

How technology has changed our parenting lives

By Christine Organ

February 23, 2015

Each new crop of parents thinks that it faces its own unique challenges. I suppose every generation feels like they are exploring new and foreign terrain because, well, as parents we all are.

My generation's uncharted territory, our seemingly unsolvable Rubik's Cube is clearly technology.

More specifically: the ways that we parents use technology – the Internet in particular – and the relevance (maybe prevalence is more accurate?) that it has assumed in our lives. It hasn't just created new parenting dilemmas with respect to our children. It has also changed the way that we interact with each other as parents, how we see other parents, and even how we see ourselves.

For one thing, the Internet has increased our access to information. Have a question about potty training, thumb-sucking, time-outs, or breastfeeding? Just ask the experts at Google. Parents have questions and the Internet has the answers. (Or at least *an* answer.)

By the same token, technology has made it easier for parents to connect with each other and find their tribe. After my first son was born, I suffered from post-partum depression and often felt like I was drowning in loneliness. Thanks to an online group I found through Meetup.com (which was a lot like Internet dating for parents), I met a handful of women who became some of my very closest friends. It wasn't until I found a handful of online communities where parents talked openly and with a certain kind of raw beauty about post-partum depression that I began to move past the shame and toward self-forgiveness and healing.

So yes, technology – the Internet and social media in particular – has made it possible for parents to connect in more meaningful ways. Put another way, technology has made it easier for us to whisper to each other that thing we are all so desperate to hear: You aren't the only one; you're not alone.

But technology isn't necessarily creating a utopic camaraderie to parenting. There is a dangerous side, as well. Due to the grip that social media has on our culture there is a slippery slope into "snapshot parenting" – the rush of assumptions and comparisons based on the snippets we see online; the romanticism of parenthood; the inaccurate representations of our children; and the cyclical tendency to share (publicly and privately) only the rosy sides of parenting.

Do I believe in celebrating the beauty of childhood and parenting? Of course. But are we at risk of slipping into a cycle of lies by omission through our online persona? Perhaps. And are we changing the rules of the game with our own inaccurate depictions of parenthood and our "snapshot" mentality? Definitely.

I recently read a popular article that romanticized motherhood, and after a little eye-rolling at the Madonna-esque tone, I felt like a less adequate mother because I didn't share the feelings of the author – feelings that had been "validated" by millions of likes and shares and Internet high-fives. Similarly, a recent Facebook status update of a friend of a friend praising herself for never EVER

feeding her kids fast food stirred up pangs of guilt about our family's trips through the McDonald's drive-through. And while scrolling through Facebook over the holidays, I was inundated with pictures of smiling families and twinkly-eyed kids, but few posts mentioned the tantrums, tears, and disappointments that we all know are part of the holiday drama.

Whatever the parenting soft spot, there will always be something that wiggles its way into that vulnerable place. We are bombarded with information from all directions, much of which has the potential to needle our soft spots, even if doing so inadvertently.

This can be scary and troubling, even for the most confident, self-assured parents among us. Parenting is inherently wrought with challenges, but the Internet and social media have amplified those challenges – for children and parents alike.

It is a challenge to sift through the overwhelming amount of information and opinions in order to find helpful advice and to connect with a supportive community. It is a challenge to maintain perspective when social media has a tendency to paint broad brushstrokes of perfection over something as imperfect as parenting. It is a challenge to remember that technology is a tool, and that it can have only as much power over us as we let it.

So how can we, as parents, help our children take advantage of the benefits of technology while managing its pitfalls if we aren't sure how to deal with them in our own lives?

Perhaps the first step is to acknowledge that our online behavior heavily impacts the way that we interact as parents, the ways that we see each other, and the ways that we think about ourselves. Then, maybe, with some practice, we can remind ourselves that, even though we are bombarded with examples of "best practices," love, pure and simple, is really what matters. There might be a mountain of information and advice out there about how we can be better parents (with countless, divergent opinions about what that even means), but perhaps we could all stand to be a little kinder and gentler with each other and ourselves as well. Maybe "good enough" needs to override "best practices" every now and then.

And, like most things, meeting the challenges takes honesty, authenticity, and open-heartedness. As a writer and a mother, I have the privilege of using technology as a platform to reach readers and, consequently, I have an obligation to paint a realistic picture of parenting. It is for this reason that I try to write about not just the sweet sides of parenting, but the bitter sides as well. I have no interest in sugar-coating things; parenting is hard, good work.

But even more than that, it takes honest conversations with each other so that we can balance out the snapshot parenting that has become so pervasive in our digital lives. Tell me your worries, your ideas, your war stories; trust me, I will tell you mine. Because even though technology might have changed the rules, parenting is still the same game. And aren't we all on the same team?

Christine Organ [blogs here](#). You can find her on Twitter [@christineorgan](#).

[Like On Parenting on Facebook](#) for more essays, advice and news.

You might also be interested in:

[How the over-glorification of motherhood hurts us all](#)

[Parenting in the age of iEverything](#)

