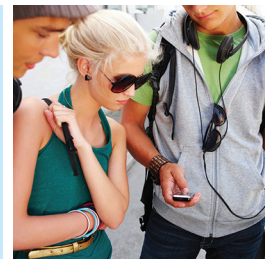




ACCOUNTABLE KIDS

EXPLAINING COVENANT EYES TO YOUR FAMILY





ABOUT THE AUTHOR



LUKE GILKERSON


Luke is the general editor and primary author of the Covenant Eyes blog (www.covenanteyes.com/blog), and also serves as the Internet Community Manager. Luke has a BA in Philosophy and Religious Studies from Bowling Green State University and is working on his MA in Religion from Reformed Theological Seminary.

Before working at Covenant Eyes he spent six years as a campus minister at the University of Toledo. He lives with his wife Trisha and four sons in Owosso, MI.



 www.covenanteyes.com

 1.877.479.1119

 1525 W. King St., PO Box 637
Owosso, MI 48867

Copyright © 2014 Covenant Eyes, Inc.
All rights reserved.

You are free to distribute print copies of this e-book to anyone you choose. As a courtesy, e-mail us at: resources@covenanteyes.com and let us know you are doing this so we can keep you informed of other similar resources.

To distribute this e-book electronically, we ask that you share the page: www.covenanteyes.com/accountable-kids/

For more information about sharing our materials electronically, see: www.covenanteyes.com/permissions-policy/

WHAT IS COVENANT EYES?

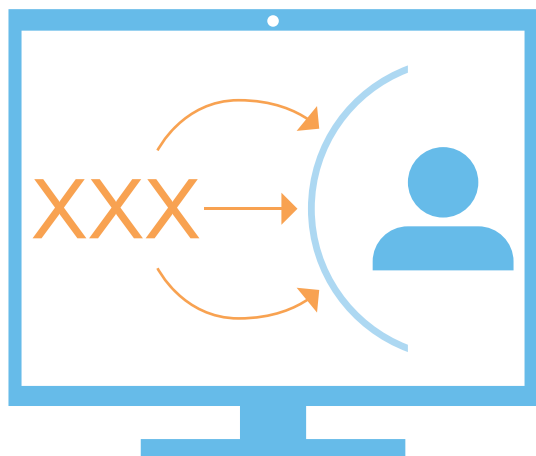
Covenant Eyes provides the tools for you to protect yourself and your family from inappropriate content online.

INTERNET ACCOUNTABILITY



The websites you visit, the search terms you use, the YouTube videos you watch... all listed in an Accountability Report that is designed for the conversation.

INTERNET FILTERING



Do you want an extra layer of protection for yourself or your kids? Our Internet Filter blocks content based on age-appropriateness.

LEARN MORE AND SIGN UP
AT WWW.COVENANTEYES.COM



5 STEPS TO TEACH YOUR KIDS ABOUT INTERNET ACCOUNTABILITY

In today's digital world, there is a disconnect between parents and children about the use of technology. Time online is largely *private* time. For both adults and children alike, this leads to a variety of temptations.

- **TEMPTATIONS OF CONTENT:** You wouldn't watch that sexual video on TV with others in the room, but the same video calls to you online.
- **TEMPTATIONS OF COMMUNICATION:** You would never utter that harsh word to someone's face, but now online it is easier to type.
- **TEMPTATIONS OF THE CLOCK:** The hours you planned to get work done are suddenly wasted on Facebook, chatting, and watching YouTube clips.

Researchers call this pattern the “online disinhibition effect.”¹ We lose our inhibitions online because we believe no one is watching us. We don't see the connection between our online actions and their impact on others or ourselves. We get sucked in by the experience of a whole world at our fingertips, with no one but ourselves to tell us how to use it.

This is why Internet accountability is critical for adults and children alike. By getting rid of the potential for secrecy, we bring our Internet use into the light of honesty and transparency.

WHY KIDS NEED TO BUY INTO ACCOUNTABILITY

The purpose of this guide is to give you information for talking to your family about the importance of Internet accountability and filtering.

