LITTLE SAINTS │ NEWS

4 OCTOBER 2018

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Dear parents

In mid-September, I was given the opportunity to attend a Digital Pathfinding Seminar organised by Jesuit Institute South Africa at which discussions on the impact of technology on young children were held.

Keynote speaker, Fr Hugh Lagan, spoke about the dangers of exaggerated reports of child trafficking on social media. He showed how, in many instances, instead of teaching children to understand the digital environment, we are teaching them to fear it. We need to engage with young people, empower them to act responsibly and stay safe without adult supervision, as well as encourage them to problem solve.

Prof Tanya Robinson, who has been in forensic private practice for the past 20 years, discussed the impact of digital media on the neurodevelopment of children. The quick pace of life and constant change in technology puts pressure on children and they struggle to regulate themselves. We, as parents, need to re-evaluate what we are providing our children with and the impact of our expectations on our children's home, social and school life. The overuse of technology among children can lead to depression, addiction, sleep problems, obesity, and digital dementia; over-stimulation creates stress and anxiety. Given the rise in cognitive and neurological degenerative changes that we are seeing in our population, it is critical that we protect our brains from the emerging challenges associated with increased technology use. Technology is reshaping the brain and enabling us to multi-task but, are we fully focused? We need to teach children to concentrate and to be attentive and, as adults, it is our responsibility to model this same behaviour.

We cannot run away from technology or protect our children from it. We are living and working in the fourth industrial evolution and technology is there to help us to be creative, critical thinkers and innovators. It is also causing a disconnect between adults and children. Anthony Egbers, a teacher from Dainfern College, gave us a few tips on how to renew those connections:

▫ It starts with parents. Parents own the devices, not the children. It is our duty to make the rules and limit screen time
▫ We must have conversations with our children about digital safety, etiquette and responsibility and check the privacy settings on the device or apps we use
▫ We must keep technology in a central place in our houses, not in bedrooms
▫ We must make an effort to understand the technology our children are using and establish ground rules with them e.g. is their account private? Do they know the people with whom they are engaging? If we cannot get into their phones, they cannot have a phone
▫ We should ask our children to set up a profile for us to follow them on social media
▫ Model the behaviour we expect from our children

Parents and caregivers need to continue doing a good job by drawing on core parenting skills that have worked for years. These include providing a safe space for children in which to grow up and the means to communicate so that they can make the most of the opportunities and resources available to them.

It is critical for parents to stay educated and interested in what their children are learning and doing, and how it is affecting them. It is our responsibility, as parents, to ensure that our children understand that we are with them on their"digital journey".

In Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's words, "There are two gifts we should give our children. The one is roots. The other is wings." It is essential that we achieve this balance.

Kindest regards

CELIA DIANA
HoD: LITTLE SAINTS

Isla turned a pillow into a giraffe using the Doodle Buddy App on the iPad

Leano transformed a circle into a boy ice skating using the app

Siena transformed a tree into a rainbow using the app