

## **Living in the World of iPhone, Video Games, Facebook and Twitter: Tools of Addiction or Modern Means of Connection?**

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**Technology is a powerful tool for pleasure, productivity and enhancing connections with others. However, excessive or improper use of it can lead to abuse or unhealthy dependence.**

### **BENEFITS:**

- Way of building relationships and sense of community with friends/family
- Finding out what friends are doing/saying, getting news of social gatherings
- Being in on gossip
- Using the safety of the Internet to take greater risks in showing oneself
- For those who feel they are "different," way to connect with others
- Being really good at something: gaining sense of mastery, accomplishment

### • **DANGERS:**

- Feelings hurt by social inclusion/exclusion: Top Friends lists
- Dissemination of information deemed private or hurtful
- Cyber bullying
- Instantaneous access to hundreds of people
- Innocence and desire for acceptance leaving teens vulnerable to predators
- Emotional numbing
- Loss of opportunity to develop coping skills personally, socially & emotionally
- Neural patterning

As a parent, how do I:

1. Encourage my child to enjoy and benefit from the technology without falling prey to the hurtful aspects of it?
2. Distinguish between use, abuse, dependency of the Internet, Video Games, Social Networking Sites, Cell Phones, TV and other Electronic Communication and Entertainment Devices? And support use and prevent abuse?

## Means of Connection

Healthy Enjoyment and Use includes:

- **Enhances my well-being and sense of mastery:** Playing video games or going on Facebook adds to how I already feel good about myself and my life
- **Focus/Mono-Tasking:** When I'm not doing it, I can immerse myself in and focus on other activities (dinner with family, homework, time with friends)
- **Self-Regulation:** I can do it for an agreed-upon period of time and stop when I'm supposed to, although I may need help from parents to shift gears
- **Balance:** I have a balance in my life that includes good friends, activities I enjoy and taking responsibility for schoolwork, chores, etc.
- **Appropriate Risk-Taking:** I do things online that may be edgy but not abusive toward or exploitive of others
- **Connection:** I find connection and build relationships in that world that enrich my life rather than increase my loneliness and isolation
- **Productivity:** I use the technology to assist me in making plans and getting things done in ways that ease the pressure and stress in my life rather than add to it. In essence, my maturity is reflected in how I use my cell phone rather than the fact that I have it.

## Tool of Addiction

Unhealthy Level of Dependence Usually Includes 3-5 or more of the following:

- **Loss of Control:** I'm unable to adhere to time limits
- **Can't Stop:** I can't stop myself from doing it even when I know I must
- **Preoccupied:** I'm constantly thinking about when I can do the activity next
- **Neglects rest of Life:** Family, friends, school, sleep, hobbies, self-care
- **Denies Problems that are Obviously Related ...**
- **Lies About or Hides** frequency and duration of the activity
- **Withdrawal:** When doing without it... is irritable, pouting, angry, depressed
- **Tolerance/Binging:** Progressively wanting more - and/or it's never enough
- **Excessive Risk-Taking:** I use the anonymity of that world to try out behaviors that are unhealthy and I wouldn't dare to do face-to-face
- **Hunger for Acceptance** justifies harmful behaviors (i.e., participating in chat rooms that are unhealthy - eating disorders, promoting suicide, etc.)
- **"Life is Bad" Starting Point** - I'm bored, frustrated so I need an escape
- **Overuse puts at risk:** relationship, other activities, educational opportunity

## PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR PARENTS OF TEENS

1. Parents and their children have differing priorities during the teen years, as follows:

### TEENS MOST VALUE

Independence and Control  
Privacy and Personal Territory  
Peer Relationships and Feelings  
Pleasure and Fun  
Experimentation  
Experiencing the Present  
Freedom and Privilege  
Acceptance

### PARENTS MOST VALUE

vs. compliance and compromise  
vs. family sharing and togetherness  
vs. parent's, siblings' feelings  
vs. work  
vs. sensibility and caution  
vs. planning for the future  
vs. limits and responsibility  
vs. achievement

"The Online World" adds some new twists on these age-old conflicts:

- Teens have more privacy vis a vis parents due to cell phones and social networks
- Ironically, teens have less ability to control what stays private with friends and even future employers-- online postings are widely accessible and hard to erase
- Teens can develop and maintain much broader networks of "friends"
- Teens' ability to experiment is exponentially greater online
- Immediate gratification is just a "click" away
- As with driving a car, cell phones and online communities provide the means but not necessarily the maturity for being more independent
- Multi-tasking is now considered the norm - mono-tasking, "down time" is "boring"

### **UPSHOT:**

Teens have always needed parents to provide structure, help support, guide, contain, and set limits during the turbulent years of adolescence. The amazing possibilities yet worrisome dangers of technology and the online world make parents' role of providing structure, setting limits and helping ensure their child's safety that much more important!

