



# UNDERSTANDING TODAY'S YOUTH

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## School Life Brings Pressure

Majka is filled with mixed emotions. She is really excited about entering grade 9 at her all-girls school in Toronto but still worries about the stress she feels to look good. "You can wear make-up or not since there are no boys to worry about. However, I still feel the pressure to look good and be accepted by the older girls. I guess a part of me is still fearful of that first week."

Majka is concerned about appearance pressure but other stressors like academics and athletics have a serious impact as well.

**Appearance** pressure is particularly hard on our girls. Their pop culture dictates everything from body type to clothing accessories. The goal is to be sexy. In reality we have groomed a generation (both boys and girls) who have trouble accepting who they are. Every retail advertisement that stalks them sells nothing but disappointment; you will never be everything you can be without my latest product. If I can't make you unhappy with what you have, I can never sell you the next hot item. With the average kid in Canada seeing tens of thousands of ads every year, what chance do they really stand?

**Academic** pressure befalls all our kids. The stress to get good grades in order to get into the right university, in order to get the good jobs, in order to buy all the material things the world says we need is always present. The result? We have an epidemic of cheating. The Canadian Council on Learning (July 7, 2010) reports that 73% of first-year university students admitted to academ-

ic dishonesty on written work submitted while in high school including cheating on essays or assignments. Nearly 60% admitted to serious acts of cheating on tests in high school. It seems, in a world of moral relativism, doing whatever it takes to get ahead is justifiable.



**Athletic** pressures face kids who attach too much of their self-esteem and future happiness on making it to the big leagues. "Making the team" is often a mark of success. Some kids are obsessed with physical activities that rob them of a balanced life. In addition, some young people have parents who are living their unfulfilled dreams through them in the field of sport. Children can become distressed and withdrawn if they don't meet the standards brought on by parents, coaches, and teachers.

We live hurried lives which only add to their stress. Young people have too many activities, too many issues, and too little time. Wise is the parent or youth worker who makes time to walk with their kids during stressful times. Read on for some helpful suggestions!

## CULTURE QUOTES

"We find ourselves naturally drawn to the benefits and opportunities of new technologies but rarely consider the risks."

**Tim Challies**  
Author, *The Next Story*



## Helping Kids Cope with Stress

School stress starts early. A UK study (Economic and Social Research Council 2007) reports that pre-kindergarten children can begin to feel the pressure up to four months before they even start school. And it's no wonder: In America, many states have instituted the DAP test as a qualifier for kindergarten. If your child cannot "Draw a Person" anatomically correct, they can be denied entrance.

School pressure can have a variety of sources – parents, teachers, coaches, peers, self. Young people are often harder on themselves because they want to live up to adult expectations. However, due to their youth, most are not equipped to cope without some help.

The WebMD (www.webmd.com) looks at various grade levels and related signs of stress. For elementary school, indicators might include fears and nightmares, negativism, lying, and withdrawal, regressive behaviour or excessive shyness. Middle schoolers might have problems sleeping, lose their appetite, be angrier than usual, become less talkative and more withdrawn, or revert back

to behaviours you thought they had outgrown. In addition, teenagers struggling with anxiety might develop eating disorders or problems with alcohol or drugs. There could be changes in their grades, attendance, punctuality, time spent alone, taste in music genres, and time spent on the Internet.

All of our children are growing up with some degree of stress. The pressure and their reaction to it will normally come during school days. How do we respond as parents? Youth Unlimited would like to make the following suggestions:

**First, spend time with your children.** Dr. Phil says, "You might not be the only influence in your child's life but you better be the best." There are no shortcuts in raising kids. We need quantity time to bond deeply and not just quality. Do things that will allow all of you to relax and enjoy life.

**Second, listen with all your heart.** Many times the clues to a child's stress come in the little things they say or don't say. It might be a quiet hint that begs us to ask a loving question in a gentle voice. A mother's intuition is often right. If you sense in your heart that something isn't right, pursue it in a calm way. Listen with your heart and not just your head.

**Third, eat together.** Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center reports that a family that dines together on a regular basis is more likely to have teens that are less likely to be depressed, be more motivated at school, and develop better peer relationships. It is also a great time for parents to monitor

eating habits which can sometimes be a clue as to how they are dealing with stress.

**Fourth, notice out loud.** KidsHealth (www.kidshealth.org) suggests you tell your child when you notice something seems to be bothering him or her. If you can, name the feeling (anger, stress, sadness, etc.) you think your child is experiencing. Young people often have trouble identifying what they are feeling. Making the statement as a casual observation tells your son or daughter that you are concerned about them. Noticing out loud can often lead to some great conversations.

