ADULTS SAVING KIDS
Founded by Alvin Erickson

Skill 6

Media & Cultural Exposure

Teach children to manage influence.

Protecting Developing Minds in a Digital World

Why Media Exposure Matters

Children today encounter a constant stream of information, images, and influences that previous generations could scarcely have imagined. Media is not neutral—it actively shapes attention, values, expectations, identity, sexuality, and emotional regulation. Children's brains are still developing and are not equipped to filter, interpret, or resist constant stimulation without guidance. Left unguided, media becomes one of the most powerful "teachers" in a child's life, often without a parent's knowledge.

> *Protection does not require fear; it requires intentional leadership.*

What Often Goes Wrong

Many parents feel overwhelmed or outmatched by technology. Common pitfalls include assuming children can "handle it," delaying involvement until problems arise, using technology as a babysitter, giving privacy before maturity, and avoiding conversations because they feel awkward.

> *Technology does not raise children—people do. When parents disengage, other influences step in.*

What Children Actually Need

Children do not need unlimited access. They need time to mature, guidance in interpreting content, protection from material their brains cannot process, and parents who are present, informed, and involved.

> *Media exposure should be earned gradually, not assumed.*

© 2026 Adults Saving Kids

The Parent's Role

Parents must remain active guides in their children's media lives. This means delaying phones and social media as long as possible, setting clear and predictable limits, monitoring access openly, explaining why limits exist, and revisiting rules as children mature.

> *Monitoring is not spying—it is stewardship.*

Real-Life Examples

EXAMPLE 1

Young Children

A tablet or TV is used occasionally and intentionally. Parents choose content, watch together when possible, talk about what was seen, and turn it off without negotiation. Children learn that screens are tools, not entitlements, and adults remain in charge.

EXAMPLE 2

Elementary-Age Children

When a child wants a phone because "everyone has one," parents say: "We're not there yet. When your brain is ready for more responsibility, we'll talk." Phones are delayed, access is limited, and ongoing conversations continue.

EXAMPLE 3

Teens

A teen has a phone, but devices charge outside bedrooms, passwords are shared, time limits are enforced, and parents periodically review content together. Privacy increases with demonstrated maturity, not age alone.

The Hidden Risks Parents Must Understand

Parents must understand several hidden risks:

- Many social media platforms and games are designed to engage the brain's reward system, encouraging repeated use and making it difficult for some children to disengage. Features such as notifications, rewards, and endless scrolling can reinforce these habits.
- Children often encounter sexualized content long before parents realize, even accidentally.
- Curated online images distort reality and fuel comparison, anxiety, depression, and identity harm.
- Predators use gaming, social platforms, and messaging apps for grooming and exploitation.

> *Awareness reduces vulnerability.*

Teaching Children to Think About Media

Parents should help children develop media literacy by asking critical questions: “Why was this made?”, “What does it want from me?”, “How does this make me feel?”, and “Is this shaping me in a good way?”

> *Media literacy is protection.*

Common Mistakes Parents Make

Common parenting mistakes include giving unlimited access too early, assuming filters alone are enough, avoiding hard conversations, and confusing privacy with secrecy.

> *Children need guidance before they need freedom.*

Media Boundaries at Different Ages

Young children	Elementary	Teens
Shared screens, limited time.	Monitored access, open discussion.	Structured freedom with accountability.

Boundaries adjust, but supervision does not disappear.

One Guiding Principle

GUIDING PRINCIPLE

If something is powerful enough to shape your child's brain, it deserves parental oversight.

Biblical Wisdom

SCRIPTURE

"Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm."

Proverbs 13:20

The people, voices, and influences we spend time with shape us. In biblical times, influence came primarily through family, friends, teachers, and community. Today, children are also influenced by social media, entertainment, advertising, gaming, and online communities. The principle has not changed: whoever we regularly listen to helps shape what we believe, value, and become.

SCRIPTURE

"Do not be misled: 'Bad company corrupts good character.'"

1 Corinthians 15:33

Scripture reminds us that influence matters—we become more like the people and messages we allow into our lives. Teaching children to manage media is not about fear or isolation; it is about helping them recognize that every influence is shaping them in some way.

Practical Wisdom / Application

Most people hear *"Walk with the wise and become wise"* and think about choosing good friends. That's certainly part of it, but imagine a parent teaching that principle in today's world: when

you spend hours watching a particular influencer, when a social media feed constantly tells you what success, beauty, or happiness should look like, when a game, video, or online community becomes a major source of identity and belonging, or when someone profits from keeping your attention—in each situation, the prompt is clear: **Pay attention to who is shaping you.**

Every voice is teaching something, and every influence is shaping something. Wise children learn to ask: "Who is influencing me?", "What do they want from me?", and "Is this helping me become wiser, healthier, and stronger?" Media literacy is not simply about managing screens; it is about learning to manage influence. Wisdom grows when children learn to choose their influences carefully.

FINAL TAKEAWAY

The digital world is not going away, so avoidance is not the answer.

Protection comes from presence, boundaries, and conversation. Parents who stay engaged give their children a powerful advantage—the ability to navigate a complex world with **wisdom, restraint, and resilience**.

THIS WEEK

One Thing to Try This Week

Option 1: Ask a Question

Ask your child: "Why do you think this video, game, app, or social media platform was made?" Listen to their answer before sharing your own.

Option 2: Watch Together

Watch one piece of media together and ask: "What does it want from us?" Discuss whether it is trying to entertain, sell something, gain attention, influence opinions, or shape behavior to help children learn that media is rarely neutral.

Option 3: Create a Boundary

Move all devices out of bedrooms for one week. Observe changes in sleep quality, family interaction, mood, and screen habits, then discuss what changed.

Wisdom Principle: Choose your influences carefully.

Scripture Acknowledgment

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version® (NIV®). Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.