

There were so many great questions asked by those in attendance at the Faith and Technology Forum that we did not have time to ask. Below are some of those questions with responses, suggestions, and resources provided by our local experts.

1. *Is there one social media platform that's "safer" for our kids than others? If we only allowed one or two accounts for our kids, what would be the wisest?*

The truth is, all social media platforms have some sort of feature, like explore or discover, that cannot be monitored. This means there is no way to filter content and also no way to control what others send, post, or message your child. In fact, Snapchat, the platform used most by teens, is probably the most dangerous when it comes to the ability to monitor because it was actually created with "privacy" in mind.

- Sarah Vander Wiele, Students Associate

It is really less about what social media platform your child is using and more about helping them create an internal filter so they can use social media wisely. I encourage parents to check out the very helpful website, [Protect Young Eyes](#), that helps parents create safer digital spaces. It provides detailed information about each social media platform and suggestions on how to protect kids, including videos for kids to watch in order to understand digital safety themselves.

- Lindsey Lehtinen, Licensed Clinical Social Worker

Matthew gave a great approach to how to onboard our kids onto technology, safely and responsibly during the Faith and Technology Forum. You may also consider a "two sticky" rule, similar to how we think about serving in our local church in a sustainable way. What two social media platforms would you want your kids to be on? By limiting them to a few platforms from the beginning, it may help them, and you, avoid being overwhelmed.

- Nick Skytland, Explorer & Technologist

2. *How can I learn more about technology so I don't feel so ignorant/unequipped? Is there a good starting point to learn about the issues and applications?*

There are a lot of great resources out there, including [clearcreekresources.org](#) to begin learning about the issues and applications surrounding technology. A few of my other favorites include: [Desiring God](#), [FaithTech](#), and [Indigitous \(Cru\)](#).

- Nick Skytland, Explorer & Technologist

3. *As a professional I have never experienced social media for kids being healthy. Why do you allow/ encourage SM when they are so neg impacted by it?*

This is always a difficult and personal decision when it comes to parenting. There is not one perfect way to decide about social media, but as a church, we know that most of our students are on social media, regardless of whether we want them to be. Our hope is to model for students how to be present in social media and be a light within it, without letting it become consuming or negative. We also try to be discerning about which social media platforms we utilize based on how the platform engages with the student. For example, we do not have a SnapChat account because it is mostly used for direct messaging, which does not align with our purpose of being involved in the lives of students and because the messages disappear and cannot be tracked, which just is not helpful or safe.

– Sarah Vander Wiele, Students Associate

4. *In what ways can parents' social media usage impact their kids' media habits and corresponding mental health?*

In all areas of life, parents need to model for our kids what we hope they will emulate and technology is no different. We need to not only tell them, but *show* them how to use it wisely. Do we look our kids in the eyes while we are talking to them or do we look at our phones? Do we have rhythms in our homes where devices are put aside, like dinner time? Do our kids sense that we care and we are listening or do they see us as continually distracted? Disconnecting from technology and connecting with our kids will not only model responsible habits, but also have positive impact on their overall mental health.

– Lindsey Lehtinen, Licensed Clinical Social Worker

5. *How can we help to develop our teens' internal filters? And how does that internal filter differ from the echo chambers that many experience on social media?*

Like, Matthew mentioned during the forum, requiring your kids to take a driver's education course *before* you hand them the keys is a great way to help kids develop their own filters and understand social media before they are actually using it. For example, you can require that your child watch video lessons based on their age on [Protect Young Eyes](#) before you give them a smartphone or allow social media applications. Examples of these videos include: "Watch Out for Tricky People," "Watch Out for Bad Pictures," "My Words Have Power," and "No Digital Secrets." There are also programs you can buy that are self-paced workshops for your child to complete to help strengthen your child's internal filter, like [Family Tech University](#). Notice, I did say that you, as the parent, can *require* these things. Finally, approach your kids with curiosity and ask questions such as: How do you feel when

you get off of social media? How does engaging in social media strengthen your friendships? Never underestimate the power of talking to your child.

– Lindsey Lehtinen, Licensed Clinical Social Worker

6. How much are our teens missing if we don't allow them to be on social media? Is it possible for them to still be connected to their peers?

This generation by nature is very centered on social media, so unfortunately, they will likely feel as if they are missing out if they are not allowed social media at all. However, I do think it's possible to create a solution where they can text friends, be involved, and stay connected with friends without social media. It will definitely take more work on their part and, yes, they will still "miss" stuff. But hopefully a genuine friend group will be understanding and inclusive. As a parent, this can be helped when an effort is made to create fun experiences that don't involve their phones. For example, everyone leaves their phone in a bin and you help make S'mores, or play a game, or whatever it is that produces experiences that aren't virtual.

– Sarah Vander Wiele, Students Associate

While I believe it is possible for teens to be connected with their peers without social media, your teen might not think so. In general, it is not best for your teen to only be interacting with peers online. One way to think about this is to encourage your teen to have enough activity in their life to keep their minds and bodies busy, like after-school jobs, youth group, or extracurricular activities, so that they are connecting with peers naturally in these environments. Many teens do communicate primarily through apps like Snapchat, but there are also teens whose close friends will contact them directly about plans instead. It might take some creativity and definitely intentionality, but it is possible for them to still be connected!

– Lindsey Lehtinen, Licensed Clinical Social Worker

7. How do you monitor what your kids see on their friends' phones?

The short answer is, you can't. There is no way to monitor it all, but if you have helped your child create an internal filter (see question 7 above), they will begin to monitor the content they come across themselves. However, it is important to say to our children, "If you ever see anything that is concerning, you can always come to me. You will not be in trouble," and mean it. We want our kids to trust us to be a safe place to come with their questions.

– Lindsey Lehtinen, Licensed Clinical Social Worker

8. *I just want to raise my kids in a safe environment with social media. How do we allow social media in our home and keep our kids safe?*

Unfortunately, there is no perfect or clean cut answer. I don't think there is a way to fully protect our kids on social media all the time because there are too many factors at play and not enough ways to regulate it ourselves. This is why knowing our kids is so important: know where they are and how they are maturing; know their friends! Another helpful way to protect them at home is to require phones and social media access to be in public spaces like the living room and kitchen and not in their bedrooms. Like Lindsey mentioned in Question 7, create spaces where your kids can talk about what they've seen and there is trust if something popped up that wasn't okay. There is no perfect way to create a completely safe environment, but the best way to protect our kids is to build trust that grows as your child grows.

– Sarah Vander Wiele, Students Associate

9. *What does a personal strategy for someone's social media account look like? Is posting non-Christian stuff still okay?*

Everyone's strategy can and will look different, there is no formula for Christian social media accounts. However, the most important thing to keep in mind is authenticity—*be who you are*. Social media is a secondary community, meaning it's only a portion of your life. So if by "non-Christian" we mean sermons, bible verses, or prayers, then yes, it is definitely okay (and I would say required!) to post other content. Really, if you are a Christian, *everything you post* is in fact "Christian", because that is who you are! Be who you are: authentically Christian. More than just a social media strategy, we should think about a personal strategy in terms of living the Christian life in all areas (see our [Spiritual Formation Grid](#)), and use that to inform how we interact with our online community.

– Jon Crump, Digital Communications Director