

TEEN TOPICS



Talking “Teenglish”

(NAPSA)—Ever since teenagers first walked the Earth, parents have complained that they spoke a different language. Today, the Internet and instant messaging software have made this truer than ever. In fact, the Internet has led teenagers to create a new language that some parenting experts call “teenglish.”

Do you know what “POS” means? How about “BRB” or “TTYL”? No, it’s not Morse code. It’s instant messaging shorthand for “parent over shoulder,” “be right back” and “talk to you later.” Carol Weston, an expert on teens and parenting, says that the first step to understanding “teenglish” is to embrace the new technology that teenagers are using.

“Instant messaging software is easy to use and is a great tool for communicating with kids in a way they understand—in their own language,” Weston said. “The important thing is to keep messages upbeat and not to nag. Send a quick hello and ask about basketball practice or say there’s a snack in the fridge. It’s also fun to add personalized touches, like a photo, smiley face or just some color.”

While teenagers are the biggest users of instant messaging, also known as IM, the phenomenon is crossing over into all age groups. Research shows that IM has already grown quickly in popularity—30 percent faster than e-mail did at its inception. The most popular free instant messaging service is MSN Messenger, which has more than 100 million active users around the world.

IM is a great way to communicate with friends and family, but many parents worry that it also can be an easy way for strangers to talk to their kids. Services such as MSN have responded with features that can help protect your children online. MSN Messenger, a free service, makes it impossible for strangers to add someone to their contact list unless that person says it’s OK. It also gives people the ability to block unwanted messages. For a small fee each month, parents can subscribe to Internet software from companies such as MSN, which offers a host of parental control options, including Web page content filtering and, if appropriate, a weekly history report on their child’s online activities.

“Instant messaging is quickly replacing the phone as the main way teens communicate,” said Weston, author of “For Teens Only” and mother of two teens. “Parents need to know how this software works so they can talk to their kids about it in an informed way, and tell their preteens or teens how to enjoy the Internet safely and responsibly.”

Weston added that even the most tech-savvy parents should use traditional parenting skills as well.

“Notice body language,” she continued. “If you walk into the room, and your child immediately jumps up and closes what he or she has been viewing on the computer, you may want to ask some questions. Trust your gut. Some kids are innocently gossiping with friends, but others may be up to something online that you should know about.”