1. John Suler. “The Online Disinhibition Effect.” *CyberPsychology & Behavior*. June 2004, 7(3): 321-326

Ultimately, as parents, we hope “parental controls” are not just a tactic we use to keep our kids in line while they are under our roof. We want more for our kids. We want them to *buy into* the need for Internet protection. We want them to become *their own* watchdogs online. We want them to leave home as young adults prepared for a world without filters.

This means providing not just good technology, but good parenting. We need to *teach* our kids the value of accountability online.

DISCONNECT BETWEEN PARENTS AND KIDS

According to a recent survey of Internet users:²

- Teens spend an average of five hours a day online, but their parents think their kids only spend two.
- 71% of teens have done something to hide their online behavior from their parents.
- 41% of teens say they check their social network accounts, not just every day but “constantly.” Only 22% of parents said the same thing about their kids.
- 45% of teens say they have visited a website they know their parents would disapprove of. Only 24% of parents are aware of this about their children.
- 31% of teens say they have pirated music or movies online. Only 12% of parents are aware of this.
- 53% of teens have cleared browser history to hide Internet activity (82% of parents are *unaware* teens do this).
- 46% of teens have minimized a browser window to hide online activity (83% of parents are *unaware* teens do this).

2. “The Digital Divide: How the Online Behavior of Teens is Getting Past Parents.” June 2012.
<<http://www.mcafee.com/us/resources/misc/digital-divide-study.pdf>>

What do we learn from surveys like this? We learn that parents are largely unaware when it comes to what their kids are doing online, even if they think they aren't. We also learn that kids spend a lot of private time online that is completely unmonitored.

INTRODUCING KIDS TO ACCOUNTABILITY

Thousands of adults use Covenant Eyes Internet Accountability to safeguard their own time online. These adults have made a decision that letting others know about where they go and what they see online is beneficial to their lives.

The same can be true for kids. They can be taught from a young age to value accountability in their own lives.

Use the ideas and scripts below to begin this training in your home and to introduce your family to Covenant Eyes.

- **STEP 1:** Lead By Example
- **STEP 2:** Talk About the Seduction of Privacy
- **STEP 3:** Frame Accountability in the Right Light
- **STEP 4:** Respond to Objections
- **STEP 5:** Set Clear Expectations

STEP 1: LEAD BY EXAMPLE

Parents need to be a model of Internet accountability to help their children see the value of it.

As a first step, download Covenant Eyes to all devices you, as the parent, use on a regular basis. Find others to be your Internet Accountability Partners as well. These might include your spouse, but they can also include any trusted friends or colleagues. These should be people you trust to receive Internet Accountability Reports of your online browsing and searching.

Why is this critical? Children and especially teens need to know they are not being targeted because they are kids. Accountability is valuable for everyone. This is ultimately something you hope they will continue to use into their adulthood. Show them how valuable it is by starting with you.

ACTION STEPS:

- Find people to be your Accountability Partners. Tell them an e-mail invitation is coming to their inbox soon, asking them to be your Partner.
- Make sure your Partners look at the [list of free resources available for Accountability Partners](https://covenanteyes.com/getting-started) at covenanteyes.com/getting-started (under “Having Internet Conversations”).
- Install Covenant Eyes on every computer, tablet, and smartphone you personally use. If your children use devices of their own, wait to install Covenant Eyes until after you have spoken to them.

STEP 2: TALK ABOUT THE SEDUCTION OF PRIVACY

Sit down with your children to explain why you have installed Covenant Eyes. Begin by talking about the problem you are trying to solve.

Unless you have reason to believe your children have done something wrong online, and unless you have spoken with each child privately about those misuses, do not presume your children are guilty of anything. The goal of this step is not to communicate that you are displeased about what they do online, but to tell them how easy Internet abuse is.

Here’s one way to start the conversation:

“I’ve chosen to put an Internet accountability program on all our devices. What this does is keep track of all the places we go online, and it compiles all of that information into a Report that I can access any time I want.

“The reason I’m telling you about this is because, first, I want you to know about it up front. If I didn’t tell you about it, I would just be spying on you, and that’s not my goal.

“Second, I wanted to tell you why I am doing this. I know how easy it is to go bad places online or say foolish things online or spend too much time online when nobody is watching you. This helps us all to keep our Internet use in check. Do you know what I mean?”




