



Parenting in Today's Tech

There was a day when we were all young. *We* were the rebels. *We* were the anti-establishment. *We* knew way more than our parents. The world was against us and *We* were out to show it that we would not be held down. But then we grew up.

Now many of us are **parents** and we now see the world from the other side. But every night we look across the dinner table to our children who now possess that same vigor, that same power, that same drive, that same cluelessness, that we once held ourselves. Yes. Indeed. *We* are old. Their world is not what ours was.

Gone are the phones that were once tethered to the wall. And along with this evolution comes a new and disturbing trend that is escalating greatly as we move forward in internet advancement. It seems like every week I encounter families whose teen or pre-teen has made a very bad choice on the internet. Now, I know what some of you are thinking. *Oh, I hope Scotty doesn't mention my child's name! He was just here!* The fact is, this is very common. Unfortunately a great number of parents that I work with have children who've made bad choices on the internet. It's not necessarily a reflection on us as parents. It's almost unavoidable. So today I'd like to share a few things I've learned in watching this trend unfold. I'm going to be candid in what your child's life is like on the internet today. I'll give you my take on it, both as a school teacher of 15 years and from the experience I've gained over the last several years as an Apple consultant. I'll share what I've learned about children over the years from having watched them from both perspectives and I'll offer some advice that you can take or leave.



So get ready. This is going to be a long one.

First, my own disclosure. I am by no means the perfect parent. I've made plenty of mistakes in the upbringing of my own child. And yes, my child too, has made plenty of bad choices on the internet (of which I will not go in to details about to avoid embarrassment. Some of his friends may be reading this.) My intentions today are to scare you, shock you, and possibly make you a bit mad in the hope that you'll be a little more equipped with how to deal with what is, or may soon be, happening in your child's life on the internet. So keeping in mind that I'm talking to the masses, let's get started. (if you have no children or they're grown, feel free to skip down to the end of the newsletter where I start bashing time capsule...and congrats. You're out of the jungle.)

The Truth Hurts

Your child is not innocent. They are fooling you. And you are buying it hook, line and sinker. They know your weaknesses. They know you're not going to check their devices every day. They know your iTunes account password even if you don't think they do. Your child has an Instagram account even if they say they don't. They are leading you to believe they are innocent and they have you eating right out of the palm of their hand.

You know those terrible things you never want your child to see on the internet? They've already seen them. The conversation you thought you were going to have in a couple more years about bees and birds? It needs to happen right now. **Assume the worst.** If you take *this* approach then you'll be much more in the loop when it comes time to actually dig in to your child's world. 10 years ago, kids were busy stealing music. Nobody steals music anymore. Kids don't even buy music. They just use Youtube or Spotify, or Pandora. While us old people are still organizing our playlists in iTunes, your kids are saying "*there's music in iTunes? I thought that was just for buying tv shows.*" 5 years ago, all the cool kids had gmail accounts. Your kid doesn't use email. They know it exists and that the old people at their school may have given them one but no one under the age of 16 is sitting around checking email. 3 years ago, your child wanted a Facebook account. Today, Facebook is for old people.

Your child's life is now filled with one or several of the following: Minecraft, Instagram, Clash of the Clans, Kik, SnapChat, Omegle, textforfree, ask.fm, and the list goes on. We're not going to go through what each one of these does. Most of you already have at least a vague understanding of what the above mentioned services/apps/sites do. Do yourself a favor. Stop reading this right now and go to omegle.com. Explore. I'll wait.....

.....Ok. You're back. That is your child's life. Remember a moment ago up top when I recalled the days that we thought we were all smarter than our parents then I later inferred that we realized we weren't? Well your child IS smarter than you. Times have changed. They've *been there and done that* on the internet. They've **already** seen things we consider inappropriate. They've seen their friends say disgusting things. They've seen the worst pictures you can imagine that their friends have shared with them. Some of these pictures have confused them. Some of these pictures frightened them. They're growing up in a world we can't relate to. Now some of you are saying, "*Not my child. Scotty's not talking about my child. My child is a perfect angel. My child is innocent.*" You may be right. You may have that 1% child. Maybe your child is impervious to the dangers of the internet. Maybe your child has no friends and your child doesn't have a device and your child has never left your home. If that's the case, then, no, I'm not talking to you. But if you keep the mindset that your child can do no wrong then you'll have a front row seat to the catastrophic events about to unfold in your household. So what do we do as parents?