IN ESSENCE, DON'T BE AFRAID TO BE THE PARENT!

## What parenting strategies work best in the "The Online World"?

### **OVERALL APPROACH**

Create a road map and structure in your daily life that provides clear guidelines about use of the Internet, cell phones, video games, social networking sites, etc. with incentives for following those guidelines and consequences for not doing so.

In general, three approaches we've seen parents successfully adopt are:

#### **1. Strict controls and oversight**

Parents limit access: little/no use of technology or firm limits on media content (G/PG/PG-13 rated movies, video games); weekends only; no Facebook; Parents model living with clear cut limits and boundaries

#### **2. Balanced Approach: Parents set norms with teen input**

Access a balancing act with quantified limits that include some use during the week (i.e. 1 hour per night after homework); 250-500 text messages a month; computer in public space: Parents model balancing/enjoying use of computers, TV, cell, etc.

#### **3. Parents provide much freedom with minimal oversight and high level of trust**

Parents trust teen to self-regulate and adjust accordingly if choices negatively impact health, school productivity, time with friends and family. Computer in bedroom. Multi-tasking: teen watches TV, listens to music, is on IM while doing homework. Parents model ability to make good choices without external limits.

### **STRATEGIES**

#### Most Effective

Modeling  
Verbal Assertiveness  
Letting Go  
Structure, Incentives  
and Consequences  
Playfulness; Joking  
Praise With Limits  
Positive Attention  
Cuing, Helpful Reminders  
If You Can't Beat 'Em, Join 'Em

#### Least Effective

Reasoning  
Threats, Yelling, Acting Powerful  
Advising  
Lectures, Bringing Up Past Failures  
Guilt-Tripping  
Harsh Punishments  
Backing Down  
Criticisms or Put-downs  
Nagging  
Atoning

## **CYBERBULLYING**

Cyberbullying refers to any behavior using information technology that involves sending or posting text or images intended to embarrass or hurt another person.

According to a study reported in "Common Sense Media,"

- 43% of kids ages 13-17 have been cyberbullied
- 53% of teens admit sending a hurtful message
- Only 10% of bullying victims tell their parents
- The #1 form of cyberbullying: making private information public

Sometimes teens are unaware they are causing harm as it may seem like it's just part of youth culture. In other situations teens are well aware but have been victimized themselves so they feel justified hurting others, or just think it's fun.

### **Some Kids are more Vulnerable to Being Bullied**

Studies show that kids who get bullied and snubbed by peers - in person and in cyberspace - may be more likely to have problems in other parts of their lives. A study by the Rush Neurobehavioral Center in Chicago has identified deficits in three key behavioral skills can lead to a child experiencing social rejection:

- Reading nonverbal cues
- Understanding their social meaning
- Coming up with options for resolving a social conflict

For teens who are challenged in these areas, the online world - with few nonverbal cues -- is that much more of a set-up for running into difficulties.

### **How to Watch for and Reduce the Chances of Cyberbullying:**

- Set clear expectations
  1. Don't text/post anything you wouldn't say in person
  2. Never share your or friends' personal information online
- Monitor cell phone and Internet use
- Urge them to pause/think before sending text/post
- Look for recent changes in your child's mood or behavior
- Inquire about their/others online life in a curious, interested way
- Assist them in their "emotional intelligence" skills re: social interactions
- Urge them to tell you or an adult they trust if they experience cyberbullying

Open-ended questions you can ask include:

- Is it easier to say certain things texting rather than in person?
- Are all "Facebook friends" really friends? What if you've never met them?
- How do you know what someone is feeling from just a text (without facial expression or voice tone)?
- I hear about these awful things kids do or say to each other online? Have your friends or classmates ever had to deal with that?
- You've seemed out of sorts. Anything going on that you'd like to talk about?

