

Bridging the Cyber Gap

"Our daughter loves to spend time on the computer—so much so that it's hard to get her excited about other things. Is there any way we can use her love of technology to connect as a family?"

by Marlene LeFever

A. Today's children will never know a time when they couldn't go online to find a piece of information. They'll never know a time when the only way to find out what language is spoken in Papua New Guinea or what a woolly mammoth ate was to look it up in a book. So it only makes sense for parents to figure out ways to use technology to create family bonds.

Connecting with Others

Your daughter likely has plenty of ideas for "talking" to friends and family through the computer. Kids love to Instant Message (IM) and e-mail, but they can also create movies, websites, and multimedia presentations to share with others. (If you don't know how to do much on a computer, ask a teenager at your church to help—he'll likely be happy to tutor you!)

Consider using a PowerPoint program to develop a short presentation on how your family members came to Christ. Create a family website and invite your relatives and friends to take a look.

Shoot a video of a grandparent sharing how he lived for Jesus for half a century. Many programs, such as the latest version of Windows and all Macintosh computers, allow you to take video from a camcorder and create movies complete with titles and background music. You can then burn the completed movies into cds or dvds. What great keepsakes!

If your daughter has a special connection with an older Christian relative or friend, encourage them to "talk" at least three times a week via e-mail. Let you daughter know that this is her private conversation and that you are willing to share or comment only if she gives you that privilege.

Connecting with God

The computer can help you create family devotions that challenge and intrigue your daughter. Read a Bible story, then go online and research the setting of the story or the lives of people who live in that city now. If you're reading about Pharaoh and Moses, go to a site about Egyptian archeology and learn more about this ancient civilization. Your daughter likely knows how to find information online, but it's fun to use a search engine like Google to explore a subject. You will find information you didn't know existed!

You can also find online Bible studies and devotionals just for kids. Do a Google search for "children's devotional," and you'll be amazed at the variety of materials available.

Connecting with the World

Over the last several years, a new form of communication has developed. It's called "blogging," and it's a powerful tool for developing a child's faith and helping her share her thoughts with the cyber community. A blog (short for "weblog") is basically an online journal that includes links to other websites. You and your daughter can create your own blog at sites such as blogspot.com.

Every day, your family can write a few sentences about your lives as followers of Jesus. Encourage trusted relatives and church friends to check out the journal and make comments in it. Discuss your entries with your daughter. For example, ask her why she included a certain event or what she wants to communicate to other people who read the blog. Keep in mind that blogs are typically open to anyone on the Internet, so don't reveal any identifying information such as your address or phone number.

You can also discover how God is working in the world at sites such as World Vision (worldvision.org) and Bread for the World (breadfortheworld.com). Sites like these can inspire your child to think of other ways to be involved in God's work in the world.

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