What do we do?

The answer is: Be a Parent.

Be a Parent

Protecting your child from what the internet offers can not come from anything that I install on your network. It can't come from an app you read about in Walt Mossberg's WSJ column. Protecting your child comes from you alone. No one else has your child's best interests in mind other than yourself. Yes, I can install filtering software and have done so with many families but if you were paying attention, I was very clear to say nothing beats good parenting. Filtering software blocks many bad terrible places on the internet. But notice I used the word "many". I didn't say "all". But I want to stress that the "bad websites" on the internet are no longer the major threat facing your child's innocence. 5 years ago that was all we needed to worry about. "*I don't want my child going to pornographic websites*". If I were to ask you what you think the biggest threat to your child is on the internet, I would bet that most of you might say something like "*I don't want my child to talk to some stranger.*" You think that some stranger is going to come and steal your child away because they met them on the internet. So your mind set is **stranger-danger**. That is absolutely a possibility. That is a very real danger. I 100% agree that could happen. Your child could also be struck by lightning. Your child could be abducted at the bus stop. So we teach our children to have common sense. Don't get into a car with a stranger. Don't stand outside during a lightning storm. Don't share your personal information with people over the internet. But that is NOT the largest threat to your child's well being when it comes to technology. But while we consume ourselves in the thought that our children could be snatched up because they shared a picture on Instagram, your child is living on a completely different planet. And by thinking only about strangers and bad sites on the internet, we are missing the real danger.

Show me your friends and I'll tell you who you are.

The real threat to your child's well being on the internet is their friends. Yes, your neighbor's kids. In other words, themselves. As I've discussed with many families already, as of 2014, your daughter's social status at school is based on how many followers they currently have within the given app of the day. And that favorite photo-sharing, texting, or social app changes every few months, especially in private schools. Your 12-14 year old daughter is desperate to get followers on Instagram right now. And how do you think a young girl might get followers? What interesting type of pictures could she post that may get her noticed and increase her follow numbers? I'll leave you to answer that question on your own. And that is what I mean by bad choices on the internet. Here it is in a nut shell. Girls want to be seen and boys want to see. Girls figure this out rather quickly and use that to their advantage to increase follower numbers because within the little clique of friends your daughter has, the girl with the most followers runs the show. Now by 15 years old or so, your daughter has grown out of that or is socially and morally aware enough not to place that much emphasis on followers. But at 12-14, that is their life. It is the most important element to their life.

I've found that often, younger kids 10-11 have multiple Instagram accounts for one of the following reasons:

A: they're still figuring how it works.

B: they are trying to hide from their parents.

But they quickly realize that having multiple Instagram accounts means that having 2 accounts are hurting their follower numbers. So by 12, they just using one. By the way, if you have a son, he's constantly looking for cute girls to follow. But don't expect his follower numbers to be as high as your daughters. So how do you even begin to deal with this?

Don't make an Instagram account for yourself and think "*I'll follow my child.*" Remember your child is smarter than you are. Don't follow your child. **Be your child.** Download Instagram onto your own phone and log in as them. Watch their world. You'll have to give up the pleasure of having your own account. Sorry parent. No Instagram account for you personally. Now if you are currently saying "*but how do I get my child's Instagram password*" then you have bigger issues to deal with. Let's talk about that. I have observed that there are two types of families when dealing with clients. There are the families where the parents are in charge and there are the families where the children are in charge. If you've ever watched the Dog Whisperer you know there can only be one Alpha. And I often see the child is the alpha in the home. So let's put this to the test to see which your family is. Right now. I mean right now, go pick your child's device up and enter the password. I'll wait.....

.....ok. How did that go? If you immediately turned around in your chair just now and said "*Sally, bring me your phone.*" You lose. You just gave them the opportunity to make adjustments before handing it to you including letting you in. They are the alpha. I said **go pick it up.** If your child said something like "*why are you looking at my phone?*" you lose. This means you aren't looking into your child's world often enough.



