

GEEK PARENTING

I've taken plenty of different parenting courses – parenting with love & logic, parenting a challenging child, spiritual parenting, etc. – but I have to admit, there aren't a lot of courses geared to help with this challenge – parenting kids who know more about technology than I do.

I am definitely in need of a little help here. Case in point: I *finally* started using an iPod this year – after having one for six months but not knowing how to download any songs. Then, to be cool, I got hooked up with a Wii since it seems EVERY student I talk to got one for Christmas! I am also attempting to text at least once a week now, mostly to improve my skill level. However, for the record, I am not on Facebook, although a half dozen of my adult friends are (and according to Time Magazine, it is THE social networking site for my generation).

Whether you are a non-techno like me or a Blackberry junkie, I know one thing for certain, as parents and caregivers, **WE ABSOLUTELY HAVE TO TAKE A LEADING ROLE IN HELPING KIDS LEARN TO WISELY USE TODAY'S TECHNOLOGY!!!**

I call it Geek Parenting, but you don't have to be a geek (thankfully) to apply good parenting skills in this arena. And you only need to see the pain caused by a hurtful text message or read about the legal implications of 14 year-olds sending questionable photos to their friends to know that kids aren't equipped to always make the smartest decisions.

This week (March 16) is book-ended with two great presentations at St. Pet's that address parenting and technology. The first, facilitated on Monday 3/16 by clinical psychologist Dr. Christopher Watson, explored how technology is impacting our family time and ways we can reclaim that time. A question to ponder: Is parenting easier because of TV, video games, computers and cell phones – or harder?

The presentation on Friday, 3/20 is for our 6th-8th graders and will be led by Detective Richard Wistocki of the Naperville Police Department. (Some of you saw Det. Wistocki in October when he spoke to parents.) He will talk about Internet Safety, but especially about the dangers of cell phones and texting (including "sexting"). I truly believe we are at the tip of an iceberg with the issues parents and schools are going to face regarding the use/misuse of cell phones. Be sure to talk with your child after Friday's presentation.

So what can you and I do?

- Be informed about what your children are doing – on the computer, on their cell phones, on anything electronic that you don't have complete control over.
- Learn about technology so you speak the same language.
- Read articles about what's going on (example: Newsweek Feb 23, *The Verdict*) – an eye-opening look at texting.
- Set limits! Follow through with consequences. Help your children to think through to the natural consequences of what they're doing.
- As parents, role model what you want to happen – if you want less emphasis on technology in your home and more on relationships, then turn off the TV and go out to breakfast or ride bikes to the park!

Trust me, just when you think you have it down pat, something new will come out to challenge you. AND your kids will know about it before you do. So good luck in your geek parenting ... (and now, if anyone knows how to TiVo *Dancing with the Stars*, give me a call!)

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