

Parenting in the Electronics Age

Contributed by Jeff Mathes

As a parent, seeing all of the electronic gadgets available to kids today can be a little intimidating. My teenagers want cell phones, iPods, computers, and video games.

Fortunately, I'm pretty comfortable with technology myself. My concern is more about how they will use those items to keep connected to their friends and how much control I will be able to maintain over them. (Control being a relative term considering they are teenagers!)

To some extent, as a parent there should be some level of trust with your teen. For a cell phone, start by setting some boundaries, like who they can call, how many text messages they can send, and when they can use the phone.

Keep in mind that as you go along that you may have to change the rules and add new guidelines. Mine originally considered the cell phone to be his to use only when he needed to call us. As soon as he was dropped off at a friend's house, he would turn off his cell phone. Of course, this meant we could not reach him so we quickly set up a new plan that included him understanding that the phone had to be on when he was out, so we could call him as needed.

Your teenager also needs to realize that those electronic devices are a privilege that can be lost. Things like grades, attitude and other issues could mean the loss of the right to have any of them. My teenagers know that it is completely within the realm of possibility that we will take them away if they get bad grades or do something that gets them in trouble at school.

Parenting a teen doesn't have to be a constant challenge. By setting up the appropriate parameters to begin with, you can alleviate some of the stress. I wouldn't exactly call it a daydream, but we have dealt with some difficult issues and learned from them.

When your teen wants to use the various electronic devices that are currently available, look at how they can be an advantage to you. That iPod keeps my teenagers quiet (no fights with the siblings) on long car trips and that cell phone is handy when we need to find them to pick them up at the mall.