



## Computer Use



Technology advancements have enabled homes to have easy access to game consoles, computers and internet access. As a result, whether schools require it or not, our children are exposed at a relatively young age to games, blogs, chats and emails. Like any tools, they have their 'dark' side and usually the **pre-mature exposure** to inappropriate things or **extended exposure** becomes an issue. Recreationally, boys generally gravitate towards gaming while girls tend towards chatting and blogging. How do parents manage this?

**First, avoid having computers in the kids' rooms!** If they are already there, think of creative ways to move them out to the hall or a 'shared' location. We know for teenagers it can be especially difficult, so do protect the relationship if necessary, which means if tension is high, leave things for now.

Next, **brief** our children on usage:

- There must be time limits (we started with 1 hour's worth of work for 5 minutes of computer play time. Yours will vary ☺);
- If they see something they are uncomfortable with or know that they are inappropriate, just close the internet site;
- Never give out personal particulars in full;
- They should not install anything without our knowledge (see the section on administrator versus user below);

**Game consoles.** We never bought game consoles in our home only because we believe we are unable to control them. Portable ones are probably worse. For those who possess them, one helpful way is to let them remain at home. "Being bored" is a catch phrase especially of the teens. When portable devices are not available during an outing, children will be forced to creatively look for alternatives. More bonding opportunities will be available for the family.

**Internet games.** While these are allowed in our home, there are limits. If there is no one at home who can supervise, enforcement will be difficult. Thus we encourage developing some hobbies or CCA that takes up time and yet develop an interest or skill. Of course it will take time to discover and develop this. When our kids are engaged in a meaningful activity, the time available for leisure computer use is reduced. Of course, during

the holidays, our password is occasionally changed to 'FREEDOM' (some internet games need to be in the administrative account to play!!) and they can literally play for hours – have to let lose some time, right? The hope is to delay extensive play to late primary (P5 or 6) and after. Selection of allowable games is probably necessary. There are family friendlier games (like Photo Hunt) where the entire family can play together for bonding.

**Administrator versus user.** If we can, give only user rights and not administrator rights to our kids. This does not eliminate problems but most new programs cannot be installed without administrator rights and thus we will know what's new. We use this to bond with our children, teaching them while we install with them. If help is needed, look around for someone who can help with the technical side of things and do it together with our kids. Of course monitoring software is another possibility if the parents are open to them.

The basic premises are:

- **Delayed and controlled exposure is good:** Especially during the early years as in primary schools;
- **Remove and replace is better:** Complement boundaries with interesting and meaningful activities or CCA;
- **Family time is ideal:** Activities like longer meals (cook together), card games, watch and talk over a wholesome movie;

Parents are concerned whether we will deprive our kids if we delay computer use. We believe the delayed gratification (unless the school warrants it) has advantages and they would not necessary 'lose out'. One possible effect of extensive computer use is the reduction of attention span and eventually lack of self-control.

In the 60s, a Stanford study on giving marshmallows to children was conducted. Those willing to wait for another 20 minutes will get more. These children were tracked as they grew into their adult years. Those who waited for the extra marshmallows were able to do better in society, holding on to jobs and have fairly good family relationships. Those who did not wait, fared worse off, some even got into trouble with the law. Food for thought indeed! <sup>Pr 25:28</sup> **Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control.** Let's delay gratification and build a wall of protection around our kids.