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All safety—including mobile and online safety—begins at home. The habits you exhibit about technology use in your home will be the same habits your children learn. Ask yourself what you consider appropriate or inappropriate uses of technology and then compare that with how you might be acting.

Do you use your phone at the dinner table? Do you text while talking with others? Do you instantly pull out your phone when a new message arrives? Do you text while driving? Do you use computers in public areas of the house or do you habitually bring them into your bedroom behind a closed door? Model the behavior you yourself expect from your children.

In addition to your living example, consider following some of these steps:

1) Use anti-virus, firewall, and anti-malware software. These software packages provide a baseline of protection. However, also make sure you and your children don’t visit file sharing web sites or open email attachments from people you don’t know or open attachments that look suspicious. Consider using a web filter (e.g. see covenanteyes.com or netnanny.com)

2) Put all computers in a public space. A central place in the house where you can see what is on the screen is preferred. Don’t put computers in children’s rooms. Refrain from using laptops in bedrooms or private areas. If computers absolutely must be put in a private room, have a policy that doors must be open when they are in use. Internet connected devices in concealed areas just offers children too much unnecessary temptation.

3) Review where your children go online. Let your children know that you will be periodically reviewing the sites that all of you, as a family, visit. Don’t do this in an authoritarian way, but rather as a way to engage your children in dialogue.

4) Teach Internet Safety. It may seem self-evident, but before you let your children have online access, teach them ethical behavior and Internet basics, which include: making sure they use strong passwords; don’t give out personal or identifiable information about themselves or their family; not talking to strangers online. Also remind children that...
5) **Review Internet Safety with your children**. Once you’ve taught your children some basics, review those basics and even do some role play. Just because you have told your children something doesn’t mean that they will be able to actually do it. Role playing can help. 

6) **Discuss what your children see online.** Interact with your children regularly about their online behavior. Computers are not baby sitters or a substitute for interactive parenting.

7) **Consider an online contract as a family.** Several web sites offer “family Internet use contracts” that clearly define the boundaries for Internet usage, what they should ask for, and permissible behavior. Both parents and children sign the contract. Examples can be found at www.faithandsafety.org.

8) **Review internet safety literature** and share as appropriate. You, your example, and your attitudes are among the most important parts of any safety plan for your family. Internet safety starts with you!

**MORE ONLINE RESOURCES**

**Children & Teens’ Internet Safety Sites:**

- **Webronauts Internet Academy:** [http://pbskids.org/webronauts/](http://pbskids.org/webronauts/)
- **PBS Kids game that helps younger children understand the basics of Internet behavior and safety.**
- **NS Teens:** [http://www.nsteens.org/](http://www.nsteens.org/)
  A program of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children that has interactive games and videos on a variety of Internet safety topics.

**FOR PARENTS:**

- **Common Sense Media**
  https://www.commonsensemedia.org/parent-concerns
  A comprehensive and frequently updated site that is packed with resources. Dedicated to improving the lives of kids and families by providing information and education.

- **Family Online Safety Institute:** [http://www.fosi.org/](http://www.fosi.org/)
- **iKeepSafe:** [http://www.ikeepsafe.org/](http://www.ikeepsafe.org/)
  Resources for parents, educators, kids and parishes on navigating mobile and social media technologies.

- **Faith and Safety:** [http://www.faithandsafety.org](http://www.faithandsafety.org)
  Safety in a digital world, a joint project of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and Greek Orthodox Church in America.

**Cell phones and children**

In his commentary on Ephesians 6:4, St. John Chrysostom wrote, “Let everything take second place to our care for our children, our bringing them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. If from the beginning we teach them to love true wisdom, they will have greater wealth and glory than riches can provide.”

For the saints of the Church, raising our children responsibly and instructing them in the ways of the Lord is our chief responsibility. When it comes time to give your child a cell phone, it’s important to take St. John Chrysostom’s words to heart. Don’t simply give them the phone. Rather, teach them responsible and appropriate uses. Engage them in an ongoing dialogue. Help them cultivate good habits.

“With great power comes great responsibility” is a phrase frequently used in the Spiderman comic books. That phrase is also applicable to children and cell phones. Cell phones are powerful communication tools that can easily be misused and abused. Help your child understand the great responsibility that comes with the privilege of a cell phone. Through your Christ-centered guidance, you will be fulfilling the words of St. John Chrysostom with those entrusted in your care.