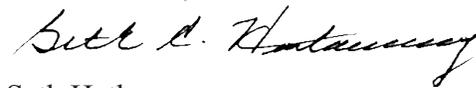
Real world human relationships happen real time; we do not get to go back and edit or delete our conversations. And while our human relationships are rich and complex, they are also sometimes demanding and messy. Knowing how to handle a conversation in the real world, especially a world that is often inimical to Christian values and ethics, is a bedrock skill students must develop. In person communications sometimes require confrontation, and His word in Colossians 4:5-6 has taught us the best manner to handle confrontation: "Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone." More and more of our students' time is spent in the on-line world, which promotes conversational control especially as it relates to confrontation avoidance. The common student phrase, "I'd rather text than talk" is often used to avoid a healthy person to person discussion on a contentious subject. To counter this growing problem, many undergraduate professors state in their

syllabi that a student must call his or her professor to request an extension to a major assignment or postpone a formal assessment. We must endeavor to keep face to face conversations with our students open to help them develop their in-person communication skills, avoid technology's empty promise of companionship with its accompanying demands of a relationship, and help students understand and believe the only one who loves them more than we do is Christ.

Actions often speak louder than words, and our hybrid era with its customized appeal to consumers promotes more integration of technology in our everyday lives than ever before; we now expect more from technology and less from each other. One way we see this manifested is at our local restaurants when families who are seated together around a table for dinner are really alone in their phones or when someone disengages a face to face conversation to check a text from a third party, which sends the unspoken message that the other party is more important. Taking time to speak with someone while waiting in a line or engaging in genuine self-reflection has been replaced with engaging with technology; being alone is now almost a problem that needs to be solved. Too often students believe the lie that always being connected is going to make them feel less alone when in reality the opposite is true. We should teach our students that solitude, or some time alone, is not a bad thing. Discouraging students for using a phone or tablet in bed is another habit to consider (texting throughout the night interrupts sleep patterns – ask any upper school teacher).

To promote in-person conversations, consider creating technology free spaces like the dinner table to help young people learn and practice the skill of active listening. For children, it may even mean listening to grandma or grandpa's story for the third time. In James 4:14 His word tells us, "[We] are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes" (ASV), so we can serve our children and students wisely by making the most of each precious moment He has gifted us. Promoting the importance of personal communications and real-world relationships over those found on-line is one way we can do that. Thank you for your continued partnership in Christian education.

In His service,



Seth Hathaway
Head of School

References:

Doug Nix (2017, June 6). PABC Discipleship Pastor staff devotion.

TED Talk (2012). Long Beach, CA. Connected but Alone [video file].

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