**Fifth, help create an action plan.** If your child is feeling stress over a particular issue, help them come up with a concrete strategy for getting through it. Knowing you care enough to talk is one thing but encouraging them to take steps to deal with it is a great skill that they will carry the rest of their life. Our job is to lead and guide and not necessarily dictate.

**Sixth, let them know you are there.** Sometimes kids don't want to talk about their stressors. Our job is to let them know we are nearby if they need us. Walking beside them through tough times sometimes means we are seen but not heard. It's hard for a parent because we hate seeing our children go through tough times. However, some stress and pressure can be a life enhancing experience; all stress is not necessarily a bad thing.

**Finally, help them find time to laugh.** Dr. Leonard Sax, author of "Girls on the Edge," has two great questions to ask all of our children. (1) "What do you like to do to have fun?" If your child has no answer to the question, you need to pay attention. All work and no play make all of us dangerous because our life is out of balance. (2) "What three words describe you?" If their answers include busy, hyper, wired, weary, stressed, or sleepless, be concerned.

When even the youngest of our children are now coping with stress, we need to be aware of the issues. Theologian Danzae Pace wrote that stress is the trash of modern life – we all generate it but if you don't dispose of it properly, it will pile up and overtake your life. Our job as adults is to equip our kids with the tools to keep life in control.



## How Technology is Influencing Families



The digital age is much more than communications and images. It is about how a whole new world of technology is shaping how we live and how our families function. Most of life is now lived in front of some sort of screen, big or small. Most parents do not understand the impact of technology in their own homes or in their own lives.

Canada is one of the highest users of technology in the world. Statistics Canada says over 80 per cent of Canadians (21.7 million) aged 16 and older used the Internet for personal reasons in 2009. In the same year 98 per cent of people aged 16 to 24 went online. And it's not just youth! Those 45 years of age and older are the fastest growing age group to tie into technology.

Tim Challies, author of *The Next Story* (Zondervan, 2011), believes that technology has become an idol to many of us. The implications are serious. "When we give our lives over to idols, we hand them the keys to our heart. We become 'possessed' by them, driven to use them... we find our satisfaction in them. We become tools of our tools; rather than owning our gadgets we become owned by them. We begin to structure our lives around them, and our actions and our choices are motivated by our need and desire for the blessings and benefits that idol provides for us."

The Family and Technology Report released May 2011 by the Barna Group (Ventura, California) has some interesting findings which we Canadians need to note as well:

**1 Parents are just as dependent on technology as teens and tweens.**

Moms and dads are using technology and media almost as much as their 11-17 year olds. Parents watch the same amount of TV and movies and use the Internet for just as many minutes; they actually spend more time on the phone and emailing.

**2 Most family members, even parents, feel that technology has been a positive influence on their family.**

Nearly one-third of parents feel it is making their families better while over one-half describe the influence as neither good nor bad.

**3 Very few adults or youth take substantial breaks from technology.**

One-third of parents and nearly one-half of their children say they never really intentionally take a break from their screens. This explains why kids can sit at a dinner table texting each other rather carrying on a conversation. This begs the question, "Do we control technology or is technology controlling us?"



**4 Families experience conflict about technology, but not in predictable ways.**

One-quarter of the parents said they had strong disagreements about the limits on media and technology on a weekly basis. Nearly half the parents worry about technology wasting their children's time. The other area of conflict dealt with the cost of equipment and the need to always have the latest gadgets.

**5 Few families have experienced – or expect – churches to address technology.\***

The majority of parents and young people interviewed had not heard any kind of teaching from any church or religious institution on

how families can best use technology. In other words, most families are not getting any coaching or assistance when it comes to integrating technology into their family life.

Barna also suggests some practical helps for parents. **First**, focus on character and not just rules. Adults need to have regular conversations with their children about the limits we set and why we have them. Our goal is to develop kids of character. **Second**, prepare them for independence. Young people need to know we want to help them grow into healthy adults;

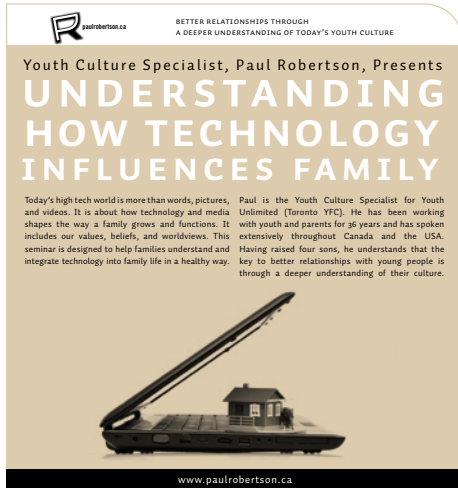
knowing how to control media usage and its impact is part of that journey. **Finally**, encourage a broader circle of influence. It is important for our kids to have other adults involved in their lives. The good word from a youth volunteer, pastor, relative, or even trusted neighbour is valuable.