They are the alpha. If you did what I said and you picked up your child's phone but found that you don't know the passcode, you lose. They are the alpha because you can't get in to their phone. Your child knows you are too old to understand their world so they lock their phones and run wild inside it. If you picked up the phone, your child said nothing, and you got right in, congratulations. You are awesome. But for everyone else, you may need to re-establish your dominance once again in the home. Now for the bad news. If you're not currently the alpha and you want to become the alpha, they're not going down without a fight. Just remember, you pay the bill. Do you have the right to go into your child's room? Do you have the right to look through your child's book bag? Then you should have the right to pick up their device and look through it at any time. I've suggested the following strategy with several families in the past. After talking with your child, try making the rule that if you

pick up their device and you get the password wrong, they lose the phone. This means that when they change the password, it must be disclosed to you. Ultimately you are in control of your child's world. It really comes down to whether you chose to be or not.

So why are your children changing their passwords so often? Because they already know what I just told you earlier. Their biggest enemy online is their friends. In some cases, even their own brothers or sisters. If I pick up your child's phone and just start randomly texting or posting, I could do a lot of damage to your child's social life very quickly. They password-protect their devices because, more than their fear of what mom or dad might see, they are scared of what their friend might type and send out in their name. So they are very protective of their phones because their phones represent who they are in their social circle. If I grab your daughter's phone and post "*I just heard that Sally is pregnant*", there's going to be major major trouble the next day. If I grab your son's phone and post "*I heard that Johnny likes Sally*" then the end of the world is near. So how do you work your way into this seedy world known as the teenage years? There are several ways.

After you've established that you have the right to pick up your child's phone/iPad at any time (good luck with that one) then it's time to move to phase two. What apps are they using to communicate? What apps will they be using next month? If your child is using your Apple ID to purchase or download free apps (and in my opinion they should be) then you're heading in the right direction. Go to settings/iTunes and App Store and turn on apps syncing. This means that the apps your child is purchasing will land on your device. Now it's time to step up as a parent. Don't be the parent whose phone is just filled with 147 children's games. Delete everything that is innocent. You don't need to keep the cake baking app. You don't need to keep Zombie Apocalypse 2013. Although those do pose another threat we'll get to in a moment. After you've deleted all the apps you don't need, sit back and wait the the next app your child downloads to land on your device. You are a parent. You have to give up the right to have a clean perfect phone. Once the new app lands there, open it. Explore it. Is it a social app? A texting app? A picture posting app? Does it require a user to create a username and password? If it does then the next steps you take are directly toward your child to get the username and password they've just created to sign in. Then you sign in to the same app on your phone and watch the conversation with the same username and password and monitor. Some apps like Instagram will sync. Others (crappy texting apps they download for a day) will often not sync posts, texts or conversations. So you still have to rely on the supreme power of picking up your child's phone unannounced. aka: be the alpha.

Enable restrictions

Their iOS device has some nice preventative measures built in but 95% of us don't know they exist. On their devices go to settings/general/restrictions. Put in a 4 digit code that only you will ever know. You'll be asked to put it in again. Now you have a world of settings that you can better control. You can choose to turn the camera off, turn off in-app purchases. I feel like everyone should turn off in-app purchases. You can disable GPS information from going out within pictures that are shared. That's a

great idea if you're still worried about the stranger-danger thing. You can block (some) adult content on websites within Safari. But remember, there are plenty of other browsers out there so your kids can allow find a way around if they have their heart set on it.

There is a small chance that when you go to enable restrictions on your child's device, your child may have beaten you to it. I sometimes see a case where the child saw "restrictions" and thought they could enable it to lock others out of something. They didn't understand what they were doing and inadvertently locked you and themselves out of those settings because the chances are very good they forgot the 4 digit number. If that is the case, the only way to solve it is to restore the device. Not fun. For more information on restrictions go [here](#).

While this next part may be a hard pill to swallow, it may be a good strategy. Your children do not want you in their world. As we discussed, the main reason they lock their phones is to keep their peers from texting pretending to be them etc... but make no mistake. Your child is having a party on their phone and you are not invited. But why are they so scared of you looking into their world? It's generally not because they're afraid of what they've posted, they're scared for you to see what their friends have posted. They assume the first time you see that Johnny posted that Sally is pregnant, you're going straight to the phone and calling Johnny's or Sally's mom and tell them what their child said on the internet. And while, your child may have had nothing to do with it, now their name is mud and they've been blackballed from the group because they have a parent who rats the other kids out. So now comes a big decision. Being a parent is full of them. Can you compromise with your child? Can you say to your child:

You are my most important thing to me in the world. Not Sally down the street. I care about YOU and love YOU. And I want to make sure that YOU are safe and making good decisions in your social world. You, my lovely child, promise to me that you will include me in your life, and I, your loving parent, will promise to focus on you, my child, and let Sally's mom focus on Sally.

