# Free workshop gives parents the tools, understanding to keep kids safe online

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How much is too much screen time for your kids? Why is 14 year-old Johnny so drawn to video games? Why is 16 year-old Becky glued to her mobile device and to Facebook? How can you keep your children safe on the Internet when you can't be with them every minute? How can you teach your child to have good judgement when online?

A Kaiser Family Foundation study released January, 2010, reveals that engagement with media has climbed to 7 hours and 37 minutes a day for 8 to 18 year-olds. Children are engaged on computers and mobile devices for almost half of this time. Much of this engagement is spent on video games and social networking (texting and social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace). These statistics have parents concerned.

Parents who have been to the Life Online workshops have expressed concern about the effect so much screen time is having on their relationship with their children, as well as the effects on grades, physical health, and psychological health. Parents have also expressed concerns about the safety of their children from predators and from cyber bullies.

Parents are right to be concerned, when one out of five 10-17 year-olds have received online sexual solicitation and did not tell their parents. Nine out of ten parents will never know that any inappropriate contact had occurred. NetLingo.com has summaries of this data from several studies: http://www.netlingo.com/tips/cyber-safety-statistics.php

When you link these statistics with the new realities of our connected world, where according to an Ofcom study, 19 per cent of 8 to12 year-olds use social media sites such as Facebook, despite officially having to be 13 to do so, you have a world that is fast spiralling out of the control of parents and care-givers.

Is it any wonder that some parents simply do not feel that they can keep up, and so are not aware of what their children are doing online? Is it any wonder that some parents have abolished Internet media from their homes? It is difficult to know what to do.

The Life Online workshops provide parents with some answers to nagging questions about why video games are so addictive, what hunger is being fed by incessant texting and social network addiction, and what to do about it.

"The Life Online Workshop is a fantastic resource for parents wanting to keep abreast of their child's use of the internet," stated concerned parent, Cheryl Scott. "The presenters are engaging, and very knowledgeable. I would recommend this workshop to all parents."

According to parent, Lisa Rutten, "...the Life Online Workshop is an excellent way for parents to understand more about internet and video game safety."

Other parents who have participated in the workshop have commented:

"The workshop provides the essential tools for understanding and keeping up with what kids are doing online and what parents need to be concerned about"

"Every person with a computer, I-pod or cell phone should attend - regardless of whether they have children or not....but especially if they have children."

"The session was packed full of relevant, practical, realistic information. As a parent, it showed me how to teach my children to use the internet for all its positives, but how to be safe and wise about it."

"This was an extremely valuable and informative workshop. I would recommend this highly to all parents."

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*The Life Online Workshops are provided by volunteer teachers, and are supported by The Comox Valley District Parent Advisory Council and School District 71.*

*An upcoming workshop will be at Valley View Elementary School: Tuesday, April 6, 6:30 to 8:30 (Secondary Age Focus) Registration: http://leading2learn.com/lifeonline*

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