The amount of time spent with media and technology is not going to shrink. The futurists predict there are only more, smaller, faster, and more complicated devices coming our way. It is the new "cultural soup" we are all swimming in and it will continue to influence family life on both sides of the border.

# Two NEW Seminars for Parents and Youth Workers/Teens

In addition to these two new seminars, please visit [www.paulrobertson.ca](http://www.paulrobertson.ca) to check out the other 13 workshops. To book Paul do a seminar for parents, youth workers, teens, or professional group, please call 905-582-4197 or email [paul@paulrobertson.ca](mailto:paul@paulrobertson.ca). Now is a great time to book for 2011-2012.

## Understanding Technology's Influence on Family



**YOUTH CULTURE SPECIALIST, PAUL ROBERTSON, PRESENTS**  
**UNDERSTANDING HOW TECHNOLOGY INFLUENCES FAMILY**

Today's high tech world is more than words, pictures, and videos. It is about how technology and media shapes the way a family grows and functions. It includes our values, beliefs, and worldviews. This seminar is designed to help families understand and integrate technology into family life in a healthy way.

Paul is the Youth Culture Specialist for Youth Unlimited (Toronto YFC). He has been working with youth and parents for 36 years and has spoken extensively throughout Canada and the USA. Having raised four sons, he understands that the key to better relationships with young people is through a deeper understanding of their culture.

[www.paulrobertson.ca](http://www.paulrobertson.ca)

The new age of digital technology is here to stay with even more dramatic changes coming. In many ways it has improved our lives significantly – access to important information and the ability to stay in touch with family and friends to name but two. However, in some ways it feels like we have been

consumed by a groundswell of gadgets that have crept into our homes. In some cases, what was intended to make our life easier has become wearisome and worrisome.

Canadians are the most active users of the internet in the world, according to a new global report by ComScore (March 2011). Canadians spend an average of 43.5 hours online every month. This is almost twice the global average of 23.1 hours.

This seminar will look at the following issues:

- a statistical profile of digital technology usage in Canada
- ways in which technology has had both positive and negative influences on families
- the impact of technology on family time
- parental usage of technology and the example they are setting for kids
- arguments and issues families are having around the use of technology in the home
- practical ways families can learn to create a healthy digital environment at home

**Book your seminar today for adults or youth. These 2 hour multi-media presentations include handouts, Understanding Today's Youth newsletters, book resource table, and promotional PDF poster and PowerPoint slide.**



## Pop culture got your kids? Youth Unlimited wants to help you get them back.

Youth Culture Specialist Paul Robertson has 13 seminars to help you deepen your relationship with the young people in your life by better understanding their culture. All articles were written by Paul.

To book Paul for your group call 416-383-1229 ext. 300 or check [www.paulrobertson.ca](http://www.paulrobertson.ca) for details.

## Understanding Media – Making Wise Choices



**YOUTH CULTURE SPECIALIST, PAUL ROBERTSON, PRESENTS**  
**UNDERSTANDING MEDIA: MAKING WISE CHOICES**

Parents and kids alike are spending hours every week with media. Media and our young people have become one. You can no longer separate a teen from the digital technology they consume daily. The question is whether or not we are choosing the right things to watch and listen to. This seminar looks at how media shapes all of us, how teens make decisions often influenced by media, and a process for discerning right from wrong in our media selections.

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They are often referred to as Generation M – as in media. According the Kaiser Family Foundation (January 2010), young people spend 7 hours and 38 minutes per day consuming media seven days a week. Furthermore, given the amount of time they spend using more than one medium at a

time, they really pack 10 hours and 45 minutes worth of media content into those seven and a half hours.

The challenge for parents and their children is choosing the best that media has to offer from volumes of meaningless programming. All media has a message that influences our values and beliefs, whether or not we want to admit it. We easily engage huge amounts of media but rarely give little thought as to the value of what we are seeing or listening to. Most teens and parents need to learn to discern the digital technology they consume daily.

This seminar will look at the following issues:

- an overview of how music and media shape kids in powerful ways
- ways in which media provides answers for young people's questions
- how kids mentally process media when making their decisions
- a process for discerning right from wrong when making media choices