

GUIDANCE ON USING TECHNOLOGY

APOSTOLIC CHRISTIAN CHURCH OF AMERICA

This document is an ongoing project under the direction of the Elder Technology Committee. This information has been compiled as a joint effort between the Technology Committee, ACCFS, and a committee of brothers with technological backgrounds. Questions, suggestions, or comments can be addressed to any Elder Technology Committee member or to ACCFS at info@accounseling.org, (309)263-5536, or (877)370-9988.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	Executive Summary	3
II.	Background and Purpose of this Guide	4
III.	Discernment and Technology Use	5
IV.	General Concerns and Guidance about Technology Use	11
V.	Definitions, Benefits, and Concerns of Specific Technologies	15
VI.	Developing a Safe Internet Use Plan	28
VII.	The Basics of Internet Filtering and Monitoring	31
VIII.	Specific Internet Filtering/Monitoring Tools	32
IX.	Prevention Focused Steps for Churches	35
X.	Resources for Internet-Related Problems	37
	Appendix A: Sample Cell Phone Agreement	38
	Appendix B: Family Computer Use Plan Guidelines	39
	Appendix C: Computer & Internet Use Disclosure Form	40

I. Executive Summary

We recognize that advances in technology are continually being made. This document is an attempt to help believers stay abreast of these changes and the potential impact they have on us and on those we love. Appropriate use of technology requires good discernment. We are thankful that the Bible provides excellent guidance for proper discernment. Using biblical precepts and teachings can guide the proper use of technology while identifying and avoiding the associated spiritual dangers.

The Internet has become an integral part of daily life in business, education, finance, commerce, and communication for an ever-increasing portion of the population. While much of this document deals with Internet use, it also reviews the proper use of devices, such as smartphones, etc. that provide means of being connected to information resources and to other people.

Many have found advances in technology to be very beneficial, while others find little need for them. Because of these rapid changes, new terms are coined regularly. We want to provide accurate definitions of those terms, to describe their uses and benefits, and to share concerns we have about their use. We do not claim to provide an exhaustive list of technological terms, but rather include those which we believe are necessary to clarify the rest of the document and to make it understandable. We do not wish to be overly negative or positive, but simply want to provide enough information for readers to make wise choices.

The potential for inappropriate use of technology in general causes us great concern. Because of the ability to remain anonymous while online, Internet users may be tempted to view indecent and sinful material, possibly becoming addicted. In addition to providing access to unwholesome material, there is a great danger of child predators and stalkers attempting to reach children by deception through the Internet. The potential for poor stewardship of time and finances as well as spiritual deception are other concerns.

Developing a safe Internet use plan is of utmost necessity. This plan should include house rules for children as well as adults. Extending those rules beyond the home to the workplace, school, library, etc., is also essential. We review a number of available Internet filtering and monitoring options. Most of these software packages can be adapted to suit individual needs. Options for establishing effective accountability for technology use are reviewed. We also suggest ways that local church congregations can be involved in helping to prevent problems.

For those who are struggling with some form of inappropriate use of technology, we provide some suggestions for dealing with these issues and living an overcoming life. Some additional resources for help are also listed.

Finally, in the Appendices we present sample forms that can be used in establishing a safe technology use plan for the home and family (encompassing the Internet and mobile phones).

II. BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

The development of new technology is constant and rapidly changing. We need to become accustomed to the rapid rate of change and realize that we most likely cannot stay on top of all of the new devices and communications media. Therefore we all, parents in particular, need to be continually aware and alert to any new technological devices and applications available. Most of these technologies use the Internet as a source of information and for the transfer of information. The Internet is a widely used and pervasive form of communication which has enormous potential for both good and evil. It is clearly one of the ways in which the prophecy regarding an increase in knowledge in the latter days is being fulfilled “...many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased” (Dan. 12:4). We are directed by the Word of God to seek useful knowledge in a humble spirit but to avoid the foolishness and distorted thinking of the world. “*The heart of him that hath understanding seeketh knowledge: but the mouth of fools feedeth on foolishness*” (Prov. 15:4). We are to “*prove all things (and) hold fast that which is good*” (1 Thes. 5:21), “*approve things that are excellent...*” (Phil. 1:10), and to “*eschew [shun] evil*” (1 Pet. 3:11).

Since the use of technology is part of everyday life for many, we feel the necessity of providing direction, exhortation, and warning on this topic. Eze. 44:23 says, “*And they shall teach my people the difference between the holy and profane, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean.*” Therefore, the purpose of this document is to:

- Share scriptural principles for discernment when using technology.
- Assist individuals and families in being properly informed on the nature and scope of the Internet by providing definitions of terms and descriptions of uses.
- Discuss appropriate uses and benefits.
- Provide warnings about dangers and misuse of the Internet and other technologies.
- Provide practical advice on ways to reduce risk.
- Present information on Internet filtering and monitoring tools.
- Provide guidance on how to set up a safe Internet use plan.
- Provide ideas to help church congregations encourage their members and friends to use technology appropriately.

The purpose of this document is not to paint a negative picture of technology as a whole, but rather to point out areas of concern and to provide guidance. Many benefits of technology exist, some of which we will explore as well. Good things and benefits are usually fairly easy to see and discover. However, Satan would like nothing better than to cloud our judgment and lead us astray with the dark side of technology.

In all of our decisions, the key is proper, prayerful discernment. So, our intent is to provide enough information and biblical foundation for the readers to make the right choices and decisions in their use of technology and then to instruct their families accordingly.

Ps. 19:8: “The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.”

Ps. 119:128: “Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way.”

III. DISCERNMENT AND TECHNOLOGY USE

A. Discernment and technology use.

When considering technology use, Christ's teaching in *Matt. 10:16* is profound: "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves." We encourage each one to use careful discernment regarding the need for and use of the Internet or other technologies. While the Internet can be both useful and helpful, totally inappropriate material also can be accessed as well. If good judgment and restraint are not exercised, temptations to access evil materials could lead to spiritual shipwreck. *Eph. 5:8-13* provides us with excellent guidance on the discernment of these matters:

"For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light: (For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;) Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret. But all things that are reprov'd are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light."

Where sound reasoning exists for the use of the Internet or other technology, this use should always be treated with prayerful discretion and moderation. The information available on the Internet is not created equally. Some of it is very accurate and helpful, while other materials range from being merely inaccurate to utterly deceptive. We are naïve to believe that because something is available online, it is true and accurate.

Proper discernment is similar to using Internet filtering software. If the filtering parameters are set too tightly, nothing will be allowed through, even websites which are clearly harmless. However, if the filtering parameters are set too broadly, everything, even including what is impure, can enter. Using biblical principles and spiritual discernment will help you filter and sort out information that is good from that which needs to be rejected.

B. Discernment principles.

Below are some principles to consider when evaluating information on the Internet. Obviously, some sites carry very low risk (such as checking your local weather forecast at www.weather.com); however, we must not become lax or careless when "surfing" the web. One can go from harmless and helpful sites to sinful and deceptive sites in a matter of just a few mouse clicks.

1. **Discernment Principle: Use self-examination in the light of God's Word to help us gain a proper perspective on our use of technology.**

a. Biblical Foundation:

2 Cor. 13:5: "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith, prove your own selves..."

1 Cor. 11:31: "For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged."

b. Applying this principle to technology use:

- Would I view this site if Jesus was sitting right next to me?
- Would I be embarrassed if others knew I was visiting this site because of the site's questionable nature?
- Is what I am viewing edifying?

- Am I allowing impurity into my life?

2. Discernment Principle: Knowing God’s Word and maturing in our walk with Him will give us a better ability to discern.

a. Biblical Foundation:

Heb. 5:12-14: “For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”

b. Applying this principle to technology use:

- Am I growing spiritually?
- Am I spending adequate time in the Word of God and in prayer?
- Am I seeking and listening to the Holy Spirit’s guidance?

3. Discernment Principle: When researching biblical topics online, ensure that efforts focus on sound doctrine and using the whole counsel of God.

a. Biblical Foundation:

2 Tim. 4:2-4: “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.”

Acts 20:27: “For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.”

b. Applying this principle to technology use:

- Have I prayed for guidance and understanding? *Jam. 1:5* states, “*If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.*”
- Have I studied the Bible to learn its teachings on the subject I am interested in? *2 Tim. 2:15*: “*Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*”
- Am I willing to receive instruction, or am I just looking for certain information to support my own thoughts?
- Is the information I am looking for available on any Apostolic Christian Church websites?

4. Discernment Principle: Make sure what we are doing edifies [builds up] ourselves and others. Just because something isn’t outright sin, doesn’t mean that it is good.

a. Biblical Foundation:

1 Cor. 10:23: “All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not.”

b. Applying this principle to technology use:

- Am I being a good steward of my time in how I use technology?

- While participating in a certain activity or technology may not present a problem for me, it may for someone else (see *Rom. 14*). I should ensure that I am not placing a stumbling block before others.

5. Discernment Principle: Be willing to seek counsel.

a. Biblical Foundation:

Prov. 11:14: "Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counselors there is safety."

b. Applying this principle to technology use:

- How did I find the website? Was it recommended by a trustworthy person?
- Would I share it with my closest spiritual friends or my elder? If not, why not?
- If the site came up in a web search, remember that just because information is online does not mean that it fits with my values or is accurate.

6. Discernment Principle: Prove all things. Determine if the values, beliefs, and purposes of the author(s) fit with biblical truth and principles.

a. Biblical Foundation:

1 Thes. 5:21: "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good."

b. Applying this principle to technology use:

- Who authored the website? An individual? An organization? A company?
- Often websites have an "About Us" link that expresses what the author(s) of the website believe(s), stand(s) for, and promote(s).
- Do the beliefs and standards of the author(s) fit with biblical principles?
- Also, remember that just because a website says it is Christian, does not necessarily mean that it is a Christian website or that it holds to doctrine similar to the Apostolic Christian Church.
- Do not give credibility to websites where no author is given.

