



**TECHNOSELECTIVES** Tech on Your Terms

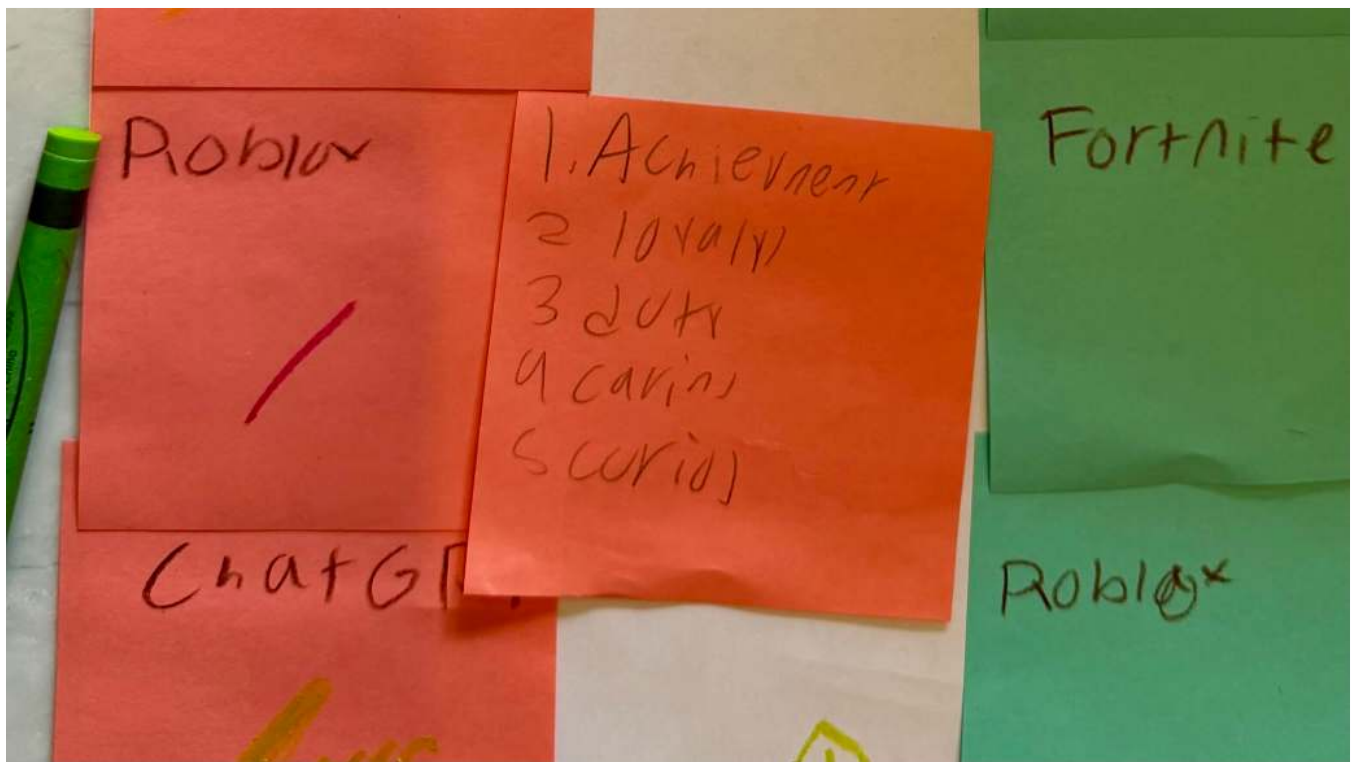
---

# Lessons from our first pilot

---

Jason Weeby, Periscope Advising | [jason@periscopeadvising.com](mailto:jason@periscopeadvising.com)

Pilot conducted August 23, 2026 | Brief prepared August 2026



01

## The Program and Its Goals

Young people make technology decisions constantly. They choose which apps to download, which platforms to join, and which AI tools to try. What they are not doing is making those decisions based on their own values. The dominant responses to this gap are all external controls: policy that lags the technology, platform self-governance that conflicts with engagement-driven business models, and parental oversight that reduces exposure to harm without building the internal capacity young people need to navigate technology on their own.

Technoselectives fills that gap by building an internal capacity. It adapts the deliberate, values-based technology adoption process of Amish communities, what scholar Lindsay Ems calls "technoselectivity," into a personal decision-making framework for young people ages 10 to 18. Instead of asking "How do I use this technology?" participants learn to ask "What kind of person will I become when I use this technology?"

