



Should you be screening her screen time?

Hooked on the Net

ages
8-12

Is your tween:

- increasingly irritable?
- always dragging her feet?
- getting poor grades?
- losing interest in her usual activities?

If so, you may have an Internet addict on your hands.

Between chat rooms, online games, IM, and the endlessly absorbing World Wide Web, it's easy to see online's allure: It's entertaining, educational, and interactive. But when a child gets hooked, it can also be alienating and all-consuming.

"Kids who spend too much time online miss out on normal

human experiences," says Daniel Broughton, M.D., a pediatrician at the Mayo Clinic. "They may have trouble forming healthy relationships in the real world."

If you think your child might be overdoing the Internet:

- **Set boundaries.** The American Academy of Pediatrics suggests a maximum of two hours of screen time a day for all children, whether it's the computer or the TV, for school research or for fun.
- **Encourage her other interests.** If she likes music, sign her up for guitar lessons. Or have her invite her friends over so she spends more time with other kids.

- **Keep the computer in a common space,** such as the den or the kitchen, so you can monitor how long she uses it.
- **Look into products that help.** Two new ones to try: **ComputerTime**, which lets you set limits on the number of hours kids can use the computer, and **Windows Live OneCare Family Safety**, a Web-based program that shows what your kids are looking at (and for how long), among many other features. (**Computer Time**, \$40, softwaretime.com; **Windows Live OneCare Family Safety**, free for **Windows XP Service Pack and Vista**, <http://ideas.live.com>) —KAMALA NAIR

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