7. Discernment Principle: Be aware that false teaching often looks good on the surface.

a. Biblical Foundation:

2 Cor. 11:13-14: "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light."

b. Applying this principle to technology use:

- Religious cults and other groups spreading religious deception often produce material that looks good on the surface.
- I should be aware of wolves in sheep's clothing.
- Many opinions about spirituality and religions are prevalent today. I must exercise great caution so that I do not become confused by exploring other doctrines.

8. Discernment Principle: Ensure that our use of technology represents Christ well.

a. Biblical Foundation:

Phil. 1:27: "Let your conversation [whole lifestyle] be as it becometh [in a manner worthy of] the gospel of Christ."

1 Thes. 2:12: "That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory."

Tit. 2:1: "But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine."

b. Applying this principle to technology use:

- Do I know that the information I am forwarding or recommending is true? Is it pure and edifying? Eph. 4:29: "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers."
- One advantage of the Internet and email is the ability to communicate with others. However, this advantage can be turned into a disadvantage if I pass along information to others that is impure, untrue, or misleading.
- Some Internet users become caught up in forwarding emails that contain stories, requests, and/or information that are "urban legends" or "too-good-to-be-true" stories.
- I should know if the information I am forwarding or recommending to someone is true. If I am unsure of the truthfulness of a story in an email, I should not forward it.

9. Discernment Principle: Seek to keep all of our activities consistent with the mind of Christ.

a. Biblical Foundation:

1 Cor. 2:14-16: "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ."

Phil. 4:8: "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."

b. Applying this principle to technology use:

- How does my Internet and technology use stand when I apply the standards of Phil. 4:8 for things to think on: true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of a good report?
- Does how I spend my time using technology show that I love the things that God loves? Am I sad over the things that make God sad? Do I stay away from the things that He abhors?

10. Discernment Principle: We should be able to be temperate (have good self-control) in all of our activities dealing with technology or the Internet. If areas exist where we do not have proper, godly balance, we need to take whatever steps are necessary to correct it.

a. Biblical Foundation:

1 Cor. 6:12: "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any."

Gal. 5:22-24: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts."

b. Applying this principle to technology use:

- Are other aspects of my life neglected due to my use of technology (time invested) or how I am using technology (poor choices)?
- Do others around me or in my family complain about my use of technology?
- Do I have any addictive behaviors related to my use of any technology (game, social network, etc.)? This could be spending too much money or time or viewing inappropriate materials.

11. Discernment Principle: All of our communications, whether in person, online, or using any type of technology, should be honoring to Christ and edifying to others.

a. Biblical Foundation:

Eph. 4:29: "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers."

Ps. 34:13: "Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile."

Col. 4:6: "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man."

b. Applying this principle to technology use:

- Am I free of any use of "corrupt communication" in my online posting or emailing (e.g., demeaning comments, controversial statements, profanity, etc.)?
- Are all of my communications free of gossip?

12. Discernment Principle: As new technologies, applications, and devices become available, be intentional in determining whether or not the benefits outweigh the potential risks and if they will contribute to a godly walk of life.

a. Biblical Foundation

1 Thess. 5:21-22: "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil."

2 Cor. 6:17: "...touch not the unclean thing..."

Luke 14:28: "For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?"

b. Applying this principle to technology use:

- What benefit (other than social status) does this new tool have toward my family life and my spiritual life?
- What are the blatant and subtle temptations connected with this product?
- Which area of life will I borrow time from to use this product?
- Will the tool connect me or isolate me from other believers? From family?
- Does the purchase of this new product adequately fit within my budget?
- Will the new tool enhance or starve my personal worship of God?

13. Discernment Principle: Using appropriate technology at the appropriate time, with the appropriate people, in appropriate places.

a. Biblical Foundation

Ecc. 3:1: "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:"

Col. 3:17: "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, ..."

b. Applying this principle to technology use:

- Who am I communicating with through the technologies I use and are those communications and relationships Christ-honoring?
 - Strangers
 - Opposite sex
 - Young people, etc.
- When do I use technology and are those times appropriate?
 - Morning
 - Afternoon
 - Evening
 - Night
 - During meals
 - During church, etc.
- What technologies am I using and does my use of them honor Christ?
 - Phone call
 - Texting
 - Music
 - Internet
 - Games, etc.
- Where do I use technology and why do I choose those locations?
 - In secret to hide
 - In public to show off or boast
 - In the library for anonymity, etc.

IV. GENERAL CONCERNS AND GUIDANCE ABOUT TECHNOLOGY USE

Below is a listing of general concerns and guidance about technology use. While some give special attention to the safety of children, readers are encouraged to remember that the misuse of technology is not limited to any age group.

A. Inappropriate content beyond pornography.

When most people speak of “inappropriate content” on the Internet, they usually are referring to pornography. While sexually explicit material is truly impure and inappropriate, that is not the only form of inappropriate content online. Websites promoting hate of one group or another, violence, cheating/plagiarism, and illegal behavior, etc. are growing daily. An increasing number of sites promote unhealthy behaviors such as drug use, suicide, self-injury, and eating disorders. For example, “pro-ana” and “pro-mia” sites that are designed to “help” girls become even more deeply anorexic and bulimic abound on the Internet. Parents are encouraged to set filtering software to block these types of sites.

B. False identities, anonymity, and lack of accountability.

Anonymity and the feeling of privacy can compound the danger of the Internet. Individuals can mask or hide their identities through made-up names and then share inaccurate and deceiving information about themselves. This is very different from situations in the past where people were often deterred from buying inappropriate materials for fear of being seen doing so in public. Conversely, now one can access unwholesome and evil things when alone in one’s home, office, computer lab, school, public library, or from a smartphone. We need to remember to “*walk in the light as He is in the light*” (1 John 1:7).

The idea of total anonymity or anonymous use of the Internet is actually a misnomer. All Internet activity is stored on the computer and/or stored on the Internet service provider’s (ISP’s) servers. The ISP can see everything that is transmitted through the Internet connection. While people may take steps to mask that transfer, ultimately the websites an individual has visited can still be known. Some may also use anonymous email names to hide their identities, but these can be traced as well. (Prov. 12:5): “*The thoughts of the righteous are right: but the counsels of the wicked are deceit.*”

Lack of accountability for one’s technology use can be a symptom of deception and pride. As 1 Cor. 10:12 reminds us, “*Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.*” Believers are advised to choose an “accountability partner” to overcome the enemy’s attempts to mislead them into believing that accountability is unnecessary. 2 Cor. 5:10 states, “*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.*”

Brothers, especially, are cautioned to avoid being lured into pursuing questionable sites and images leading into an addiction to pornography. If the enemy gains even a small step in a person’s life, early confession to an elder, minister, or trusted brother can stop a downward spiral into sin and help the individual achieve victory. Jam. 5:16 says, “*Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.*”

C. The “online disinhibition effect.”

Even though online behavior is not anonymous, it does provide people with the feeling that it is. The increased feeling of anonymity can tempt users toward doing things online that they normally would not

do. Therefore, we need to listen to *Rom. 13:14*, where we are encouraged, “*But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.*”

Researchers have identified a phenomenon called the “online disinhibition effect,” which results in letting one’s guard down while using online technologies. This effect is fueled by subtle beliefs such as, “You don’t know me.” “You can’t see me.” “I can get away with this.” “No one will know.” Some individuals develop an attitude of unaccountability, thinking, “If it’s all in my head, what can it hurt?” This further removes users from reality and the consequences of inappropriate relationships and behavior. Remember, nothing is hid from God, not even our thoughts.

Unfortunately, this type of reasoning is carnal and often leads to online behavior and exploration that is neither healthy nor godly. *Rom. 8:5-8* discusses the battle between the spiritual mind and the carnal mind, “*For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.*”

Related to this, we would like to note three specific points:

- Youth who are socially isolated and who have low self-worth may find online activities and relationships easier to navigate than real-life relationships, leading them to an overuse of technology.
- High achieving, perfectionistic youth appear to be at increased risk for the online disinhibition effect because they find online anonymity to be an escape from the pressures of reality.
- We want to caution readers, especially those who are single, to avoid online romantic involvement. Note that benign email correspondence with the intent of encouraging someone else spiritually sometimes grows into emotional attachment. Healthy emotional and relationship boundaries are essential.

D. Spiritual error and deception.

Every kind of religion and cult that exists has a voice through the Internet and can use very convincing language, even to the point of misusing Scripture. Jesus spoke of this type of deception in *Matt. 24:4-5*, “*And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.*” We must try the spirits and not simply believe something because it is found online and sounds religious. *1 John 4:1*: “*Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.*”

As with other forms of communication, including radio ministries and printed literature, a significant amount of errant doctrine is available through the Internet. Remember that just because a website advertises itself as Christian does not mean the organization/author holds to sound doctrine. *2 Tim. 4:3-4*: “*For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.*” Caution must be exercised when browsing through this type of content. An ecumenical spirit that seeks to encompass all believers under one umbrella can draw believers and friends alike into confusion. The young in faith are exhorted to be particularly careful in this area and to seek counsel from those mature in faith.

E. Misuse and waste of time.

Redeeming our time spiritually means to use our time for God's glory. *Eph. 5:15-16*: "See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil." While computer and Internet use can simplify tasks and increase our efficiency, it can also provide many opportunities to waste or misuse time. Believers must not neglect personal devotions, family time, or job responsibilities due to technology use. Parents are reminded that computers and the Internet should not be inappropriately used as "electronic babysitters." Make sure that Internet time usage is not taking away from important family time together. Also, a child or teenager's excessive Internet use, especially late at night, may be a clue that a problem exists. Mounting evidence shows that high use of media by children has a detrimental effect on their academic progress.

