Introduction: I recently heard a speaker say that this is the first generation where we need to have conversations with our kids about our digital footprint. If you don't know what a digital footprint is, ask your kids! Technology is advancing at an incredible rate making it difficult to keep up with the latest and greatest. Parents can feel like pioneers trying to not only understand the technology that our children are immersed in, but also how to protect our children from the blind spots that come with new things. Often times we see two extreme approaches to technology. The first is complete adoption and consumption. As soon as the newest device is available we consume it and make it available to our kids. On the flip side others approach technology with a deep sense of skepticism and avoidance. We would advocate an approach to technology and social media that sits between these two extreme positions. While we all can readily admit new technology comes with blind spots and shortcomings, there can be positive uses as well. With the advent and exponential growth of social media there is an increasing amount of good research being done to help us understand the impact of technology on developing adolescents. It is pivotal that we engage this research and seek to understand the digital world our students are immersed in so that we can help them thrive. This milestone is designed to equip parents with tools, resources and ideas to help their son or daughter navigate technology in healthy, God honoring ways.
Navigating Technology
6th Grade

Helpful Resources

“4 Questions Everyone Should Ask” with Jon Acuff [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y0oV-f10Bpk]

“The Shallows, What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains” by Nicholas Carr

“I Gods, How Technology Shapes our Spiritual and Social Lives” by Craig Detwetler

“Alone Together” by Sherry Turkle
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Setting up Parents to win at home

1. **Become a student with your student.** It is really easy to be overwhelmed by the advent of new technology and advancements in social media. Parents will set themselves up to win when they join their son or daughter in the learning process. Allow your son or daughter to be the expert. Promote a culture in your home of investigating before adoption by asking inquisitive questions (what will it do, how will you use it, how could it be abused)

2. **Screen the screen time.** Set limits on the amount of time. This is especially important the younger your child is. Notice how your child is affected by screen time and adjust accordingly.

3. **Understand Filters.** A good place to begin with your home internet is with filters. Filters allow you to screen content and prevent your son or daughter from venturing into areas of the Internet that you don’t want them to go.

4. **Find ways to make conversation safe.** The internet is a big place and there are a lot of places that as parents we would like to protect our children from ever entering. But there will be times, either intentionally or accidentally, when they will discover the dark sides of social media or the internet. As a parent you want to create safe space for conversation when those times come. Start the conversation about social media early and often. Let your child know that they can come to you at anytime to talk you about what they see or experience online.
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5. Go “Dark” as a family. From time to time choose an activity to do as a family and leave your technology behind. Create space where you can practice being “present” with each other and not distracted by cell phones and other electronic devices.

6. Keep computers in public places. It is wise when you are promoting healthy use of technology (i.e. computer) to keep your computer in a public place like a kitchen versus a bedroom. With the advent of smart phones that do just about everything a computer does including internet searching, it is also wise to consider keeping phones in a family space after a certain time each evening.

7. Start social media accounts together. When starting Facebook, Instagram or whatever comes next accounts, start them together. Have access to username and password. When your son or daughter pushes for freedom and privacy, let them know that freedom is a goal, not a gift. You are working towards healthy use of these technologies and you are beginning that journey together.

8. Reinforce relational skills. With the advent of social media common relational skills sometimes go underdeveloped. Reinforce skills like how to be present with people, when to allow phone/texting interruptions, and how to handle conflict without texting.
**Connect to the Story**
(Being “present” when it’s easy to be distracted)

38 As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. 39 She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. 40 But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, “Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!”

41 “Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.” Luke 10:38-41

**How does Student Life create space during this phase?**

1. **Retreats:** Retreats and mission trips give students the chance to practice real community while visiting places with limited access to technology (or phone reception)

2. **Setting up parents to win and talk about this at home in helpful ways!**