

ADOLESCENTS IN CYBERSPACE

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- Whether we like it or not, computers are part of modern life
- The typical adolescent wants to explore and do more, they want to write scripts that simulate their online activities, create their own web pages, scan pictures and email friend
- The internet and the use of computers assists with making them feel better about themselves
- The internet is a vast library covering any topic imaginable, in some respects it may even be better than most libraries in the fact that they can obtain more information on their favorite rock group or actor and actress than the library has
- The newest street corners, arcades and malls that serve as teen hangouts can be found right within the walls of the homestead – they are electronic mockups of the real thing – accessed by the family modem equipped computer

What draws adolescents to the Internet?

1. Identity Experimentation and Exploration:

- Adolescents are grappling with who they are – it's a lifelong process and for the adolescent they are on the verge of leaving home and establishing their own life
- These are heavy duty questions that some adolescents look for on the internet

2. Intimacy and Belonging:

- During adolescence they are looking for intense relationships, especially with the opposite sex
- Adolescents look for comrades and new groups where they can feel a sense of belonging

3. Separation from Parents and Family:

- The adolescent is searching for their own identity, relationships and groups and they are also trying to separate from their parents – emancipation

4. Venting Frustrations:

- This is a period of “storm and stress” and the adolescent needs to vent these frustrations in a place that they feel safe – the internet provides this anonymous place

What are the danger signals of excessive Internet Use?

1. Denial and lying about the amount of time spent on the computer or about what they are doing on the computer
2. Excessive fatigue and changes in sleeping habits, such as getting up early or staying up late (in order to spend more time online)
3. Academic problems, usually grades slipping. Sometimes parents might overlook the fact that the computer is the culprit since they assume their children are doing school work at the keyboard
4. Withdrawal from friends and declining interest in hobbies (online friends and activities are taking the place of the real world)
5. Loss of appetite; irritability when cut off from computer use; a decline in their appearance or hygiene
6. Disobedience and acting out. Teens may become very hostile when parents confront them. They may deliberately break the computer use rules that are set. Their reactions may be so intense because they feel that they are being cut off from their attachments to cyberfriends

What can a parent do to help their teenager?

1. *Get knowledgeable and Join In:*
 - To be most effective in supervising the adolescent's cyberspace activities, the parent needs to know something about the topic
 - Talk with your kids about cyberspace and join them in some of their online activities
2. *Talk to them:*
 - The old warning "Do you know where your children are?" applies to cyberspace as well as the real world
 - Ask them about their internet use, web sites they are visiting
 - Avoid the accusatory tone
3. *Acknowledge the Good and the Bad:*
 - Don't vilify cyberspace that will only alienate the adolescent
 - Talk about the pros and cons
 - Show some acceptance of their cyberlife, but discuss some of the dangers and what steps they should take if they encounter bad places and/or people
4. *Make the computer visible:*

- Privacy is a tricky balancing act with the adolescent
- Generally speaking it is not a good idea to place the computer in the adolescent's bedroom but place it in the family room for better supervision

5. *Set reasonable rules:*

- Parents don't let their children stay out all night, watch any movie they want, or drive anywhere they want
- Adolescents need rules
- Set rules about what they can and cannot do on the internet