“Think about it like this: the Internet is like a big city. There’s a lot you can do in a big city, and a lot of it is very good. But there are also some bad parts of town, places that are unsafe to go. This software will help me see if any of us are getting close to any bad places online.”

If your children don’t understand what you mean, give them some examples from your own life.

“Often, it is easy to waste a lot of time online when no one is checking up on you. The Internet can be a very distracting place. You know what it’s like to get distracted, right? There are times I get online to do one thing and end up spending a long time doing something else. This is very easy to do when no one is helping me keep track of the time I spend online.

“There is also a lot of very inappropriate content online, and it is so easy to find, even when you aren’t looking for it. It’s too easy to click on one thing after another, and before you know it, you’re looking at pictures and videos and stories that don’t honor God and they don’t honor other people. This is stuff I would never look at out in the open, but it is easy to look at it when I know nobody’s watching. Often, it can happen mindlessly. You don’t even know you’re doing it. Have you ever seen anything online that you think probably doesn’t honor God?”

ACTION STEPS:

-  Tell your children you have installed Covenant Eyes on your devices and plan to install it on their devices.
-  Talk to your children about the problem of secrecy online, and the potential temptations it can create.
-  Make sure your tone is not accusatory. Draw from examples in your own life. If your children acknowledge that they can identify with you, then draw in examples from their own lives as well.

STEP 3: FRAME ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE RIGHT LIGHT

After you've discussed the problem, address the solution: serving one another by holding each other accountable.

Sometimes the very word "accountability" can have a negative or even accusatory tone to it. When talking about an accountability program for your computer, this is fine, but when talking about the atmosphere of your home, use phrases like "serving one another" or "helping one another" instead. You don't want the focus to be on how your kids will be "monitored." It's about creating a healthy dynamic or atmosphere of accountability in the home.

Here's one way you can explain it:

"For me, one of the best ways I know to help us stay on track when it comes to how we use the Internet is to watch out for one another. This is why the new accountability software will be so helpful. When I can clearly see what we're doing online, I can address any small problems before they become big problems. Plus, just knowing that someone else will know where you go online should really help you to not get tempted to go places online you shouldn't go. It will also help you to stay on track.



"This is something a lot of people do when they want to start good habits in their lives. They ask other people to support them. They keep track of what they are doing. You can probably think of several examples of this, can't you? If someone wants to lose weight or exercise more, they ask someone to hold them accountable to going to the gym or to talk to them about what they are eating. When someone wants to stop spending too much money, they keep track of their expenses to more easily see where they are spending too much.

"The same is true for the Internet. I want us to use the Internet wisely, and the best way I know to do that is to keep track of what we're doing online as a family. I want us to have good habits online. Do you see why something like this would be valuable?"

Use an example from your own life about why you choose to use Covenant Eyes:

“My Accountability Reports go to [person’s name]. I do this because I want [person’s name] to talk to me about what I do online. It is too easy for me to get distracted online. Sometimes the distractions are fun, but sometimes the distractions don’t line up with the person I want to be. I don’t want to look at images or information online that don’t honor God. That’s what Covenant Eyes will keep track of. If [person’s name] finds anything questionable on the Reports, they can talk to me about it and I can change what I’m doing before it becomes a bad habit.”

ACTION STEPS:

-  Talk about accountability software as a means to keep track of what the family is doing online so you can support one another and keep each other on track.
-  Talk about accountability software as a means of protection. It reminds us that what we do online all by ourselves is just as important as the stuff we do offline.

STEP 4: RESPOND TO OBJECTIONS

“BUT THIS IS AN INVASION OF MY PRIVACY.”

This is a common reaction, especially among teens, and it is important to respond carefully. Here are a few things to mention.

“I’m glad you mentioned that. Sometimes when people hear about the idea of accountability they can’t stand the idea of someone else knowing their private business. I understand that.

“But privacy means different things in different situations. If a wife started to secretly cheat on her husband, does that man have a right to know that this is going on? Yes. Or what if a husband started to spend lots of money behind his wife’s back. Does that spouse have a right to know? Yes. They have a right to know because they are in a special relationship where their lives are tied together. That person’s actions impact them in a significant way. That person doesn’t have a right to privacy in those cases.