The framework has four modular components:

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>1</p> <p><b>The Personal Constitution.</b><br/>Participants identify 3 to 5 core personal values that become their filter for all technology decisions.</p>                                                                                    | <p>2</p> <p><b>Technology Mapping.</b><br/>Participants map their current technology use against those values with a simple color code: green strengthens, red weakens, yellow is complicated.</p>                                                                                                           |
| <p>3</p> <p><b>The Test Drive and Flag System.</b><br/>Mirroring the Amish practice of small-scale real-world trials, participants evaluate new technologies, particularly AI and wearables, against their constitution before adopting them.</p> | <p>4</p> <p><b>The Trap Hack Toolkit.</b><br/>Participants learn to identify design features built to capture their attention and respond with four moves: Fence (block or delete), Switch (on for a purpose, off when done), Time Out (a planned pause), and Hack (reconfigure the tool to serve them).</p> |

The theory of change draws on identity development research showing that adolescents who engage in structured values exploration develop stronger, more stable identities, and on decision science showing that explicit values articulation improves decision quality. The hypothesis is that practicing values-based technology decisions in a structured format builds a durable decision-making habit that travels with the young person, outlasting any specific app, platform, or parental rule.

A distinctive element of the program is Val, an AI voice agent built on ElevenLabs that guides each participant through a one-on-one values identification conversation drawing on a set of 19 values adapted from the Schwartz refined values framework. Val extends the values work beyond what a group facilitator can do alone and gives each participant a private, judgment-free space to think out loud.

## The Pilot

On Sunday, August 23, 2026, I ran the first full pilot of the Technoselectives workshop with five participants: my 13-year-old son, three of his 13-year-old friends, and one friend's 11-year-old sister. The group represented a useful spread of technology experience. One 13-year-old had owned a phone for some time, the 11-year-old had received her first phone a month earlier, one 13-year-old had gotten his phone the day before the session, and the remaining two did not yet have phones but wore Apple Watches. Several parents joined as observers, and after the session they asked good questions and offered ideas of their own. Compensation for the kids: a couple hours of arcade games and food afterward.

The session ran two hours and followed the facilitator agenda:

- 1 A warm-up ranking their four most-used technologies from most to least fun, then re-ranking them by "makes me more like the person I want to be"
- 2 A "show me your rules" segment surfacing the rules they already have and who profits from their attention
- 3 Individual values conversations with Val, each participant retreating to a quiet corner with a device and headphones
- 4 Mapping their tech rankings against their named values in green, yellow, and red
- 5 A quick pass through the four moves
- 6 A discussion of a future technology (AI glasses) as a values test case
- 7 A closing debrief in which the participants acted as co-designers, which I recorded



## What Worked

**The core arc held.** The warm-up ranking, the values conversation, and the mapping stacked on each other the way the design intends. One participant named this directly in the debrief: listing the technologies "really brought everything together because once you list the technologies, later on you come back to it... so this stacks up." The re-rank by "the person I want to be" caught participants by surprise in a productive way. Everyone re-ranked, to different degrees. One participant moved three of four technologies including the top one; another moved just one. The size of the gap between the two rankings turned out to be a conversation generator in itself.

**Val was the highlight.** The kids responded enthusiastically to identifying their values through a voice conversation with an AI agent. For most of them it was their first conversation with an AI, and watching them scatter to quiet corners of the house to talk privately was one of the best moments of the session. In the debrief, one participant said the voice agent worked because "it was like interactive, so you could actually experience it, and after... you could think back on what happened in that call." The roughly ten-minute conversation length was right, and the paper list of all 19 values served as a useful check afterward: are the values Val surfaced the right ones, or did the list jog something Val missed?

**The interest extends beyond kids.** Parents who observed stayed engaged and curious, consistent with earlier signals that adults want a version of this experience for themselves. One parent specifically flagged the Amish framing as the part he found most compelling, and one participant echoed that in the debrief: the Amish reveal at the end "made a lot of sense," though he suggested not opening with it.

**The attention economy landed.** The "who made money?" question worked. Participants readily connected attention capture to platform revenue and volunteered their own stories of scrolling or bingeing past the point of feeling good about it.

## What Needs Work

**Instructions and scope.** Asking for their "top four tech" without distinguishing devices from apps and websites caused confusion at the start. Apps and websites are the more accessible frame for this age group, though there is real value in discussing wearables; mixing them in one list muddled both. The fun ranking also implied a forced choice that needed clarifying: pick the technologies you use most, then rank those by fun.

