Parent Pages

What is my teen doing?

When teens are online, they may be engaging in a number of activities from listening to music, surfing the web, chatting with friends, or looking at social network sites. What does all of this mean???

What is it called?	What does it do?	What are the pros?	What are the cons?
Internet search (Google, etc.)	Helps users find information	Educational (can be useful for doing research for homework)	Teens can be exposed to inappropriate content online
Text Messaging	Allows users to send and receive short written messages on mobile phones	Useful for sending quick messages; a good option when teens cannot use the phone	May be used as a substitute for speaking by phone or in person; potential for overuse and can be costly
Facebook and MySpace	Social networking sites where personal updates and photos can be posted	Free access; a relatively safe place for teens to share information and to meet new people	Sharing too much information; information can be viewed by others if privacy settings are not controlled
Twitter	A public instant messaging service that allows users to send and read others' very short messages called "tweets"	Very easy to use; allows youth to provide quick updates on their life and read about others' lives	Twitter messages ("tweets") are public, not private conversations; Twitter feeds are continuous and nonstop—users often feel they are "missing something" when they are not online
Instant Messaging (IM)	Software that allows two people to communicate in "real time" with typed messages	Can be a fun and quick way to keep in touch with friends and family	It is important to make sure privacy and safety are protected (e.g. If account is not set up properly, anyone can contact your teen and retrieve their personal information through their personal profile; messages can be intercepted by strangers)

Chat Rooms	Electronic "rooms" for groups of people to interact and exchange their thoughts about a variety of issues; can be public or private	Can be fun to communicate with other like-minded people	Chat rooms can be anonymous, which can expose teens to dangers including solicitations from strangers and cyber bullying
Music and Movie Downloads (e.g., iTunes, Netflix)	Able to get a wide range of songs and videos from the Internet	Teens can access music and movies for a fee	Downloading copyrighted material without permission is illegal
YouTube	A video sharing website where users can upload, view and share video clips	Teens can easily create, upload, view and download videos	Once a video is uploaded to YouTube, it can be accessed by people worldwide; youth should therefore divulge as little personal information as possible
Blogs	An on-line place where users can ask questions or share their personal thoughts and opinions	Blogs can be useful for enhancing teens' writing skills and allowing for self-expression. Can also have an educational component— many teachers use blogs for their classes	Although blogs can be educational, most public blogs are not checked for accuracy making it difficult to distinguish fact from fiction. Bloggers can be a resource for cyber bullying and predators

What are some of the benefits to these new technologies?
- **Educational—**the Internet is full of legitimate and useful information
- **Social Connections—**teens can remain connected to friends and family, as well as expand their social circle beyond friends and family to chat with teachers and others who may share their interest in a particular topic
- **Cultural—**exposes teens to a wide range of songs and movies
- **Creativity—**allows teens to create and share their own videos and other content

What are some of the drawbacks and dangers?
- **Physical Harm—**can occur if teens decide to meet someone they have met on the Internet in person. Teens should avoid any contact with unfamiliar friends and adults.
- **Cyber Bullying**—can occur when teens use the Internet to spread rumors, post damaging information about someone, or harass others. It often occurs without adults knowing.
- **Illicit Materials—**there is a great deal of opportunity for teens to be exposed to age-inappropriate movies, music, and material on the web. In fact, there are more than half a million pornography sites, and that number continues to grow.
- **Viruses**—these can cause your computer to work slowly, work incorrectly, or not work at all. When you look at certain sites or open e-mail from people you don't know, you can unknowingly download viruses and other programs onto your computer.
- **Identity Theft**—occurs when someone steals personal information, such as a social security number, to commit fraud. This is the fastest growing crime in the U.S.
- **Illegal Downloading**—there are multiple Internet sites where teens can download movies and music without paying. There are stiff penalties if you get caught! You can also be sued by the recording company.

- **Lost Opportunities—**too much time spent on media means loss of time that could be spent on school work, sports, personal contact with others, or other activities.

(Adapted from New York State Parental Information & Resource Center (PIRC) Factsheet: Monitoring Your Child's Internet Use)

What Can You Do?

Establish Household Rules
- Make certain your teen is aware of your rules for Internet use. Be prepared to follow through with consequences if the rules are violated.
- Place computers in a central and frequently visited spot in your home—do not allow computer use in your teen's bedroom or other areas where you are not able to monitor your teen and/or that isolate your teen from family activities.

Communicate With Your Teen
- Talk with your teen—find out what they like to do online and why. Be open-minded!
- Talk as a family—develop a family strategy for technology that meets everyone's needs such as determining an appropriate amount of time and money that can be spent for online activities as well as which sites or types of media are allowable.
- Try to respond appropriately and not overreact if your teen reports an online concern or incident. Fear of overreaction is the main reason teens do not report online concerns to adults.