That's a very hard deal to make because you are going to see Sally's mom tonight at book club and you may not be able to hold back about what was posted on Instagram. That's where you'll have to use your own discretion. I've tried to draw a frame for you and it's up to you to add the details on how you will be a parent. Every family is different. Ultimately it's up to you to find a way in to your child's life. Your child will only grow up once and the world they live in is not the Facebook world of three years ago. And it will be completely different in three years from now. Now comes the part where you have to establish trust with your child. Trust goes both ways. If you can create an environment where your child feels safe bringing things that happen in their world to you without the fear of retribution against them or the friends then you win. You won't have to monitor nearly as much because they will disclose what's going on without you having to ask.

Remember that when you were young, you may or may not have had a phone in your room with a dial. An actual dial. And that phone had a cord connected to it. Your child's social world is changing quickly and it's up to you to try to keep up. **Vine** allows your child to post 15 seconds of video of themselves instantly to the world. (By the way, that may be eating through your data plan if they're not using your wi-fi home network... you know who you are) We are giving our children, you are giving your daughters, a 4 inch device with a live video camera on it, kissing them on the head and sending them to bed. You had a rotary phone with a cord attached to the wall and your child has more computing power and live video in their bedrooms than the Apollo missions. As I've said to a few parents, I was a boy once. And at 13, I would have loved to have a live video feed into my girlfriends bedroom. *"Good night Sally. Here's a video camera. I totally trust you."*