“The same is true in our home. As your parent, I have a responsibility to make sure you are growing and developing into an honorable person, someone with strong character. As long as you are in our home, our lives are tied together, and I have a responsibility to help you and guide you. I can’t do that if I let you develop your own private life that I don’t know about.

“DON’T YOU TRUST ME?”

When kids and teens know you are going to keep track of them, they may feel like you don’t trust them. Here is one way to respond:

“You’re right. I don’t trust you, but for the same reason I don’t trust myself or anyone else for that matter. The fact is, the Internet can be a tempting place for anyone. We lose track of time online. We see things that make us curious. One click leads to another. It’s easy to start going down a path where we suddenly find ourselves in a bad place, looking at or reading things that don’t honor God or aren’t consistent with the kind of people we really want to be.

“Even if I thought you could handle any temptation thrown at you online, I still want to be able to talk to you about the temptations you are facing. I don’t want any of us to think that we’re above temptation. It’s when we think this that we’re most vulnerable.

“Even good people can make bad choices online, and this is one way to guard against that.”

“HAVE I DONE SOMETHING WRONG? AM I BEING PUNISHED FOR SOMETHING?”

When making the change from no accountability to having accountability, many teens may feel like this new restriction is a punishment. Here is one way to respond:

“No. This isn’t a punishment. After all, I’m doing this for myself, too. This is

something the whole family is doing. This is something I think anyone can benefit from, so I want all of us to do it.”

ACTION STEP:

- Anticipate the above objections and prepare yourself to respond to them.

STEP 5: SET CLEAR EXPECTATIONS

The last step is to install Covenant Eyes on every device and make sure your children understand your expectations about the Internet in your home so there are no surprises.

Set clear guidelines for each child in your home. A natural time to talk about these guidelines is when you are showing your child how to sign into Covenant Eyes on different devices. Depending on the age and maturity of your children, talk to each child separately about your expectations.

- Each child in your home should have his or her own username and password. [Watch a tutorial about how to set up all your usernames](#) and how to make using them as seamless as possible at [covenanteyes.com/getting-started](#) (under “Set Up Your Software”). Tell your child exactly how to sign into Covenant Eyes on the devices he or she uses.
- For young children you might be using the Covenant Eyes Internet Filter in tandem with the Accountability service. [Watch a tutorial to learn more about how to be an effective Filter Guardian](#) at [covenanteyes.com/getting-started](#) (under “Set Up Your Software”). Tell your son or daughter that the Filter is installed and will block specific websites. If they believe a page has been unnecessarily blocked, tell them to come to you to override the Filter.
- Tell each child your expectations regarding pornographic content online. If the child is younger, warn them about the possibility of seeing “naked pictures” online. Tell them to close the browser window or turn off the computer if something pops up on the screen that makes them feel uncomfortable. If the child is older, tell them to notify you in advance if they see something online they believe will receive a high rating on their Accountability Report.

- ▶ Tell each child your expectations regarding social media and chatting. Talk to them about the conversations you do and do not want them having online. Set boundaries like: no sexual conversations, no sharing of personal information (e-mail addresses, phone numbers, or physical addresses), and no talking with strangers.
- ▶ Tell each child your expectations regarding passwords. You will hold all the passwords to their e-mail and social media accounts.
- ▶ Tell each child your expectations about time online. If you are using the Covenant Eyes Filter, set times of day you want to be blocked from Internet access altogether. Talk to each child about the times of day you do or do not want them using the Internet.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

INTERNET ACCOUNTABILITY AT HOME:

A CONVERSATION GUIDE FOR PARENTS

As you start getting Internet Accountability Reports, [download a free checklist](#) as a reminder about how to have good conversations about the Internet in your home. This guide is useful when conversing with your child about Reports with or without questionable activity.

Find this checklist at www.covenanteyes.com/getting-started (under “Having Internet Conversations”).

