

Taming THE Media

Media and technology can be dangerous when left to run unchecked; however, like wild horses, when tamed they can become valuable tools.

By Starla Averkamp Butler

Jocelyn Christensen, a blog writer and mother of four living in Pennsylvania, USA, knows the difficulties that many parents experience with today's media and technology. "We purchased a tablet for the family to use for educational benefits, but we quickly realized that we hadn't given enough thought about how to regulate what games our kids could play and for how long. We came to the conclusion that our children were just too young to have so much access to this device, because we preferred to see them playing outside after school and we didn't like where the road of 'gaming' might lead them. However, we were worried about how our eight-year-old son would react to a rule change."

Parents can sometimes feel trampled by the stampede of tablets and smartphones and overwhelmed by the

accessibility of media on the Internet. It's true that media and technology can be dangerous when left to run unchecked in our families; however, like wild horses, when tamed they can become valuable tools—tools our children can use to become a strong influence for good in the world.

Although it is certainly wise to use Internet filters, Sister Linda S. Reeves, second counselor in the Relief Society general presidency, has taught that "the greatest filter in the world, the only one that will ultimately work, is the personal internal filter that comes from a deep and abiding testimony of our Heavenly Father's love and our Savior's atoning sacrifice for each one of us."¹

As families, we can tame the "wild horses" of media and technology as we and our children understand good media standards, learn to follow the Spirit, formulate a





plan for good media use, and consistently emphasize excellent content in our media choices.

Understanding Media Standards

We can ensure that our families understand the Lord's standards for media by reviewing together the words that the General Authorities and other Church leaders have spoken about this topic. For example, Randall L. Ridd, second counselor in the Young Men general presidency, recently gave this counsel to the young men of the Church: "There are countless ways technology can distract you from what is most important. Follow the adage 'Be where you are when you are there.' When you are driving, drive. When you are in class, focus on the lesson. When you are with your friends, give them the gift of your attention."²

As a follow-up to this counsel, you could ask your children how spending too much time on electronic devices can hurt their relationships with other people and with Heavenly Father and discuss positive uses for electronic devices. As we discuss these and other inspired words together with our children, we can determine if we are following our leaders' guidance in our families.

No matter our age or the age of our children, the principles in *For the Strength of Youth* are applicable: "Do not attend, view, or participate in anything that is vulgar, immoral, violent, or pornographic in any way. Do not participate in anything that presents immorality or violence as acceptable."³ You could discuss with your children what these words mean and how media content that is degrading can damage our spirits. Study together the



words of the thirteenth article of faith: “If there is anything virtuous, lovely, of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things.” Talk about how good media can uplift and strengthen us.

Following the Spirit

One of the most important things we can teach our children is to follow the Spirit. As the prophet Mormon said, “The Spirit of Christ is given to every man, that he may know good from evil” (Moroni 7:16). Help children pay attention to how they feel when they watch, listen to, or read something. Talk about how to recognize which feelings may be promptings of the Spirit.

Like many mothers, Sister Christensen is trying to teach her children to recognize the Spirit with regard

to their media choices. “When my son was seven, his schoolteacher started reading a book in class that was a little disturbing to him and probably too mature for his age-group. He started complaining of having a stomach-ache every day. His teacher told me, and I asked him what was wrong. He finally admitted that whenever she read the book, it made his ‘stomach hurt.’ I was able to help him see that this was the Spirit alerting him that the book wasn’t the best choice for him. I talked to the teacher, and we decided to let my son choose what to do. He decided to spend the reading time reading his own book at his desk.”

As our children learn to recognize promptings of the Spirit, they will be able to avoid inappropriate media in their lives.

Creating a Plan Together

As your children understand the doctrine behind staying worthy of the Holy Ghost and making good media and technology choices, they will understand the need to set limits to help your family stay spiritually safe. You can then sit down together and create a family media plan.

A family media plan is specific to the situation of every family that creates one. It can be a set of guidelines, strategies, and principles to help respond to your family's needs as they make media and technology choices. Here are some ideas to consider with your children as your family creates a media plan.

Prevention and Protection

Movies, TV Shows, Books, Music

- Discuss strategies for checking the rating and content of movies and other media by using appropriate websites. Remember that sometimes media with an “okay” rating still has inappropriate material because the world's standards are not the Lord's standards.
- Establish specific standards, such as not using media content that is violent, immoral, vulgar, or degrading.
- Create procedures for discussing TV shows or movies you want to see. “Determine as a family what

shows are appropriate for viewing, then turn the television [or internet TV] on for those programs only.”⁴ Help children learn how to weigh the merits of the material they watch.

Internet, Computers, Mobile Devices

- Discuss together the location of computers in the house and when and where it is appropriate to use mobile devices.
- Decide on guidelines for mobile devices, such as what kinds of apps are appropriate and what media use is appropriate.
- For younger children, you may want to establish Internet rules such as what websites they can visit.

