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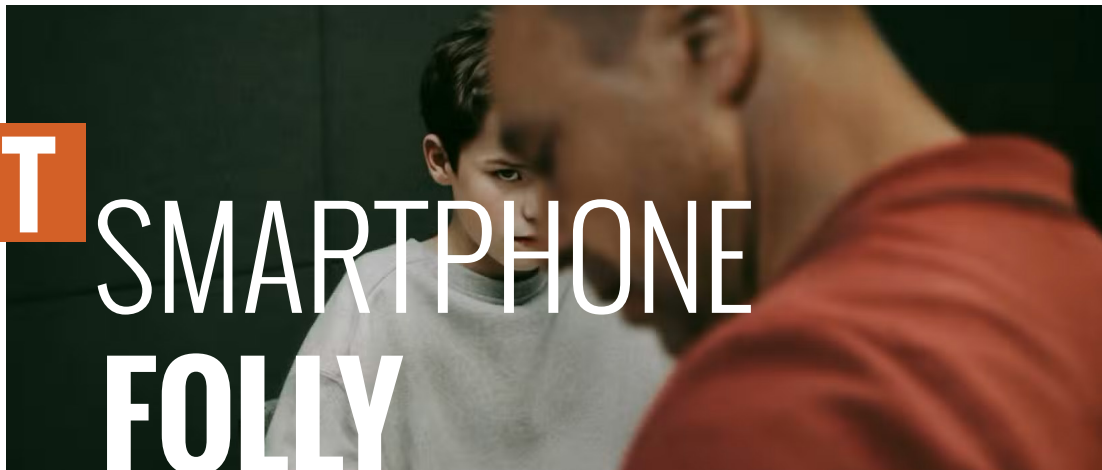
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HELPING PARENTS UNDERSTAND TEENAGERS AND THEIR WORLD



SMARTPHONE FOLLY

I wonder what Jamie Miller's life would have been like if he had been born 20 years sooner into a smartphone-free world? You might be wondering the same thing if you've watched the recently released Netflix mini-series, *Adolescence*. The four-part drama centers on the 13-year-old seemingly average British schoolboy who is accused of and arrested for the murder of his female classmate, Katie Leonard.

Gut-wrenching from start to finish, *Adolescence* forces us to consider the role that smartphones play in developing our current world where kids mix, mingle, and are formed (or *de-formed*) right under the unknowing noses of parents who are ignorant to its existence, rules, and effect on their very own kids. Jamie Miller's story and decisions unfold as a result of a perfect storm of influences, including online bullying. . . which all of our kids are susceptible to, both as perpetrators and/or victims. The show could serve as Exhibit A for proof of media critic Marshall McLuhan's decades-old assertion: "We become what we behold. We shape our tools and then our tools shape us." Parents, if you've never heeded McLuhan's extremely wise words of warning before, it's time to sit up and listen. Watching Jamie Miller's panicked parents Eddie and Manda rethink

how they've parented their son while ignorant to social media's dark underbelly is a painful exercise, but also a wake-up call to all of us raising kids in today's world. Parenting in today's world requires the attention of an air traffic controller: constantly aware and on high-alert!

Watching *Adolescence* took me back almost 20 years to the time when I began fielding the same question over-and-over again from parents wondering how to best navigate the emerging world of smartphones with their kids. "When should I allow my son/daughter to get a smartphone?" was a question few if any knew how to best answer. The devices were new at the time, so my answer was always a combination of "I don't know" and "It's best to exercise caution." At the time, we were all fascinated by the potential for good of these new devices. But as the years have passed, we've all become aware of how the 24/7 presence of smartphones are stealing childhood in ways that have fostered mental health issues, anger, loneliness, sextortion, social contagions, gender/sexuality confusion, isolation, cognitive decline, and broken relationships... among a host of other concerns. As social psychologist Jonathan Haidt has noted, these are consequences of the shift from a world marked by a *play-based childhood to a phone-based childhood*.

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YOUTH CULTURE

HOT QUOTE

Columnist Barbara Lippert, about the Netflix series *Adolescence*, in an article regarding teens, social media, smartphone bans in schools, and more, [MediaPost.com](https://www.media-post.com), March 28, 2025.

"Beautifully written and acted, it offers a, delicately layered, non-cliched mixture of psychological and social insight into the life of contemporary teens. It's painful to watch. We are led into a raw, suffocating world that is lived mostly online, while most adults are unprepared and/or clueless about monitoring or understanding their kids' experiences."



“I URGE YOU - STRONGLY - TO TAKE SERIOUSLY YOUR PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY TO NURTURE YOUR CHILDREN IN THE FAITH AND WHAT THAT MEANS IN OUR CURRENT SMARTPHONE AGE.”