Monitor Your Teen's Use of the Internet
- Engage in respectful monitoring: public online activities are public and open to review; private communications should be reviewed if there are reasons for concern.
- Purchase or download monitoring software that filters or blocks inappropriate content on all computers your teen uses. There are a number of filtering and blocking software programs that you can download onto your computer that allow you to block access to sites you consider to be inappropriate for your teen, such as pornography. Filtering and blocking programs cannot protect your teen from online dangers, but they can help.
- Keep track of the websites your teen is visiting and be on the lookout for inappropriate sites or anonymous chat rooms.
- Look carefully at your mobile phone bill to determine that your teen's cell phone use is not resulting in extra charges.
- There is no substitute for monitoring!

Become Tech-Savvy!
- Learn the technology. Doing so will allow you to monitor your teen's online use more closely.
- Set up an online music and media account with a budget.
- Ask your teen to show you Facebook, MySpace and/or Twitter and to help you set up your own account or profile (see example Facebook page, below).
- Learn how to adjust the privacy setting on MySpace, Facebook and Twitter so that only people you and your teen approve of can access the information they provide. You can learn how to adjust the settings by going in to Google and typing in: "adjust privacy settings in Facebook" (or MySpace, or Twitter).
- Ensure that your child's privacy settings are appropriate.

What Can Teens Do?
- Never meet anyone in person that they meet only online
- Tell a caregiver immediately if someone they meet on the Internet asks to meet them in person

- Do not open email attachments from people they do not know
- Visit only approved chat rooms
- Do not share their personal password or personal information that identifies their home address, phone number, etc.
- Adjust their privacy settings on their email, instant messaging, and social networking accounts
- Do not post anything they would not want the public to see
- Do not download music or movies without paying for them

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The Internet can be a very useful tool, providing access to information such as news and blogs, communication tools such as email and social networking sites, and entertainment, such as movies, music and videos. On its own, the Internet is neither good nor bad—it can be used for positive activities as well as negative ones. When used properly, the Internet can be a fun, creative, and educational resource for teens. However, there are also many reasons to exercise caution when using the Internet. Therefore, it is important for both caregivers and their teenagers to understand the benefits as well as the drawbacks and dangers of Internet use.

Example of a Facebook Page:
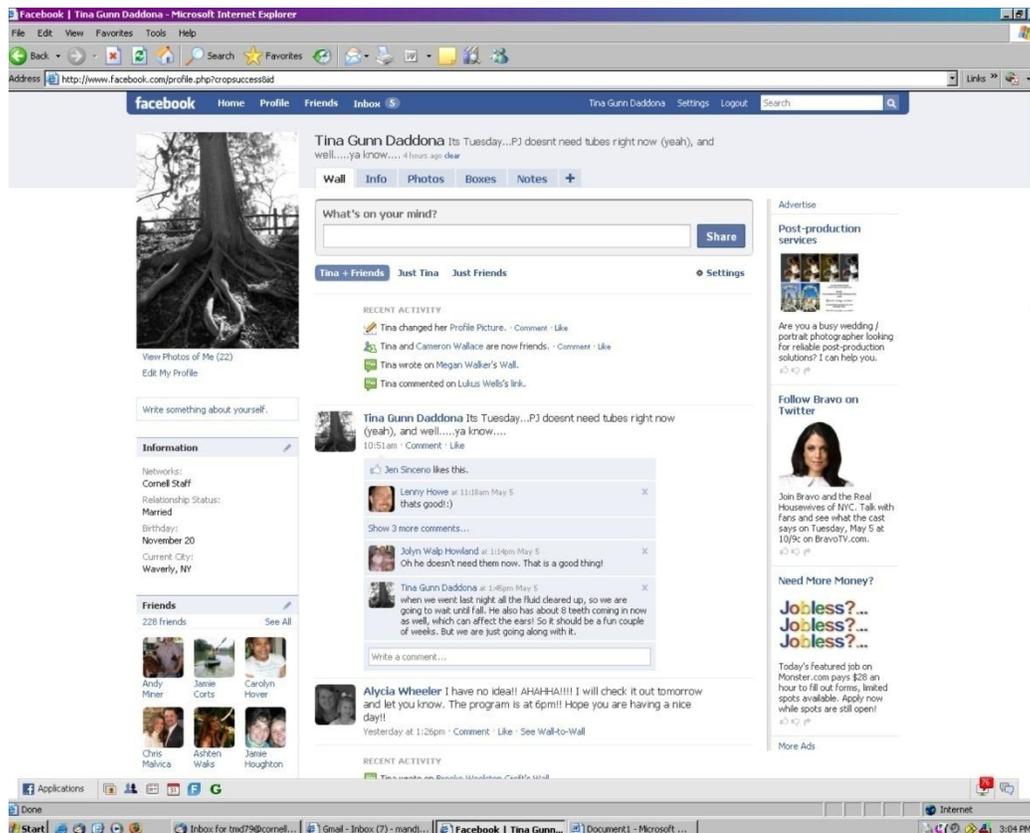
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