

# The Trouble with Tech Toys

The latest cell phones, iPods and video games may be teaching your children a lot more than you want them to know.

*by Elizabeth Racine*

Buying your children technology for Christmas? Better clear your calendar because you're going to need some time for your new hobby—vigilantism. One glance at the day's headlines should tell you all you need to know: *"Filters Don't Filter Everything. Use a porn-detection tool to see what your filter has been missing."*

Because we live in a fallen world, the meteoric rise in gadgets available with online access has led to a corresponding rise in the amount of porn our children are exposed to. The effect on our children is dizzying, and while researchers scramble to study and make sense of it all, the secular media is still trying to deny that porn is a problem. Those with eyes to see already know what's going on—a spiritual battle of epic proportions for our children's souls.

While the U.S. Department of Justice laments that most parents do not follow the most basic of safety rules with their home computers (such as putting the computer in a central location, not in a child's bedroom), what happens with the ever-shrinking high-tech devices that fit in kids' pockets and have Internet access that can be viewed in private - anywhere? Sadly, porn is widely available for cell phones and video game devices, including the Sony Playstation Portable (PSP). This, along with the fact that strangers can gain access to unsupervised children through these games, is a dangerous combination, leading to an increase in child prostitution and human trafficking in the United States, according to Kevin B. McDonald, EVP of Alvaka Networks and board member of Web Wise Kids.



“It’s a growing problem, and unfortunately, the Internet has fueled this rise.”

So, if you are planning to give tech toys to kids, be prepared to stay vigilant. Keep in mind that almost all parental controls can be disabled through the use of circumventor programs.

For instance, one of the hottest tech toys for teens and ‘tweens, the iPod Touch, can be compromised by a program called “Jail Break,” which enables the user to install unauthorized software, often pornographic. Another program called “Hide Pod” uses the iPod Touch’s calculator as a “front” for hidden porn. When a password is entered in the calculator, it flips to reveal the HidePod application, giving the user access to hidden videos, photos, music, and applications. And, since the iPod Touch’s big draw is its huge storage capacity, it can hold an entire porn movie and more.

Parents can find out if their child is using HidePod by entering the serial number on Hide Pod’s site [www.hidepod.com/registration\\_lookup.html](http://www.hidepod.com/registration_lookup.html). If it returns a registration number, then you will know your child has uploaded that software to their iPod Touch. (The serial number can be found on the back of the iPod Touch, on the box, or by going to >>Settings >>General >>About.)

Once upon a time, cell phone carriers provided family-friendly content known as a “walled garden,” which offered protection to our children, but adding Internet service to the phones removed that wall of protection.

### What Can Parents Do?

In order to win this spiritual battle, we can imitate Padre Pio, who prayed the Rosary incessantly. “Bring me my

weapon,” he would say, referring to his rosary as a weapon against evil.

We must step up to fight the evil of pornography, which is being normalized by phone and game service providers through sites like Sony’s online store, which offers a link for downloads for its mobile devices. One such linked site is “Crackle,” which offers a weekly “reality show” entitled, “Mommy XXX,” which celebrates the bizarre home life of a “Mommy” who works as a porn star, and her two teenaged children.

The effect on children growing up in this hyper-sexualized culture is that, without proper formation, their judgment becomes impaired about appropriate standards of behavior. They pose for, and send nude photos of themselves to others, a practice dubbed with the cutesy nickname of “sexting”—which also serves to normalize the behavior, and in





fact, makes it appear “cool.” Children may not realize that sexting can lead to being arrested and charged with distributing child pornography.

It’s no wonder that the incidents involving sexual crimes against children are escalating in number. Studies show that 77 percent of pedophiles use adult porn to groom their victims, since it helps to normalize this behavior and desensitize children to it, thus breaking down what used to be children’s natural resistance to sexual discussions and activities with adults. If the kids are already used to seeing porn, this is one less step the pedophile has to take with his next victim. Children, in turn, are acting out sexually with one another and with younger children. News reports reflect this trend, but we are only seeing the tip of the iceberg.

