



# Top 5 Reasons Kids Go Online

by Gwen Darling

Have you ever wondered exactly what your teen is doing for hours on end at the computer? The truth may surprise (and delight) you.

1

## Communication

Teens are talking. In a national AOL survey of more than 6,700 teens and parents of teens, it was found that 81 percent of teens between the ages of 12 to 17 use the Internet for e-mail, and 70 percent use it to send instant text messages to their friends' computers or wireless devices. A similar study by Jupiter Media Metrix, an Internet research firm, backs these results, listing the top Web sites visited by teens as Yahoo, MSN, AOL and Hotmail – all destinations that support e-mail and instant messaging. Clearly, the Internet is slowly but surely replacing the telephone in the lives of our teens.

2

## Research/Homework

Teens are learning. Studies show that teenagers are using the Internet as a research tool, replacing the library as their primary source of information. As much as 61 percent of teens turn to online resources to complete their homework assignments, accessing detailed maps, rich historical data, and other study aids. Homework help Web sites such as

<http://www.homeworktips.about.com> and <http://www.homeworkspot.com> are popular with teens and offer a free alternative to tutors. Teenagers are also seeking access to news and current events online, preferring the fresh stories and vivid graphics of the Web to

the "boring" newspaper that their parents are reading at the breakfast table.

3

## Games

Teens are playing. Eighty percent of 8- to 12-year-olds who go online begin their Internet education by playing games. This percentage drops, however, as kids reach their teenage years, decreasing to 60 percent by the time teens reach 18. Teens' tastes in games are as varied as the selection, ranging from interactive role-playing games such as "The Sims Online" (<http://www.thesims.com>) to online, souped-up versions of old standbys like Yahtzee and Tetris. Game sites popular with teens include MSN's Game Zone (<http://www.zone.msn.com>) Uproar (<http://www.uproar.com>) and Shockwave Games (<http://www.shockwave.com/sw/games>).

Interestingly enough, game playing online is really a further extension of teen-to-teen communication, as most games provide a chat function for discussion between rounds.

4

## Music

Teens are groovin'. What would life with a teenager be without music? Today's teens literally have music at their fingertips and, as a group, have embraced the availability of free tunes online; 55 percent of teens ages 12 to 17

and 65 percent of older teens list listening to music as an Internet must. Using software applications such as Windows Media Player and KaZaA Media Desktop, teens can now download digitized audio and video files with a click of the mouse, and share them with friends with the same taste in music, all free of charge (for now). Favorite teen hangouts include Audio Galaxy (<http://www.audiogalaxy.com>) Rhapsody (<http://www.listen.com>) and KaZaA (<http://www.kazaa.com>). Access to thousands of live radio broadcasts is also a big draw, with formats ranging from London alternative to Minneapolis hip-hop.

5

## Window Shopping

Teens are just browsing. Teenagers make up the largest group of online shoppers who don't actually purchase online, increasingly computer-savvy, but lacking credit cards, 89 percent of teens have never made an online purchase, but 29 percent have researched products on the Internet before making a purchase in a conventional store. Research indicates that teens frequent the same popular online stores as adults, such as Amazon.com and eBay, but stop short of making a purchase.

Talking, learning, playing, groovin', shopping – all typical healthy teenager behaviors! However, it would be naïve to suggest that teenagers aren't tempted to occasionally wander over to the "seedy side" of the Internet. How can a parent protect an independent teen from the dangers online, without squelching his enthusiasm for the technology of his generation? Pull up a chair! If you haven't taken the time to surf the Web with your teens, you're missing out on a great opportunity to get a glimpse of your child's world – a world of limitless boundaries and possibilities. And if they know you're interested in (and able to see) what they're viewing, they are much more likely to stick to the healthy, top five reasons to go online.