

4 technology habits OF THE AMERICAN HOME

In partnership with author Andy Crouch, Barna Group conducted a public opinion survey among 1,021 U.S. parents with children ages 4–17 in January and February of 2016. The results show the deep connection, emotionally and physically, that Americans of all ages have with their smartphones.

#1: “Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep ... with My Smartphone”

When they do go to bed, most people take their phones with them. A full 7 in 10 parents say they sleep with their phone next to them. Alarming parents say their kids are even more likely to take their phones to bed: More than 8 in 10 parents of teens (82 percent) say their child takes their phone to bed and more than 7 in 10 parents of preteens (72 percent) say the same. And when that phone is right next to you, it’s tempting to reach for it when you wake up: 62 percent of parents say checking their phone is the first thing they do in the morning. What are they doing on their phone while they rub away the cobwebs of sleep? Most check their email (74 percent). Social media (48 percent), news (36 percent) and calendar organization (24 percent) also vie for their attention. Less than 1 in 5 (17 percent) are using a Bible or devotional app.

#2: Parents Might Limit Kids’ Device Usage — But Don’t Eliminate It

Children are spending an average of five hours on an electronic device (tablet, phone, computer, etc.) every day. Even at this amount, most parents say they are limiting the amount of time their kids spend on electronic devices (60 percent). Millennial parents — perhaps because they have younger children or perhaps because they are more likely to be immersed in and therefore experiencing their own angst around electronic usage — are more likely (73 percent) than Gen Xer (57 percent) or boomer parents (57 percent) to limit their children’s time on electronic devices. Limiting time seems more popular than eliminating the devices: Most kids have phones. Nearly 9 in 10 parents with teenagers (88 percent) say their teen has a phone and just under half of parents with preteens (48 percent) say their child does.

#3: Parents Say Technology Disrupts the Dinner Table

When it comes to family meal time (which parents on average say happens at least six times a week), parents are apt to admit this space has been disrupted by electronic devices: One-quarter (24 percent) say they strongly agree that electronic devices are a significant disruption to their family meals, with an additional nearly one-fifth (18 percent) saying they somewhat agree. However, about one-third of parents (32 percent) say devices are not allowed at the table and another 1 in 5 (22 percent) say family members rarely bring their devices to the table. Only 1 in 5 (19 percent) say their family members always bring their devices to the table.

#4: Video Games and Family Time Dominate After School Hours

Aside from television watching, technology occupies a central place in many of the after-school activities of children: Four in 10 parents (42 percent) say their children regularly play video games after school, 3 in 10 (27 percent) are on social media or texting with friends and a quarter (25 percent) are online other than for homework. Of course, there’s plenty of offline activity too: Nearly 6 in 10 (56 percent) spend time engaging with family members, 4 in 10 (39 percent) are playing informally, one-third (32 percent) are reading other than for homework, a quarter (23 percent) are playing organized sports and more than one-fifth (22 percent) are hanging out with friends.

Source: <https://www.barna.com/research/6-tech-habits-changing-american-home/>

Techy families

Families breaking new ground with technology in homes

By Carrie Brown McWhorter
The Alabama Baptist

More than three-quarters of parents believe it is more difficult to raise teenagers today than when they were growing up. The No. 1 reason? The prevalence of technology.

“We’re the first ones to have to deal with it,” said Andy Crouch, author of “The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place.” “We can’t go to the wisdom of previous generations ... and so we are all just figuring this out as we go along.”

Crouch, a former editor at *Christianity Today*, is the author of several books that examine the intersection of the gospel and culture. In “The Tech-Wise Family,” Crouch combines his own experiences as a parent with original research from Barna to explore the tensions of parenting in a digital age (see sidebar).

What the research found is that parents today face challenges that their parents never imagined, Crouch says. For the first time perhaps in human history, the younger generation is more knowledgeable about a critical area of life than their parents are.

“Children, youth and young adults ... figure [technology] out really quickly,” he said in an interview with Barna’s Mark Matlock.

Managing technology is another story, however. Both parents and kids are uncertain how to manage technology, including smartphones and social media apps, in healthy ways.