WHEN YOUR CHILD IS LOOKING AT PORN

If you start finding evidence that your child is looking at inappropriate images online, this can be frightening. [This free e-book](#) gives parents a step-by-step approach to talking with a child who is looking at pornography online. It also offers answers to many frequently asked questions. Download it at www.covenanteyes.com/e-books.



WHEN YOU'RE AT YOUR BEST, PLAN FOR YOUR WORST

BY TIM CHALLIES

The following is an article by Tim Challies,³ a Christian blogger who uses Covenant Eyes, about how he talks to his children about Internet protocols in the home.

My children are growing up fast and, between you and me, they're growing up a little bit faster than I had expected. My son is 13 now, just a half school year away from being in high school. I sometimes find myself remembering when I was 13, and the kinds of things I awakened to and became interested in. Though I see now that I was only a kid, I was sure that I was all grown up. It's disquieting at best. Meanwhile my oldest daughter is 11, going on 16. I love her to death, but she too is getting far too old for her own good. There are three kids in our home, but only one of them is still a child.

As my kids grow up, I find that I need to have important but uncomfortable discussions with them. They are unfortunate discussions, but the kind you've got to have in a world like ours. I suppose the only thing worse than having those discussions is not having them.

Some time ago we implemented a plan in our home to protect the kids from some of what lurks out there on the Internet. We removed Internet access from some devices, limited it on others, and applied filters that keep tabs on what we are doing online. It has been very smooth from a technological perspective, but a little less so on the interpersonal level.

3. The article was originally published on January 22, 2014, at challies.com. Republished here by permission.

Recently my son said, “Dad, you’re treating me like I’m addicted to pornography. But I haven’t ever seen it and don’t want to see it!” And he’s right, to some degree. If I’m not treating him like an addict, I am at least treating him like a pre-addict, someone who has the inclination, or who may well have it before long. In this way I think I understand him a little better than he understands himself. Of course our Internet plan is not designed only to protect the children from exposure to pornography, but that is still one of its major purposes.

But his exasperation and hurt feelings gave us opportunity to talk about one of the principles I have found helpful in my own life: When you are at your best, plan for when you are at your worst. I see this as an application of 1 Corinthians 10:12-13: “Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”

Right there, in the middle of this discussion about sexual immorality, the power of temptation and the promise in temptation, Paul gives a call to humility: “Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.” This is consistent with what he told the church in Rome: “For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned” (Romans 12:3).

There is a kind of weakness, a kind of vulnerability, that may come when we are convinced of our strength. It is when we are not being tempted, it is when we are standing strong in the Lord’s grace, that we ought to consider the times we will be weak and tempted and eager to sin. We need to assume such times will come and we need to use the moments of strength to put measures in place that will protect us when we are weak. The wise nation builds its defenses in peace time, not once the enemy has invaded its borders; the wise homeowner buys insurance before the big catastrophe, not once the flood has already risen. The wise Christian fights sin even when sin seems distant and dormant.

I do not consider myself particularly prone to the temptation of pornography. I can sit at a computer early in the morning or late at night and not feel any pull to abuse the privilege. Not at this point. And yet, I explained to my son, I treat myself as one who is disposed to the temptation. I do this because I know my own proneness to sin and I do this because I have seen so many men shock themselves

and their families by succumbing to the temptation. This is obviously Satan's major point of attack on men today—old men and young men alike—and it would be folly to assume I'll never face it. It would be folly not to prepare myself right now while I'm thinking straight. And it would be folly for my boy as well.

I have yet to meet the man who hasn't been tempted at one time or another. And for this reason I have filtering software and accountability software and, even better, men who ask me good questions about my life. In the end, I explained, I am only holding my son to the standard I use for myself—the standard of a sinful man, wanting desperately to avoid a major fall, and all too aware that in those times I begin to lose my delight in God, I grow in my delight in sin. This, I hope, is the sober judgment the Lord calls us to.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



TIM CHALLIES

Tim Challies (pronounced CHALL-eez) is a pastor of Grace Fellowship Church in Toronto, Ontario. He writes at challies.com, one of the most widely read Christian blogs in the world. He is the co-founder of Cruciform Press and is the author of *Sexual Detox: A Guide for Guys Who Are Sick of Porn* and *The Next Story: Life and Faith After the Digital Explosion*.