

Technology Helps Fill An Empty Nest

(NAPSA)—Every year close to four million college freshmen leave home. Many of their parents discover that, after 18 years of child-rearing, they may have peace and quiet but they miss having their kids at home.

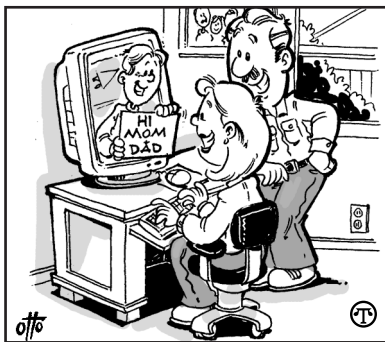
“The dilemma parents face is how to stay in touch and be part of their children’s lives, while still giving the kids their space,” says Dr. Andrea Van Steenhouse, psychologist and author of “Empty Nest...Full Heart: The Journey from Home to College.” “The good news is that technology like instant messaging and e-mail can help.”

Dr. Van Steenhouse says the Internet makes it easier to ease the pain of separation and stay in touch. Nearly two-thirds of people age eighteen to twenty-seven have used IM and nearly all of them use e-mail. Both offer great ways to communicate with young people on their level.

Instant messaging is like e-mail except messages are sent in an “instant,” so conversations happen “live.” It’s faster and easier than sending e-mail. You can even play games and send digital pictures over IM. The most popular free IM service is MSN Messenger, which you can get at MSN.com. The site also has a free e-mail service, Hotmail, so it can be a good place to get started.

Explained one student: “Talking online is so much easier than having to pick up the phone and wonder if the person you’re calling is even home.”

While students may not admit they’re struggling with living on their own, many do. A quick note from a parent can go a long way toward helping freshmen make the transition.



E-mail and IM can bridge geographical distances and gladden parental hearts.

“The Internet is a wonderful way for parents to feel involved in their children’s lives and maintain contact with them in a way the child feels comfortable with,” says Dr. Van Steenhouse. “With instant messaging or e-mail, kids can quickly get that vital information only parents seem to know, like how to work the laundry!”

Dr. Van Steenhouse’s top five tips for parents include:

1. If you don’t have e-mail or IM, get it. You can sign up for free Hotmail and MSN Messenger accounts at msn.com.
2. E-mail and IM are read more eagerly if kids can expect positive news.
3. Kids may use e-mail and IM to communicate new ideas to their parents—even if it’s head shaving, tattooing or changing majors! Use IM and e-mail to ask your kid for more information and to find out more about what’s going on in their lives.
4. Non-intrusive questions, such as “how was your weekend?” may yield more sharing answers.
5. In addition to chatting, you can send news stories, photos, even video.