Extensive personal use of the Internet and other devices while on company time is not good stewardship of company resources and is unethical. We are expected to give 8 hours of work for 8 hours of pay. *Luke 16:1-2*: "And he said also unto his disciples, There was a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods. And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward."

Experience has shown that our enemy will steal minutes, hours, and sometimes days if we are not prayerful and careful. *Matt. 12:35-37*: "A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned."

F. Addictive behavior.

Experience and mounting research evidence reveal that some technology users become overly involved in the Internet/technology to the point of developing Internet Addictive Disorder (IAD). *1 Cor. 6:12* warns that it is not good for someone to be "brought under the power of any. . .," and technology certainly applies. Having any kind of addiction is an indication of the loss of temperance (i.e., self-control; see *Gal. 6:19-23*). At the very least, this addiction leads to a significant waste of time but also can involve other more serious spiritual consequences such as pornography, profanity, gambling, and spending addictions.

G. Child predators and stalking.

Studies show that various technologies have been used by wicked and evil individuals for stalking and sexually abusing children. Child predators often use false identification and deceit to lure children into meeting with them. Predators often will groom their victims, gradually breaking down their barriers and gaining their trust before asking for photos or setting up meeting times. Parents should instruct their children never to give personal information such as name, phone number, address, or even school class schedules to individuals they meet online. Parents are encouraged to read the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI's) helpful online publication called **A Parent's Guide to Internet Safety** (www.fbi.gov/publications/pguide/pguide.htm). The guide includes information on:

- What parents can do to minimize the chances of an online exploiter victimizing their child.
- Signs that a child might be at risk online.
- What parents should do if they suspect their child is communicating with a sexual predator online.
- Additional information can be found at www.missingkids.com, the website for the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

H. Poor stewardship of finances.

Purchasing items online can be a convenient and efficient alternative to store shopping by saving travel time and expense. Unfortunately, impulse buying and compulsive shopping can be as problematic for some people online as it is for others inside shopping malls. Online buying can encourage purchases which one cannot afford and/or may not need. Further, this type of buying may lead to the abuse of credit cards. We must all remember that we are stewards of what the Lord has given to us and are accountable to Him for what we do with what He has given us (See the parable of the talents in *Matt. 25:14-30*, where we learn the importance of being good stewards).

I. Poor interpersonal skills.

The lack of appropriate development of interpersonal skills is another problem that is growing with increasing usage of technology. Some young people are not developing adequate skills for social interaction and conversation in real-life relationships. They may become so accustomed to email, texting, blogging, etc. that they find those avenues easier than actually visiting with someone face-to-face. Unfortunately, this practice may lead to a devaluation of real relationships in favor of “virtual” friends. The Bible strongly encourages the body-of-Christ to gather together for worship and fellowship (*Heb. 10:25, Acts 2:42*). While electronic communication can be a good supplement to our fellowship and communication, it should not be viewed as a replacement for it. *1 John 1:3*: “*That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.*”

J. Lack of routine maintenance.

Computers and electronic equipment need updates and periodic maintenance just like a car needs an oil change. Many people do not understand that the maintenance of electronic technology equipment and software is an ongoing necessity. Each head of the household should take the responsibility of ensuring proper maintenance to family computer equipment. People who are not familiar with computers may want to ask someone to help them get set up. Both practical and spiritual concerns relate to proper maintenance. On the practical end, preventative maintenance will lead to fewer problems with the computer. However, more importantly on the spiritual side, lack of proper maintenance can lead to problems ranging from exposure to pornographic spam emails to a malfunctioning Internet filter that could be easy for someone in the home to circumvent. Periodically, check to make sure the following are working on all computers:

1. Is the Internet filter installed and working properly?
2. Is data regularly backed up?
3. Is virus, spyware, malware, and spam software up to date?
4. Is the firewall installed and working properly?

Unscrupulous and deceptive individuals and companies abound on the Internet seeking to mislead users into purchasing defective and even dangerous products and services. Phishing, the practice of obtaining sensitive personal information through deceptive means by companies masquerading as legitimate firms, is on the increase. Email scams and popups offering products such as rogue security or fake antivirus software may claim the computer has a virus or is infested with inappropriate material to provoke opening their message. This software is crafted to look very legitimate with names like: Antivirus XP 2010 or Vista Antivirus 2008 (whatever the operating system/ year of issue (changes)) but is dangerous and will introduce viruses and harmful malware (software designed to damage the computer). Readers are advised to carefully research any company with which they intend to do business and to not open any email from someone they do not know.

V. DEFINITIONS, BENEFITS, AND CONCERNS OF SPECIFIC TECHNOLOGIES

The information below provides an overview of a number of common technologies used today. A brief definition is provided for each technology, followed by uses, benefits, concerns, and recommendations.

A. Email.

Definition: Email (short for Electronic Mail) is a method of exchanging digital messages between two or more people via a computer, cell phone, or other electronic devices. The advent of email has greatly changed the manner in which people communicate. Email has not only replaced a significant portion of handwritten letters and items carried by the U.S. Postal Service, but also has increased the overall amount of communication enormously. This method of communication existed prior to the Internet with messages being sent directly from the sender to the user.

Uses & Benefits:

- One must no longer wait days or weeks for a letter to complete its journey. With email, messages can be sent and received nearly instantly to be read and responded to at the receiver's leisure.
- Learning how to send and receive email is relatively simple and can be done by young and old alike.
- Email allows for easy communication, both international and domestic. People living out of the country (e.g., our own church missionaries) rely heavily on email as a primary mode of communication and a link to their home churches and family.
- Documents, photos, videos, etc. can be attached to an email and sent to the receiver, thereby further expanding email's usefulness.
- Family members can exchange information and photos nearly instantly.
- Email can be read on any computer with an Internet connection at home, in public libraries, and, increasingly, on smartphones and other devices (iPhone, Android, iPod, Blackberry).

Concerns:

- When an email is forwarded, we must be mindful that what we send can be forwarded to others. Sending or forwarding unwholesome material can be a poor witness to others and hurt our reputation. *Prov. 22:1: "A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold."*
- We are exhorted in Scripture against gossip and spreading rumors. *Prov. 16:28: "A froward man soweth strife: and a whisperer separateth chief friends."* Unfortunately, forwarding emails is a very easy way to be involved in gossip. A good policy is not to forward emails which contain personal information someone else sent to us.
- Forwarding emails endlessly without really knowing how they began or whether the information they contain is truthful is very easy. Sometimes the original email has nothing to do with current information that has been added and forwarded. We should be very careful to know the entire content of anything that we plan to forward. *1 Cor. 13:6: "Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;"*
- Never send or forward emails that contain unwholesome content of any kind (video clips, images, etc.). Remember the teaching of *Eph. 5:11-12: "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret."* Many employers have access to all emails generated or forwarded on company computers and can examine them at any time. Individuals have lost their jobs as a result of poor discretion in sending emails about the company, its leadership, and/or for forwarding inappropriate material.

- A distinct and often unrecognized disadvantage of using email is it does not allow the receiver to see your nonverbal communication. That is, receivers cannot see our body language, hear our tone of voice, or always accurately sense the intensity of emotion conveyed in an email message. This can lead to misunderstandings and a misinterpretation of the message. Appropriate email etiquette should be used when composing email messages (i.e., noting when and when not to use all capital letters, etc.)
- Email is an avenue by which scammers and phishers attempt to get personal information and/or introduce harmful software into computers. Emails from any unknown person should be permanently deleted without opening them.

Recommendations: Use *Tit. 2:7-8* as a guide for all of our email usage: “*In all things showing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine showing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you.*” Finally, remember that the elderly often do not have email access and that handwritten cards and letters are appreciated by nearly everyone. Receiving a handwritten note is special, something email simply doesn’t provide.

Matt. 12:35-37: “A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.”

B. Internet and World Wide Web (www).

Definition: These two terms are often used interchangeably. The Internet is a worldwide connection or network of devices. It is a collection of personal computers and connected servers where vast amounts of information are stored, retrieved, and transported from one to another. Any computer, anywhere in the world, can be connected to the Internet via an Internet Service Provider (ISP) through a phone modem, high speed Internet connection, or wireless connection. Some seemingly “innocent” devices may also have Internet access such as: smartphones, game consoles (Xbox LIVE), handheld gaming devices (PSP), iPads, and iPods. An Internet connection allows individuals access to literally billions of pages of stored information and also allows both individuals and companies to develop webpages containing information they wish to make accessible. The World Wide Web is a network of documents (also called “web documents,” “webpages,” or “websites”) connected through the Internet.

Website content is viewed with software called a web browser. Some common browsers include: Internet Explorer, Mozilla Firefox, Opera, Chrome, and Safari. The web browser is a powerful information-gathering tool that allows access to pictures, video, sound, and text stored on a webpage. Each webpage has a unique address called its URL (Uniform Resource Locator). By typing the URL in the address bar of the web browser, one can go directly to the page desired (e.g., www.apostolicchristian.org). Material is also found by using “search engine” websites (e.g., www.google.com) that will display hyperlinks to webpages containing any topic or set of keywords.

Uses & Benefits:

- By simply clicking on a hyperlink on a webpage (whether in a search engine or any other page), the web browser will take the user directly to another webpage associated with that link. In this way, the user can browse, or “surf,” from one page to the next on practically any topic of interest.
- The web provides easy access to information for educational, business, shopping, travel, etc. This provides for quick access to information and to a central location for that information.

- Several national church agencies within our church such as HarvestCall™, Morton Home for the Handicapped, Gateway Woods, and Apostolic Christian Counseling and Family Services have websites for sharing information. Many individual churches have also established websites for sharing the gospel, for communicating announcements and calendars, and for listening to sermons in real time or for listening to recorded sermons.