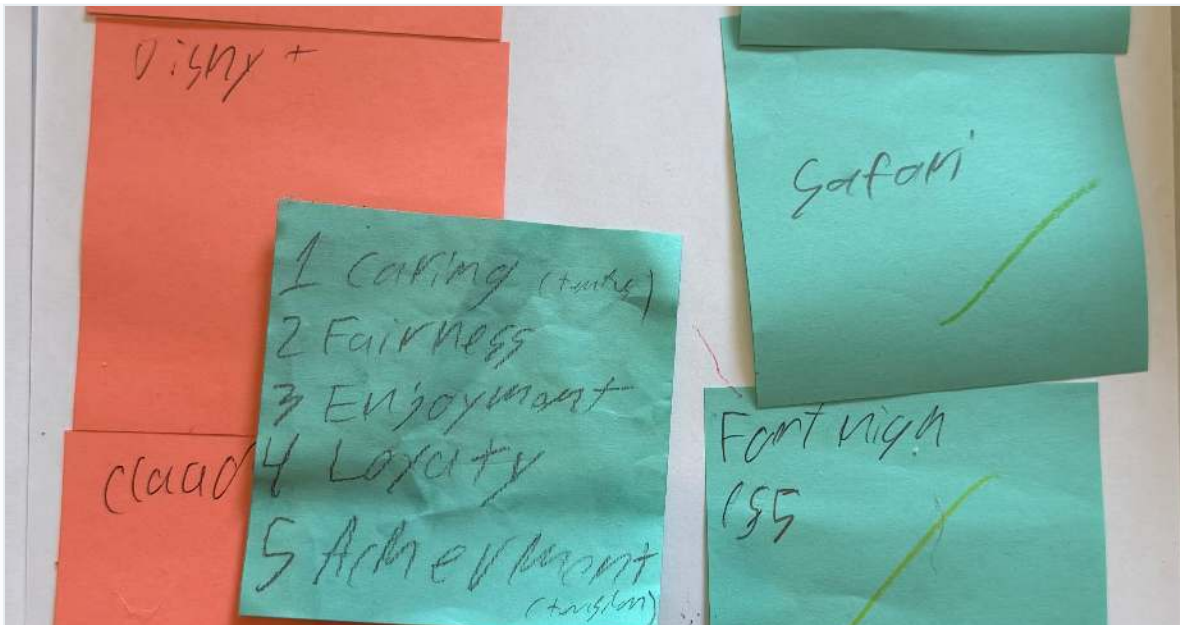
**The rules segment assumes rules that do not yet exist.** This was the pilot's most important surprise. In an earlier observation with 16-year-olds, participants had already built their own rules about which apps they use for what. These 11- and 13-year-olds had not. They defaulted almost entirely to their parents' rules. Less time on devices means fewer bad experiences, and fewer bad experiences means less self-authored rule-making. The segment fell flat as designed, but it opened a promising alternative: examining their parents' rules, what those rules are trying to protect, and how they might eventually author rules of their own that accomplish the same goals. That reframe turns a weakness into an agency-building opportunity.

**Val needs tuning.** Several specific fixes emerged from participant feedback:

- *Concision.* The most consistent critique. Val over-explains, repeats confirmations, and says "one more thing" too often. One participant: "just a faster, more efficient, kind of cut to the chase, giving you more time to talk." Another ended the conversation as soon as his values appeared because the extra explanation "was getting really annoying."
- *Turn-taking.* Val sometimes started speaking before participants finished, forcing them to repeat themselves.
- *Clarifying questions.* One participant noted that when she gave a vague answer, Val made assumptions rather than asking a follow-up, which she suspected affected her results.

- *Value distribution.* Certain values (Achievement, Caring, Loyalty) surfaced repeatedly across participants, while others (Wealth, Open-mindedness, Adventure, Safety, Nature) rarely appeared. The participants noticed this themselves. It could reflect genuine similarity among friends from the same community, or it could indicate Val is over-indexing on certain values. The conversation transcripts need review, and a test with a more diverse group would help distinguish the two.
- *Output discipline.* Val sometimes returned five values; three to four is the right number for the mapping activity. Participants also need explicit instruction, from both Val and the facilitator, to write their values down at the end of the conversation.
- *Stability.* One participant had to restart the conversation three times due to disconnections on the ElevenLabs platform. Testing the ListenTwice deployment may improve fidelity and stability.

**Mapping worked; the discussion protocol did not.** The green/yellow/red mapping with crayons ran smoothly with few clarifying questions. My instruction to use all three colors should soften to something like "most people will use at least two colors," since an all-green or all-red map is a legitimate result. The pair-share afterward needs structure: timers and a clearer protocol, because airtime was not shared well. And the "challenge your partner's tag" prompt failed outright. Participants heard it as an invitation to disagree with each other's rankings rather than to probe the reasoning. The challenge framing should be replaced with an inquiry-based prompt that asks partners to draw out the connection between a value and a ranking.



