

PRAISE FOR iKIDS

“An enlightening look into the world of the newest, techiest generation, *iKids* is chock-full of useful tidbits to help parents prevent children from overloading on too many screens and too much technology. [This book is] an excellent guide for Christian parents who want to raise their children with the right values.”

—*Jean M. Twenge, author of Generation Me and coauthor of The Narcissism Epidemic*

“Every parent in America needs a copy of this book. If I were a pastor or staff member of a church, I would make sure every parent and grandparent had this book, and I would organize teaching and small-group discussions around it. There is something to learn on every page—from information to perspective to practical tips.”

—*Reggie McNeal, author of Get Off Your Donkey: Help Somebody and Help Yourself*

“This book is an amazing representation of the children who are entering into middle school. Miller provides a vocabulary to understand these children and their experiences, and he provides teachers, parents, pastors, Christian educators and other leaders in the church ways to give guidance for a deeper spiritual walk with God.”

—*Leigh Meekins, Christian educator and ordained deacon, The United Methodist Church*

“I read *iKids* through the eyes of a grandparent. I am giving a copy to each of my children to help them practice proactive parenting in an age of techgear and digital media, and better understand their influence on the mental and social development of our grandchildren.”

—*Mike Slaughter, Senior Pastor of Ginghamburg Church*

“Miller’s unique navigation through the digital waters surrounding pre-teens and teenagers today is brilliant. As a pastor of a growing congregation and the father of two young children, this resource is essential. I highly recommend adding it to your collection.”

—*Olu Brown, pastor of Impact Church in Atlanta, Georgia,
and author of Zero to 80*

iKids

Parenting in the Digital Age

CRAIG KENNET MILLER



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For Matthew

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	9
Introduction: When Every Day Is Disneyland.....	11
What Is Techgear.....	12
One: Digital Child	17
Techgear and iKids' Sleep Habits	20
Playing Outside Helps iKids Develop Better Eyesight.....	24
Two: Digital Brain	31
Continuous Partial Attention and iKids	48
Three: Digital Culture	51
The Inverse Power of Praise.....	64
Four: Digital Learning	67
iKids and Common Core Educational Standards	70
Informal Education in Your Home.....	74
Reading as Part of an iKid's Informal Education	78
Five: Digital Creators	85
iKids Are Growing Up in a New Class System	90
Six: Digital Marketing	101
Developing Better Habits.....	104

Seven: Digital Identity	113
What iKids Need to Know to Protect Their Footprints.....	118
iKids and Energy Drinks	122
Eight: Digital Inc.	125
Who Owns Our Pop Culture?.....	134
Give Your iKids Some Brand Sense	138
Nine: Digital Families	141
The Death of the Neighborhood School	150
When Faith Communities Adopt Schools.....	152
So Your iKid Wants a Phone	158
Ten: Digital Soul	165
What Should iKids Know About the Bible?	168
What Does Your Church Offer to iKids?.....	176
Recommended Reading	181
Notes	183

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INTRODUCTION

When Every Day Is Disneyland

I wonder what my son's life will be like when he is my age. His childhood is already vastly different than mine was. I grew up with Mickey Mouse, Superman, and Batman, characters from my favorite comic books. He has grown up with Mario, Sonic, Bowser, Princess Peach, Zelda, Link, Pikachu, Spyro, and Donkey Kong from his favorite video games.

While I had the complete set of the Hardy Boys mysteries on my bookshelf, he has a complete set of 39 Clues, Percy Jackson, and The Hunger Games on his Kindle. While my family had a black-and-white TV, he has access to a variety of screens, from a Kindle Fire HD, to a Wii U game pad, to a Nintendo DS, to an old Mac Pro his sister used at college, to the HD TV that sits in our family room, not to mention the smartphones my wife, daughter, and I carry around with us as lifelines to the World Wide Web. Daily he reminds me that all his friends have smartphones, so he should have one too.

