



Safe Environment Newsletter

Archdiocese of Indianapolis

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Using Smartphones Smartly



Vulnerabilities of using smartphones...

- **Decreased connections** – Smartphones keep people 'connected' constantly but have ironically caused a sharp decline in meaningful communication as people prefer virtual interactions over personal connections.
- **Loss of focus** – A study from Florida State University says that mobile notifications can play havoc with our focus, even if we don't actually pick up the phone to respond to them.
- **Cyber-bullying** – Smartphones have become a venue for cyber-bullying, as people anonymously tease, threaten or spread rumors.
- **Privacy at risk** – Details of who we meet, where we go, what we like, how we spend etc. are all tracked as we use smartphones for communication, browsing and transactions.

"Do not be afraid of new technologies! These rank among the marvelous things which God has placed at our disposal to discover, to use and to make known the truth, also the truth about our dignity and about our destiny as His children, heirs of His eternal Kingdom."

Pope John Paul II from January 24, 2005

Why this matters

21st century students access and interact with technology in a way no generation has thus far. Quite aptly, author and game designer Marc Prensky describes today's students as "digital natives" who have spent their entire lives surrounded by all the toys and tools of the digital age.** But the arrival of the smartphone has taken the volume of interaction with technology to another level, combining games, email, video, internet, and instant messaging - integral parts of students' lives - in a single device. A report from 2015 says 73% of teens in the US have access to a smartphone.* This same technology though also gives students access to information and people that may put them at risk. So we need to help children be safe as they use the ubiquitous smartphone.

Reflection

Given the easy and constant access provided by smartphones, 92% of teens report going online daily.* Through the internet, smartphones offer unprecedented access to information, social networking, videos, online stores, apps and games among several other features. While this presents opportunity for great development and growth, it also puts young students at risk. *The experience sampling survey illustrates that smartphone usage often produces feelings of productivity and happiness, but that many users also feel distracted or frustrated after mobile screen encounters.*

Develop a safe environment for children:

- **Healthy fences:** Discuss and lay down rules on when and how the phone can be used, setting clear limits.
- **Engage:** Have easy conversations over dinner or while having fun together to know what a child is learning from handheld devices.
- **Equip:** Talk about what is inappropriate content, contact or interaction. This discussion should include what a child can do or whom should he approach when he encounters unwanted content.

"The Church recognizes that these media, if properly utilized, can be of great service to mankind, since they greatly contribute to men's entertainment and instruction as well as to the spread and support of the Kingdom of God."

Second Vatican Council's —Decree on the Media of Social Communications

*All statistics taken from research conducted by Pew Research Center, www.pewresearch.org

**Marc Prensky -- Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants by Marc Prensky, *On the Horizon* (MCB University Press, Vol. 9 No. 5, October 2001)