



# Parents Make A Difference!

## Teens and Internet Safety

February 2005

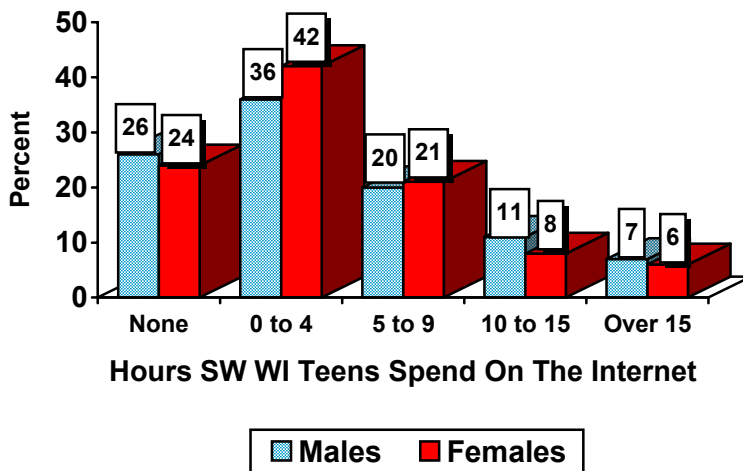
The Internet provides tremendous opportunities for all of us to access information and communicate with family, friends, and people throughout the world. Technology has evolved so that computers are no longer the only way to reach the Internet. Internet access is becoming common on cell phones, personal digital assistants and even some video games.

Young people have embraced the Internet and know more about it than most of their parents. In this issue of *“Parents Make A Difference!”*, we explore teen Internet usage, the potential dangers the Internet poses for teens and provide parents with tips to increase the safety of teens when they are online.

### How Much Time Do Teens Spend on the Internet?

Research from the recent Southwest Wisconsin Youth Survey (SWYS) of 5,704 7-12<sup>th</sup> graders shows that 75% of southwest Wisconsin teens report spending time on the Internet each week. The survey also found that 38% of males and 35% of females spend more than five hours per week on the net. The chart below shows a more detailed breakdown of the time southwest Wisconsin teens spend on the Internet.

How many hours per week do you spend on the Internet (surfing, e-mail, ICQ-instant messaging)?



### What Dangers Does the Internet Pose For Teens?

Internet dangers for young people include unwanted sexual solicitation (which can lead to kidnapping), unwanted exposure to sexual materials and cyber bullying or harassment.

According to a nation-wide survey by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), 1 in 5 regular Internet users ages 10-17 received unwanted sexual solicitation in the past year. One third of the youth that received these unwanted solicitations were males and two thirds were females. According to the study, 97% of the solicitors were people that the young person had met online.

More than 16% of youth reported forming at least one close friendship with people they met online, about one half of these friendships were formed with someone they met in a chatroom. In southwest Wisconsin about 1 in 5 teens report developing a “relationship” with someone they met on the Internet. Of these teens, about a third of them say they met the person face-to-face after developing the relationship online.

Chatrooms are perhaps the most dangerous area on the Internet. Chatrooms allow for live “conversation” as everyone in the chatroom instantly sees what is being typed. Some chatrooms have monitors, but users can always go to a private chat area where the conversation is unsupervised. SWYS found that a third of southwest Wisconsin teens spend time in chatrooms.

Instant messaging (IM) has become extremely popular among teens. IM allows the user to stay in touch with other users without having to use e-mail as the message will appear on the computer, cell phone or wherever the user is connected to the Internet. Like chat rooms, IM makes it possible to have several people exchanging messages at the same time and the user needs to make sure they know who is online.

In addition to unwanted sexual solicitation, the NCMEC study found that one in four youth reported unwanted exposure to sexually explicit materials. This unwanted sexual material came in the form of e-mails or was mistakenly found while surfing the Internet. Internet filters or blocking software can reduce the exposure to unwanted sexual material, but the NCMEC survey found that only one in three households had blocking software on their computer.

About 1 in 16 youth in the NCMEC study reported being victims of cyber bullying. The incidents included threats to harm the youth, their family, friends or property and efforts to embarrass or humiliate them. One youth reported having a hate page posted about her on the Internet, another having a note to her boyfriend scanned into the computer and sent to the whole school, while another reported having a note about them involving sexual name-calling posted on the web.

Teens do recognize the danger of the Internet. In fact, 75% of the youth in the NCMEC study said that parents should be very or extremely concerned about young people being exposed to sexual material on the Internet.

### Parents Can Make A Difference!!

Despite the dangers, parents can help their teens safely explore, utilize and enjoy the Internet. Parents can best help teens avoid and confront Internet safety challenges if they learn as much as they can about the Internet and follow the guidelines outlined below:

- **Stay in touch with what your teen is doing online.** Do your best to discuss Internet issues and share Internet experiences like planning a vacation, picking out a movie or visiting a prospective college online. Ask your teen to show you the sites they enjoy and show interest in them.
- **Keep the computer in a public area** in your home. While teens may want a computer in their own room, it is easier to monitor their activity when the computer is in a room the whole family uses.
- **Set online rules for your teen such as:**
  - Never arrange a face-to-face meeting with someone they met online.
  - Never upload or post pictures of themselves to the Internet or online service to people they do not personally know.
  - Never give out their name, home address, and school name or telephone number online.
  - Never download pictures from unknown sources.
  - Never respond to messages that are suggestive, obscene, harassing or that make them feel uncomfortable.
- **Look into computer filters and virus protection** to block objectionable material and prevent computer viruses. See what resources are available through your Internet provider.
- **Remind your teen that what they are told online may not be true.** Everyone is not who they say are online.

### According to the FBI, Your Teen Might Be At Risk Online If:

- Your teen spends large amount of time online, especially at night.
- You find pornography on your teen's computer.
- Your teen is getting phone calls from adults you don't know or phone numbers on your long distance bills you don't recognize.
- Your teen receives mail, gifts or packages from someone you don't know.
- Your teen turns the monitor off or changes screens when you come into the room.
- Your child becomes withdrawn from family.
- Your teen is using someone else's online account.

Visit [www.fbi.gov](http://www.fbi.gov) for more information.

### Resources For Parents

[www.fbi.gov](http://www.fbi.gov)  
[www.cybersmartkids.com](http://www.cybersmartkids.com)  
[www.missingkids.com](http://www.missingkids.com)  
[www.safeteens.com](http://www.safeteens.com)  
[www.teen-scene.org](http://www.teen-scene.org)  
[www.msn.staysafeonline](http://www.msn.staysafeonline)

### REMEMBER: PARENTS MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

*"Parents Make a Difference"* is a product of the Southwest Wisconsin Youth Survey (SWYS), a program of University of Wisconsin-Extension, local school districts and UW-Platteville. This series is adapted from the UW-Extension "Whose Kids?...Our Kids!" series. This issue was written by Tom Schmitz, UW-Extension Grant and Lafayette County and edited by Deb Ivey, Ruth Schriefer and Sarah Weier, UW-Extension Iowa County and Bev Doll, UW-Extension Grant County. Thanks are extended to the 5,704 7th to 12th graders from southwest Wisconsin who participated in the 2001 SWYS survey. Contact UW-Extension for further information, or by phone Grant County (608) 723-2125; Lafayette County (608) 776-4820; and Iowa County (608) 935-0391 or on the web at <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/cty/grant/tap/parentresources.html>.

References for this edition of *"Parents Make A Difference"* include: The FBI publication "A Parent's Guide to Internet Safety", MSN Stay Safe Online, National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, Teen-Scene.org, SafeTeens.com and Cyber Smart Kids Online.