n the past, Apple Cider has been my platform for discussion on topics as varied as cloning, games for the Mac, and the Microsoft antitrust trial. I hope you have come to view it as one Mac fanatic's look at the state of the computing world.

But, this month, I have to step back to talk about something more important—the tragic shooting at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado.

I know what you might be thinking. "Tom, I've already read enough about this."

I am afraid, though, that I have to weigh in on the matter. After all, this is a forum where (hopefully) I have built a decent readership, and, now, with a one year old son, violence in the schools and our society is becoming a bigger issue every day.

When I wrote my review of Internet monitoring software last November (ATPM 4.11), I was stunned. Oh, sure, I was well aware of the number of sites offering pornography on the Internet. The amount of smut out there for people to surf onto is staggering. It was almost comical to see the variety of pornography that is available out there (Midget Estonian goat herders reveal their most intimate carnal desires for you!). True, the pornography did leave me feeling that something was not quite right with the world. Unfortunately, it's the whole issue of supply and demand. Since there is a demand, someone will undoubtedly offer the supply.

But, the pornography I saw was no where near as disturbing as the number of sites where I could go to get step-by-step instructions on how to build a pipe bomb. Or kill someone in hand to hand combat. Or to disable or destroy a car. The detailed instructions were there for the reading, printing, and disseminating. The authors of these articles said that these activities were fun.

And, they were there, on my computer screen, in my living room.

I know that this sort of information has been available before. Many books, such as the Anarchist's Cookbook, has been around for decades. For those of you who may not know what this book is all about, it's basically a manual on how to conduct guerilla warfare. Booby traps, explosive concoctions, and methods to hurt people are all discussed in vivid detail. I don't agree that publishing this sort of information is a good policy, given the number of disturbed people out there. I can't, however, say that the information shouldn't be published. After all, the First Amendment allows free speech, even for tracts as dangerous as these, to be published. It's one of those trade offs we make to live in a democracy.

Now that the majority of the information once contained in a few books is widely available on the Internet, it's a lot easier to get this instruction delivered to your living room. Where once it took tracking down a bound copy of the Cookbook at a book dealer or waiting the three to six weeks for it to be delivered from a publisher, someone with basic knowledge of a search engine can bring up detailed plans in seconds. If someone is angry at his or her neighbor, there is much less of a "cooling off" period between the impulse to get this information and the opportunity to use it.

I'm not advocating removing this information from the Internet. Heck, if you pulled one site off the 'net, three more would spring in to fill its place. Instead, what I am advocating is that, as parents, we take an active interest in what our kids see when they go on line. Surf the 'net with them and ask them questions about what you see together. If this means that you should remove the computer from his or her room to a centrally located family place, then do so. A good rule to establish may be to only allow surfing at home when you or another responsible adult is present. If that means changing passwords for your ISP account, then, by all means, do so.

You see, the Internet is like a large city. There are many places to go for culture, shopping, and education. There are also many places where one can run afoul of the law. Just as you wouldn't turn your son or daughter loose on the streets of New York, Chicago, or Los Angeles, you shouldn't turn them loose on the Internet. It is up to us as parents to offer the necessary supervision to prevent our children from obtaining information which their developing judgement skills can't effectively process.

Staying with my theme of proper supervision, you have to remember that discipline isn't just about punishing your son or daughter when they do wrong. Discipline is a matter of asking your kids how their day went. It's a matter of looking into your kid's room every so often, to see what they have brought into your house. It's a matter of finding out who your son or daughter is hanging out with, and what their beliefs are. It's also a matter of praising them when they do good things. It's a matter of offering an ear when they seem concerned. It's a matter of making time to spend time with them doing things.

Believe it or not, your kids do learn a lot from you. Growing up, I always thought my parents were full of malarkey. Now, I realize that a lot of the lessons they have taught me have withstood the test of time, and have made me a better person.

You have to be involved in your kid's life. That's how parenting works. And, that is your responsibility as well. Apparently, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, the two high school seniors who perpetrated this heinous act, got quite a bit of their bomb making techniques off the Internet. Bomb making materials were strewn about their rooms, along with weapons and ammunition. While doing my research, I noticed that the majority of the bomb making techniques were essentially very involved chemistry experiments involving highly noxious chemicals such as gasoline and ammonia. I took a chemistry class back in high school, and I'd imagine that it would be hard to hide such activities in a typical suburban bedroom.

How the parents of these two—parents who apparently put up the facade of a typical suburban family—failed to notice this is beyond me.

When their kids began to idolize Adolph Hitler, why didn't they ask questions?

When the boys started hanging out in an anti-social group, why didn't they talk with their sons just to find out what was going on?

Didn't these parents ever stop to just see how their kids were doing? I know that nobody wants to be miserable. So, I'm sure that these kids must have been crying out for help at some point during the year it took to plan this bloodbath. Just a little time invested on the part of the parents could have averted this tragedy, which claimed the lives of twelve of their classmates and a teacher.

I'm sure a number of you are probably thinking that gun control would be an easy answer to the disturbing questions raised in Littleton, Colorado. But guns, like the Internet, are neither good nor evil on their own. It's sort of like looking at fire. Fire can save your life if you are freezing to death. Doctors who faced the Ebola virus in central Africa burned the victims' corpses and their belongings to kill the pathogen and check the spread of the illness. Fire can cook your food. Fire can also be used as a weapon, and has been since the days of the ancient Greeks. It can burn cities to the ground, like Chicago, London or Rome. It can scar and maim. Yet, fire in itself is neither good nor evil. It is the use of fire which determines its ultimate perception.

What I am advocating instead is child control. I realize this may be a controversial stand, but children need guidance from their parents. They need to be monitored. They need to be praised, and they need to be punished. They need to be told right from wrong. They need an environment filled with strong, adult role models so they know where to look for their guidance.

I'm afraid that if we don't, Columbine High School will only become one sad story in a string of more yet to come.