



Steps to take to protect your family re: technology and the Internet

Nicholas Black, Harvest USA; nicholas@harvestusa.org

1. **Keep this in mind:** Always keep in mind that implementing protective boundaries will **ONLY** work effectively as you begin and maintain an ongoing dialogue on the following:
 - a. **On sex and sexuality:** Talk about current issues, make them aware of the damage porn does to one's mind and character, and real-life relationships, and keep an interactive discussion on why the biblical worldview of sex is good (and how the sexual boundaries are there to protect what is good).
 - b. **Creating an environment in the home where honesty is valued.** It is way too easy to cover one's Internet tracks (you can no longer rely on the history of sites visited, as they can be easily erased, and private browsing windows are standard now). Link honesty with developing healthy, intimate and strong relationships. Honesty can only thrive in grace-filled environments (see below).
 - c. **Creating an environment in the home where problems are addressed with grace.** Issues, failures and sins are addressed with understanding, grace and constructive support, leading to a constant dependency upon Christ to live with sexual integrity. There is simply **NO** fail-proof *technological solution* to keeping pornography out of one's life. Talking with your children is the best method you have to protect them. To learn more how to talk to your kids about sex and sexuality, read our two mini books:
 - *i-Snooping on Your Kid: Parenting in an Internet World*, **mini book** by **HARVEST USA**, Nicholas Black, New Growth Press, 2012; www.harvestusa.org (> Learn > Browse our Store).
 - *Raising Sexually Healthy Kids*, **mini book** by **Harvest USA**, David White, New Growth Press, 2014; www.harvestusa.org (> Learn > Browse our Store).

2. **Start with your home:** Install a Wi-Fi filter on your router, so that every Internet-connected device (desktops, laptops, smartphones, tablets, iPod touches, game consoles, TV's) will have this bottom-line protection. This will provide filtering and accountability for going on the web via your home's Wi-Fi. **BUT NOTE:** some web sites like Tumblr will NOT be blocked by Wi-Fi filter software like OpenDNS (Tumblr is one of the most popular blogging sites but it is also the repository of one of the largest collections of porn). Why won't it be blocked? Because the URL is tumblr.com, and when you access the individual blog sections, the URL remains the same, and even though the "blog name" extension is given, some filters like OpenDNS do not block them individually.

This above example simply means that you will **ALWAYS** come across some sites that are pornographic (or borderline) that you will need to "blacklist" in the account settings.

 - a. Free: OpenDNS (www.opendns.com)
 - b. Paid: OpenDNS Home VIP (better customer support; web stats, etc.)
 - c. Paid: Pandora's Hope (Wi-Fi filter + router + annual subscription); www.cleanrouter.com
 - d. Paid: Circle (Wi-Fi filter + router + apps; no annual subscription)

- e. Another option: Go straight to filtering and/or accountability software by installing filters and accountability software on every one of your family's devices (most programs like Covenant Eyes, Accountable2U, etc. now allow multiple installations on a set number of devices for one price).
3. **Address the mobile problem.** If you go for the Wi-Fi protection option for your home, then for every Internet-connected device that accesses the web via a data plan, you still need to install either a filter and/or accountability software on EVERY device. If you don't do this, your child's smartphone or any web-connected device can bypass the Wi-Fi protections in your home and go straight to the web via the cell carriers data plan. Of course, mobile devices will be free to access the web outside the home with a data plan, so that must also be factored into your protection plan.
- a. Filters are porn blockers that have built-in parental protection levels (which generally can be adjusted). I recommend total filter blocking for young children.
 - b. Accountability software: No filtering or blocking, only recording (tracking) of what sites are visited. This is best for parents and for older teens (giving your kids more freedom to make wise choices and to discuss what sites they are visiting).
 - c. Lots of programs out there: Covenant Eyes, NetNanny, SafeEyes, Accountable2U, and lots more. Many have free trials for a time, so test out ones to see which one works best for you.
 - d. Parents are the accountability partners for their children. Spouses can be accountability partners for each other, but if one has a problem with pornography or sexual sin, it is best to have a close friend outside of the family do this. Wives (or husbands) should not be their partner's "porn police."
4. **Address the mobile problem 2:** It's still not that simple.
- a. Unfortunately, Apple devices do not work seamlessly with these filters and accountability software because apple is a vertical-integration company. In order to filter and track with an apple product, you must turn off the native web browser (Safari) in order to direct Internet traffic through the protection company's own web browser. That means setting restrictions in the settings of iPhones, iPads and iPod Touches and then password-protecting those restrictions to limit access so only you can set them. For apple devices, to turn on Restrictions: Go to Settings > General > Restrictions > Enable Restrictions > enter your passcode > turn off Safari. Keep this in mind: Accessing the web through the protection company's proprietary browser does degrade the speed and performance of the device, and that can be a problem for some. Safety vs. performance can become an issue here.
 - b. Android devices don't have the proprietary software/hardware issues like apple, so the protection coverage is generally better (i.e. you can use whatever web browser you want). But, there is a wide proliferation of Android phones with different OS (Operating Systems) systems and some have proprietary OS overlays, making it difficult to find a one-size-fits-all solution. Again, try out some systems and see what provides the best coverage and performance.