Concerns:

- Availability of almost unlimited material on the web has raised great concern due, in part, because inappropriate, inaccurate, deceptive, and/or sinful information is easily available.
- Much of the unwholesome and/or sinful information on the Internet that can be spiritually and personally damaging is technically legal and is not regulated by any government agency.
- Because there is no expiration date for information on the Internet, even good, wholesome material can be out of date and therefore inaccurate and potentially harmful.
- Just because a website has a URL that begins with HTTPS does not necessarily mean it is secure or tamper proof.
- Most types of media are available online such as streaming radio and television. Sites such as Netflix, Hulu, and Amazon also offer videos for purchase or monthly subscription.

Recommendations: Adequate precautions (i.e., filtering software) and proper discernment are essential to ensure appropriate Internet use. As ISPs only provide a connection to the Internet, they are not required to monitor or be responsible for content. Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the husband, father, or head of the household to ensure that proper filtering and monitoring of Internet use occurs in the home.

2 Tim. 2:22: "Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart."

Rom. 13:14: "But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof."

C. Chat rooms, Message Boards, & Instant Messaging.

- **Definition:** Chat rooms and Instant Messaging (IM) are forms of electronic communication in which two or more persons are posting and reading typed messages in a prearranged space on the Internet. Some common IM providers are: Googletalk, AOL(AIM), and MSN Messenger. While chat rooms and IM work differently, they may each be organized and accessed by individuals or organizations with or without the use of web browsers. Message Boards such as reddit.com, 4chang.org, and 9gag.com are newcomers to the Internet scene and are very addictive due to their continually changing content and tend to lean toward atheism and homosexuality.

Uses & Benefits:

- Chat rooms and IM can be used to hold private (restricted access) or public discussions.
- They may be used, for example, by students in a class to discuss the course material, to ask questions, or to share additional information.
- They provide a way of communicating among friends or groups of people who want to discuss specific topics (e.g., an online support group for people dealing with a health condition).

Concerns:

- While these conversations can be harmless chatter among friends, improper use of these technologies can lead to inappropriate relationships and even deception.
- Young people using these forms of communication may be vulnerable to exploitation by predators that try to lure them into a physical meeting.

Recommendations: Parents need to monitor and, as appropriate, control who their children and adolescents are communicating with online. This area has the potential to be exceptionally dangerous because it gives the opportunity for children and teens to have live conversations with anyone about anything.

D. Smartphones and other devices (e.g., iPod, Android, iPad, Kindle, etc.).

Definition: Many other devices besides computers now have access to the Internet. These devices are even more individualized than the computer because in many cases, they never leave the user's person. They provide instant communication and can be very convenient and useful in our business and personal lives. Many of us can scarcely remember a time when we didn't have a cell phone and might wonder how we could manage without one. Music players such as the iPod or other mp3 players may not have direct Internet access, but can be loaded with the owner's preference of music, pictures, and videos.

Uses & Benefits:

- Smartphones and iPods can contain vast amounts of information and/or music for instant retrieval.
- Sermons digitally saved can be downloaded and played whenever desired.
- Mobile phones are also becoming more functional as a small computer and offer several communication options. Graphics and images are easily downloaded and clearly displayed.
- Many mobile phones also have cameras which allow photos to be sent via phone messages. Sending photos to family of a new grandchild or vacation memories can be a desirable feature.
- Nearly all smartphones have Internet and email access. Individuals with these devices and options essentially have the capabilities of the Internet "in their pocket."

Concerns:

- The potential risk of viewing inappropriate content when someone has private, unmonitored access to the Internet cannot be over-emphasized. Brethren are warned against the temptation to download inappropriate images, video clips, and music onto these types of devices. Accountability is essential. Having such private, anonymous access to the Internet without accountability can present a grave danger to anyone, but particularly to our youth. Listen to the words of Jesus in *John 3:19-21*: "*And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.*"
- Smartphones can be locked with passwords to ensure they are not accessed by unauthorized users. However, individuals seeking to avoid accountability may try to use passwords to hide their improper activities. *Jer. 23:24* warns against this type of thinking: "*Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord.*"
- An alarming trend within recent years is the increasing number of inappropriate sexual photos or messages sent by mobile phones. "Sexting," as it is now called, involves sending sexual photos of the sender or someone else. Unfortunately, these photos can then be very easily posted on the Internet,

leading to harm and embarrassment. Importantly, since this practice is popular among adolescents, the images are often considered child pornography. Numerous individuals have faced criminal charges and very serious legal issues as a result of being in possession of such images.

- Recent technology, Snapchat, offers the option of sending photos by texting with the added “safety” of having the message self-destruct shortly after receipt. However, the receiving phones have the capability of taking a screenshot prior to the deletion of the message that would ensure the photo isn’t destroyed. Also, anything sent via the Internet is really never fully erased. A copy of that image resides somewhere. This self-destructing instant messaging by photo presents the temptation to send pictures that are inappropriate and that one might not send without the “vanishing” feature.
- Sending a photo of someone else in a compromising position, making threatening or insulting comments, and sending generally obnoxious messages with the intent to inflame and agitate is also considered “cyber-bullying” or “cyber-harassment.” Some cases of this practice have resulted in the victims committing suicide. *Rom. 12:10: “Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another;”*
- It’s becoming more common for Internet-enabled phones to also function as a “hotspot” providing Internet access for any local computers. This can enable Internet access from other devices where the parents might not have suspected Internet access. For instance, parents only allow Internet usage on a central computer, but their teenager has a phone and a laptop and can get to the Internet on his or her laptop through the phone’s connection.
- Devices such as the iPod do not have inherent cell phone capabilities but simply by downloading an application (app), they can make and receive calls and text messages. This greatly expands the function of an iPod but also increases the need for discernment and monitoring especially for children.
- Google Glass is a new device which features a pair of glasses with a computer in the frame and a heads-up display. It is voice-activated and will search the Internet, make a call, or take a picture or video of whatever the wearer happens to be looking at. The potential for misuse can scarcely be comprehended!
- Other “wearable” technology includes the Apple Watch which is simply a tiny mobile device on a watchband.

Recommendations: To date, filtering/blocking tools are available for smartphones but may have somewhat limited functionality (See Section VIII). This limited availability increases the importance of being personally accountable and taking proactive steps to guard against yielding to temptations. We also recommend that each family have a cell phone use agreement. A sample agreement can be found in Appendix A. Some cell phone service providers offer filtering, monitoring, and limiting of usage time with their plans, at additional cost. Among those offering such services at this time are: AT&T, Alltel, Verizon, T-Mobile, and Sprint. Some phone companies offer cell phones with filters in place such as: Sanyo, Sprint, Firefly, TicTalk, and others.

E. Text messaging.

Definition: Text messaging (or texting) refers to the exchange of brief typed messages between mobile phones.

Uses & Benefits:

- Texting can be a very helpful way to communicate, because it allows individuals to send very brief messages to be read by recipients, especially if they are not able to place or take a phone call and if timely communication is important.
- This service also can be used to receive bill payment reminders, weather information, market updates, and many other types of urgent or time-sensitive communication.

Concerns:

- Texting while driving is very dangerous. In fact, some states and/or cities have made texting while driving illegal.
- Texting messages at inappropriate times and places such as during church services, at dinner, or other social events when one should be paying attention to others is not acceptable.
- Most service plans offer unlimited texting, which can easily lead to inappropriate over-use and even addictive behaviors.
- The speed and privacy of texting makes it very easy to enter into a casual relationship with the opposite sex.

Recommendations: Self-discipline is essential, and proper boundaries and guidelines should be established and maintained. The content of text messages should be honoring to Christ and edifying to others. *Eph., 4:29: "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers."*

Special Recommendation for parents: With the continual development of new software and applications, texting and even making phone calls is now available on iPods and similar devices which do not have a phone package or phone capabilities. Extra monitoring and the placement of time boundaries is suggested.

F. Blogs, microblogs, and personal webpages.

Note: While these platforms are slightly different in format, we have combined them here because they have similarities in their uses, benefits, and concerns.

Definition: A blog (short for web log) is a website maintained by an individual or business with regular entries of commentary, description of events, or other material such as pictures or videos. The content is usually displayed in reverse chronological order with newest items being at the top of the page. Sites such as blogspot.com or wordpress.com provide user-friendly platforms from which individuals can build and launch a blog. Over time, the majority of personal webpages have been replaced by either blogs or social networking sites.

Twitter is a type of communication tool referred to as "micro-blogging." Messages sent through this service, called "tweets," are limited to 140 characters. These messages can be sent to multiple persons simultaneously and viewed as emails, text messages, or online. Users set up a personal profile and can limit access to their information. Those who are allowed access to receive tweets are called "followers."

Uses & Benefits:

- Blogs provide positive opportunities to share information among friends, brethren, and family members, provide a medium for people to stay in touch with each other, and are becoming commonly used by businesses and in education.

- An example of a very useful blog that has benefitted our church family is www.caringbridge.com, where information about the status of individuals and families going through severe medical crises and treatments is shared. This site also gives the opportunity for well-wishers to leave encouraging notes to the affected individuals. A similar site for children with serious illnesses is the Starlight Children's Foundation at www.starlight.org. *1 Cor. 12:26-27: "And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular."*
- On some sites, access to content can be controlled through the use of passwords.

