

# MY MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY DIET

**GOAL:** *empowering parents with information and tools to help them guide their families effectively into safe and healthy media habits.*

## Preparation:

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- TV and video
- Powerpoint with questions
- Notepaper & pens
- Copies of questions (see *Extra Resources* on website)

## Explain it: *what do we want to achieve today?* (5 min)

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Start by explaining the goals of this event. Say something like:

1. **Information and awareness.** If you leave here today asking more questions than you came in with, we will be happy. We believe parents should be aware of their kids' media intake, including internet use, and how it is impacting them. We can't give you all the answers for your family today, but we can help you ask the right questions.
2. **Understanding.** Every now and then we get to see life through someone else's eyes. Parents, hopefully you will see your kids' world a little clearer because of the time we spend together today, and kids, you will understand your parents' struggles just a bit more as well.
3. **Balance.** Because parents often don't understand the world of media that their kids are surrounded by, they respond in one of two opposite ways: they decide that movies, games, TV, music and the internet are evil and ban their kids from them; or they throw up their hands and allow their kids to consume anything and everything with no supervision or restrictions. We think there is a better, healthier place in the middle.
4. **Action.** We hope that you will put the information you receive into practice. We want your kids' media intake to be healthier because of something you learn, talk about or do as the result of today.

5. **Encouragement.** When parents and kids work together and try to understand each other, the world of media we explore can become a positive, productive and even edifying place!

## Inspire them: *why is this topic so important?* (10 min)

You might say something like:

Let's take a bit of a look at the use of media in our society. A 2010 survey by Statistics NZ showed that the average Kiwi spends

- 1+ hour a day listening to music
- 2 ¾ hours a day watching TV and video
- Watching TV is the #3 activity for NZers aged 12 and over in terms of time use, behind sleep and paid work.

Compared to ten years earlier,

- the time males spent exercising decreased by ten percent, while
- the time males spent gaming on computers or consoles increased by almost 50 percent.

We live in a culture where massive media exposure is normal, but how often do we stop to consider the effect all this media has on us? It's like a fish stopping to ask what's in the water he's swimming in. That's why we have called today's session 'My Media Diet' – what you consume will have an effect on you! Just like if you eat McDonalds every day for breakfast, lunch and dinner; if you consume junk on TV, in movies, music, books and on the internet, it will change you as a person. And collectively it will change our culture as a society.

Studies have shown that what we watch, the devices we use and the media channels we engage in can actually re-programme our brains! When we make a post on social media for example, and it gets liked by multiple people, that creates a reward response in our brains, making you more likely to post again and again until you are trapped in a pattern of behaving purely for others' approval.

Phones are being designed to display what you view in a finely-tuned light setting, so that they will keep your attention and have you use them for longer periods. This is bad news for those using phones late at night, especially teenagers who need more sleep and are kept up with active brains, cancelling out the body's natural signals to switch off.

In ancient Corinth they had a saying, "I am allowed to do all things." This sounds like the attitude I mentioned earlier where parents give up and don't set any boundaries. Well, when Paul wrote to the Christians in Corinth he acknowledged they had this saying and he added some bits to it. He wrote, "I am allowed to do all things," but not all things are good for me to do. "I am allowed to do all things," but I will not let anything make me its slave. (1 Cor. 6:12).

What do you think of that? Is he right? I am over 18 so I can get out a DVD about people who do drugs and murder people. I am allowed, but is it good for me? I am allowed to play online games,

but they can get pretty addictive; what if I don't want to go to work anymore or join with the church in worship on Sundays because I'd rather play my game? Have I become a slave to it? If God is our god, we should belong to him, not to our phones, a TV series, game, website or whatever.

So you see how important it is to think about what we consume instead of just doing it? We run the risk of making habits and normalising media consumption that will make us unhealthy or even prisoners to it. We need to keep our eyes open to the risks and keep appropriate boundaries, like meerkats; not just put our heads in the sand, like ostriches.

This is still a lesson for me, and I'm... years old! I must admit that sometimes I don't think about the affect media will have on me. I realise that some of the ideas I think about came from movies I watched and some of the sayings I use are from TV shows. On the other hand, I watch a YouTube clip about the world around me and it moves me to worship God because I'm amazed at what he's created.

