

Dear Parents

About ninety years ago the great English writer, G.K. Chesterton, did what a lot of us are doing now; he looked at his society and was troubled by what he saw and he wrote the following: “There comes an hour in the afternoon when the child is tired of ‘pretending’; when he is weary of being a robber or a noble savage. It is then that he torments the cat. There comes a time in the routine or an ordered civilization, when the man is tired at playing at mythology and pretending that a tree is a maiden or that the moon made love to a man. The effect of this staleness is the same everywhere; it is seen in all drug-taking and dram-drinking and every form of the tendency to increase the dose. Men seek stranger sins or more startling obscenities as stimulants to their jaded sense. They seek mad religions for the same reason. They try to stab their nerves to life. They are walking in their sleep and try to wake themselves up with nightmares.”

Well, not all of Chesterton’s observations are still there for us in our society, but a number are and our society has added a few more: The illegal drug trade is one of the biggest industries in the world, internet pornography is one of the biggest addictions in the world, excessive use of alcohol is everywhere and drug dealers find a market among our school students. It would appear that many people in our society are trying to “stab their nerves to life” by increasing dosage of their particular addiction.

We live at a time when we have the most wonderful technologies available to us. We have the internet with its amazing breadth of interesting sites; we have phones, Ipads, games, Facebook, Twitter, that are linked to it. But with all this comes a problem: how to handle all this in a non-addictive way, how not to allow these technologies to control our lives. Perhaps all this fits under the heading “Excess” about which Ron Rolheiser, columnist and author, has

this to say: “Excess is a substitute for genuine enjoyment. We go to excess in things because we can no longer enjoy them simply. It’s when we no longer enjoy a drink that we drink to excess; it’s when we no longer enjoy a simple party that we let things get out of hand; it’s when we no longer enjoy the taste of chocolate that we over-indulge. Excess isn’t just a substitute for enjoyment, it’s the very thing that drains all enjoyment from our lives; every recovering addict will tell us that.”

So, how do we prevent our children from slipping into the world of excessive behaviours? For the most part, children don’t know what “excess” is, unless adults introduce them to it. If a child is excessively involved with computer games and the like, maybe it’s because of loneliness: no one has the time or interest to provide options such as belonging to a sports team, music group, hobby club, being involved in home cooking, gardening, board games, maybe visiting the local library or local park.

Children can learn about “excess” by observing the behaviours of adults who might have succumbed to the pressures of life and so consume more, buy more, drink more, spend more than they should and genuinely substitute excess for enjoyment. Life to be enjoyable needs to be fairly simple. Perhaps the mantra of Author Mary Jo Leddy has wisdom to offer us:
“It’s enough.
I have enough.
I am enough.
Life is enough.
I need to gratefully enjoy what I have.”

Peace and Best Wishes.