Concerns:

- Knowing the authenticity of information provided by others online is often difficult, and sometimes impossible. The accuracy of information shared through some blogs is questionable since little to no accountability or fact-checking is available. Blog content is essentially the blogger's opinion.
- Some people spend a significant (and sometimes inordinate) amount of time reading and writing on blogs. While similar cautions exist for using Twitter as for any blog, the potential for time wasting seems to be even more significant. Good judgment is needed to ensure that proper balance is kept in one's life. *Eph. 5:15-16: "See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil."*
- Parents are sometimes unaware that their child has a blog and that he/she makes regular postings of highly personal material.
- Writing very personal information in blog postings is becoming increasingly common. While for some individuals this writing may be therapeutic, it sometimes goes to the point of providing too much information or even being indecent. Other times, people seek to stir controversy through discussions on their blogs. Remember *Phil. 2:3* in any blog or website posting: *"Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves."*
- Employers commonly view blogs and personal webpages of employees and potential employees. Unfortunately, this has led to some people not receiving jobs and others being let go.

Recommendations: Parents should be aware of any blogs or Twitter accounts their children maintain or follow closely. Anything placed on a blog or webpage should be above reproach. We are to be *"children of light, and the children of the day"* (*1 Thes. 5:5*). We are fully aware God sees everything we do and knows the intent and motive of our hearts.

Appropriate use should always be that which edifies, ministers grace, and demonstrates humility and respect. The information written in blog posts should always be consistent with being a follower of Christ. *Eph. 4:1-3* provides good direction for the boundaries of blog postings: *"I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."* The Elder Body requests that any references to Apostolic Christian Church of America materials be only to those materials which have been officially approved for distribution by either the Apostolic Christian Communications Committee or the Apostolic Christian Publications Committee. Anyone wishing to create a church-related website should consult with their local elder. *Rom. 14:19: "Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another."*

G. Online gaming.

Definition: The Internet offers many varieties of online games, ranging from very simple puzzles to extremely complex multiplayer games that allow individuals to play against others who are online playing

the same game. In addition, the Nintendo Wii, Sony PlayStation, and Microsoft Xbox are video game consoles that can also connect to the Internet and allow online interaction with others.

Uses & Benefits: From online Sudoku to learning games for children, many wholesome options are available. Many such games are excellent educational resources and can also provide enjoyment for young people and adults alike.

Concerns:

- The content of some games may involve violence, sexuality, and spiritual error/occult themes. *Ps. 101:3: "I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes: I hate the work of them that turn aside; it shall not cleave to me."*
- Interactive online games may provide opportunities for sexual conversations between anonymous adults and children. Under this cloak of anonymity, sexual predators are known to use online multiplayer games in order to befriend and meet children.
- Online gaming can become an addictive escape from reality as participants take on various characteristics and play out their roles in the game. Fantasy-based, role-playing games played on the Internet, smart phone, tablet, computer, or game console (e.g., X-box, PlayStation, Wii) are so engaging for some people that they can lose their sense of reality.
- Because online gaming can consume a large amount of discretionary time, we must remember the admonition of *Eph. 5:16: "Redeeming the time, because the days are evil."*
- While often considered an area of risk for children/adolescents, inappropriate online gaming can also be a serious problem for adults.

Recommendations: Parents need to set clear guidelines and boundaries for their children's use of computer and online games. They need to resist giving in to pressure from their children to purchase games just because "everyone else has one." Parents can check with the Entertainment Software Rating Board (www.esrb.com) to learn about the content of video and computer games.

H. Online gambling and lotteries.

Definition: Online gambling offers all of the gambling opportunities available at a casino from any location while the player remains anonymous. Included are casino games such as blackjack and roulette where a person plays against the "house" as well as interactive games played against other people who are online. Funds for gambling winnings and losses are transferred through online accounts from credit cards, debit cards, and online banking. Online lotteries are very similar to regular lotteries except that players can participate in lotteries from around the globe much more easily.

Uses & Benefits: There are no godly uses or benefits associated with online gambling and lotteries.

Concerns:

- As with all gambling, online gambling is ultimately poor stewardship of resources that can become very costly. *1 Tim. 6:9* has a strong warning: *"But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition."*
- Online gambling offers an escape from reality and a level of competitiveness that has few equals. Becoming addicted to gambling is a very real danger and is a habit not easily broken. Compulsive or problem gambling is an urge to gamble in spite of harmful consequences or of a desire to stop. A severe gambling problem may turn into a pathological issue that affects mental health. *Prov. 28:22: "He that hasteth to be rich hath an evil eye, and considereth not that poverty shall come upon him."*

- Certain elements of online gambling are illegal and some Internet gambling entities operate from outside the United States to avoid existing laws. The Unlawful Internet Gambling Enforcement Act was implemented in 2006 to monitor all online gambling activity. Recent violation of that Act has resulted in the indictment of three major online gambling networks.

Recommendations: Readers are encouraged to avoid these online activities.

I. Videoconferencing.

Definition: Videoconferencing allows people at two or more locations to interact simultaneously via two-way video and audio transmissions through the Internet or satellite connections. This type of communication can be as simple as two people communicating or involving many people at different sites.

Uses & Benefits:

- Videoconferencing can be an effective, low-cost, long-distance communication media for both personal and business use.
- It allows families to stay in touch by being able to see who they are talking to through the use of a webcam, in addition to hearing their voices. For example, Skype is a commonly used videoconferencing platform that friends and families use to see and talk to each other, whether they are communicating across the country or between different countries. A common videotelephony product is Facetime, a downloadable app which uses a WiFi connection, does not need a phone connection, and comes preinstalled on every iDevice. This allows any device with an Internet connection to serve as a phone and provides both parties of the conversation to view each other by way of the device's camera.

Concerns:

- Videoconferencing can be used inappropriately by having live pornographic interactions with another person. In addition to being sinful, this risky activity can also be illegal. Being convicted of online interactions with a minor can lead to time in jail and to an individual being listed as a sex offender.
- We want to offer a grave warning to the use of technology called Chatroulette and Omegle. This technology randomly connects strangers around the globe via webcam. Unfortunately, it is proving to be a source of vile and lewd behavior in addition to creating easy access for online predators.

Recommendations: Limit the use of videoconferencing only to godly, edifying interactions. Readers are also encouraged to avoid any Chatroulette or Omegle online activity, warn their children about the dangers, and ensure that it is blocked by filtering software.

J. Social networking.

Definition: A social networking site focuses on building an online community of people who share interests and activities and who explore the interests and activities of others. Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are three of the more popular social networking websites available, with Google+ also vying for market share. LinkedIn tends to be more popular for business connections. To become a member of one of these networks, some personal information needs to be shared. For example, users on Facebook set up a profile where they determine who will be able to view their information and post messages, etc. The people whom the user chooses to allow access to their personal information are known as "friends." This medium is a very popular and growing form of communication. Older readers can think of social networking as being akin to when telephones consisted of a party line.

Uses & Benefits:

- Social networking provides positive opportunities to share information among friends and family members, provides a medium for people to stay in touch with each other, and is becoming commonly used by businesses and schools.
- It allows people in our churches who are geographically distant to many of their friends in other churches to stay connected.
- On some sites, access to content can be controlled by allowing or disallowing others to view one's profile.

Concerns:

- Knowing the authenticity of information provided by others online is often difficult, and sometimes impossible. The accuracy of information shared through social networking sites is sometimes questionable, with little to no accountability or fact-checking.
- Some people spend a significant (and sometimes inordinate) amount of time reading and writing on social networking sites. Good judgment is needed to ensure that proper balance is kept in one's life. *Eph. 5:15-16: "See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil."*
- At times, users become calloused and unaware of the personal nature of the information and opinions they are posting or the manner in which they are posting them. For example, use of language that is not fitting for a Christian should be avoided. Also, discretion and discernment should be used when deciding to link to another group. Avoid linking to groups that promote alcoholic beverages, entertainment/media, violent games, other doctrines, etc. Think about weaker brothers or sisters before adding links.
- Parents are sometimes unaware that their children are accessing social networking sites and that they are making regular postings of highly personal material. Parents are advised to be aware of what is on their children's social networking pages and how dependent they may be on social networking.
- According to a report published in 2011 in "Cyberpsychology, Behavior, & Social Networking," research has found that feelings of happiness and contentment potentially decreased in regular users of social network sites as their use of those sites increased. One of the reasons cited is that usually only those pictures that depict happiness, excitement, and companionship are posted. Many people have "friends" and "followers" who they really do not know personally and are unacquainted with their more private struggles and unhappy times. This can lead to the perception that "everyone else is living a happier life than me" and may have lasting emotional consequences.
- People commonly write very personal thoughts in social networking postings. While for some individuals this may be therapeutic, it sometimes goes to the point of providing too much information or even being indecent. Be discerning and careful about what kind of personal information is shared online. Personal photos, if posted, should represent us as ambassadors for Christ. Other times people seek to stir controversy through discussions in their social networking posts. Remember *Phil. 2:3* in any blog or website posting: "*Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.*"
- A very recent trend is called "ambient social networking," which uses applications on smartphones that track the user's location through GPS capabilities and then allow for the user to "check in" at that location. These applications also interface well with other social networking sites such as Foursquare, Facebook, etc. The potential threat of this new trend is privacy because these applications broadcast the user's location at all times to friends and, in many cases, to strangers. Since this technology is very new and subject to constant change, we cannot make an exhaustive list of applications but some of the current ones are: Sonar, Crowdedroom, highlig.ht, Ban.jo, and Glancee.

- Employers often view social networking sites of employees and potential employees. Unfortunately, this has led to some people not receiving jobs and others being let go.
- A fairly new wave of social networking is the “anonymous app.” There are many versions of the anonymous app such as Whistper, Secret, YikYak, Gossip, After School, etc. These apps allow users to share gossip and to vent their feelings about others through an anonymous pseudoname. Often this amounts to cyberbullying and can be very harmful.

