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When you look at the youth in your community, what do you see? Do you see the same things you saw in yourself when you were young? Probably not. The young people today are not the same as the young people of yesterday.

One of the biggest influences on youth today is technology. Reports show that the United States has more computers than the rest of the world combined. For this reason, it is no surprise that teens not only want to work with technology, but they are expected to. Children as well as adults are forced to use technology everyday.

Introducing computers, email, internet, cell phones and text messaging into society altered the way people communicate. An estimated 45% of youth 12-17 years of age have cell phones. Most kids this age also have access to computers. This increase in technology has really sped up the rate of communication. In fact, it has created its own language!

The new language is written mostly in abbreviations. For example, “gr8 2 c u” spelled out in normal English says, “great to see you”. While this phrase doesn’t sound threatening, others such as “POS” and “PAW” should send up a red flag for any parent as they stand for “Parent Over Shoulder” and “Parents Are Watching”. Codes like this could indicate inappropriate conversations or just that the teen is uncomfortable about talking about the subject around adults. Either way, you need to be aware of the acronyms so that you can spot trouble should it arise. A complete list of acronyms used online as well as a wealth of information regarding internet safety can be found at www.cybertipline.com.

In order to better communicate with your family, you not only need to know what they are doing

online, but you also need to update your knowledge of technology. In a family, children are known to spend the most time online. As a parent, use this technology to reach your family. One study found that, of the families surveyed, 58.9% regularly use email to communicate back and forth with family members. They also responded that email has increased communication within the family. As an added bonus, the increased communication can help create a stronger support system and help people feel more connected. It may even help people overcome difficult situations with less stress.

The good, the bad and the ugly of technology can be debated till no end. What you need to remember is this: use technology how it best fits your family’s needs. Be aware that too much of a good thing can be harmful. New technology may not be the best way for every family to keep in touch. Some people, especially the elderly, may be afraid of technology. Make sure the technology being used is increasing family communication rather than substituting or decreasing what is already being done.

References:

- YMCA of the USA www.ymca.net
- UN Workshop on Technology and Families Report www.un.org/esa/socdev/family/meetings/famtech/famtecrep.htm
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