How Do I Select a Technology Monitoring Service?

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Teens and kids today are spending more and more time online through mobile devices.

Simply seeing our kids' actions and behavior in the physical world is no longer enough to know how they are acting or who they are with since the rise of social media and these digital devices.

So, what is a parent to do?

Well, according to a 2016 PEW Research report, 61% of parents check their kids' web history, 60% monitor social media, and 48% check their kids' text and phone calls.

So, it seems the question is not, "should I monitor my kids?" but "how do I monitor my kids?"

There are a few things to consider when you are looking at these types of services.

One, how much control are you wanting?

Some services allow you to do very little or a variety of features.

If you have a younger child, you may only be looking for internet protection, but with older students, you may also be looking to monitor messages and social media.

The second thing to consider is, do you want your child knowing that you are monitoring them?

Some parents are open and honest when it comes to monitoring. Other parents want to monitor in the shadows anonymously. There are services for each type of parent which we will discuss below. However, I believe that being honest with your student about your intentions is one way to generate buy-in and understanding when it comes to kids and their technology.

There is already a disconnect between parents and their kids when it comes to the things with screens but being honest is a way to bridge this gap and build trust.

The third thing to consider when selecting a monitoring service is the ease of use.

If you purchase a great software but do not know how to use it, then it does you no good. The good news is that many of these services offer a multi-day free trial, so you can try them out before you fully commit.

The last thing to think through is will this service only work on mobile devices like phones and tablets or will they also work on computers or even smart appliances like your T.V.

Knowing the range of your service or services is important before committing fully to any of them.

Now that we have discussed a few things to look for, here are a few suggestions based on what you might be looking for.

Below we will identify 8 different monitoring options and look at how they measure up to each of these pieces of criteria.

Again, the criteria will be:

1. How much control do you want?
2. Do you want your kid to know you are monitoring?
3. Ease of use.
4. Will this work on all technology or just mobile devices?

COVENANT EYES

- Control: 4/5 Stars
- Do They Know: YES
- Ease of Use: 3/5 Stars
- All technology or just mobile: ALL

Features:

- covenanteyes.com
- Internet Filter
- Accountability Report Available
- $11.99/month (personal) $15.99/month (family)

CIRCLE

- Control: 5/5 Stars
- Do They Know: YES
- Ease of Use: 4/5 Stars
- All technology or just mobile: ALL

Features:

- meetcircle.com
- Set Time Limits
- Internet Filter
- Block or Allow Apps
- Set Log-Off Times and/or Bed Times
- See History
- Pause Internet
- Give Rewards
- $99 for the unit (no monthly fee) $5/month to enable features off home WiFi

QUSTODIO

- Control: 4/5 Stars
- Do They Know: YES
- Ease of Use: 4/5 Stars
- All technology or just mobile: ALL

Features:

- qustodio.com
- Internet Filter
- Activity Reports
- Set Time Limits
- Block or Allow Games & Apps
- Monitor Social Media
- Monitor Calls (Android only)
- Location Tracking
- $4.58/month (5 devices) $8.08/month (10 devices) $11.50/month (15 devices)

TEENSAFE

- Control: 2/5 Stars
- Do They Know: YES
- Ease of Use: 3/5 Stars
- All technology or just mobile: MOBILE

Features:

- teensafe.com
- View Web History
- View Text Messages
- View Calls & Contacts
- Location Tracking
- See messages sent & received from WhatsApp & Kik Messenger

POCKETGUARDIAN

- Control: 4/5 Stars
- Do They Know: Yes
- Ease of Use: 3/5 Stars
- All technology or just mobile: MOBILE

Features:

- gopocketguardian.com
- Monitor Social Media (Snapchat, Kik, etc.)
- Alerts for Inappropriate Words & Images
- Monitor Mobile Apps
- View Web History
- Location Tracking
- View Installed Apps
- View Calls & Contacts

X3 WATCH

- Control: 4/5 Stars
- Do They Know: Yes
- Ease of Use: 3/5 Stars
- All technology or just mobile: ALL

Features:

- x3watch.com
- Internet Filter
- Accountability Reports
- $5.83/month (single user) $8.33/month (family use)

SCREEN TIME (Android)

- Control: 4/5 Stars
- Do They Know: YES
- Ease of Use: 3/5 Stars
- All technology or just mobile: MOBILE

Features:

- screentimelabs.com
- App Usage
- Daily Reports
- Web & Search History
- Time Limits
- Block Apps & Games
- Pause
- Schedules
- Bedtime App Blocker
- FREE (limited features & 1 device per child) $4.99/month (all features)

SCREEN TIME (Apple)

- Control: 4/5 Stars
- Do They Know: YES
- Ease of Use: 5/5 Stars
- All technology or just mobile: MOBILE

Features:

- iOS 12
- App Limits
- Daily & Weekly Reports
- Internet Filter
- Web & Search History
- App Store Restrictions
- Tracks "Pickups" & Notifications
- FREE with iOS 12 compatible device

As you can see, there are a variety of options that parents have at their fingertips, and these are only a few. As it was stated earlier, find something that you feel comfortable using and move forward with it. I would also recommend you stick with it for at least a month, or the trial period. This will give you a more "real life" look and feel to the application you choose.

It is a growing world out there, and the Internet is only getting bigger. Schools are incorporating screens more and more, and "being connected" is a desire of the next generation.

As parents, the best thing that we can do is to prepare and parent our kids through this digital world. Face to face conversations are still needed, but the assistance of a service like these are a great resource in your parenting tool belt!