Recommendations: Parents must have access (e.g., be listed as a “friend” in Facebook) to their child’s social networking site. Because there are ways to hide information even from subsets of friends, parents should also be able to access their child’s site with his or her password. In addition, parents need to be aware of a child’s online acquaintances and people with whom they regularly communicate. Anything that is posted on a social networking site should be above reproach. We are to “*walk in the light as He is in the light*” (1 John 1:7). We are to be “*children of light, and the children of the day*” (1 Thes. 5:5). We are fully aware God sees everything we do and knows the intent and motive of our hearts. Finally, social networking posts should never place a stumblingblock before anyone else. *Rom. 15:1-3: “We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification. For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me.”*

K. Video and photo sharing websites.

Definition: Video and photo sharing websites such as YouTube, Flickr, Pinterest, Photobucket, Instagram, Tumblr, etc. have become extremely popular. A relative newcomer to the scene is Vine which is popular among teens. All of these sites consist of videos and pictures that individuals and businesses upload for others to see. Increased bandwidth, faster data networks, and better WiFi coverage seems to be driving new video and photo sharing websites.

Uses & Benefits:

- Material such as family vacations and children’s activities can be uploaded and shared with others.
- News clips, product advertisements, and instructional videos are also posted.

Concerns:

- Because nearly anyone can post practically anything they wish, these sites often contain significant amounts of objectionable material such as pornography, violence, and other unwholesome videos and images.
- Note that while some video and photo sharing websites have rules against posting pornography, often such videos and photos are not quickly found nor deleted.
- Filters cannot “see” pictures and can only decipher whether the title of a video or photo is offensive so they may allow unwholesome material to be viewed.

Recommendations: Good boundaries and spiritual discretion are needed when considering using these sites. *Ps. 101:3* has good instruction for us: “*I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes: I hate the work of them that turn aside; it shall not cleave to me.*”

L. Virtual worlds.

Definition: Virtual worlds, such as Second Life and Habbo, are an increasingly popular area of the Internet. These areas allow individuals to create their own online identities (graphical characterizations called avatars) and interact with others in a virtual 3D world that includes animation, pictures, and sounds to represent people and objects in the virtual world.

Uses & Benefits: We find no godly uses or benefits in these online virtual worlds.

Concerns:

- Some virtual worlds contain significant amounts of adult/mature and sexual content.
- For some people, virtual worlds are extremely addicting and may cause an individual to spend so much time in their ‘virtual world’ that they become irresponsible and detached from their real life. This is more frequently a danger to young adults or people with extra time, but can be a risk for anyone.
- There is also a great financial risk as real money is converted to “Virtual World” money and used in a similar way as real money. An example of this type of “virtual money” is Bitcoin for which there is no central authority or bank.

Recommendations: Readers are encouraged to avoid this type of online activity.

M. Virtual Reality

Definition: Virtual reality is sometimes referred to as “computer-simulated reality” or “immersive media.” This computer technology replicates an environment and simulates a user’s physical presence in such a way that he or she can interact with it. Virtual realities artificially create sensory experience which can include sight, touch, hearing, and smell. Multimodal devices such as wired gloves and body suits help create an immersive lifelike experience.

Uses & Benefits: There are some training benefits in the fields of medicine, aircraft piloting, and a handful of other specialized fields.

Concerns:

- As with our concerns about virtual worlds, there is the danger of significant amounts of sexual content within virtual reality games and software.
- For some, virtual reality becomes more desirable than reality and with its addictive nature can cause people to lose the ability to connect to reality.
- There are health risks associated with the use of virtual reality software from nausea to eye strain to anxiety and depression.

Recommendations: Except for the very limited valid use of virtual reality software for specific training purposes, readers are encouraged to avoid it.

N. Dating sites.

Definition: An online dating site is simply a way for individuals to contact and communicate with one another with the objective of developing a relationship. Dating site members must provide some personal

information which is used to find a similar “match” within the database of participants. There are many online dating services with names like: Zoosk, eHarmony, OurTime, Tinder, and even ChristianMingle.

Uses & Benefits: We see no godly uses or benefits associated with online dating services.

Concerns:

- Perhaps the most obvious concern is that there is no proof of authenticity of any of the information provided by participants.
- There is a very real-world danger as sociopaths and other criminal minds stalk the Internet to prey on unsuspecting people. Someone working through a broken relationship and seeking a new one through an online dating service may be especially vulnerable.
- Teens especially may be troubled by distorted images of self-worth and an online romance may sound tempting.
- Many scam artists masquerade as participants seeking a relationship when they are only interested in obtaining personal and financial information.

Recommendations: Readers are encouraged to avoid this type of online activity.

VI. DEVELOPING A SAFE INTERNET USE PLAN

The Internet is unique in its ability to bring a huge body of information within easy grasp of the user. The technology explosion that has occurred in recent years requires us to be more vigilant in protecting our children and ourselves from destructive online influences. Parents must be willing to take responsibility for ensuring that a Safe Internet Use Plan is established within the home. Whether one's children are experienced computer users or are just getting started, they need parental involvement, experience, judgment, and counsel.

Deut. 6:7: "And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up."

1 Thes. 2:11: "As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children."

IQ, TQ & EQ: Consider the following terms and definitions:

- **Intelligence Quotient (IQ):** a measure of one's ability to learn, understand, and apply knowledge.
- **Technology Quotient (TQ):** the degree to which one is knowledgeable and comfortable using technology.
- **Emotional Intelligence (EQ):** the level of social and emotional awareness, judgment, and maturity one has.

Many of us are familiar with the IQ. However, everyone also has a TQ and EQ. While parents and their children often have similar levels of intelligence, parents and children often have very different levels of comfort for using technology (TQ) and of emotional intelligence (EQ). This is because parents generally have a significantly higher emotional intelligence (EQ) than their children, due to having more life experience, maturity, and spiritual grounding. Research shows that the development of the areas of the brain associated with good judgment (EQ) don't fully mature until the early twenties. However, parents are often lower in their understanding of technology (TQ) than their children. Unfortunately, this may lead some parents to assume that if they know less than their children about computers, they must not have much they can offer for guidance. Not true! Research clearly shows that children who are not given parental limitations on Internet and media use are at higher risk for problems related to technology use.

The more emotional intelligence someone has, the more skilled he or she is at making healthy choices and taking preventative steps to avoid potential problems. Because children are generally higher in comfort/knowledge about technology (TQ) but lower in emotional intelligence (EQ), they may not fully think through or understand the implications of their online behavior and technology use, leaving them exposed to danger and Satan's snare. Unfortunately, rarely will children seek out a parent's advice for using technology. Parents must, therefore, make an intentional effort to engage their children and communicate, educate, and monitor their children's technology use. Otherwise, opportunities to train their children are not going to happen. Parents must stay aware of their children's technology use.

Developing a Safe Internet Use Plan.

Following are some key points that should be addressed when developing a Safe Internet Use Plan. Appendix B provides guidelines that can be used to develop a specific written plan for your family. An Internet Use Plan template is available from ACCFS online at www.counseling.org, by calling (309)263-5536, or (877)370-9988. Having a prevention-focused mindset is essential. *Prov. 22:3* teaches that, “A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished.”

- 1. Location of the computer:** Consider keeping the computer in a family room or other open area rather than in a bedroom, basement corner, or other isolated area. More temptation is present when the Internet can be used in complete privacy. The computer should be placed somewhere in a high traffic area of the house to ensure continual accountability. Children should not have a computer with Internet access in their rooms where no accountability is available and/or where filtering/monitoring software is lacking. Also be aware of the possibility that people may be able to access the Internet via wireless networks near the home. In other words, a neighbor’s wireless network may be strong enough that it can be picked up inside another home and vice versa. Periodically check for “Neighborhood WiFi,” as this is called and the available networks on any computers in the home that have WiFi capability.
- 2. Internet filtering/monitoring software:** Filtering software is one part of an overall Internet safety plan that provides protection against accidental and/or intentional access of inappropriate material on the Internet. However, since no filtering software is perfect, we should still be vigilant and proactive in ensuring that we are aware of our children’s Internet activities and be accountable for our own Internet usage even if we use filtering software. *1 Pet. 3:11*: “Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it.” See sections VII and VIII for more information.
- 3. Time limits:** Parents can and should establish time limits on Internet usage based on the age and maturity of each child. Monitoring software can be used to help control times the Internet can and cannot be accessed within the home. These limits are especially helpful for parents who want to limit their children’s Internet access during times the parents may not be in the home.
- 4. Accountability:** Parents need to be aware of their children’s Internet usage habits. Taking time to monitor the history of computer usage and websites visited is very important and can be done either with the child present or independently, depending on the situation. Communicating openly with children about expectations for appropriate Internet use and about the need to monitor the sites they visit can be a big support to them in avoiding potentially unwholesome sites.
- 5. Go online with children:** Regardless of the success of the filtering or blocking program chosen, one of the best ways to assure that children are having positive online experiences is to stay in touch with what they are doing. A way to do this is to spend time with our children when they are online. They can show us what they do and teach us how they use the Internet.
- 6. Monitor children’s use of social networking sites, chat rooms, Instant Messenger, and blogs:** These technologies can be useful for communication and educational activities. Children and adolescents should not participate in unmonitored chat rooms where the purpose and participants are not known. Parents should be aware that while online communities like MySpace and Facebook are quite popular with teens, the content on these sites can be impure or contain spiritual error. In addition, without proper discernment, unwholesome and inappropriate relationships can develop.

Parents are encouraged to consider using software (see section VIII) to monitor and review chat rooms, email, and Instant Messenger. Moreover, this is especially important if a concern exists about a child's correspondents.

