



Lepage Associates
Solution-Based Psychological Services

ASK THE EXPERT
By: Tina Lepage, Psy.D.

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Q: How do I check on my teens' activities on-line without making them feel like I don't trust them or have invaded their privacy?

A: Teenagers are at an age when developmentally it is appropriate for them to want and be given more privacy than they had as children. However – though they might argue to the contrary! – there still must be limits to their privacy, particularly when safety issues are involved. The Internet has not only become a wonderful information resource for teens in a positive way, but has also become a place to easily access pornography, and a place where pedophiles solicit unsuspecting teens, often by pretending to be children themselves, or by pretending to be a caring adult who is interested in the child. Teens generally understand that safety concerns have more boundaries around them than activities that have no harm potential. Explain to your teens that their computer use is not monitored because you disrespect their privacy, but rather because as a parent you are responsible for their safety. Have the computer in a public place in the house so that you can make fly-bys while your teen is on the computer (no different than checking in on them when they have friends over). Review the websites that your teens have visited or even restrict certain websites. This is no different than being familiar with any place your child may spend time, such as friends' homes, the Mall, or a sports facility, and just as you might restrict your child from going places that you view as unsafe or not in line with values you want them to learn, restricting some websites makes sense. Again, communication is key, so explain to your teen why you are checking on their "whereabouts" on-line. Not computer savvy? Visit a local computer store to learn more ways to set healthy limits on Internet use. Regarding trust, think of the Internet just as you would any place your teen goes. If your teens are honest with you about the "where/with who/doing what/why/when-time spent" then you trust them more and give them more leeway; if your teens lies about the where/who/what/why/when of their activities, then they have earned less trust and get less leeway. Though teens balk at it at times, again, they do understand the concept of trust being earned, and that their actions affect your trust. Lastly, let your teens know that the issue on Internet use is not a you-against-them issue, but rather is something you can become savvy about together. Take time to learn, with your teens, information about safe Internet use, so that they can make healthy decisions on their own too. Many teens, who know what to be aware of, will make appropriate choices.

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