Pointers For Parents

Too Much Time Online...
Is Your Child Addicted To The Internet?

(NAPSA)—For children and teenagers, the Internet can be an excellent resource for information, communication and entertainment, but many parents are increasingly concerned about excessive time online.

Researchers are finding that for some youths, Internet activity is replacing their real-life experiences and relationships. In extreme cases, Internet addicted youths can compromise their future and health with compulsive Internet use. Dr. Kimberly Young, Clinical Director of the Center for Internet Addiction Recovery, offers these warning signs for parents:

• Losing track of time while online

• Sacrificing sleep to spend time online

• Choosing time online over friends and family

• Constantly checking e-mail and text/IM messages throughout the day

• Becoming agitated or angry when online time is interrupted.

A new children's book and animated film, produced by the Internet Keep Safe Coalition, is designed to help parents talk to their children in a fun, non-threatening way about the risks involved in spending too much time online. Set in the backdrop of next year's Olympics in Beijing, the book tells the story of the Web-surfing Faux Paw the Techno Cat, who learns the hard way what can happen when online gaming interferes with real-life goals.

Dr. Young also recommends several steps for parents who are concerned about their child's Internet use.

• **Address the problem.** Take some time to think about what needs to be said. Expect an outburst designed to make you feel guilty or inadequate. Avoid responding emotionally. Don't lecture. Acknowledge your child's feelings but stay focused on the topic of excessive Internet use.

• **Show you care.** Children often interpret questions about their behavior as blame and criticism. Remind your child that you love him or her and that you care about his or her happiness and well-being.

In Faux Paw's new Internet adventure, kids learn to balance real life with screen time.

• **Become more computer savvy.** Learn the lingo (both technical and popular) and become comfortable with the Internet; at least enough to know what your child is doing online.

• **Set reasonable time limits.** Work with your child to establish clear boundaries for the amount of time spent online. Allow perhaps an hour per night after homework, with a few extra weekend hours.

• **Encourage other activities.** Help children find alternative interests, whether it be something they used to enjoy or something new, such as joining a team or a club at school. Talk to them about what they most enjoy on the Internet so you can steer them toward healthy real-life equivalents.

If you believe your child may be addicted to the Internet, the Parent-Child Internet Addiction Test can help assess your child's dependence. It is available online at www.ikeepsafe.org/TEST.