Today, we want you to see the incredible power that media has [pause] and not create a tiny cage to protect yourself from it, or ignore it and give in, but work out *together* what will not harm you as a person and as a Christian, but will be healthy for you.

I'll conclude this section with another verse that I hope will help as we think about our media diets. It's from Philippians 4:8: "Brothers and sisters, think about the things that are good and worthy of praise. Think about the things that are true and honourable and right and pure and beautiful and respected."

(The Netflix documentary *The Social Dilemma*, may also have some up-to-date information you can share on the way social media works and some of the ways we can be manipulated by it.)

### **Model it:** *discuss media and technology use together* (15 min)

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Show the 'This is 40' clip<sup>1</sup> as an example of a conversation about media boundaries.

*(Note from Gareth Davies, Kumeu Baptist: the film clip above comes from a film that is not appropriate for children (rated R16). I believe the clip itself is great for the session but some facilitators may feel that showing the clip endorses the film as a whole.)*

Discuss the following questions as a combined group. (Display questions on a powerpoint)

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- How do you spend your time on the Internet?
- What is your overall evaluation of the Internet? Is it good or bad?
- What would you say to parents who leave their children to use the Internet completely unsupervised?

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.wingclips.com/movie-clips/this-is-40/no-more-wifi>

- What would you say to parents who ban their children from Internet usage?

Separate kids and parents into separate groups to answer the following questions. Have a leader with each group.

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- How would you describe your personal MEDIA DIET?
- How important is it for parents and teens to discuss these issues?
- Why do you need parental guidance?
- What are some of the tricks kids use to get around online rules and how can parents prevent them?

Re-unite and compare answers – leaders to report. What were the differences?

*(A note from Gareth Davies, Kumeu Baptist: One of the best parts of the session was when the parents and youth came back together after having discussed their questions separately, and we compared answers. The parents had given some thought to how their children might work around restrictions but they were shocked at the other ideas the youth themselves suggested! It laid a great foundation for the Practice It section where parents and children talked together in their families.)*

### **Practice it:** *make some guidelines as a family* (20 min)

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You might say something like:

“With all you have heard, seen and discussed today we’d like you to take some time to work out some guidelines together. We believe it’s much more helpful for your family to have discussed this together before a major disagreement comes up, or a child crosses boundaries that are harmful. We know that this isn’t a one-size-fits-all kind of thing so we’d like you to discuss as parents and children what kind of boundaries you will have when it comes to media and the internet.

For example, I’ve heard of parents that will not let their children go to an M-rated movie without them, or they will see it first. You might want to talk about how much time is too much time on a particular device, or what times of day will be appropriate to use the internet. Will your internet be accessible anywhere in the house or in a public place only? How will you decide what games are played? Are there any books or magazines that are limited until a certain age?

**We’ve made up a sheet here** [leaders hand out with pens and blank paper – see *extra resources*] to guide your discussion, and the same questions will also be on the screen, but if you would rather just talk around your own ideas then feel free. We’d like you to work out the boundaries together, and write them on the blank sheet so that you have some guidelines for your household.”

[time to talk and write]

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“I hope that was a helpful exercise for both of you. You know, it’s never too late to set healthy boundaries in your home. You might want to go home and type your sheet up to make it tidy.

Once you have something you all agree on, have your whole family sign it and date it. You can also renegotiate it once a few years have passed if you think it needs updating.

I've heard it said that healthy family boundaries are like a funnel. When children are young, they need pretty tight boundaries for their own protection and learning. But as they get older, the boundaries can be widened gradually to prepare them for when they are adults themselves. The idea is that as you get older, you gain greater freedom and increased responsibility. So the boundaries that you have as a nine-year-old will not be appropriate boundaries when you are a fourteen-year-old. Hopefully in those five years you will have proven yourself more trustworthy in certain areas so that you can be trusted in new areas."

You can finish with some time for questions and answers. You could have paper available for people to write their questions on if they wish to keep them anonymous.

## **Resources:**

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Have copies of the Media Resources handout for parents to take away. They provide information about setting up healthy internet and computer boundaries.