As a kid growing up in Southern California, I wished every day included a trip to Disneyland. All year long I looked forward to our annual trek to the happiest place on earth. It was a world of wonders where at each intersection of the park I could make a choice to travel to a different land. I could walk down Main Street and go into Sleeping Beauty's Castle. I could go to Adventureland, to ride the Jungle Cruise as wild animals tried to swamp the boat. I could go down a waterfall on the Pirates of the Caribbean ride in Frontierland. In Fantasyland I could relive a cartoon on Mr. Toad's Wild Ride. And in Tomorrowland, I could imagine a future with picture phones, color TVs with remotes, and plastic houses at the Monsanto Chemicals House of the Future.

Each ride was a carefully crafted experience created by imagineers; the genius developers who knew how to turn the everyday thrill ride into a story. You didn't

WHAT IS TECHGEAR?

Techgear is shorthand for such items as tablets and smartphones that share these characteristics:

1. A self-illuminating screen that emits blue light, the part of the light spectrum that our eyes associate with daytime.
2. A touch-sensitive screen that allows you to manipulate and click on objects with the touch of a finger.
3. Customizable by downloading apps (applications), which are typically small programs for games, business applications, and entertainment.
4. Able to connect to the web.
5. Includes a camera that allows the user to take pictures and videos, which are easily shared on social networking sites

Some examples of techgear include iPhones and iPads from Apple, the Kindle Fire HD products from Amazon, Samsung smartphones and tablets, Nintendo 2DS and 3DS portable game systems, and tablets designed for young children from companies like LeapFrog, VTech, and Nabi.

just get on a roller coaster; you went on bobsleds in the Swiss Alps as you rode the Matterhorn, the iconic ride that every kid looked for as they entered Anaheim.

The worst part about going to Disneyland was going home. You knew it would be a long time before you were again immersed in a world of imagination that consumed your every thought and action.

For my son and his generation, every day is like going to Disneyland—their entertainment choices are at their fingertips. The same imagineers who created the rides at Disneyland now spend thousands of hours creating immersive games that grab gamers' attention whenever they turn on a smartphone, tablet, or game system.

Games with names like *Dragonville*, *Candy Crush*, and *Doodle Jump* can be downloaded onto a device, and within seconds gamers jump into the newest carefully crafted scenario that makes them want to come back for more.

To have fun, children today don't have to get in a car and ride to a theme park; they just have to text, chat, or livestream with their friends from the privacy of their bedrooms. If they feel goofy they can use Snapchat to send a video or picture that "disappears" in a few seconds. They can update their Tumblr site or Facebook account to let their friends know what they are watching online, or they can let them in on the latest news about their friends and school. And they can do this at any time of the day or night.

Before the year 2000, children lived in a world in which it was easy to distinguish between the digital world of created experiences and the analog world of

everyday life. While the children of the 1980s and 1990s played computer games, had first- and second-generation gaming systems like Game Boys and Sega, and were kept busy watching videos of their favorite movies like *The Little Mermaid* and *The Lion King*, their entertainment choices pale in comparison to the 24-7 always-on digital world our children and teens inhabit.

It was just a few years ago, in 2007, that Apple introduced the iPhone, the revolutionary device with something called *apps* that allowed users to simply touch the screen to make choices. You no longer needed a computer to access Facebook, to get driving directions, or to find a best-reviewed restaurant. The iPhone allowed you to take clear pictures and videos, which you could upload and share with others. It also came with games that took advantage of the touch screen to give you a gaming experience that was not available on a PC.

Today's generation of children and emerging teens have taken to smartphones and tablets like ducks to water. For them having techgear is a birthright. It is their access to their culture, it's the way they connect to one another, and it's the way they navigate childhood and adolescence.

As the parent of an "iKid," a member of the generation of children and teens born since 2000, I began to wonder how all this techgear was influencing parents, children, and the newly minted teenagers who had recently celebrated their thirteenth birthdays. I spent a year sifting through books and articles and talking to parents, pastors, and teachers as I investigated the pros and cons of the emerging digital culture of the iKids generation.

