JACK'S CORNER

QUESTION: Something about my daughter's fascination with chat-rooms bothers me, but I don't have real, solid reasons to forbid her from spending time in this way. My husband thinks I'm over-reacting.

ANSWER: Surely you have seen all the TV specials and articles about bad things that happen to kids who meet people on the Internet????? Not only do we have these warnings, but people who spend more time interacting through chat-rooms than real life interactions are sending up a red flag about **possible** difficulties in (1) relationship building skills, (2) withdrawal from family and other real relationships, (3) setting the stage for social anxiety, (4) opening themselves up to deception, and (5) struggles with loneliness.

So often these days, I hear parents (yes parents) use phrases like: "It's not that bad." or "Everyone's kids are doing it." or "I don't see anything wrong with it." I believe **this is compromise.** Instead of just trying to figure out what is wrong with a behavior, ask: **"What is right about it."** 1 Corinthians 10:23 says: "Everything is permissible--but not everything is beneficial. Everything is permissible--but not everything is constructive." (NIV) When it comes to questionable activities like chat-rooms, where **deception often is an integral part of the setup,** I would be wary. Again, ask what is right about it. It may not be overtly evil, but is it "constructive"? "Beneficial"? Does it build up faith? Can your child handle it?

Paul says in Philippians 4: 8: "Whatever is **true**, whatever is **noble**, whatever is **right**, whatever is **pure**, whatever is **lovely,** whatever is **admirable**--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--**think about these things.**" Rather challenging to us all about how and where we spend our time, don't you think? Let me offer some guidelines:

1. **Sit with your child** and explore the Internet together.
2. **Limit** the time. God calls us to interact with people, not machines. Personal interaction is always preferable to something like a chat-room.
3. Frequently **check the sites** your child visits.
4. **Have clear, godly expectations** for your child regarding the Internet. Make certain he/she knows these expectations.
5. **Talk with a professional who knows about computer filters and chat-rooms,** although no filter can take the place of active, involved and savvy parents.
6. Be vigilant and relentless in helping your children be able to **recognize evil and its tactics**. "Be wise as a serpent, and innocent as a dove." (MT. 10:16)
7. Children have different levels of awareness, susceptibility, spiritual discernment and naiveté. **Know your child well** so you can accurately assess the danger. It might be relatively small, or huge.

We all have heard wonderful anecdotes about chat-rooms and the Internet (Let's not throw the baby out with bathwater! Technology is God given gift as Dave Black would say.). However, as a counselor, I have heard different

stories... how the Internet and chat-rooms have been a seductive, titillating, and destructive trap. It is always hard to get men to come to counseling; they are terrified. **The vast majority of men I do see, come because of addictions to pornography and/or affairs that began in chat-rooms on the Internet** (Not to mention the heart-broken wives who have lived the consequences**)**. These were all Christian men, active in their churches. Satan will use anything and warp it to be used for evil purposes. Stay alert! This is a wake up call for you as parents. I have learned to highly respect a mother's intuition. If you sense in your spirit that something is wrong, you are probably right! Dad, this a time to respect and value your wife's input.

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