

ONLINE EXPOSURE:

Teens at Risk and Parents Disconnected



An E-Guide for Parents

Everything you need to know about social networking, net lingo, and viral video to better understand your teen's online habits.

National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign
750 17th Street, NW Washington, DC 20503 USA

www.TheAntiDrug.com

PARENTS.
THE ANTI-DRUG.

Online Exposure: An E-Guide for Parents

Are you up on your teen's online habits? Did you know:

- The Internet is a teen's second most-used medium after television: 84% of teens go online in a given week, spending an average of eight hours online per week.
- More than half of teens (52%) report listening to MP3s in a given week, with an average listening time of more than four hours per week.
- 9 out of 10 teens (93%) have online access at home, school, work or elsewhere.
- 77 percent of teens, nearly four out of five, have access to the Internet at home.¹

With teens spending so much of their time online and so many new Web sites, gadgets, and digital platforms popping up every day, how can parents effectively monitor their teens' technological habits?

One thing's for sure: your teen will always be one step ahead. That's why it's crucial to understand the basics and be able to speak their language, even if you can't decipher every text message they send.

Social Networking Sites

MySpace and Facebook consistently rank at the top of teens' favorite and most visited Web sites.² These popular hotspots allow teens to stay in constant touch and get up-to-the-minute updates from friends and their connections. You can help your kids use these sites wisely and steer clear of trouble if you follow these tips:

1. Require that the computer remain in a common area in your home rather than in your teen's bedroom.
2. Talk to your kids about why they are on a social networking site, how they communicate, and how they represent themselves on these sites. Make it clear that any information they post about themselves, their family, or their friends is open for the world to see, including photos and videos.
3. Review your teen's profile together and make this a regular activity so they aren't tempted to add inappropriate content after the fact.
4. Be consistent with setting rules and consequences pertaining to alcohol and substance abuse references on your teen's social networking pages.
5. Facebook postings, text messages, and instant messages might look like gibberish to you, but decoding this lingo is an important monitoring skill. You might see some of these acronyms in your teen's online conversations:

¹ *The Tru Study*, Teen Research Unlimited, 2008

² *Ibid*

Lingo to Warn of Parent Monitoring

POS	Parent Over Shoulder
PIR	Parent In Room
P911	Parent Alert
PAW	Parents Are Watching
PAL	Parents Are Listening

Social/Sexual Lingo to Watch For

WYCM	Will You Call Me?
ASL	Age/Sex/Location
MorF	Male or Female
KFY	Kiss For You
ADR	Address
LMIRL	Let's Meet In Real Life
HAK	Hugs And Kisses
ILU or ILY	I Love You
KOTL	Kiss On The Lips
WUF	Where Are You From?
WYRN	What's Your Real Name?

For the most up-to-date abbreviations, acronyms, emoticons, etc., visit:

www.netlingo.com.

Cell Phones

Nearly 7 in 10 teens have mobile phones³ and the latest models enable teens to stay in touch with friends and family through more than just a phone call. However, many parents don't understand these newer phones and all their features, allowing their teens free rein over a potentially dangerous medium.

1. Establish rules for when and how often teens can use their cell phones – both at home and at school. Make sure you know what the school's rules are regarding cell phones on premises.
2. Negotiate an agreement with your kids that if they use more than a certain number of cell phone minutes and/or text messages, they have to pay for the overage charges.
3. Let your teen know that, on occasion, you'll be checking their text messages and the monthly bill for any unknown incoming and outgoing numbers. It won't seem like an invasion of privacy if you state upfront that you'll be monitoring intermittently.
4. Make sure your teen is completely aware of safety issues, like never driving and using the cell phone at the same time. Remind them often and be a good role model yourself.

³ Ibid

5. Discuss the unintended consequences of taking cell phone snapshots and circulating those photos with friends or on the Internet. Seemingly innocent or private pictures can quickly become public property and even legal nightmares (particularly risqué images of underage peers).

Online Music and Videos

While there are many entertaining and safe Web sites promoting popular songs and videos, there are also many that contain messages harmful to youth – messages about drugs, alcohol, body image, sex, and violence – and kids often take these messages to heart, especially when they come from some of their favorite celebrities.

1. Talk to your kids about your own values and expectations about sex and drug use. Otherwise, the main input they'll get is from the media, Internet, and pop culture, which makes dressing sexy, experimenting with alcohol and drugs, and casual hook-ups seem like the norm.
2. Keep the lines of communication open. As your kids grow up and their tastes change, ask why they enjoy the music they regularly listen to and the videos they download.
3. Establish clear rules about what your kids can watch online and what they can download. Emphasize that they cannot visit porn sites or watch online clips of raunchy behavior, and check the computer history to see where they've been going.
4. Take an interest in what your kids are listening to and are excited about. If you flat-out reject their love of popular culture, they will be tempted to shut you out completely. Embrace their world, but establish clear boundaries about what you find acceptable and appropriate.

Media Literacy

Parents can help their children navigate the constant bombardment of information and media marketing by watching and listening to the messages their children receive. This critical viewing skill is called media literacy. There are many ways parents can help their kids become media literate:

1. Find out what kinds of media your kids are being exposed to. Have them look or listen for pro-drug or other unhealthy messages and discuss how to resist those behaviors.
2. Remind your child that there are people (actors, producers, songwriters, corporate sponsors, advertising executives, etc.) whose job is to create these messages and there are Web sites (Wikipedia, Erowid, celebrity blogs, etc.) created to inform or entertain without credible sourcing. Discuss any messages about drugs that are untrue or unfounded.

3. Help your child look for media messages that might not be so obvious. Ask questions like, “Does this song suggest that violence is a good way to solve problems?” “According to this movie, what are women like? What are men like?” “What does this commercial say will happen if you wear those jeans? Is that true?” “Is drug use portrayed as positive or glamorous?”

4. Turn a viewing or listening experience into a teachable moment. For example, if a character on a TV show is using drugs, you could start a conversation with any one of these opening lines:

- “I wonder what his family thinks about him getting high?”
- “Where do you think this person would end up in life?”
- “Why would he do drugs?”

More Resources

Need more help? If you suspect your teen is engaging in risky behaviors while online, there are additional technologies that might be helpful for monitoring your teen’s tech habits. Visit www.TheAntiDrug.com for a list of recommended filtering guides and products.