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Technology and a House of Learning
By Charles and Dawn Graham

Organize yourselves; prepare every needful thing; and establish a house, even a house of prayer, a house of fasting, a house of faith, a house of learning, a house of glory, a house of order, a house of God.

Technological innovations over the past decade have had a huge influence on our lives, from the way we communicate and recreate to the way we educate students in the U.S. Technology has even had an impact on our religious lives and on ways we share our beliefs with others.

With so many media options available, our experiences resonate with Elder M. Russell Ballard’s statement:

Media today presents vast and sharply contrasting options. Opposite from its harmful and permissive side, media offers much that is positive and productive. . . . Thus our biggest challenge is to choose wisely what we listen to and what we watch.

We must find the positive and productive uses of technology. There are four key roles found in “The Family: A Proclamation to the World” that can help us navigate the use of technology in our homes:

By divine design, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families. Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children. In these sacred responsibilities, fathers and mothers are obligated to help one another as equal partners.

Learn to Preside
One who presides in a family shows leadership by exercising guidance and direction. It is important for parents to take the lead in the use of technology in a house of learning. Youth today are heavily involved in text messaging. One way parents might preside is to talk to their youth and establish guidelines for texting. Parents show leadership when they learn about technologies that are relevant in their children’s lives and include the children when framing guidelines for appropriate use in and out of the home. Examples of leadership for technology might include:

- Learning about popular computer games to make sure they are wholesome and then setting time limits for the family to follow
- Learning how to set Internet filters and teaching children how to safely access quality Internet sites
- Learning about social networking sites (MySpace, Facebook, etc.) and setting family standards regarding this media

Perhaps one of the most important ways that parents can show leadership with technology is to put face-to-face relationships with family above virtual relationships and communication. A parent who limits his or her own computer, cell phone, and TV time to make time to build relationships is setting an example that will counter current technology trends.

Learn to Provide
Parents sometimes fear technology because they know that there are dangerous uses of technology. Perhaps one of the best deterrents is to provide
children with positive and productive ways to use available technology such as the following activities:

- Creating a video movie of a family vacation or a family history documentary
- Teaching family members how to contribute to a family blog
- Exploring online resources to develop a child’s interests
- Using online resources to complete a school assignment
- Using RSS feeds and sites like Wikipedia to keep informed on current topics

Learn to Protect
While there are many benefits to having technology in the home, we must protect our children against the following dangers:

- Degrading content sites that promote hate, pornography, or unhealthy behaviors
- Addiction to technologies that entrap: pornography, online gaming, texting, etc.
- Cyber bullying using e-mail, instant messaging, or social networking sites
- Online predators who form relationships through deception
- Viruses that damage equipment and software
- Identity theft and insecure transactions
- Idleness created by using technology to simply pass time

We as parents are responsible for setting up layers of defenses to keep our homes safe. We cannot leave this vital task to others. Additionally, parents are entitled to receive divine inspiration regarding how to best protect their homes from the dangers posed by technology. One of the most effective ways to protect our children is to arm them with knowledge about dangers and instill in them a desire to choose things that are “virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy.”

Learn to Nurture
Nurturing implies presiding, providing, and protecting in a loving environment that allows family members to grow, stretch, and bloom. A healthy combination of providing and protecting will help children thrive in a technology-rich world. Growth comes as we provide age-appropriate knowledge and experiences with technology. Stretching occurs when parents and children learn how to use technology in positive ways. A nurturing environment allows children to make informed choices and experience consequences.

It is our belief that we live in a world where it might not be possible or practical for parents to completely cut off youths’ access to technology. As we preside, provide, and protect in a nurturing environment, our youth not only will have the knowledge that allows them to choose wisely but will have the desire to make good technology choices.

For additional ideas on how to provide positive technology opportunities for children, visit http://sites.google.com/site/technologyinahouseoflearning.

For a fully referenced version of this article, please visit education.byu.edu/news/magazine/focus.html.