Show Me the Money

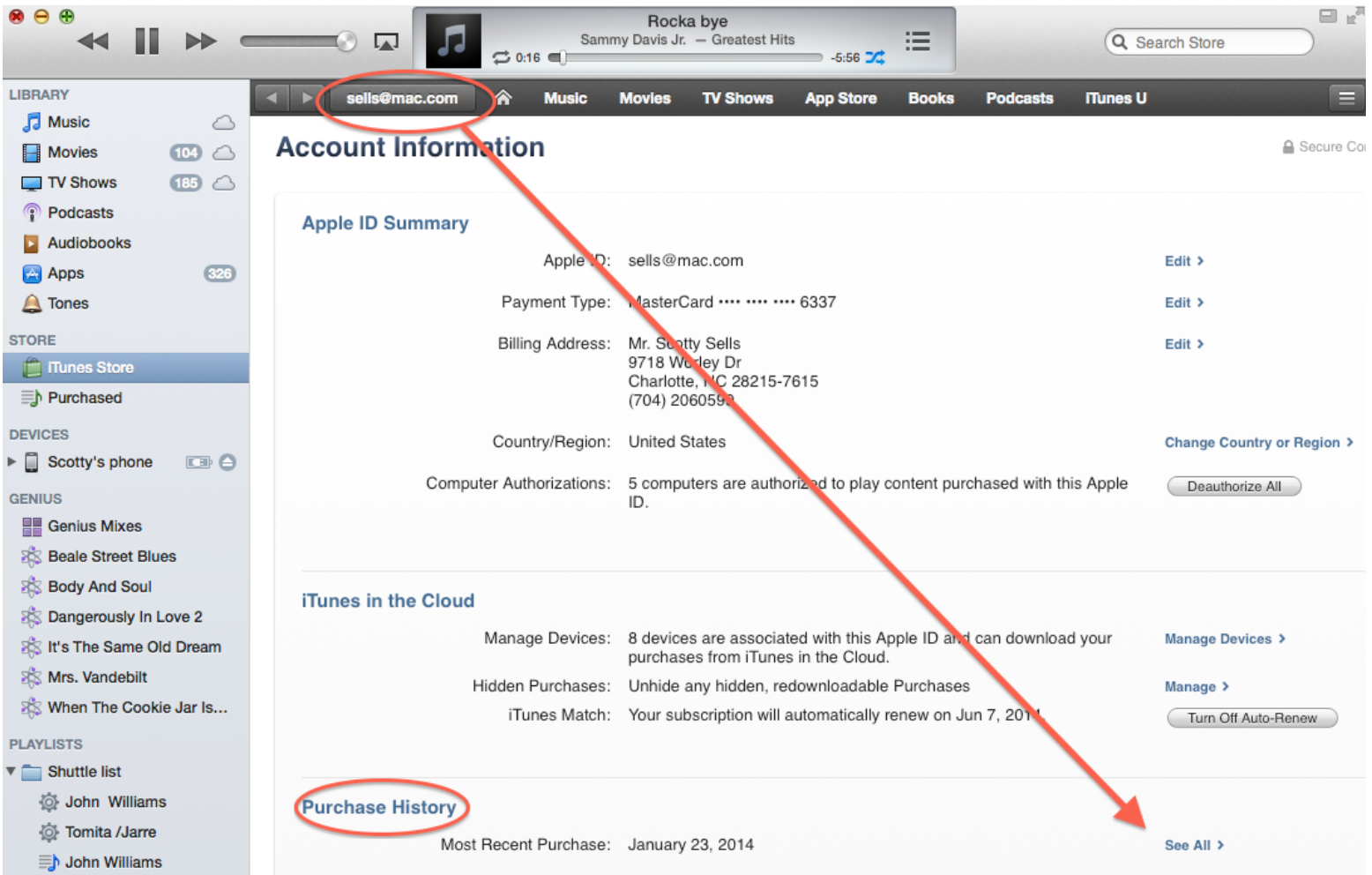
We've covered the threat of child's internet social world. Now let's talk about all money that's leaking out of your bank account that you have no idea about. Here's great teachable moment for your child. Nothing in life is free. The number of paid apps has gone down-down-down and the number of free apps has gone up-up-up. Developers have realized that if they give level one of an app away then charge for levels 2 through 99, they're positioned to make \$98 versus the \$4.99 they would have charged for the full game. Level one of Clash of the Clans is free. Level two is not. Your child (remember the one that supposedly doesn't know your password?) knows something you don't know. He doesn't have to know your password. He brings you the phone. *"Mom/Dad, can I download this app? It's free."* He hands you the phone. You proudly put in the password to authorize the app because you're living in the fantasy world that he doesn't know it, you hand him back the phone. He now has 15 minutes to make in-app purchases without having to re-enter the password. Keep in mind that your children are, at all times, playing Vanna White with your passwords. They are constantly watching your fingers as you type and they're very good at it. Ok, the pw starts with the letter B. 2 days later...Ok, the pw ends with 68. 3 hours later. Ok, it ends with 4 numbers, the last two of which are 68. The next day...Ok, there are two t's in the word in the middle. It starts with a B, has two t's in the middle, ends with four numbers, the last two of which are 68. Got it. Mom's password is "Butterfly1968". But don't tell her that we know it. Let's play it cool and use it when we need it.



