

Technological Society - Growing Up Online

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Our society has created a virtual society. Many contend that we are living our lives online as a continuation of our existence. Computerized communication has been a booming interpersonal mode of communication. Our vocabularies have expanded to include words created from the information highway. The internet world has been widespread, at such a fast rate of speed, that the language continues to grow.

Many parents are concerned over the lack of policing and supervision in this technological society. Parents claim that no one is in charge and that their child or adolescent is free to “go wild”. Some parents attempt parental controls, but many complain that their children find a way around it. Many schools find it is necessary to use “computer talk” or to computerize the curriculum, just to capture their student’s attention.

Being online has quickly become a normal element in children’s lives. The internet, cell phone, texting, and so on has further lessened the need to be present socially, since the invention of the telephone. The lack of social presence and the ability for privacy adds a different sense of being associated in a social context. This makes it easier to e-mail, text, or chat with strangers because there is less nervousness or fear about being offensive or being offended on an interpersonal level. Being online assists online relationships by allowing children and adolescents to take their time to reveal their thoughts and feelings and to communicate without interruptions. Additionally, the ability to find others with similar interests, no matter how obscure the topic may be, is causing a sudden increase in the number of chatting forums. E-mail and virtual communities are changing our kid’s friendships and social communication, both on-line and in the physical world.

Before children and adolescents can utilize the world of the internet, the workings of cyberspace need to be better understood. Children and adolescents often find that they

feel free to communicate online, in an unrestrained manner. Our previous rules and regulations regarding oral and written communication is being challenged. Because of this trend, the child or adolescent may feel a sense of freedom in which they do not have to hold back the way they would in the physical social environment. The child or adolescent may feel that the likelihood of repercussions for internet activity is minimal. Therefore, a “free for all” of expression of thoughts, sexuality, emotion, etc. is often the norm. In the virtual social world, the child or adolescent is not inhibited by the judgments of others or the normal sensory cues. The results can be an emotionally distorted and empty form of communication without the normal restrictions that society usually imposes.

Communicating on-line can increase the social networks for a child or adolescent to feel a sense of belonging and/or that attracts their interest. This can be very alluring. The types of differences between people, that might typically hinder the development of a relationship in the physical environment, is completely hidden in the online world. This encourages a sense of belonging or being a part of a group.

Communication on-line can increase a child’s or adolescent’s impression in this online and written format. Writing formats can be easily interpreted more negatively or more positively than would be perceived in the personal and social context. The loss of facial and verbal cues can falsely create greater intimacy or lead to misunderstandings. In addition, the child or adolescent can select only aspects of themselves that they decide to make public. On-line can be a way of having choices about how one decides to present one’s self. The child’s or adolescent’s raised self-presentation can be greatly romanticized which is magnified to an unrealistic level. This exaggerated self-presentation may explain the high rates of conflicts between kids. The child or adolescent may be encouraged to idealize the writer of a romanticized posting and lose sight of the real person behind the e-mail address or chat room name. A very high risk exists, in which the people met on-line may not be the person that the child or adolescent thought they were.

Our virtual and/or online society is not going away. PBS featured a movie titled *Growing Up Online* that discusses this topic in great length. See PBS's website *Growing Up Online*, FRONTLINE at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/kidsonline/> to view the movie and for more information. The movie features schools that have incorporated into their curriculum, how to teach even young children online safety procedures. The movie stresses society's need to educate parents regarding their obligation to supervise their children's online usage and how to educate their children of the risks.

The internet falsely provides feelings of safety. The reality is that anyone can view your child or adolescent while they are online. Therefore, it is imperative that we realize that the virtual world is here to stay, which thereby requires us to educate our children and adolescents as to the helpful and harmful elements that it holds.