“My best advice for parents is to know everything their children are doing, including having usernames and passwords for all of their accounts, making it clear that a prerequisite to having an account is the expectation that the parent will be checking it,” says Investigator John Miner of the New York State Police Computer Crime Unit.

“It is never enough to just ‘trust’ them. For instance, if a teen is on Facebook or MySpace (anyone under 16 should not be on these sites, period) the parents should have their own page and be able to see all the activity.”

He adds: “Allowing children unmonitored access to all technology is the moral equivalent of physically allowing them to wander through the ‘red light’ district of a major city at 2 am. It’s abdicating responsibility and leaving them vulnerable.”

## Tips for Parents

\* We’re the ones God has anointed to protect our children. Step up and exercise the gift of authority that God has given us. Use the authority in His name. Be a parent—it’s difficult at times, but we must not forsake who we



are, and we must not forsake the power God has given to us.

\* Communicate with your children. Let them know how much you love them, and how much their safety means to you. Visit the Cell Phone and Internet Safety Program “It’s Your Call” [www.WebWiseKids.com](http://www.WebWiseKids.com) (for middle school and up). On this site, children are

presented with a series of difficult decisions in an Interactive video, and then must deal with the consequences.

\* Sign a Contract with your child, outlining your goals and expectations for their use of technology. The iCareCoalition website has an excellent one to use: [www.icarecoalition.org/safeuseagreement.asp](http://www.icarecoalition.org/safeuseagreement.asp)



\* When purchasing technology, find out about parental controls. What can be controlled? (Internet access—filtering, blocking, and regulating times that child can use the technology). Can you use it to block access to certain sites that contain material that is not monitored such as on social networking sites like YouTube? For reviews of Internet Filters and all forms of technology, visit <http://internet-filter-review.toptenreviews.com/>

[Note: the iPod Touch, iPhone and Blackberry have built in parental

controls. To access controls on the Touch, touch Tap, Settings, General, Restrictions, Enable Restrictions, then enter a 4-digit code which lets you lock settings and switch off explicit iPod content, Safari, YouTube, iTunes and Installing Apps.]

\* The Annual Media-Wise Video Game Report Card, issued annually in the fall by the National Institute for Media and the Family, lists the best and the worst videos. This is one list you will want to keep handy. Find it at: [http://www.mediafamily.org/research/vgrc\\_index.shtml](http://www.mediafamily.org/research/vgrc_index.shtml).

\* Commit to learn the technology. The only way to lead our children through these uncharted waters is if we know the way!

\* Inspect each purchase before handing it over to your child. Note that more than one child has viewed porn because their parents purchased devices that had been used and then returned to the store, still containing memory sticks containing porn.

\* Set up a ‘network of accountability’ in your child’s world. Parents, family members, clergy, religious, teachers, coaches, and neighbors can have a significant influence on the youth in our communities. Each should let the children know they are watching and aware—and that they care.

### Parental Control Websites:

\* **Microsoft xBox 360:**

[www.xbox.com/familysettings](http://www.xbox.com/familysettings)

\* **Sony Playstation 3 or 2:**

<http://www.us.playstation.com/support/ps3>; click on parental controls icon on the right side of screen

\* **Sony PSP:**

[www.us.playstation.com/psp/features/parentalcontrols](http://www.us.playstation.com/psp/features/parentalcontrols)

\* **Nintendo Wii, and the handheld Nintendo DSi:**

<http://www.nintendo.com/corp/parents.jsp>

\* **iTunes:** to supervise music, games, ringtones, and other apps. For detailed directions visit <http://support.apple.com/kb/HT1904>.

*NOTE: To be sure your kids can’t disable the parental controls, give the kids their own limited user account on your PC. iTunes will install a second time in your kids’ account, and you can manage their purchases.*

*Elizabeth Racine is an internet safety advocate and founder of Moralert, Inc.*

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