7. Periodically talk to children about potential online dangers: Training children to use the Internet appropriately is a process that unfolds over time. Parents are greatly mistaken if they believe that having a single conversation with their children is sufficient. Some topics parents may want to cover include:

- Reminding children that people may alter their identities online.
- Providing age-appropriate information about how predators try to meet and lure children.
- Avoiding inappropriate images and telling children what to do if an inappropriate image comes up on the computer.
- Cautioning about the development of online romances especially for teenagers and older children.
- Never sharing personal information such as name, phone number, address, credit card information, class schedules, etc.
- Asking for consent before taking, posting, or tagging photos of others.
- Never taking or posting inappropriate photos.
- Never stealing software/music (piracy).
- Never taking the written words of others and using them as our own (plagiarism).
- Reminding children that everything they post is public and permanent.
- Asking if they would be willing to allow their posts to be viewed by their parents, peers, police, and ministers.
- Being aware that cyberbullying (threats, intimidation, gossip, and rumors) is wrong.
- Never being involved in cyberbullying activities or behavior.
- Making parents or someone aware if they have been a victim of a cyberbully. Parents need to understand and recognize the signs of cyberbullying in a victim. More information on this subject can be found at www.stopbullying.gov.

8. Parents should have access to all of their children/teens' online passwords: Although it may seem like an invasion of privacy to a child/teen, parents should be able to go anywhere online that the children/teens go. At the same time, parents should avoid being overly intrusive. Appendix C provides a sample computer and Internet use disclosure form that can be used.

9. Internet access at schools, public libraries, and at friends' houses: Internet access is widely available in schools, public libraries, and at friends' houses. The guidelines, filtering tools, and monitoring tools used vary widely. Parents should be aware of the extent to which their children are utilizing the Internet and counsel them about appropriate Internet use at these locations.

Much more information is available online on the proper use of the Internet. Readers may find some of these sites helpful, including: www.getnetwise.org, www.safefamilies.org, and www.missingkids.com.

VII. THE BASICS OF INTERNET FILTERING AND MONITORING

A. Types of Internet safety software.

Two main types of Internet safety software are available:

1. **Filtering/blocking software** that denies access to inappropriate material and/or blocks access to the Internet within established time boundaries.
2. **Monitoring software** that provides accountability by allowing a parent/accountability partner to see what another person is doing online.

Filtering/Blocking Software: One is foolish and unwise not to have effective Internet filtering software on the computer. A rapidly expanding list of software limits Internet access only to appropriate sites. Most of these programs allow for filtering settings to be set differently for children and adults. These programs can be installed on the computer and configured to filter out sites containing pornography, hateful or violent material, or material that advocates the use of drugs, tobacco, or alcohol. Parents can also choose whether to allow or block access to news groups, chat rooms, and social networking sites which may be inappropriate for children. Some software programs can be configured to prevent children from revealing information about themselves such as name, address, or telephone number. Others keep an electronic record of sites visited that can be displayed readily and only deleted by parents or an accountability partner. Having a public record of visited sites is a strong incentive to limit misuse of the Internet by children and adults. Most users have found these programs to be extremely helpful when installed and used properly. While filtering tools are encouraged, they are not completely foolproof. Even the industry's best blockers are not able to forestall the access of ALL objectionable content, because new sites and content are being added continuously.

Monitoring software: Internet monitoring software records all Internet activity by a user. This information is then available to an accountability partner or parent who has password-protected access. Properly installed monitoring software is an excellent deterrent for the conscientious user to make every effort not to visit sites with unwholesome material. However, software that only monitors activity is not effective in blocking inadvertent access of objectionable content. Therefore, software that has both filtering/blocking and monitoring capabilities is preferable.

B. Over-blocking and under-blocking.

When appropriate information is accidentally blocked by an Internet filter, it is called "over-blocking." No filter is perfect; and, at times, legitimate sites will be blocked. However, most blocking/filtering tools have a way to request that legitimate sites be unblocked or to provide a mechanism to override the protection software (e.g., by entering a password, emailing a request to the software company, etc.). The occasional inconvenience that over-blocking may cause is a much better alternative than "under-blocking," or allowing access to inappropriate sites.

C. Installation passwords.

The safety of filtering software is increased when it is installed by someone who has very little risk of being tempted to use the computer to access inappropriate materials. For example, in many cases a mother or wife may be the best person to know the password to the blocking software. In certain circumstances a trusted brother or sister-in-faith who does not routinely use the computer may be the best choice to be the only one who knows the password. For those being monitored, this will remove the temptation to uninstall the software, temporarily manipulate the blocking, or tamper with the log of recorded activity.

VIII. SPECIFIC FILTERING/MONITORING TOOLS

The following products represent some of the most effective Internet filtering and monitoring tools available to date. This list is not exhaustive and should not be taken to imply that any of the products are flawless. Each tool has its own strengths and weaknesses. The functions and abilities of filtering and monitoring software are changing constantly. Individuals interested in using any of the following tools will need to check the computer system requirements for each product. For example, some products may not be compatible with certain computer operating systems. Most filtering/monitoring software is purchased by subscription, which ensures continual updates. We suggest taking advantage of the trial period that most companies offer to see if a product is adequate and user-friendly. For a frequently updated list see: www.accounseling.org/technology.

Internet Filtering/Monitoring products:

The products listed in this section contain the following features which we consider to be very important:

- Filtering/blocking of inappropriate material.
- Adjusting filtering capabilities for content based on each user's profile.
- Providing capability for an accountability partner and/or a parent to view website usage and sites visited.
- Blocking and/or monitoring instant messaging, social networking, and chat room conversations.
- Providing protection for children and adults.
- Giving the ability to "white list" (specifically allow) or "black list" (specifically disallow) specific URLs.
- Allowing the setting of time restrictions per user.
- Automatically updating the program.
- Providing high accuracy and difficulty to circumvent.

1. AVG Family Safety (www.avg.com)

- Previously marketed under the names: American Family Filter, BSafe Online, bsecure.
- Offers software-based filtering recommended for small (1-5 computers) businesses or larger home networks.
- Offers social networking protection and can block peer-to-peer (P2P) file sharing.
- Compatible with Windows and many mobile devices.

2. SafeEyes (www.safeeyes.com)

- Also marketed as Every Home Protected (www.everyhomeprotected.com).
- Offers software-based filtering for medium-sized businesses (10-200 computers).
- Can block peer-to-peer (P2P) file sharing programs.
- Available for some mobile devices.
- Can be installed on up to 3 computers with one subscription.
- Compatible with Windows and Mac operating systems.

3. CleanRouter (www.cleanrouter.com)

- This is a subscription service that is set up at the router level instead of the computer level.
- Will work for multiple computers and devices or home-based wireless network.
- Has many features and is difficult to circumvent.

4. Covenant Eyes (www.covenanteyes.com)

- The monitoring version of this software does not provide filtering. We recommend that the filtering/monitoring version of this software be used.
- Is available for iPod Touch/iPad/iPhone and Android (monitoring only) devices.
- Filtering is compatible with Windows, and Mac.

5. NetNanny (www.netnanny.com)

- Feature rich and programmable for multiple users.
- Currently only supports Android devices for call/email/text monitoring and web filtering but iDevice support is coming soon.
- Compatible with Windows and Mac operating systems.

6. K9 Web Protection (www1.k9webprotection.com)

- Available at no cost.
- Not as fully featured or as customizable as other products.
- Compatible with the Windows and Mac operating systems.
- Supports the iPhone/iPad/iPod platform.
- Allows you to enter a website's URL to receive a rating on it.

7. Spector Pro (www.spectorsoft.com)

- Monitoring software that records chats, Instant Messages, emails sent and received, websites visited, keystrokes typed, programs launched, social networking, and P2P file searching/swapping.
- Records all computer activities completely in the background. Users can review screenshots of the exact sequence of everything done on the computer.
- Provides excellent monitoring/reporting where very high levels of accountability are needed or where concern of Internet deception exists. This level of monitoring is not necessary in the majority of situations and can be intrusive.
- Compatible with Windows and Mac operating systems.
- Compatible with Android and Blackberry devices.
- Does not provide web filtering.

8. WebWatcher (www.webwatchernow.com)

- Records web activity, keystrokes, chats, instant messages, email.
- Has the ability to do a screen-capture that is triggered by website visited, keyword typed, or application launched.
- Log of monitored activity automatically uploaded to web, able to be reviewed in near real-time from any machine with an Internet connection by accessing the on-line account.
- Remote accountability in near real-time without having to wait for emailed report.
- Requires a fair amount of customization to achieve desired results.
- Compatible with the Windows operating system
- Supports Android and Blackberry.

9. X3Watch (www.x3watch.com)

- Monitors and filters Internet activity.
- Protects up to 10 computers.
- Option to block P2P file sharing.
- Compatible with MAC and PC.
- Compatible with iPhone/iPad/iPod and Android.
- Standard version is free.

10. Filtering and monitoring solutions for Linux and other operating systems.

- DansGuardian (www.dansguardian.org)
- OpenDNS(www.opendns.com)

11. Mobile Spy (www.mobile-spy.com) monitoring software for mobile phones

- Monitor online in complete stealth
- View complete SMS text messages
- Monitor WhatsApp and iMessage
- Get GPS locations as often as you wish
- Monitor Facebook and Twitter messages
- Record call details and websites visited
- View photos and videos of the phone
- View memos, contacts and email
- Block Apps from running on the phone
- View LIVE Screen with LIVE Panel Option

12. MobileWebGuard (www.mobilewebguard.com) filtering software for mobile phones

- Compatible with most iOS (Apple) and Android devices
- Blacklist checking
- Whitelist checking
- Parental Control
- Content Scanning
- Time of Day Control
- History Tracking
- Wifi and Cell
- Tamper Resistant
- Customizable

IX. PREVENTION-FOCUSED STEPS FOR CHURCHES

The following information is provided to give church congregations a menu of options that could be used to promote wise use of technology. Churches have an opportunity to teach the applicability of the Word of God to current and future technological advances. In the spirit of *Prov. 4:10-15*, churches can point the way to biblical living in all aspects of life:

“Hear, O my son, and receive my sayings; and the years of thy life shall be many. I have taught thee in the way of wisdom; I have led thee in right paths. When thou goest, thy steps shall not be straitened [hampered]; and when thou runnest, thou shalt not stumble. Take fast hold of instruction; let her not go: keep her; for she is thy life. Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away.”

