

The Inner Game



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If we become addicted to the external, our interiority will haunt us. We will become hungry with a hunger no image, person or deed can fill.

— JOHN O'DONAHUE, "ANAM CARA"

Our children today are growing up in a world of constant bombardment from outside sources that are seeking their attention and engagement. Social media, video games, YouTube, online gaming and gambling are coming at them 24/7, and AI is figuring out what they like and how to get them more of it. And it's not going to slow down.

The idea, from one perspective, is "at least this content is keeping our children entertained and happy as they navigate this crazy world." The truth is a lot of our children aren't happy. Many are lonely, isolated and disconnected, and growing up faster than we can imagine.

The world for pre-teens and teens has always been a bumpy ride. We experience more changes in those few years than we will in the rest of our lives. The difference is that now they are comparing themselves with artificial images from the outside world. And most kids are carrying those images around on their phones all the time.

I spend a lot of time talking to parents, and the impact of technology is always their number one concern. Preschoolers have iPads now, and the cell phone is the holy grail for youngsters. Parents know they can't stop it, but they are looking for balance as the pull of outside culture robs their kids of a connection with their inner worlds.

Parents and grandparents can model responsible use of technology, set limits and stick to them. Our son and his wife use the acronym PNP when they pick up their kids after preschool. It stands for "Play No Phone" from after school until bedtime. They all stay outdoors or play in the house, but the focus is on personal connection. Everybody loves it, and the outside world can wait.

Reading together is still about as good as it gets for connecting and finding things to talk about. Start when they're babies and keep it up as long as you can. In middle school, they'll start reading great books for schoolwork. Get a copy for yourself and be in on the conversation.

What goes on in your home is still more important than the outside culture. Home is where kids can learn and practice the inner game. ☸