Living in good faith... with technology

The Families pages are adapted from Tapestry of Faith lifespan faith development programs.

www.uua.org/ tapestryoffaith

STORY FOR ALL AGES

The Children and the Frogs

Once upon a time a group of children ran down to the pond near their neighborhood. There they began a game of skipping stones and throwing rocks across and into the pond. What fun they were having as they searched for more and more stones and threw them with greater and greater splashes into the depths of the pond.

But underneath the water the inhabitants of the pond were not having such a fine time. In fact they were being hit by those rocks. Their homes were being damaged and their bodies torn. They trembled at the bottom in fear.

Finally the oldest and bravest frog swam to a lily pad on the surface of the pond and croaked loudly. The students stopped their games and looked.

"Please children, do stop your terrible game," said the frog, "While it might seem like simple fun to you, it means death for us." And the frog hopped back into the water.

Did the students stop their game? I hope so. What do you think?

An Aesop fable, retold by Elisa Pearmain in Once Upon a Time: A Storyteller's Guide to Character Education and Bullying Prevention.

Frog: ©iStockphoto.com/Shiffti

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A rock you toss in a pond cannot be gathered back, nor can you know the damage it may do underwater. Likewise, a cruelty posted online cannot be undone. You may never know all the hurt it has caused.

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Turn It Off, or Use It Together

Don't use media and communication devices all the time.

✳ Turn off television and ignore beeping phones and messaging devices at mealtimes.

✳ Reserve electronics-free times and no-media zones in your home, and recapture the art of being together.

✳ Minimize the time children spend alone online. Make it a family practice to use a computer together for homework, entertainment, or planning family activities.

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Cyberbullying

Studies suggest as many as half the youths in the United States have experienced cyberbullying—repeated online threats, teasing, or harassment by their peers. The potential for anonymous, instant dissemination of electronic messages makes unmasking and stopping a cyberbully especially challenging. The Wired Safety group (www.wiredsafety.org) offers kids advice, starting with the "Stop, block, and tell!" response to a bullying message:

■ **Stop what you are doing.**

■ **Block the person.**

■ **Tell a trusted adult.**

Another tip is to "Take 5!" Rather than respond immediately, perhaps angrily or impulsively, to an online message, youth can learn to "Drop the mouse! And step away from the computer so no one will get hurt!"

"Stop, block, and tell!"
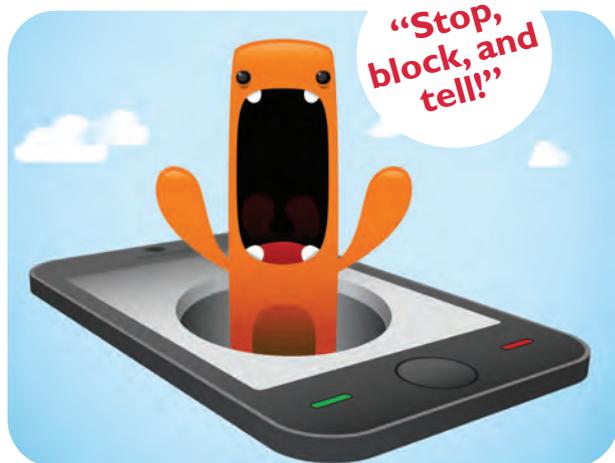
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Get Up Off of that Chair
The opposite of technological communication? Walking meditation!

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The goal is not to go really fast, nor really slow, nor to get anyplace—simply to be aware of yourself as you move.

Take a deep breath, all the way down into your belly, and then let it out.

Now, begin walking. If you are with others, move in a circle, leaving space between you so everyone can find their own pace.

■ Feel your body meeting the ground that holds you.

■ Is it textured or smooth? Hard or springy?

■ Let your shoulders relax, your head float, your eyes focus softly on your immediate path.

■ How you are feeling? Happy? Sad? Impatient?

■ Acknowledge your feelings and thoughts, then let them go as you step past them. Notice how air enters your body and then leaves again, just as thoughts enter your mind and then you let them go.

Use the World Wide Web for Global Good

While nothing can replace direct, in-person action, the Internet opens fast-track channels for advocacy and philanthropy that transcend geography. Online, we can organize ourselves into impossibly large groups to work together to promote change. We can help people who live in places we care about yet may never visit.

Online giving has many valuable expressions for your family or congregation to explore.