When speaking to parents about smartphones and social media these days, I don't wait for that "when should I" question to be asked. I tell them. My answer has been ascending over the last few years, as knowledge of how smartphones and social media influence undermine the well-being of our kids during the vulnerable developmental years of childhood and adolescence. Who among us isn't aware that even as adults, it takes great awareness and discipline to manage these devices ourselves!

So, what's the answer? The reality is that each of our children is different, meaning there's no one answer. For those kids who exercise a maturity marked by a willingness to lean into Godly wisdom and discernment, we might ease them over time into having and managing a smartphone under strict supervision marked by clear borders and boundaries. These would include *where* they may use their phones, *when* they may use their phones, *what* they may access on their phones, and for *how long*. Others, who don't show evidence of a heart bent on honoring and worshipping God through willing conformity to parental guidelines, should wait until a later time when they are more mature and willing to live according to the borders and boundaries we establish in order to protect them from harm and to provide for their well-being.

At the very least, I like the guidelines suggested by Jonathan Haidt in his book, *The Anxious Generation*. First, no smartphones before high school. Second, no social media for kids before the age of 16. And finally, all of our schools should be

phone-free. If you're wondering whether Haidt's recommendations are too strict, go ahead and watch *Adolescence*, and then think again.

I urge you - strongly - to take seriously your parental responsibility to nurture your children in the faith and what that means in our current smartphone age. Take some time to read and consider Deuteronomy 6:1-9 and the responsibility to make teaching the Word of the Lord to your kids a top priority. Recognize that this requires you to not only tell, re-tell, and keep on telling them the Truth, but to also keep them from the lies told and dispensed through those little devices that have such a huge influence. One clear way to do this is to move slowly and deliberately when it comes to putting a phone in the hands of your child. Proverbs tells us that "folly is bound up in the heart of a child" and that discipline is what drives that folly away (Proverbs 22:15). Earlier in that same chapter, we are given this nugget of wisdom: "The prudent sees danger and hides himself, but the simple go on and suffer for it" (Proverbs 22:3).

During a recent seminar on teaching our kids to wisely follow Jesus on the digital frontier, a man raised his hand during the question and answer time. Instead of asking a question, he made this comment: "Last year we put a smartphone in the hands of our 10-year-old daughter. We did this to help keep her safe. We realize now that we put an even greater danger in her hands." Eddie and Manda Miller would agree.

WALT MUELLER
CPYU President



FROM THE NEWS

APA SOCIAL MEDIA REPORT

There's a growing amount of research pointing to the fact that smartphones and social media are undermining the well-being of our kids when borders, boundaries, and safeguards are not enacted.

Recently, the American Psychological Association released a report on the science of how social media affects our youth, specifically looking at the risks associated with content, features, and functions. One of the opening paragraphs of the report says, "Platforms built for adults are not inherently suitable for youth. Youth require special protection due to areas of competence or vulnerability as they progress through the childhood, teenage, and late adolescent years." The report warns that chronological age is not directly associated with social media readiness. In other words, just because a platform requires a child to be 13 in order to download the app, that doesn't mean it is safe and harmless. Parents, are you tracking with the data that will help you parent wisely?

TRENDS:

Shifting

There's a concerning new trend among the emerging generations that offers up evidence of their deep search for meaning and purpose in life. It's known as "shifting", and it encompasses efforts by young people to escape their earthly presence and reality by transporting their consciousness into alternate realities. Reports from those who track with the trend online tell us that some want to escape into the world of Hogwarts or the Marvel Universe. Practitioners will oftentimes lie on the ground counting backwards while they visualize a desired reality, hoping to transport themselves into that world as an escape from the difficulties of this world. We need to be aware of this trend which not only fosters a desire to escape from the embodied reality we've been given by God, but is a supernatural foothold for the enemy to exploit. What shifters are ultimately searching for is a relationship with God, which should motivate us all the more to point them to Jesus.



LATEST RESEARCH:

Elite Colleges and Lack of Reading

A recent article in *The Atlantic* magazine was titled, "The Elite College Students Who Can't Read Books: To read a book in college, it helps to have read a book in high school." In the article, Rose Horowitch writes that many students no longer arrive at college, even at highly selective elite colleges, prepared to read books. In her research she found that it's not that students don't want to do the reading. It's that they don't know how. Middle and high schools have stopped asking them to. She writes that in 1976 about 40% of high school seniors said they had read at least six books for fun in the previous year, compared with 11.5% who hadn't read any. By 2022, those percentages had flipped. It's reasonable to assume that one reason for the decline in reading and reading aptitude is the smartphone. The old maxim still holds true: "readers are leaders and leaders are readers." Parents, we encourage you to get your kids to put down the phones and pick up a book.