A. Teach and discuss appropriate Internet use.

Information and/or presentations on appropriate Internet use could be given such as:

- The local elder/ministers could provide the congregation with appropriate scriptural teaching on the importance of godly, appropriate use of technology.
- Topical discussions with Sunday school students.
- Lessons for junior high and high school students.
- Meetings with local church and college young groups.
- Family nights or topical Bible studies for the congregation.

B. Encourage husbands to take responsibility for creating an Internet/Technology safety plan.

While parents should make sure their children are using the Internet in a safe manner, they must also have protection in place for themselves and visitors who may use their computer. Husbands have a spiritual duty before God to, first of all, understand themselves and deal with their own temptations, and then to lead and guide their families. *2 Tim. 2:22*: “Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” When a husband is not present in a home, whoever functions as the head of the home should take responsibility for ensuring that a plan is created and followed. If no one takes the responsibility to ensure that safe Internet practices are in place, then Satan is given an unfettered opportunity to create harm. As *1 Pet. 5:8* says, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.”

Following the last section of this paper are three appendices. Included are examples of documents that could be used as part of an Internet/Technology safety plan for the home. A detailed plan would include acceptable times of use and consequences for plan violations. The proper use of cell phones should also be addressed for reasons of etiquette and safety.

C. Encourage single adults living on their own to be accountable to someone for their Internet use.

Single adults living alone should use Internet filtering software on their home computers. In addition, they should consider using software that emails accountability reports of all the sites they have visited to their accountability partners.

D. Identify local brethren to provide consultation and assistance.

When needed, brethren are encouraged to seek technical assistance from local brethren who are sound in faith and knowledgeable about computer/Internet use. Often, brothers and/or sisters in the church can be especially useful in computer setup, appropriate software installation, and other technical assistance. While the goal of receiving counsel from others in regards to technology is to be *prevention-focused*, computer-savvy brothers or sisters could also be used to help create a plan to address specific Internet-related problems that have arisen. Spiritual counsel should be sought early if concerns or problems arise. *Prov. 4:13*: “Take fast hold of instruction; let her not go: keep her; for she is thy life.” The following are examples of times when these brothers or sisters could be used:

- To help a family evaluate and set up Internet filtering software on their home computer.
- To help a family create “Rules for Safe Internet Use in the Home” that takes the ages of the children and needs of the family into account.
- To help in situations where pornography has been discovered on a computer and a family needs help deleting it and setting up filters.

E. Encourage employers to establish appropriate Internet-use policies in their businesses.

The Internet has become an integral part of business. Employers need to take proactive steps to address appropriate Internet use at their place of business. Failure to do so puts both them and their employees at risk.

- As an employer, unfiltered/unmonitored Internet access for employees may allow poor stewardship of time, lead to lost productivity, introduce security threats into computer network, expose the business to legal liability, and allow use of business computers for unwholesome or sinful activities.
- Unfiltered/unmonitored Internet access may leave employees exposed to temptation. Because of the hidden and insidious nature of sin, it is impossible for an employer to tell which employees will or will not struggle with inappropriate Internet use. Creating a work environment that includes safe and productive use of the Internet is a win-win situation for employer and employees.
- It is necessary to have a policy in writing that describes acceptable Internet and email use at the business.
- Symantec Web Security, EtherShield Business from Internet Safety.com, and iPrism Web Security by EdgeWave are examples of Internet security suites that allow employers to filter, set usage allowances, and monitor Internet usage on computer networks.
- Depending on the complexity of the computer network, a computer consultant may be needed to help find the best way to provide Internet filtering/monitoring for the business.

X. RESOURCES FOR INTERNET-RELATED PROBLEMS

A. Suggestions to Consider:

- Pray and ask God for the humility, honesty, and courage to deal with the problems.
- Talk to someone. Satan thrives in isolation. We should push ourselves to get problems out into the open. *James 5:16*: “Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed...”
- We shouldn’t be afraid to approach our elder or minister to confess this fault. Be encouraged. He will seek to help us. As we read in *Gal. 6:1*, “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.” Elders and ministers are ready and willing to help, support, and encourage.
- Set up regular check-ins with an accountability partner(s).
- Make sure that Internet filtering software is installed on the computers to which we have access.
- Set up Internet accountability reporting that will send an email of the websites visited to an accountability partner(s).
- Read recommended materials on dealing with the problem (recommended materials at www.accounseling.org).
- Seek professional counseling.

B. Additional Resources for Help:

- *Apostolic Christian Counseling and Family Services*: ACCFS is staffed by licensed counselors and church outreach staff to provide consultations, counseling, education, and referrals to struggling individuals and those trying to help them. Those wanting to speak with a counselor to ask questions, receive support and direction, or obtain counseling should call the ACCFS office at (309)263-5536, (877)370-9988, or email to info@accounseling.org.
- *Apostolic Christian Way of Purity*: ACWP is a sixty-lesson biblically-based accountability program for individuals struggling with sexual temptation, pornography, compulsive masturbation, etc. Each participant is assigned to a mentor (a trained and approved Apostolic Christian Church brother or sister) who provides support, feedback, and guidance. The participant completes daily Bible study lessons and emails the lessons to his/her mentor. Anyone wanting to enroll in the ACWP program should contact his/her home elder. If you have questions about the program, please send an email to acwp@accounseling.org, call (309)263-5536, or (877)370-9988.
- *ACCFS Website*: The ACCFS website (www.accounseling.org) offers information and resources on dealing with sexual temptation, pornography, and sexual addiction. A broad range of material is available from being proactive about maintaining godly sexual purity to recovery from severe sexual sin. Information for wives of men struggling with pornography is also available.

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APPENDIX A: SAMPLE CELL PHONE AGREEMENT

(Note: Parents will need to adapt this policy to the ages of their children and needs of the family.)

We agree that having a cell phone is a privilege that can be revoked and should not be taken for granted. We further agree that the following set of guidelines must be followed to avoid having cell phone privileges restricted or withdrawn:

- Cell numbers will not be given out to anyone outside of our immediate family, friends, church, employers, or school administration without parental approval.
- Calls from family members will be answered immediately, and voice mails/texts will be returned immediately.
- School rules concerning cell phones will be followed.
- Cell phones will be turned off during family time.
- Hurtful or harmful voice or text messages will not be sent.
- Toll free numbers will not be called without parental permission.
- Nothing will be downloaded from the Internet via cell phone.
- No setting changes, feature additions or deletions will be made without parental approval.
- Inappropriate voice or text messages or pictures will not be sent.
- Pictures and videos of others will only be taken with their approval.
- Pictures taken with the cell phone will not be posted to any website without the subject's and parental permission.
- If inappropriate voice or text messages or pictures are sent to your phone, tell your parents immediately.
- The use of the cell phone in the presence of others will be discreet and minimal. Any request to discontinue using the cell phone will be honored.
- Sending text messages while driving is expressly forbidden.
- Parents will review the mobile phone bill each month. You are expected to stay within the amount of minutes you are allotted per month.
- You are responsible to pay (help pay, pay for overages, etc.) \$_____ each month toward the mobile phone bill.

The consequences for violating the terms of this agreement are:

1.

2.

3.

Signed by parent: _____

Signed by child: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX B: FAMILY COMPUTER USE PLAN GUIDELINES

(Note: Parents will need to adapt this policy to the ages of their children and needs of the family.)

Purpose of Policy: This section should state the reason for the policy which would include the desire for the health and safety of the family as well as being Christ-honoring. The rest of the document should reflect that purpose. Try to avoid coming across in a way that sounds controlling. Stress that the reason for this document is to help the family.

Time & Place: This section should state where the computer(s) will be located in the house; ideally in public areas in the home. It should also include how much time per day or week is acceptable to be online and what times of the day are appropriate. Some flexibility may be needed during vacation, holidays, etc.

Privacy: In this section, determine what constitutes private or personal information and how private each person's password should be. Family members should be encouraged to never give out their private information online, including address, phone number, or any financial data.

Meeting Others: This section includes cautions against meeting people in person who have been met online. Clear warnings about the dangers of online predators should be discussed, including how people can lie about their identities while online.

Respectful Communication: This section should include specific instructions on proper online etiquette (netiquette): writing in CAPS, politeness, avoiding gossip, forwarding information, and respectful communication.

Blocking/Filtering/Monitoring: This section should establish that Internet filters/monitors are in place and will be used. Discuss what a family member should do if they accidentally come across inappropriate material.

Username, Passwords, Buddy Lists: Parents need to have access to each family member's online usernames and passwords. No one can sign up for new accounts without parental permission. Parents should be friends or have access to any social networking sites and blogs in which their children participate.

Unacceptable Activities: This section should include specific unacceptable activities such as pornography, gambling, peer-to-peer file sharing, and the illegal downloading of music.

Consequences: This section includes what will happen if this policy is violated intentionally. It also should include provision for a confessed transgression as opposed to a discovered transgression. Encourage proactive sharing of issues.

Conclusion: This section should convey the desire to respect a teen's privacy and avoid being overly rigid. This policy should extend beyond the home to the homes of others, school, library, and any other place of Internet access. This policy should be in effect for all computers and other mobile or portable devices.

Signatures: After discussion and clarifying any questions, everyone in the home should sign.

APPENDIX C: COMPUTER AND INTERNET USE DISCLOSURE FORM

(Note: Parents will need to adapt this policy to the ages of their children and needs of the family.)

1. List all the computers you use or can access:
2. Where do you have access to the Internet?
3. List all email accounts you use.
4. List all instant message screen names and services.
5. Are you a member of or do you visit any chat rooms, social networks, or Internet groups?
If so, list all screen names, service and group names.