If you are like me, you may have a very old Apple ID that is associated to an email address you no longer use. You left Bell South long ago and I told you not to create another Apple ID. But you no longer use that bell south email address. That's correct. But what I forgot to tell you was to go into your Apple ID and assign a new email

address to the Apple ID that's based on an old email address. It's very confusing I know. But for some of you, I'm guessing 20%, you haven't seen an iTunes receipt for downloaded or paid items in years. Because Apple is sending it to an email address you no longer have. Why is this important? Your child may be making in-app purchases you have no idea are taking place. If this is you, go to appleid.apple.com and log in using your Apple ID and password. Check to see that the email address is current. Now the next sentence is very important! I'm not telling you to change that Apple ID from your old email you no longer use. I'm telling you that if you don't see receipts from iTunes for purchases or downloads, go make sure the email address associated to the Apple ID is current, even if the Apple ID itself is not. It is totally 100% possible to have an old Apple ID scotty@bellsouth.net whose receipts are emailed to scotty@sellsconsulting.com.

Another way to see what's going on with your money is to use iTunes to look at purchase history. Select iTunes store, log in using the Apple ID your children use, then select all. You'll see the most recent purchases on the account.



Now I may be showing my age here but, the whole parent child internet dance reminds me of **Hogan's Heroes**. Remember that show from the 70's where Col. Hogan and his buddies were prisoners of war in Germany and the commanding officer, Col. Klink had no idea they were running major military operations directly from within the prison camp, right under Klink's nose? And Sargent Shultz, the German guard would see it all happening right in front of him, but just turned a blind eye saying "*I see nothing! I see nothing!*" Well, a lot of us are sort of like that. As parents we are tasked with guarding our children against the world. We could choose



to be Klinks and have absolutely no clue what's going on. We could choose to be Shultz's and just pretend it's not happening. Or we could be real commanding officers and get ahold of the plans your kids are making with their friends to blow up the bridge and smuggle the double secret agents to safety on the train heading out of Berlin at 5am. In Hogan's Heroes, Hogan knew he was smarter than the Germans and he didn't do things by himself. The prisoners were a team. Your children are a team. Every day in the lunch room they hold strategy briefings in the lunch room on how to work around what the parents have put in to place. They know you think looking at their browser history makes you feel good so they don't clear it. That's an amateur's move. They go into their history and selective remove the sites they don't want you to know they've visited. Or they jump over to the neighbor's wi-fi to work around the OpenDNS parental controls that guy Scotty put on last time he was here.

Nothing beats watching what your child is doing as often as possible. "*How do I do that?*" By being a visible parent. Make unannounced visits into your child's iPad or iPhone. Don't rely on Verizon, AT&T, OpenDNS, Apple iPhone parental controls, or some restriction app the Wall Street Journal recommends. Rely on the relationship you build with your child to be open with you. Gain their trust by ensuring that you won't destroy their social ecosystem (except in extreme circumstance of course-you never know what Sally could be getting in to next). Build a relationship where your child is eager to disclose what's going on in their iOS lives. Teach them that trust works both ways. Keep an eye on what apps they're using, what they say within those apps. Have the ability to pick your child's device up at any time without a struggle. Put consequences in place if a rule or condition is broken. If you do only that, you win. Looking at your child's phone is essentially the same as sitting down at their table in the lunch room. If they know you're listening (and you have every right to listen) then they might make better choices. You'll know when it's time to give them their space.

I recently conducted an experiment of my own in Instagram. I did a random search and found a couple teenagers in Argentina and started following them. All the posts were in Spanish so I had no idea what they were saying but their profiles were public so all I had to do was click and their world was on my phone. So I decided to see how many of their friends with private accounts would allow me to follow them. After all, I'm following other people they know. Out of around 20 teens that I requested to follow (if their profile is private, you must request to follow) almost all of them allowed me to follow them. These kids allowed a grown man in the United States that runs a computer consulting business to follow them. I didn't pretend to be anything other than I was. My Instagram name was sellsconsulting and my website was listed in my profile. I originally did it so I could pull out my phone during a session and show parents how easy it is to look inside an average teenager's life, but the pictures became so unpredictably uncomfortable that I finally ended the experiment and un-followed them because it was becoming borderline creepy. 95% of your children would allow a total stranger to follow them (and remember that's without even pretending to be a teenager) just so they can get their follower numbers up. Now, don't you think you need to see what your child is posting and what they're seeing? Not only because creepy apple consultants might be watching them but also so that you are in the loop with what their friends post and say. I'm glad I don't speak Spanish.

As you can see, parenting is one of my favorite subjects that I care deeply about. Having been a school teacher for 15 years before going into consulting, I'd like to think I've learned a lot about children. It's the combination of that experience plus the last several years of going into home after home and dealing first hand with children and the mistakes they've made, I can usually see in a child's eye right off and tell whether they feel like they've got their parents beat or not. Have conversations with your child about what's going on in their technological social world. Assume they've seen and heard bad things. Prepare them for the worst— Create a safe environment where they feel they can bring you the inappropriate picture Sally posted and you can talk about it without the fear that you'll hurt their own image socially. You'll never be better than them at their social world but if they see you are at least trying to keep up, maybe that will be enough.

If you have a 7-13 year old son and you've not yet received an over \$200 bill from iTunes for in-app purchases then consider yourself lucky. If you have a daughter and have not yet gotten a call from the school about your child's involvement in a plot to destroy the life of the girl that lives down the street, consider yourself lucky because chances are good either she's currently participating in a plot or she's the target of one.

Keep in mind, your children ARE smarter than you. But they are not better parents than you. My definition of technology is something didn't exist when you were young. We've had to learn how to use these devices because they didn't exist in the days we were at our best as learners. Our children just absorb it.

I'm online most every Monday night at 7pm for [Town Hall](#). I'd love to continue the parental discussion there whenever you'd like. It's free, so if you ever have a simple question, just click the "join in" button and ask away.

Thanks, and keep being great parents!

Scotty

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