■■■■ Tekst 4

Internet: Boon or bane for kids?

By Ruth Peters

A few years ago, a parent came to my office with a new problem: Her child was spending so much time on Internet chats and downloading music that her grades were slipping and her social life deteriorating. Since then, the Internet has increasingly become a regular topic in my counseling sessions as a psychologist who specializes in treating children and families.

The bold promise that the Internet would greatly improve children's lives now seems __12__ – on the surface, at least.

Consider recent headlines. MSN closed off its free chat rooms out of concern that sexual predators were using them. Parents have been sued by the Recording Industry Association of America for file swapping done by their children. Unsavory spam infects e-mails. Nearly one in five parents now __13__ that children spend too much time online, up from 11% in 2000, reports the Center for Communication Policy at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA).

Computer time
What 7- to 12-year-olds say they do online:
Play games
87%
Listen to music
63%
Do schoolwork
60%
Watch videos, movies, cartoons
36%
Learn about celebrities
27%
Source: America Online's Digital Marketing Services

And moms and dads don't know the half of it. A study in the social science journal *Youth & Society*, for example, found that while one out of every four young Internet users were unwittingly exposed to sexual material online in the past year, only about a third of their parents knew about it. National School Boards Foundation researchers found that parents tend to underestimate how much time kids spend online and overestimate how much they spend at educational sites. These are legitimate __14__. But the real risk is that parents will overreact to them.

Any tool can be hazardous

The Internet's promise is still true: It is an incredibly powerful tool that offers our children unprecedented opportunities to learn and grow. As with any such tool, however, adult supervision is required to make it work safely and effectively.

In the same UCLA study, nearly 23% of parents said the Internet boosted their kids' grades; fewer than 4% felt it hurt them. The National School Boards Foundation found that Internet use tends to steal time from TV viewing and that wired kids tend to spend more time reading newspapers, magazines and books.

__15__, chatting can help kids make social connections. I've counseled children suffering from painful shyness or speech anomalies who have blossomed in the new world of cyber-socializing opened up by chat rooms and instant messaging.

Parents don't have to take extreme measures – or be techno-geeks – to maximize __16__ while keeping their kids' online neighborhoods safe and clean. Filtering software is getting better at blocking questionable sites while leaving the door open to legitimate, kid-friendly ones. Online timers can automatically shut off access once the allotted time has expired. Web trackers will e-mail reports to parents about their children's online activities.

Plenty of wheat mixed with the chaff

Finding an amazing array of great kid-friendly sites that make learning fun and exciting isn't hard, either. The federal government, __17__, has a site (www.kids.gov) that posts links to dozens of worthwhile kids' sites. Sites such as National Geographic Kids, PBSKids.org and Time for Kids have educational games, as does America Online's kid-focused service, called KOL, which also has a homework help site and chat rooms supervised by adults.

The bottom line is that parents can relax and learn to enjoy the Internet once they've taken a few simple steps to minimize its risks and maximize its potential.

USA Today

Eindexamen Engels havo 2006-I

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Kies bij iedere open plek in de tekst het juiste antwoord uit de gegeven mogelijkheden.

1p **12** ■
- **A** fulfilled
- **B** questionable
- **C** realistic

1p **13** ■
- **A** complain
- **B** deny
- **C** forget
- **D** pretend

1p **14** ■
- **A** concerns
- **B** demands
- **C** experiments
- **D** explanations
- **E** measures

1p **15** ■
- **A** After all
- **B** However
- **C** In addition
- **D** Therefore

1p **16** ■
- **A** the Internet connection
- **B** their support
- **C** these benefits

1p **17** ■
- **A** for example
- **B** however
- **C** meanwhile
- **D** therefore