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Years

Teenagers online: being a responsible 'cybercitizen'

Teenagers spend an average of 1-3 hours online per day. You might worry that this is bad for your child, but participating in the online world offers advantages too.

What teenagers get out of being cybercitizens

Teenagers see the online environment as a place to share, create and learn.

When they're online, teenagers can be social and collaborative. For example, websites like Facebook are social forums that allow teenagers to maintain local and long-distance friendships. Also, the 'culture of sharing' on the internet helps teenagers feel connected to a larger global community and can even enhance their existing relationships.

The internet offers teenagers opportunities to be expressive too. They can create their own online worlds by joining groups, commenting on the online profiles of their peers, and posting photos and videos of themselves and their friends.

Finally, the internet lets teenagers be proactive. It can give them good access to news and health information, and many turn to the internet first to find out about themselves and the world.

How to be a safe and responsible 'cybercitizen'

There are ways to encourage your child to be safe online. Start by talking together about:

- considering privacy – as a general guideline, if your child wouldn't do something in front of a live audience, she shouldn't put it online
- creating respectful online communities by treating online friends with as much respect as those he meets face-to-face
- agreeing not to post provocative photos of herself or others. It's also smart to avoid posing for inappropriate photos in real life (such as at parties)
- remembering that it's often hard to 'read' emotion in emails, and jokes can easily be misinterpreted. Using emoticons like smiley faces can help
- being cautious about identity. Not everyone online is who they say they are
- deleting rude comments made on her profile pages
- blocking or 'unfriending' those who don't treat you with respect. This will send the message

did you know ?

In a recent survey, 40% of teenagers reported they 'always' or 'sometimes' shared computer passwords with friends, even though this makes it possible for others to pose as them online.

that it's not OK to mistreat or bully someone online

- sharing only as much information as necessary. It's not compulsory to enter your year of birth, mobile number, email address, or city on web forms
- keeping privacy settings up to date on social networking sites so that your child's profile is not publicly available.

Risky online behaviour

It's easy to feel anonymous online. Impulsive teenagers sometimes do things on the internet that they would never do in person. But photos, comments and videos shared online are much harder to get rid of than in real life.

In fact, this kind of content can remain online permanently. Uploading content to the internet creates an 'online reputation', or digital footprint, which is very hard to change or erase.

> If all else fails, encourage your child to remember the 'Nanna rule': 'If you wouldn't want your nanna to see it, don't put it online'.

Concerns and facts about teenagers and internet use

You might be concerned about the following issues in relation to your child's internet use. It helps to know some facts:

- Online harassment or cyberbullying: this can be a problem for teenagers online, so read about steps to take in our article on cyberbullying.
- Paedophilia: fortunately, cases of paedophilia are rare.
- Online relationships versus real-life friendships: most teenagers do a good job of balancing time online with real-world interests such as school, family and sport.
- Internet addiction: a recent study found that nearly 80% of surveyed teenagers said they 'never' or only 'sometimes' had a hard time staying away from the internet for several days at a time.

> Read more about keeping your child safe online in our articles on sexting and creating content.

Rated ★★★★★ (2 ratings)

More to explore

- Social networking
- Teenage friendships
- Teenagers and mobile phones
- Teenage risk-taking: how to handle it
- Internet safety
- Computer use and school-age children
- Bullying at school: helping your child
- Your child bullying others

Web links

- Pew Internet – Social Networking Websites and Teens
- Pew Internet – Social Media and Young Adults
- Cybersmart Kids

Mikami, A., Szwedo, D., Allen, J., Evans, M., & Hare, A. (2010). Adolescent peer relationships and behavior problems predict young adults' communication on social networking websites. *Developmental Psychology*, *46* (1), 46–56.

Davies, Tena (2010). As yet unpublished.