

Digital Citizenship and Internet Safety

There is a crazy online world out there, and it is one many of us are not familiar with having grown up in different time where there was far, far less access to the internet, phones, etc. God's word reminds us in 2 Timothy 1:7 that "God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." This online world can be alarming, so we should educate ourselves and our children about the safety concerns and how to ensure we are using these resources as safely as possible.

First, the internet is made up of three main parts: the surface web, the deep web, and the dark web. The surface web includes what you will find in your typical google searches, and it makes up about 4% of the internet. The deep web is the largest part of the internet comprising about 90% of the internet. This part contains legal documents, government records, scientific reports, academic records, and financial records. This is the part of the internet the hackers want, so they can use it for the dark web which is about 6% and includes drugs and other illegal info.

Schools and children under 18 are now the number one target of cyber-criminals because information about them can be used for identity theft purposes and the crime can go unnoticed for many years. It is important to protect social security numbers, DOBs, PIN numbers, and passwords for everyone, including minors. Criminals use phishing, which is the fraudulent use of sending emails or other messages and pretending to be from reputable companies in order to entice individuals to reveal personal information, such as passwords, and credit card numbers. It is recommended to never click links in emails asking for this confidential information. Go to the website directly or call the institute requesting the information to make sure everything is as it should be.

In addition to being very cautious to protect the data of your family, the applications on phones can also lead to many problems if not used carefully. An algorithm is a set of instructions for solving a problem or accomplishing a task. Algorithms are a low-key way social networks draw us in and keep us paying attention. Most people today have many applications on their phones constantly accessing the algorithms. It's almost an addiction for young people and adults alike. Some information to consider about some popular apps:

1. Tik Tok is owned by Chinese Company ByteDance. There are 150 million American users. That is 45% of the US population. It is currently banned on US Federal Devices as well as NATO equipment.
2. SnapChat originated as a way to send pictures that would disappear after a set period of time. It quickly became the preferred to send nude pictures and videos.
3. WhatsAPP is an internet-based texting/messaging app. It is end-end encrypted and very secure. It currently has over 2 billion users worldwide. (This is also known as the cheater's app since it does not show up on phone bills.)
4. Onlyfans was created in 2016 as a subscription-based service where you can pay for photos, videos, and live streams. There are currently 1.5 million creators and 170 million registered subscribers.

AI is the simulation of human intelligence processes that are carried out by a computer. AI uses data collected by many of the previous apps mentioned.

Another dark web aspect is sexting: 90% of teens report that their friends are actively engaged in sexting. Sexting is sending or receiving sexually explicit videos, photographs, or texts via mobile phone or another digital device. By age 8 over 10% of kids have been exposed to sexting and by age 14 that numbers climbs to 50%. (Innocent Lives Foundation 2022)

Finally, Human Trafficking is a crime that involves forcing a person to provide labor or services, or to engage in commercial sex acts. In the United States, on average, every two minutes, a child is bought or sold for sex. The average age of a child sold for sex is 13 years old. Human trafficking is the second-fastest growing criminal industry, just behind Drug Trafficking. (TBI 2022) Grooming is the process a human trafficker uses to identify and ultimately control someone for the purpose of trafficking them. Children are most often groomed through game consoles where the trafficker pretends to be a minor close to the same age as the victim. Communication often moves to a cell phone with an app such as WhatsApp where sexting is requested. The trafficker then blackmails the victim from photos or videos sent and uses them to solicit more of those items.

In conclusion, what are some ways we can help teens with these issues? Pray with and for your children. Withhold phones and gaming devices as long as possible. Make sure children and teens know you are responsible for what is on their devices and that you will be checking them regularly. Talk to them, and have open and honest conversations. Look at your child's phone and the apps they have on them. Some free options to monitor apps are: *Use Screentime* for iPhone and *Digital Wellbeing* and *parental controls* for android. Paid options include [bark.us](https://www.bark.us) and [qustodio.com](https://www.qustodio.com), and each of these are \$99 per year. Remember 2 Timothy 1:7, "For God hath not given us a spirit of fear but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."

*Summary of presentation by Wade Haney. Wade is happy to do presentations at churches and events. He can be reached wahaney@comcast.net.

Article written by Ashlee Korte, homeschooling mom to two, and Oliver Springs shop owner for *Loren Grace Boutique and Gifts*.