**The four moves and the future test were rushed.** With time running short, the four moves got a quick treatment and most participants defaulted to the move they already knew from their own lives: time limits. The future test (would you adopt AI glasses, and on what terms?) generated a lively discussion about whether and how they would use them, but it was less values-anchored than intended. The MIT students' demonstration of hacked Meta glasses doing real-time facial recognition, or an immersive prompt in the spirit of the Rithm Project's Immersive Futures work, could give this segment the concreteness it currently lacks.

**Format and pacing.** Two hours of sitting and talking is the ceiling for this age group, and the Val break in the middle was essential. Future versions need varied modalities: getting up and moving, handling a prototype, watching a short video. I also skipped the exit ticket, which was a mistake; it would have captured individual takeaways that the group debrief smoothed over.

## Early Signals of Impact

The most encouraging data arrived after the session, through parents. On the drive to the arcade, one parent talked with his kids about the experience. His 13-year-old said he had not previously thought about how his technology use affects his relationships and wants to be more aware of it. His 11-year-old, one month into owning her first phone, had not thought about any of this before, which suggests the timing of the intervention, near the moment of first adoption, may matter a great deal. Another parent reported that his son came home wanting to set a firmer evening cutoff time and seemed to mean it; the parent plans to watch whether it sticks. In the debrief itself, participants said they would think differently about "the technology I have and how it impacts and aligns with what I want to do." I will follow up with parents informally to see whether behavior changes or family conversations persist.

These are self-reports from a tiny, friendly sample, and I weight them accordingly. But they are exactly the kind of transfer the theory of change predicts: reflection continuing after the session, unprompted, in family conversation.

## Where This Goes Next: Questions and Opportunities

The pilot did what a first pilot should: it validated the core arc and generated a rich set of directions worth pursuing. Each of the threads below is a concrete, testable opportunity for the next phase of concept development.

**Tighten scope and sequence.** The five modules appear to be the right ones. The opportunity now is dosage and format. The two-hour workshop works as an introduction, and each module could expand to an hour delivered across multiple sessions, especially for older participants: deeper on the Amish framework, on values and identity formation, on attention capture and the profit motive, and on the four moves, with challenges or quests to try between sessions. A multi-session version is ready to be designed and tested against the single-workshop format.

**Explore different audiences and formats.** The pilot confirmed that this experience is not only for kids. Parents leaned in, and one proposed running Technoselectives as a family. That opens several delivery formats worth prototyping: an adult version of the experience, parallel tracks in which kids and adults each build their constitutions separately and come together to share at the end, and a fully integrated family version in which they go through the process side by side. Each format tests a different theory about where the conversation between generations does the most good. I am deliberately leaving all of these doors open; each is a candidate for its own pilot sprint.

**Differentiate by device experience, not just age.** The pilot suggests the meaningful variable may be technology experience rather than age alone. Participants with less device history need more coaching on values and identity formation, have fewer hard-won lessons to draw on, and have not yet felt the need to author their own rules. Older or more experienced users arrive with self-made rules ready to examine. Building a readiness dimension into facilitation and materials is a clear next design task.

**Build the parent-rule bridge.** Younger participants' dependence on parental rules is not a flaw to design around but a starting point to design from. A module that has participants examine their parents' rules, articulate what those rules protect, and draft their own rules to accomplish the same ends could be a powerful agency-building sequence, and a natural on-ramp to the family formats above.

**Resolve Val's value distribution.** Whether the recurring subset of values reflects the sample or the agent is directly testable: review transcripts against surfaced values, and run the experience with participants from different communities. This matters because the constitution is only useful if it is actually theirs, and resolving it will make Val stronger for every future pilot.

**Make the future test immersive.** Discussing hypothetical technologies in the abstract pulled toward adoption logistics rather than values. The next version needs immersive, concrete artifacts, along the lines of the Rithm Project's Immersive Futures approach, to make the "decide before you adopt" muscle real. This is a promising area for collaboration.

**Strengthen measurement.** The pilot relied on observation, a recorded debrief, and parent reports. The next iteration will add a lightweight pre/post measure of technology intentionality, a consistent exit ticket, and structured parent follow-up in the weeks after the session.

## With Thanks

This pilot was made possible by **4.0 Schools**, whose stipend through their Possibility Sprint funded the materials, tools, and time to move Technoselectives from concept to first test. I am grateful for their early bet on this idea and for a program built around exactly this kind of small, fast, real-world learning.

Thanks also to the **Rithm Project**, whose team and network provided thoughtful feedback that sharpened the design, and whose Immersive Futures work points toward what the future-technology module should become. And thanks to the five young co-designers and their parents, who gave up a Sunday afternoon to tell me what was boring, what was confusing, and what was worth building.

To discuss partnering on the next round of pilots or supporting the concept development plan, contact me at [jason@periscopeadvising.com](mailto:jason@periscopeadvising.com).

