

Parents and the Internet

Last August, I attended the annual American Psychological Association convention in San Francisco, California. One of the more frequent topics discussed was Internet use by teenagers and the role parents play in guiding teenagers. Some of the advice I heard given was as follows:

1. Learn the technology and if possible, learn it from your child. Ask them to show you how to use YouTube or My Space. This will give them a sense of empowerment and you will gain a keen understanding of how they think of these new Internet tools.
2. Limit your child's online time. It might be beneficial linking time spent online with time spent in live interaction with people. For instance, an hour online for each hour spent hanging out with friends/family. Or one hour of reading or doing homework earns one hour online.
3. Monitor their activity. You need to be aware of what your children are doing and what may cause potential problems. So, as always, try to maintain a constructive line of communication with your child.
4. Remember some of the online activities your child is experiencing are not very different than the ones we experienced while hanging out at the malls. They include flirting, "playing the role", making new friends, trying out new identities and pushing the social boundaries.

For some teens, however, rather than being "used" to further online friendships, the Internet leads to social isolation. In a 2005 *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice Study*, more than 1,000 mental health professionals from 11 professional membership associations, including the APA, completed a two-phase mail survey examining the Internet-related problems most reported to them by clients. Areas were categorized in an 11 group inventory of problems, including overuse, risky or inappropriate use, and sexual abuse and exploitation. Participants classified 15 percent of youth clients described in the study as engaging in isolative-avoidant use of the Internet. In essence, teens were spending so much time on the Internet that they isolated themselves from family and friends, says lead author, Kimberly J. Mitchell, Ph.D. from the University of New Hampshire.

The Parents' Retreat will feature a workshop to help parents understand how their children use the Internet and what they can do to guide them. I'm sure you will be interested in this information.

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