Time and Technology Management

- For all members of the family, decide how much time can be spent on the Internet, playing electronic games, or watching TV or movies.
- Decide what media and technology use is appropriate for Sundays, both at church and at home. For example, Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has suggested putting phones and tablets in airplane mode during church so that

ONLINE HELP AND SAFETY TIPS

- Websites like kidsinmind.com, commonsensemedia.org, and ok.com have content reviews of movies, TV shows, video games, and more.
- Sites like Google and YouTube have safe-search options that you can use and teach to your children. For Google, this feature is under the advanced-search options, and for YouTube it's at the bottom of the page.
- Many popular websites have filter options. For example, music website Pandora has a filter to block songs with strong profanity, and Facebook lets you label ads and posts as offensive so that you don't see material of that kind again.
- Your children's favorite sites likely have safety options. Research them and teach your children how to use them.



digital scriptures may still be used without the distraction of incoming messages.⁵

- Decide what media and technology use is appropriate when you are with other people.

Responding to Problems

- Decide how to respond when you or your children come across something inappropriate in your media use. What will you do? Whom will children tell? Whom will parents tell? What measures will you take to avoid such material in the future?

Work together to follow your family media plan consistently, and revise it if needed. As children grow older and technology changes, you can periodically review your media plan and make any necessary adjustments. You could also make time during family home evening to talk about the blessings your family has received as you've striven to follow your plan.

Emphasizing the Excellent

As they establish standards, many parents realize the need to examine their own media use. "When I started studying this topic, I felt prompted to raise the bar on my own media consumption," Sister Christensen says. "Think about the shows you watch when your children aren't around. It takes humility to make an honest assessment

of your own media choices, and keeping the standards yourself will give you the moral authority to teach your children."

One of the most important things you can do as a parent to help your children follow a media plan is to follow it yourself and emphasize the excellent in your media use. Set an example, and consider this counsel given by the Savior to an early Church member: "Govern your house in meekness, and be steadfast" (D&C 31:9).

Making a concerted effort to bring good media into your home will help your children avoid the bad. Here are some ideas:

- Visit the Church websites with your children and watch the Church videos together.
- Take advantage of the free music downloads on youth.lds.org and encourage your youth to do the same.
- Talk about good books you've read and seek out uplifting music and movies.
- Encourage your children to make positive uses of their time on the Internet.
- Follow Elder Ballard's counsel: "Take time to watch appropriate media with [your] children and discuss with them how to make choices that will uplift and build rather than degrade and destroy."⁶

Many families are striving to emphasize good media in their homes. "We encourage our children to use technology for good whenever possible," Sister Christensen writes. "At times, we've had a laptop in the kitchen where children can play games on the *Friend* website, and now our son is encouraged to help me with FamilySearch indexing. He also likes to explore the FamilySearch website and dabble in family history. I believe it is important that we show our children how to 'stand in holy places' online as well as in real life. They need to know the power for good that they have when they use technology correctly."



HEARTFELT UNDERSTANDING

"Teaching our children to understand is more than just imparting information. It's helping our children get the doctrine into their hearts in a way that it becomes part of their very being and

is reflected in their attitudes and behavior throughout their lives."

Cheryl A. Esplin, second counselor in the Primary general presidency, "Teaching Our Children to Understand," *Ensign*, May 2012, 10.



Conclusion

As we and our children understand the principles of good media and plan together, our families will find the strength to make good decisions. We won't need to fear the wild horses, for we can find the way to tame them for our family's benefit.

Sister Christensen and her husband found that this approach was the solution to their tablet problem. "During family home evening we carefully outlined the principles behind why we needed to make this rule change in our home. Some weeks previously, we had studied as a family Elder Quentin L. Cook's talk 'Lamentations of Jeremiah: Beware of Bondage' [*Ensign*, Nov. 2013, 88–91]. We reviewed the four ways we can be in bondage, and our children knew that some things, while not inherently bad, can put us into bondage because they use up our time and keep us from doing other things. It was easy for them to apply this principle to playing electronic games and to

accept our rule change. We were surprised and delighted at the mature reaction of our son, who even went so far as to delete the games off of the tablet himself."

The Lord will bless us as we help our children make good media choices and as we seek to bring uplifting media into our homes. Not only will we feel the satisfaction of knowing that our families are making good media choices, but more important, we will be giving our children the opportunity to feel the Spirit more strongly in our homes.

The author lives in Utah, USA.

NOTES

1. Linda S. Reeves, "Protection from Pornography—a Christ-Focused Home," *Ensign*, May 2014, 16.
2. Randall L. Ridd, "The Choice Generation," *Ensign*, May 2014, 58.
3. "Entertainment and Media" section, *For the Strength of Youth* (booklet, 2011), 11.
4. Carla Dalton, "Setting Family Standards for Entertainment," *Ensign*, June 2001, 27.
5. See M. Russell Ballard, "Be Still, and Know That I Am God" (Church Educational System devotional, May 4, 2014), lds.org/broadcasts.
6. M. Russell Ballard, "Let Our Voices Be Heard," *Ensign*, Nov. 2003, 19.