### **What to do if Your Child is experiencing Cyberbullying:**

- Have them save communications that have already taken place
- Have them block communications that are hurtful and delete messages
- Be there for them, listen to their experience (trying not to be highly reactive): First and foremost, convey your unconditional support and find out as much as you can about the circumstances
- If you determine your child is the one who has done the cyberbullying, be firm in restating expectations and enforcing consequences. Have them apologize and/or make restitution for their behaviors
- If it is someone your child and you know, consider contacting the parents.
- If appropriate, notify the authorities to follow-up: the police, Internet Service Providers, etc.
- In cases where your child has been deeply affected, get professional help

### **Resources:**

[www.stopcyberbullying.org](http://www.stopcyberbullying.org)

[www.cyberbullying.us](http://www.cyberbullying.us)

[www.wiredsafety.com](http://www.wiredsafety.com)

[www.stopbullyingnow.com](http://www.stopbullyingnow.com)

## 10 TIPS FOR PARENTS

### 1. Don't be scared to venture into the "World of Technology"

You can learn your way around. Really!

### 2. Determine where you stand and set clear expectations regarding

- What is allowed and what isn't: (i.e. no weekday use until homework finished)
- What is private: (who you talk with online is not private; what you say is)
- Rights and privileges (i.e. Having a cell phone is a privilege)
- How much is OK and what is excessive (# of hours per day/per week)
- How you will hold them accountable and monitor their activity (POS)

### 3. Provide structure that supports a life in balance and sets clear limits

- Establish clear rules and conditions for usage
- Include incentives for good behavior as well as consequences for bad
- Get their input on structure and show understanding for their desires/needs
- Components include: homework, chores, family time, fun, down time, creativity and face-to-face time with friends that are not "screen-based"
- Say "no" with sympathetic firmness to requests that are not acceptable; "I'm not comfortable is valid reason for saying "no"

### 4. Reinforce the positives

- Applaud what's good about it: it's fun; it's a way of building friendships, etc.
- Play the Wii, PS3, Xbox, learn to text, Skype with them with grandparents

### 5. Identify use that is excessive/unhealthy

- Use the guidelines above to help distinguish between use and dependence
- If there is disagreement, have them chart their usage for a week
- If they insist they are not dependent have them go without for a week

### 6. Apply tools you have to help ensure their safety and let you sleep at night

- Computer out of the bedroom
- Knowing with whom they are talking online or on their cells
- Insist they set "privacy controls" to limit access; look at their settings
- Google your child's name to see what information is available publicly
- Review cell phone calls/text messages; use monitoring software - even if they get around them, knowing you are monitoring will be inhibiting factor

## 7. Examine your own behaviors to see what you are modeling to them

- Are you on email constantly or taking phone calls during meals?
- Are you spaced out in front of computer or TV after tiring day?
- Does a part of you relish them being "addicted" because you get down time?

## 8. Get Networked Yourself

- Talk with other parents to find out how they are handling these issues
- Use online resources to get information and advice

[www.connectsafely.org](http://www.connectsafely.org)

[www.wiredsafety.org](http://www.wiredsafety.org)

[www.isafe.org](http://www.isafe.org)

[www.wiredkids.org](http://www.wiredkids.org) (for kids)

[www.stopcyberbullying.org](http://www.stopcyberbullying.org)

[www.netsmartz411.org](http://www.netsmartz411.org)

[www.nsteens.org](http://www.nsteens.org) (for teens)

- Online Assessment Tools:

From Ofer Zur: <http://www.zurinstitute.com/internetaddiction.com>

<http://www.netaddiction.com/> Self-Assessment Test for Gaming Addiction:

<http://psychcentral.com/blog/archives/2005/08/21/beard-and-wolfs-2001-criteria-for-maladaptive-internet-use/> Beard and Wolf's 2001 Criteria for Maladaptive Internet Use

- Monitoring software: "Net Nanny" <http://www.netnanny.com/>

## 9. Additional Rules I Recommend Implementing:

- Never give out screen name or cell number online
- Don't ever express negative feelings through email/IM/Facebook - words alone without seeing/hearing the person can lead to huge misunderstandings
- Have your child show you their Facebook profile
- Tell us, tell friends, tell someone if you are the victim of cyber bullying - we will not punish/shame you for telling even if you've been breaking our rules!

10. Your involvement may meet with resistance, but it communicates to your child that you care and that he/she matters. Never forget that!

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