5. **Apps:** You cannot stop with just the above steps! The Internet is becoming eclipsed by apps on mobile devices. There are good apps, problematic apps (like Tumblr, Skype, YouTube, for e.g.), and dangerous apps (messaging apps like Snapchat, Kik, Yik Yak, Tinder, for e.g.). New apps are coming out daily, so it's important to know what apps your kids are using because new apps are coming out constantly.
 - a. Always know what apps are on your kid's devices. Look at their devices. Ask them what the app does. If you don't know what a particular app does, go online and search it out: Type in: "Is _____ safe for kids?" on a search engine. Read some of the links and form an opinion on its safety or lack thereof.
 - b. For young children, I recommend preventing them from downloading apps on their devices. Consider being the one in control of downloading any apps on your children's devices; in this way, they come to you first to discuss what apps they want to download. For apple devices, to turn on disabling apps: Go to Settings > General > Restrictions > Enable Restrictions > enter your passcode > turn off installing apps.
On Android devices: Open Google Play Store app > Touch the menu icon > Settings > Content filtering > choose your filter levels. (**NOTE:** the Google Play store, unlike the App Store with Apple, does contain highly problematic and pornographic apps, so setting content filters is critical).
 - c. Another thing you can do with apple devices is to set content levels for music, movies, TV shows, books, apps, websites, etc. : Go to Settings > General > Restrictions > Enable Restrictions > enter your passcode > Allowed Content > set levels.
 - d. **YouTube:** Unfortunately, YouTube is becoming coarser, and lots of porn sites use YouTube to show a milder form of porn that will have either links to the porn site or the address of the porn site listed. To filter out inappropriate content on YouTube: Open YouTube > scroll to bottom of page > click the Safety button to "On" > enter your Gmail password to lock it.

6. **Search Engines:** Search engines are the highways to porn today. Parental controls are absolutely essential on all devices. All search engines now have "Images" links and these can show very graphic images. Don't underestimate the type of porn that can be displayed on image searches. Even if you have a Wi-Fi blocker like OpenDNS, the Wi-Fi filter can block clicking through on the image thumbnail to the website of the image, but that's all—the pornographic image will still show in the thumbnail (See my comments on # 2 above, re: Tumblr).
 - a. I recommend Google's SafeSearch parental controls. They can be password protected, so a child cannot bypass the restrictions. SafeSearch blocks virtually all hardcore pornographic images, but occasionally some bad images do slip through. But the reduction is significant.
To set Google's SafeSearch controls: First, you'll need a Google account. Sign up for Gmail and set up a username and password > Open google.com for a search > Click on the gear settings icon in the upper right corner > Search settings > Filter explicit results > click the link: Lock SafeSearch > re-enter password > Click the Lock SafeSearch button > it is working when you see the colored balls in the upper right corner.
 - b. Yahoo and Bing have parental controls, but they are not password protected, so they can be easily bypassed by simply going into settings and turning it off.
 - c. Don't forget that you also need to put parental controls on the search engines of mobile devices. Again, I recommend using Google's so you can password protect the search engine.

- d. This brings up the necessity to prevent your kids from downloading alternative browsers on their mobile devices by limiting or blocking access to download apps (this pertains especially to apple devices).
 - e. IF you have accountability software on their devices, it will display what search terms they are looking at, however.
 - f. Remember, do not rely on looking at the history on any device anymore. Private browsing windows that don't leave a trace, selective deletion of sites visited, etc. make this unreliable.
7. **Social Media:** Wisdom and appropriate parental oversight is needed here. Porn may not be a problem on Facebook, but there are dangers pertaining to relationships and communication on all social media sites. Some social media is highly problematic: Tumblr, Twitter, and the plethora of messaging apps can and do display links to porn sites or material. Make sure you are your child's "Friend" on Facebook, and that you are in their "Circle" on Google+. Check these regularly, as children are immature when it comes to posting information that should not be distributed widely over the Internet. Set the safest settings on all social media sites (like "Friends Only" on Facebook).
8. **Passwords:** For young children, I recommend parents know all their kid's passwords, so if need be, they can access email and social media sites. But don't abuse doing that! It will erode the building of trust and the need for appropriate privacy as your kids get older.
9. **Friend's houses:** Sadly, a big variable here. I recommend knowing if your friend's parent's homes are utilizing safe Internet practices. If not, that can be a huge temptation for your child during times after school or on sleep-overs. Even if your child has protection software on their devices, they can view objectionable material on their friend's devices. Talk openly with your friend's parents on this matter. Don't ignore this step. Don't assume if your child's friends are Christian that they are taking all protective steps. And, alert your kids to the dangers if their friends are accessing porn at their home (see 1.b. above). Another reason to keep talking to them, because there will be multiple situations where they will need to exercise wisdom.
10. **TV:** Use parental controls, especially on Internet-connected TV's. Read the manuals to implement. Also, while Netflix lists a history of what has been watched, they are on the verge of coming out with a privacy option that will no longer list the titles of movies someone has viewed (and there is a lot of R-rated and sexual programming on their site). Same with Amazon video. Not sure about Hulu.