

ANTI-DRUG UPDATE - October 7, 2008

POPULAR YOUTH WEB SITES EXPOSE TEENS, TWEENS TO IMAGES OF VIOLENT BEHAVIOR, SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Downloadable "Teens and Technology" Package Available for Parents in Your Community

The Office of National Drug Control Policy today released a startling data compilation indicating the extent to which Web sites - particularly those that post user-generated content - can spread misinformation and facilitate dangerous behaviors among teens, tweens, and younger children. These behaviors can include drug and alcohol use, self-mutilation, extreme violence, and anorexia and other eating disorders. While parents in your community may be aware of the risks of online pedophiles and other sexual predators, they may not be aware of the nature and extent to which their children are exposed to or engaging in other dangerous behaviors online.

Recent research* has indicated that drugs don't make parents' Top 10 list of concerns about their kids' online computer use. Therefore, ONDCP has undertaken an analysis of youth-accessible online content in an effort to increase in-depth understanding of the ubiquity of portrayals of risky behaviors that teens are exposed to when they are online, including drug use. Drugs, alcohol, prescription drugs, sex and other egregious content are widespread, easily accessible, seldom shows any consequences, and rarely refuted. ONDCP believes that alerting parents to this problem is essential to reducing teen drug abuse and other problem behaviors.

A new Nielsen Online study, conducted on behalf of the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) during the month of June and released today, measured the online viewing habits of teens, and tracked their exposure to drug-related content. The findings reveal that in any given month, nearly one million teens are exposed to one or more drug-related videos. The analysis found that more than a third of those viewing drug-related content are under the age of 16.

Other findings include:

- Almost 40 percent of drug-related videos contain explicit use of drugs and/or intoxication (Nielsen Online Custom Study);

- The average age of first Internet exposure to pornography is 11 years old. Eighty percent of 15- to 17-year-olds have been exposed to hardcore porn multiple times (Internet-Filter-Review.com);
- Nearly a third of students say their parents would disapprove if they knew what they were really doing on the Internet (i-SAFE Survey);

Even the youngest kids have access to dangerous online content. The top online video destination for 2- to 11-year-olds (by audience size) is YouTube.com, followed by DisneyChannel.com. Today's tech-savvy teens are targets for those promoting substance abuse and other risky behaviors by posting pictures to their social-networking pages or uploading video on sites like YouTube.com. The Web and image-sharing technologies available on cell phones have exponentially expanded teens' abilities to see and engage in dangerous behaviors.

When dealing with the Internet, parents need to monitor differently and update their parenting skills. There are three things parents can do to become more familiar with the technologies their teens are using:

- **Do Your Homework:** Check out the popular teen sites like MySpace and YouTube. See for yourself the kinds of images and information teens can find;
- **Set Rules and Consequences:** Be explicit about the behaviors and activities that are acceptable in your family and set rules to establish when and how new technologies can be used; and
- **Monitor Your Teens:** Know who your teen's friends are and where they go, on and offline. Check your computer's browser history and downloads, cell phone text messages, and incoming/outgoing phone numbers.

Here's how you can help spread these important new messages to parents in your community:

Downloading. A brand new "Teens and Technology" package includes a downloadable E-GUIDE and QUIZ, which outline everything parents need to know about social networking, net lingo, and viral video to better understand their teen's online habits:

<http://www.theantidrug.com/teens-technology/index.asp>. A customizable "Teens and Technology" Open Letter to Parents is available for download on TheAntiDrug.com with tips for customizing and distributing:

http://www.theantidrug.com/openletter/Open%20Letter%20eMonitoring_Editable.pdf.

To read more information on the new study released today, download the teen online exposure fact sheet: <http://www.theantidrug.com/resources/pdfs/Teens-Tech-Factsheet.pdf>.

Learning. The updated "Teens and Technology" online section provides guidance and advice to help parents monitor their teen's online activities: <http://www.theantidrug.com/teens-technology/index.asp>.

Ordering. For additional strategies on keeping teens drug-free, take advantage of the Media Campaign's FREE RESOURCES by visiting <http://www.TheAntiDrug.com/Resources> or calling 1-800-788-2800.

Signing Up. Encourage parents in your community to sign up for TheAntiDrug.com's Parenting Tips e-Newsletter, a regular e-mail notification with advice and strategies to help keep teenagers healthy and drug-free: <http://www.TheAntiDrug.com/Newsletter.asp>.

* "State of Internet Security: Protecting Children Online." Webroot Software, 2007.

ANTI-DRUG UPDATE (formerly Media Campaign FLASH) is your source for the latest news on the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign. Feel free to forward this information to your community partners and announce this information on your Web site or in your organizational newsletter. Sign up for the ANTI-DRUG UPDATE here: <http://www.theantidrug.com/resources/form.aspx>. Free materials from the Media Campaign are available to distribute in your community by visiting www.TheAntiDrug.com/Resources or calling (800) 788-2800.

ABOUT THE MEDIA CAMPAIGN: Since its inception in 1998, the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign has been authorized by Congress to reduce and prevent teen drug use. For more information on the ONDCP National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign, visit www.MediaCampaign.org.