QUICKSTATS

Among customers on the paid subscription tier for Replika - a virtual chatbot platform powered by artificial intelligence - 60% have reported having a romantic relationship with the chatbot.
(Bloomberg)

About 1 in 6 teenage drivers report driving while drowsy, despite the fact that 95% said drowsy driving is extremely or very risky.
(Sleep)

TOP 10

SONGS PLAYED ON APPLE MUSIC

USA Chart
March 31, 2025
Source:
Apple Music

1. "NOKIA" by Drake
2. "luther" by Kendrick Lamar, SZA
3. "Just In Case" by Morgan Wallen
4. "I'm The Problem" by Morgan Wallen
5. "30 For 30 (with Kendrick Lamar)" by SZA
6. "Not Like Us" by Kendrick Lamar
7. "Vanish Mode" by Lil Durk
8. "I'm A Little Crazy" by Morgan Wallen
9. "Love Somebody" by Morgan Wallen
10. "They Want To Be You (feat. Future)" by Lil Durk



NURTURING WISDOM & EXPOSING SIN

by WALT MUELLER

Advances in neurological science point to the amazing complexity of our God-made brains. Because their brains are still developing, our children, teens, and even young adults have what is called an underdeveloped impulse control. This makes them less prone to resist behavioral impulses and more prone to engage in risky behaviors perceived to bring some kind of immediate benefit, but which could also bring long-lasting negative consequences.

In spiritual terms, this not only means that our kids are likely to lack wisdom and discernment, but more readily fall into sin. We need to teach them that as sinners, their default setting is to follow their sinful hearts more readily than they are to follow God's Word. Which means that we must nurture them into knowing God's good, life-giving Word, helping to expose sin. As their frontal lobes are still developing, they need parents who serve to train them in Godly decision-making and living.

FROM THE WORD

he book of Proverbs – a book of wisdom – reminds parents in Proverbs 22:6 of their responsibility to teach and train their children in ways that reorient children and teens away from a lifestyle of selfishness and towards a wise and prudent way of life that steers clear of danger (v. 22:5).

Proverbs 22:6 offers multiple levels of wise and good advice to parents. First, parents are the ones who are to provide training. In our current culture, this means that we don't leave the moral education of our kids up to the media, peer group, smartphone, or prevailing spirit of the times. As parents, God has given us both authority and a duty to take charge. Second, we must recognize and respect our kids' God-given bents and abilities. In other words, "the way he should go" takes into account their God-given uniqueness. We must help them discover and use their distinct gifts and abilities. Finally, the effort we put into obediently

following God's command to train our kids will result in our kids growing up with the opportunity to choose to live by the course we've charted for them as we've encouraged them choose God's wise way rather than their own foolish path. While it's not a hard-and-fast promise, it is a general statement of how things will most likely turn out.

Are you parenting your kids with wisdom?

"Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it."

Proverbs 22:6



PODCAST



Youth Culture Matters

A CPYU PODCAST

Youth Culture Matters

is a long-format podcast from CPYU hosted by Walt Mueller.

BE SURE TO CHECK OUT EPISODE 198:

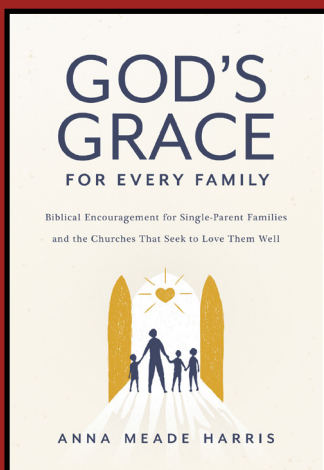
"THE CHURCH AND SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES" WITH ANNA MEADE HARRIS

LISTEN AT WWW.CPYU.ORG/PODCAST

Biblical Encouragement for Single-Parent Families and the Churches that Seek to Love them Well



HELPFUL RESOURCES



BOOK

Weaving her own story together with nine attributes of God's character revealed from Scripture, Anna Meade Harris speaks to vulnerable single parents and to churches who want to love them well. After the death of her husband, Anna discovered that single-parent families don't seem to have a place in the local church. Because she and her kids no longer fit into the Christian family mold, the body of Christ felt alien and strange when Anna's family needed it the most. Belonging, even in the most loving church, was a challenge.

God's Grace for Every Family: Biblical Encouragement for Single-Parent Families and the Churches That Seek to Love Them Well was born out of Anna's desire to help other families avoid feeling the loneliness that hers felt. This gospel-centered work addresses the single parent who needs to know that God sees, loves, and cares for their family. The book also addresses the church at large, in the hopes that Christians will come to understand the unique needs of single-parent families and do a better job of welcoming, valuing, and loving them.

This book is written for all Christians, married or single, parent or childless. It's written for widows, divorcees, and those who never married. And it's written for the congregants, pastors, leaders, and church family who wants to embrace every family and learn how to serve them well. By addressing families and the church together, *God's Grace for Every Family* opens the door for gracious conversations and greater unity in the family of God.