The Internet: supporting children and young people

Tips and suggestions for parents of 11- to 16-year-olds

Englisch

Die Stellen für Suchtprävention im Kanton Zürich

Children nowadays grow up with a variety of electronic media: In addition to television, mobile phones and electronic games, everyday life includes computers connected to the Internet. Depending on how, and for what, they are used, they provide opportunities or threats to children and young people.

Opportunities / benefits of the Internet

- The Internet provides knowledge and prepares for working life.
- It enables new forms of communication and exchange with other people.
- It offers interesting reports and insights into other worlds.
- It banishes boredom and is relaxing.

Risks / disadvantages of the Internet

- There is problematic content, such as graphic violence or pornography, which can overwhelm and frighten children and young people.
- School performance can suffer due to excessive use.
- Once published on the Internet, data such as private pictures, addresses or phone numbers can be difficult, if not impossible, to delete.
- There is a risk that viruses that damage the computer will be downloaded.
- On the Internet time passes quickly and you can lose track of it. Intensive use leaves too little time for social contacts in the real world. Above all, games and chat can be addictive.
- Social networking sites can be used to abuse and bully children (cyber-bullying).
- Complete strangers can exploit the curiosity of children and young people and the anonymity of the Internet to elicit their personal information or to harass them. It can be dangerous if a stranger arranges a meeting with your child in the real world.

It is important to give children guidance

Because the Internet carries risks, you must make yourself familiar with them, show interest, check on and guide your child, and make rules. You do not need to understand all the technical details to support your child. You should, however, tell your child what you think is good and what is not. Explain your reasons to him or her (them) – for example, why you reject violent games, or why you don't want vacation photos of your daughter in her bathing costume shown on the Internet.

What children and young people do on the Internet

Girls use the Internet primarily for chatting, that is, to communicate with others. Boys use it most often to play online and computer games.

Important Internet terms

Internet	Interconnected networks and computers. Enables communication and data sharing.
Online	Actively connected to the Internet
Chat Chat room Internet forum Social network	In chat rooms (space to chat) or on internet forums (such as Facebook) you can chat in writing and share images, and more, with other Internet users. In this way you can hide your true identity (anonymity).
Cyber-bullying	Anonymous harassment and insults via electronic media, such as broadcasting lies or intimate pictures on Facebook. Happens mostly between people who know each other.
Gaming	Playing on a computer with a games console or on the Internet.
Surfing	Jumping from site to site on the Internet, often by following links.
Link	Reference to other web pages or files which opens when clicked on.
Download(ing)	Download data from the Internet to your own computer.

What parents can do

- Find out more. Acknowledge your relationship with electronic media and your own media use.
- Explore the Internet together with your child. Talk with them (her or him) about what they do on the Internet. Have them explain to you what games they play.
- Educate your child about potential dangers on the Internet (unpleasant surprises when chatting, transmission of viruses, etc.).
- Agree on rules with your child about how often, and for how long, they may use various electronic media. Make sure that they stick to the agreement.
- Encourage your child to spend enough time in other activities and with their friends besides electronic media.
- Make sure that your child chooses games and movies suitable for their age.
- If in doubt, it can be very helpful to talk with other parents. You will also find support from counselling and advice services.
- Educate your child about criminal activities on the Internet. These include in particular cyber-bullying and downloading of extreme content.

Checklist: Risk of Internet addiction

Signs that parents should look out for:

- The computer and/or the gaming console are on for four or more hours a day.
- Your child never, or hardly ever, meets up with their friends any more.
- Your child stops showing any interest in other activities and hobbies.
- Their school or learning performance deteriorates over time.
- Your child neglects their body and loses their appetite. They are often tired during the day.
- Your child reacts aggressively or becomes depressed if they are not allowed to use the computer.

Rules for protection against abuse

- Never give out personal details (name, address, phone number etc.).
- Never meet privately with strangers encountered on the Internet.
- Never open emails or files received from strangers.
- Never send photos of yourself to strangers on the Internet.
- On social networking sites like Facebook limit access to pictures and other personal data to known friends only.
- Get advice if in doubt.

Rules for technical security

- Don't click on every link and don't be in a hurry to press "OK".
- Never download unknown software from the Internet.
- Get advice if in doubt.

Translation: Andrew Fellows

Information and advice

Brochures

"Surfing, chatting, gaming … talking with children and young people about Internet use." Detailed brochure for parents in German. Published by Sucht Info Schweiz (Addiction Information Switzerland) and available for free download from:
www.sucht-info.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/DocUpload/Surfen_gamen_chatten_jugendlichen_sprechen.pdf

Advice services

If you have problems in setting and enforcing rules, contact the youth counselling or youth and family counselling service in your area. Addresses are available at: www.lotse.zh.ch/service/detail/500012

Or call the parents emergency helpline on 044 261 88 66

If you suspect that your child uses the Internet too much and is developing a dependency, call the drug prevention agency in your area. Addresses are available at:
www.suchtpraevention-zh.ch/ueber-uns/regionale-stellen or by phone: 044 634 49 99.

Internet links

www.internet-abc.de/eltern
Assistance with Internet issues (German)

www.usk.de Information about age classification of computer games (German)

www.fit4chat.ch Information about chat (German)

www.schau-hin.info
Information for media education (German, Turkish)

www.security4kids.ch Information about protection against abuse and viruses (German, French, Italian)

www.safersurfing.ch Information about protection against abuse (German)

Orders

Further copies of this flyer can be ordered from:
www.suchtpraevention-zh.ch/Publikationen
→ Informationsmaterial → Familie
or by phone: 044 634 49 99.
Orders in Kanton Zurich are free of charge.