

Lamorinda OUR HOMES

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Situating Technology for Teens

The challenges of arranging home entertainment

By Chris Lavin



This living room is regularly taken over by pre-teens and teens, who surf the Internet on the TV, or interact via laptops and other technological devices that they bring to each other's homes when "hanging out."

Photos Chris Lavin

The admonitions ring throughout the day. "Not at the dinner table!" Or "turn that light off and go to bed." One such recent command was made by the mother of 15-year-old Sam Russo in Canyon. A request that was met with, "You don't seem to get this, Mom," Sam said.

"I cannot live – I mean I cannot live – without the Internet."

In an age when children are practically born into the world with iPhones in their hands, families with teens are not only wrestling with limits on technology use, they are having to figure out new

places to put all the darn stuff. So arranging entertainment systems can be a daunting task.

"The main thing is that people definitely want to know what their kids are doing," said Bob Castellano of Sound and Video Concepts in Lafayette. He has installed dozens of theater systems, which often have to be interfaced with the rest of the household electronics.

According to a Pew Center study for the Pew Research Internet Project, 78 percent of teens now have a cell phone, and almost half of those own smart phones. One in four has a tablet computer, and nine in 10 have a computer in their house.

And another Pew report concluded that 97 percent play video games.

"Lots of kids have the Xboxes or Play Stations in their room, and parents are very cognizant that they are playing their games," Castellano said. "But I also see more families wanting to switch to multi-purpose rooms. They don't want the kids playing all day long without seeing them."

That is definitely the case with the Erhardt family in Walnut Creek. When teenager Logan isn't working at the Orinda day camps, he wants to get on his iPhone as soon as he gets in the car for the ride home.

"I let him," said mother Laurie Erhardt. "But we have limits. Strict limits. It's been shown that kids who spend too much time on technology don't do as well in school."

Castellano and Erhardt came up with some ideas for making teen technology more user-friendly for the family.

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