

Humanity Deficit 101: The shortage in American children's human contact

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Most parents can still remember a time when playing outside was normal, and friends came over to play. Today, children and adolescents have much less contact with kids their own age. In fact, parents and children spend so little time together, they are lucky to eat dinner together. It's time to ask the question: Why are children spending so much time alone?

First, having too many electronic toys reduces the amount of time spent with parents, siblings, and friends. The time spent using computers, TVs, ipods, MP3s, cell phones, Blackberries, CD players and burners, video games, digital cameras, and digital media players are affecting children's social and emotional lives. Most children and adolescents' day and night time hours are spent either with electronic equipment or attending school and doing school work.



I believe this reduced time with caring adults makes children feel isolated and lonely. Some parents admit that they do not really know their children because they spend a lot of time in their rooms. There is little time to talk and feel close, which are so crucial to building respect and trust. Without children's trust, parents cannot influence them, and worse yet, children can be swayed by other influences.

Second, the Internet can interfere with parenting socially healthy children. In a recent American Psychological Association publication entitled, "Socially wired: Instant messaging and email may dispel inhibitions and can lead to close friendships for children and teens." (Cynkar, 2007), 89 percent of teens were found to use the Internet at least once a week, and 61 percent log on at least daily, primarily to use instant messaging (IM) and get their emails. Seventy-five percent of all online teenagers use IM and almost half of them get their emails everyday. Its author questioned how this kind of communication would affect children and teen's social development.

Internet contacts are not used to make new friends, just to contact existing friends. Because they can self-disclose more online, intimacy may grow. However, the author also mentioned that some teens spent too much time "cuddled up" with their computers instead of flirting at the mall. Also, this type of online disclosing was found to lead some troubled teens into dangerous connections with strangers or becoming a victim of online harassment. Besides, the article argued, humans evolved from face-to-face communication, and, although, online contact makes children freer, there is a risk to developing less personal social relations.

The closeness that children report feeling from Internet contacts is made possible by being less ashamed to talk about intimate topics, like having a crush on a boy. However, not learning how to disclose secrets in person could harm later relationships like, a boyfriend, spouse, or close friend.

Finally, some teens' online contacting did not serve to strengthen offline friendships but to socially isolate them.

Fifteen percent of youth became isolating and avoidant because they spent too much keeping themselves apart from family and friends. These children were using the Internet as a substitute for socializing.

Thirty-two percent of online teens reported a stranger had contacted them. Also, of 1500 youth ages 10 to 17, 25 percent had casual online friendships and 14 percent had formed online friendships or online romances. Teens that are deeply troubled, with a history of depression or abuse, and conflicted parent-child relationship were most at risk for online exploitation, including teasing, harassing, or physical threats both from people they know offline and those who they only know online.

Even though children and adolescents are naturally social, heavy use of electronic equipment decreases the amount of time spent socializing. I believe that too much television and internet use, in addition to having too many electronic toys worsens feelings of loneliness and makes them more passive.

For More Info:

[One parent's blog about cell phone use for kids](#)
[When toys take over](#)

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