The one discovery that most resonated with me was this: We are in the midst of a great experiment. No one knows how the use of techgear and digital media is affecting the mental and social development of iKids. Whether it's Toys'R'Us selling a line of tablets for four-year-olds or school systems giving children iPads so they can take the Common Core test online or parents giving eight-year-olds smartphones so they can track them when they go to school, the iKids are immersed in a screened-in environment that beckons them at every turn.

The only thing we know for sure is that as our society purchases techgear in record numbers and puts it in the hands of our youngest generation, we are faced with a slew of questions that won't be answered until the iKids are in their twenties and thirties.

Beyond the family, every retailer and online business is trying to figure out how to best use the latest devices to connect with the iKids. Children and young teens are not simply users of iPhones, Samsung Galaxy tablets, game sites like Webkinz, or social networks like Facebook. They are salespeople working on behalf of the brands they love. Whenever an iKid signs up for something or says they "like" it, they are adding to the value of that device or app. When I was a child I was just a passive viewer of my favorite TV program. Now digital companies actively track iKids' choices because the use of their products increases their bottom line.

Who Are the iKids?

Born from 2000 to 2017

65.5 Million

20% of US Population
Projected United States Population of iKids Age 15
and under in 2015

1.9 Billion

26% of World Population
Projected World Population of iKids Age 15
and under in 2015

White:	52.9%
Hispanic:	25.0%
Black:	13.3%
Asian:	4.5%
Two or More Races	3.1%
Native American	.2%
and Pacific Islander	

Projected US Ethnicity of iKids in 2015

2000: 33.2 percent

2012: 40.7 percent

Percentage of Births in US to Unmarried Women

Two Parents:	69.0%
Married Parents:	65.0%
Mother Only:	24.0%
Father Only:	4.0%
No Parent:	3.0%

Who are iKids living with? (US 2013)

Source: US Census Data

As households, schools, corporations, and places of worship embark on a race to catch up with the newest, fastest, and most innovative techgear and apps, we would do well to remember that children are not miniature adults with fully developed bodies, values, and emotions. They are under construction. No matter how great our technology, the unassailable fact remains that the human body develops over time. It is not until a person reaches his or her early twenties that the brain is fully formed.

Children and teens are not just nodes on a digital network. They are persons of worth, created by God, who are at their most vulnerable and are at the time in their lives when they decide on their values, their beliefs, and the nature of the relationships they will have in the future.

While it may appear that I am a technophobe, ready to shut down the World Wide Web, in fact the challenge of a parent is finding the right balance between digital and analog, between images on a screen and face-to-face interaction, between virtual and real.

In the pages that follow we will discover how the emerging digital culture is influencing and impacting the lives of iKids and their families. We will investigate key issues that are facing parents and iKids:

- how iKids who are entering adolescence are at the peak of brain development and the implications for the use of digital media
- how the parents of iKids have been shaped by their own cultural experiences
- how iKids in public schools will be affected by the biggest sweeping change in education in generations, the rollout of Common Core
- how corporations use data gathered from children, teens, and parents to influence their purchases
- how to understand identity and privacy in a digital economy
- how the values of the creative class affect everything we do
- how to think about spirituality and faith formation in a digital age

Rather than a self-help book on parenting, *iKids* brings forth the questions parents, teachers, pastors, and Christian leaders need to examine to understand the impact our digital culture is having on our lives. Along with the main text, you will find short articles that highlight key findings and ideas.

I invite you to reflect on the world we are creating for the iKids, our children and emerging teens who are embracing the digital life and will, as every generation before has done, be creating their own culture as they move toward adulthood.

For me this topic is personal. As I have been writing this book, my twelve-year-old son has served as my cultural guide and confidant into the world in which he lives. In many ways he was my cowriter, who kept me on track and allowed me to see many of these issues from his side of the life-span continuum.