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**Teen Advice On-line**

**By Angela Butera Dickson**

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There is no doubt about it. We are an electronic society. From our cable television sets to our satellite radios, our cell phones to our beepers, our global positioning devices to our palm pilots, and of course the world wide web - we are a truly connected society.

There are opportunities for educational and interest driven activities all around us but no where are they more readily available than on the World Wide Web. I wonder if we parents are prepared for the global reach of these intrusions into our parenting practices?

Our children no longer depend solely on the advice of their closest friends. Friends that we as parents can get to know and trust as not more or less worldly than our own children. There is so much information available to our children today on the internet, in the privacy of our homes, that it is often easier for our children to look for answers to personal questions on the web than risk the inquiry and concerns of their parents.

Children today are tech savvy - so we parents had better be too! Often our children are independent on the computer before we are. Writing their own web pages, downloading their own pictures, getting into chat rooms and sometimes circumstances that their limited experience hasn't prepared them for, gleaning advice from young or uneducated individuals or people with different values than those of your family.

Of the many potential hazards on the internet faced by our children the sites with the biggest potential for causing the most serious harm are the teen advice web sites. These kind of sites have the ability to give out incorrect information to a stunningly large number of individuals by posting questions and the answering reply right to their web page. Only one teenager need ask the question and many more will believe the answer, correct or not, because it's written right there in front of them and they are often too afraid or too embarrassed to look for another opinion. These question and answer sites are most often presided over by young, inexperienced or barely experienced, teens. These teen "counselor's" are

## Teen Advice On-line

typically ages 13 and up. They give free, solicited, advice on everything from health care, sex and birth control, mental / emotional health concerns and legal issues. These sites rarely have adult preceptors. Most sites do have a disclaimer stating that they are not responsible, nor liable for your teen's life or any further problems your teen may experience in relation to the advice given. Those simply worded disclaimers won't protect your teenager from the potential harm of an often-misinformed "teen counselor" who dishes out incorrect and possibly dangerous information.

Anything your teen wants to know and may not want to ask you about is available on the internet. These teen advice sites cover just about every subject you can imagine and many you wouldn't want to. There are "Pro-Anorexia." sites – dedicated to the encouragement of anorexic and bulimic behaviors. Sites specifically to give advice to young teens on methods of birth control (one of these I was presided over by a sexually active, 13 year old, girl). Gay, lesbian and straight sexuality sites. Sites for the practice of self-abuse and mutilation, Sites for finding ways to get high and more.

In reading some of these I was most amazed by the sheer volume of incorrect, often potentially life-threatening advice doled out by these "teen counselors." They covered such topics as how many additional birth control pills to take if your partner didn't use a condom. How to maintain a successful anorexic diet. The best way to purge and getting the cheapest high from everyday, household items. Do these internet sites serve a useful purpose? Yes, I think they can if they are catalysts for discussion between parents and their children. We have all read the flood of warnings about the internet hazards our children face, there seems to be a plethora of new ones daily, but these hazards can be educational tools as well. You can turn them into unique opportunities to increase our children's knowledge and self-confidence. You can empower your children to find and make the right choices for themselves and to learn to trust their inner voices.

Give your children guidelines on what you find acceptable. If they want to explore something outside of those guidelines tell them it needs to be done with a parent so you are able to talk about any issues that arise. Teens want, need and deserve privacy and showing them where to get high quality, up to date information will help empower them to make safe choices.

Not all-teen sites should be grouped into one negative category. I found some high quality sites, for very young children up through the teen years, which offer complete, correct, and responsible information. Though no one site will match everybody's family values and preferences it may be a good idea for parents to search out some of the sites they feel are best suited to their own family and email or bookmark them for their children.

Here are a few sites to check out:

Kids Health, Everyday Illness and Injuries:

This is a great site

for younger children to gain comforting information about common childhood questions, illnesses and injuries. Great basic information without the "fear-factor".

CoolNurse:

Lots of high quality teen information! As a nurse myself I was

gratified to see this site up. It's upbeat and packed with information that is up to date and complete on just about any topic a teen could wonder about. This comprehensive site is also written in a modern, straightforward, non-condescending style that all age groups will appreciate.

Teen Advice On-Line:

This site has many articles with teen oriented

topics. Seems conservative without preaching. Most of these counselors are 18 to 24 years in and they are from all over the globe.

Angela Butera Dickson is a full service, freelance copywriter offering some of the best prices on the web. From articles to brochure copy, ghostwriting to marketing letters, she can help you cultivate a polished, professional business image.

## **I've Learned To Love Teen Art**

**By Martin Stoleman**

I have loved art for as long as I can remember. As a child I spent hour after hour doing art projects of all kinds with my mother and my siblings. We would paint, practice sewing or create things out of clay for hours on end. I never knew that the amount of art projects we worked on was abnormal until I got a bit older and heard all of my friends and school talking about their years of playing with trucks and action figures or being outside building forts. I guess our mother wanted us to be well rounded individuals so she started us on all things art from the start. I don't remember exactly what kind of teen art I created during my formative years, but I do know that it wasn't until recently that I learned to appreciate teen art.

To the surprise of no one that I knew, I decided to become an art teacher when I went to college. I loved art so much that I couldn't think of a better way to spend my days than on teaching children and teens more about the things I loved. I enjoyed my elementary aged students immensely from the beginning. I loved their curiosity and I enjoyed the way they saw art. It was the teen art that my junior high aged students were creating that took me a while to adjust to.

The thing about teen art is that it is less than traditional and often it needs to be classified outside of any established genres of art. The teens in my art classes saw art in a much different way than I expected, and hence their work was much different as well. I would give them an assignment and they would create work so unlike what I had asked for and yet so creative that I couldn't complain.

I have realized that teen art needs to be a genre of art all by itself. Why? I've determined that teen art is so unique because of the time of life that it represents. Teens are going through the ultimate time of

transition, so it makes sense that their art would have a particular perspective and slant. And as different as teen art can often be, I have learned to appreciate it. I have learned to see it through the eyes of a teenager exploring the world and trying to make sense of their place in the world.

If you have a teenager who likes to play around with any art form, then you probably know exactly what I'm talking about with teen art. In fact, you've probably had similar issues in trying to recognize, define or categorize the art work that seems to make your teen come alive. My advice to you is this: teen art is something entirely of its own kind. Stop trying to make teen art into something else, and instead just enjoy it for what it is.

Martin Stoleman is an elementary and junior high school art teacher. He loves working with students and seeing what kinds of teen art they will come up with next. See

for more

details.

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