

An excerpt from a presentation to parents at Clarendon Primary School, Port Elizabeth, May 2010.

In his book, 'Boundaries for Teens' John Townsend speaks about four anchors which need to be in place when establishing BOUNDARIES in our children's lives:

1. I love you and I am on your side.
2. We have some rules and requirements for your behaviour.
3. You can choose to respect or reject these rules.
4. Here is what will happen if you reject these rules.

Common Guidelines for parents

1. **Connect with your children:** make your connection with them stronger than any online connection. Bill MacPhee reminds us to –
 - ✓ **Be available:** not when it fits your schedule but in a way that works for your child.
 - ✓ **Be accessible:** physically and emotionally. Your child needs to feel that they have access to your time and your heart.
 - ✓ **Be present:** look your son or daughter in the eye when you listen.
 - ✓ **Be ready:** look for and anticipate the moments when your child is open for you to meet their needs. Listen and look carefully for your teenager to articulate, maybe in an awkward or veiled way, a request for your help. Don't pounce but respond with gentle help.
 - ✓ **Be encouraging:** watch the language you use as you connect with your kids.
2. **Be informed about technology.** [Check out some useful websites below]
Keep learning! You have a problem if you need your 8 year old to programme the parental blocker on your decoder!
3. **Communicate and discuss** the pros and cons of MXIT, Facebook, cell phones etc with your children. Look at the good, the bad and the ugly.
4. **Monitor screen time.** The rise of gadgetry in today's society has many parents wondering "What is too much screen time?" Parents find that, once their pre-teens are 'plugged-in' to almost any electronic device, they are very much 'tuned-out' to parents, family needs and chores. While texting or wearing earphones, tweens can be unresponsive to the rest of the world.

Dr Aric Sigman, an associate fellow of the British Psychological Society, believes watching TV puts children at increased risk of health problems, including attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and obesity. In April 2007, he told MPs children under three shouldn't be exposed to TV at all.

He recommended children aged between 3 and 7 should watch no more than 30 minutes to an hour of TV a day, 7 to 12-year-olds should be limited to one hour, and 12 to 15-year-olds should watch a maximum of one and a half hours.

Set boundaries about where and when electronics are to be used. Involve your tweens when making house rules about where and when electronics will be used. If they have some ownership over the rules, they are more likely to adhere to them.

Encourage your children to get outside and develop other interests. [Download the Screen log to track your family's screen time].

5. **Place that TV and computer with Internet access in an open space.** It should literally face the entrance of the room you have chosen for them so that there is no opportunity to change a channel, close a page, or hide a message without your noticing.
6. **Discuss the dangers of chat rooms.**
7. **Discuss the implications of providing personal information online.** Tweens do not have the capacity to comprehend the vastness of the Internet. It is crucial that we help kids understand the implications and potential consequences of providing personal information to the world.
8. **Adjust your parenting style according to your child's development.** A 6 year old has fewer choices than a 16 year old; a younger child must trust your decisions but a teenager needs an explanation and discussion over decisions. We parent a 3 year old and a 15 year old very differently.
9. **Be aware of personality differences.** Punish an introvert by sending them to their room and you've missed an opportunity for learning. Different personalities are also more susceptible to outside influences. Know your child.
10. Remember that many things are **permissible but not beneficial.**
11. When facing a decision or situation, **ask "where is there life?"** is this life giving or draining?

12. **Model appropriate usage.** If you don't want your pre-teen to be texting at the dinner table, make sure that you are not on your cell phone during that time. Honour the boundaries that you've set as well as the time you spend with your family. You are still your child's first line of reference on how to behave in society.
13. **Discuss the differences between online communication and face-to-face interactions.** It is important that kids understand the importance of developing deep relationships with others and that that cannot happen on via a screen and a keyboard. We can help tweens to understand this through discussions that identify the differences between the two forms of communication.
14. **Encourage actual face-to-face socialization.** Encourage your pre-teens to be involved in social activities such as sports, sleepovers and other opportunities to engage with peers.
15. **Discuss the permanency of information posted on the Internet.** Pre-teens do not have the capacity to comprehend permanency. We need to help kids understand that photos and comments that are posted online cannot be taken back. Encourage them to show restraint when posting potentially hurtful comments or personal photos. Help your child understand that they should never forward or post pictures that could cause embarrassment if passed on.
16. **Communicate with other parents.** Partner, discuss, celebrate, fret and help one another.
17. **Trust your kids.** Ultimately, we cannot control our children's every move. We need to learn to trust that we've raised them to have and use good judgment. The more we are able to show that we trust them, the more they will want to prove that they deserve it.

Great Online Resources

The De-Texter

Keeping up with your teen can be exhausting, especially when they appear to be conversing in another language – which is where DTXTR comes in. This website provides parents with an interactive and collaborative resource so you can decode your teen’s texts, and stay on the top of the texting trend.

<http://www.lgdtxr.com/>

The Online Mom: Tech Tools for Parents

The Online Mom provides internet technology advice and information to help parents protect their kids, encourage responsible behaviour and safely harness the power of technology in the new digital world. Social networking, photo sharing, video games, IM & texting, internet security, cyber bullying, educational resources, the latest on tech hardware, gadgets and software for kids 3-8, tweens and teens, and more.

<http://www.theonlinemom.com>

Parent Teen

Parent Teen exists to resource, train, and come alongside anyone who influences adolescents and their world. Their mission is to bridge the gap between teens and their parents. The mission includes helping adults first of all understand today's adolescence, and then empowering these adults to nurture kids toward responsible and interdependent adulthood.

www.parentteen.com

Parenting in a Digital World: helpful articles on a variety of topics

This website has teamed with iKeepSafe and the Center on Media and Child Health to bring you a cheat sheet for bringing a more complete approach and perspective to the task of preparing children for 21st Century digital communication.

<http://www.education.com/special-edition/digital-world/>

Facebook Privacy Settings: An updated guide to Facebook privacy: December 2009 edition

An easy to understand tour through Facebook's privacy settings that helps you make sure you're not allowing strangers to see and access your information.

<http://arstechnica.com/web/guides/2009/12/an-updated-guide-to-facebook-privacy-december-2009-edition.ars>

Plugged In

Focus on the Family's Plugged In website reviews movies, music, general media, and pop cultural issues from a conservative Christian perspective. On the music section you can review albums complete with 'pro-social content, 'objectionable content' and a 'summary advisory'. Stay up-to-date with the latest bands, video games and movies, empowering you to have informed discussions with your teens. It is quite conservative, but helpful.

www.pluggedin.com

Tim Marshall

Tim is an ordained minister in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. He was born in Bloemfontein where he attended St. Andrew's School and he is still a proud Cheetahs supporter.



Tim Marshall

He holds a B Comm in Industrial & Organisational Psychology and Business Management and an Honours degree in Theology. He was the Youth Pastor at St. John's Methodist Church for 11 years before starting as Associate Minister and Youth Director at Walmer Methodist Church in 2008.

He has been working in Youth Ministry for over 13 years and is passionate about teaching, working with families and mentoring teenagers. Apart from ministry, Tim enjoys facilitating workshops, doing voiceovers and adverts, being the MC at events and he is a stand in presenter for KingfisherFM, a local community radio station.

Tim is married to Terri Blake, a chiropractor, and they have a son, Luke, born in March 2010.