“The impulses and addictions that drive us to use (technology) badly are age old — boredom, distraction, laziness, greed, lust,” he said. “To fight these old vices requires old virtues — character, courage, wisdom. The tech-wise family isn’t obsessed with rules. It’s obsessed with cultivating character, curiosity and play. If you get that stuff right, technology is more likely to fall into its proper place.”

Teens turn to technology, especially social media apps, to determine who they are, said Emily Hamilton, ministry assistant at Etowah Baptist Association and a former Baptist campus minister at the University of South Alabama in Mobile. Hamilton frequently speaks to parents, youth leaders and teens about social media.

Hamilton emphasizes that teenagers of every generation have sought to find their place, to fit in and to create an identity for themselves. In the past that exploration happened in activities like sports and school clubs. Today it happens on Instagram and Snapchat. Parents play a huge role in helping kids see that their identity comes first from Christ.

“Kids are looking for a place to belong and parents are empowered to help children realize that our worth comes not from followers on Instagram or likes on

Facebook. When a child’s identity is firmly rooted in the Body of Christ, all other relationships are secondary to that,” Hamilton said.

Many parents are reluctant to get involved in their kids’ use of technology, which Hamilton said is a mistake. It’s okay to tell kids to put the phone down or to set limits on when and where the phone can be used, she argues. But it’s also important to realize how much kids’ lives and technology are intertwined.

“The way they celebrate is through an Instagram post. So we might have to say, ‘You can take a picture of your plate but then we’re going to put our phones down and have a conversation.’ We have to create an environment where technology and social media are acknowledged but are not the most important thing,” Hamilton said.

Youth leaders also have a tremendous influence in helping kids put technology in perspective, said

Scooter Kellum, youth ministry strategist for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

“Social media and technology are great tools for gospel ministry and kingdom impact if we use them correctly,” Kellum said. “Youth pastors are learning and studying so they will know what’s going on in that world.”

Because parents sometimes aren’t in the online world, it’s youth ministers who often recognize problems first, Kellum said. So often, the youth pastor is going to parents to alert them to concerns.

“Our tendency is toward being reactive instead of proactive,” Kellum said.

“The resources to help kids make better decisions are out there, so if parents used those more I think we would see a big difference in what kids are doing online.”

Hamilton believes small groups will continue to make a huge impact on ministry, especially with students because that’s where they can interact one-on-one.

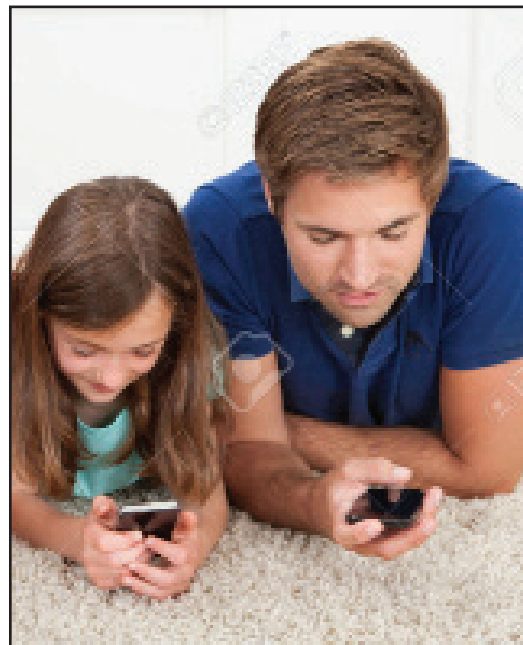
‘Monopoly’ on life conversations

“We as the Church have a monopoly on the market of being the place where life conversations happen,” she said. “Meetings at home, in coffee shops, wherever, is something we will see more and more and being very effective in ministry to youth and college students especially.”

Parents can use the same strategies with their children, Hamilton said. “It’s empowering parents. It’s discipleship. When mom or dad or youth pastor says, ‘Let’s go to dinner,’ it may be uncomfortable for teens but deep down they want that connection.”

Research backs that up, according to Crouch.

“When we ask kids, ‘What do you most wish was different in your relationships with your parents?’ their No. 1 wish is that ‘I wish my parents would get off their screens and talk to me.’”



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