Activism. The UUA's Standing on the Side of Love (SSL) campaign uses a website to coordinate simultaneous actions in multiple locations—last fall to express solidarity with Muslims and promote religious freedom, and in 2009 for Valentine's Day equal marriage actions. "Technology helps a movement elevate the power of its actions, beyond a single event, to reach a larger community over an extended period of time," said Dan Furmansky, SSL campaign manager. www.standingonthesideoflove.org

Microlending. On the Kiva website (www.kiva.org), donors learn about and invest in microlending programs that help low-income entrepreneurs around the globe. Click to lend as little as $25 through Kiva's local financial partners. Then, track your investment online.

Environmental action. The Natural Resources Defense Council (www.nrdc.org), International Fund for Animal Welfare (www.ifaw.org), and World Wildlife Fund (www.worldwildlife.org) are environmental advocates that offer online learning, advocacy, and giving opportunities.

World justice. The Amnesty International website (www.amnestyusa.org) provides detailed, searchable information about human rights problems worldwide, success stories enabled by donor funds, and opportunities to act and give in-person and online.

Did You Know...a Unitarian Universalist invented the World Wide Web?

On his website, Tim Berners-Lee tells how he and other scientists developed the Web and reflects on its purposes and power.

"The actual explosion of creativity, and the coming into being of the Web was the result of thousands of individuals playing a small part. . . . not for a direct gain, but because they had an inkling that it was the right way to go, and a gleam of an exciting future. It is necessary to UU philosophy that such things can happen, that we will get to a better state in the end by each playing our small part."

"[T]HE MAIN THING TO REMEMBER IS THAT ANY REALLY POWERFUL THING CAN BE USED FOR GOOD OR EVIL. . . . SO WHAT IS MADE OF THE WEB IS UP TO US. YOU, ME, AND EVERYONE ELSE."

Technology can help us connect with others. *We must take care to communicate responsibly.*

STATISTICS

> Three quarters (74%) of U.S. 7th–12th graders say they have a profile on a social networking site.

> This age group spends an hour and thirty-five minutes, on average, sending or receiving texts per day.

> More than half of young people say they use media either "most" (31%) or "some" (25%) of the time they're doing their homework.

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From a 2010 study by the Kaiser Family Foundation in collaboration with researchers from Stanford University.

Are We the Loneliest Nation on Earth?

Once upon a time, the telephone was a unique way for people to stay connected. Now, technology helps us stay connected to more and more people, more and more of the time.

Does our enthusiasm for cell phones, texting, and social media show how greatly we value human connection? Or does it suggest the opposite—a profound American loneliness?

It is hard to say whether technology makes us less, or more, lonely. Like money, technology is neither good nor evil, just a tool whose responsible use is in our hands. However, in our urgency to click "send" we can easily forget that the electronic device in our hands has people on the other end of it. The technical marvels of today's communication technology can overshadow its power to break as well as build relationships, to foster misunderstanding as well as understanding.

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Telecommunication lacks the tactile benefits of face-to-face communication. In some cases, electronically is the only way communication can happen—and for that, we are grateful. Yet, these media discourage shared silences, which can communicate so much, and obliterate non-verbal cues that can clarify or deepen an interaction. Something is missing when two parties do not share the same air. Further, email and text communications happen one-way. Are we learning to speak as if no listener is there?

• To what or whom do I feel connected?

• If I were feeling overwhelmingly lonely, to whom or where would I turn? Would I reach out in person, or phone or email someone? Or, would I post a message on a social networking site? Why?

• What can I do to address loneliness—my own and the loneliness of others—with technology? Without it?

Join Hands and Cross the Generational Digital Divide

Multigenerational activities can nurture relationships among your family and friends while inviting older people to learn from young people's comfort and resourcefulness with technological tools. Engage a multi-age group to plan a celebration together, or sign up as a group for a volunteer service activity. Link tech-savvy young people with elders who may be reluctant to try new technology or lack devices they want to learn to use.

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It is strange to be known so universally and yet to be so lonely.
— Albert Einstein

FAMILIES:
WEAVE A TAPESTRY OF FAITH

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FIND OUT MORE

• Examine an article, "e-bully," in *Teaching Tolerance*, a publication of the Southern Poverty Law Center. www.tolerance.org/magazine/number-29-spring-2006

• On the UUA website's WorshipWeb, read a sermon, "The Tao of iPod." The Rev. Anne Welsbacher suggests we might embrace "the kids' new gadgets: They're *here*, and they aren't going anywhere soon. And the kids, at least some of them, seem to understand how they can be used in positive ways." What the gadgets offer us in the end, she says, is based not on what they are, but on who we are.

• Tim Berners-Lee's website offers the Unitarian Universalist scientist's reflections on where the Internet has taken us and where we may yet go. See www.w3.org/People/Berners-Lee/ and Berners-Lee's book, *Weaving the Web*.

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