



In Their Own Words – Understanding the Communication Styles of Teens

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Hey bf... sup? Wut u doin? OMG - Idk why u r not goin 2 the prty.

Neways cu 2morrow cuz I ctn. Tyl - byee! <3

Does the above look like secret code to you? If you were a teen, you would easily be able to read the lines as “Hey best friend, what’s up? I don’t know why you are not going to the party. Anyway, see you tomorrow because I can’t talk now. Talk to you later, bye! (heart).”

Through their preferred methods of communication, which include text messages, AOL instant messaging and Web sites such as MySpace, many teens have begun to develop their own language and way of communicating, most of which adults don’t understand. As some teens report, this new “language” has crept into other parts of their lives, and some have received lower grades on reports and tests for “accidentally” using this abbreviated text.

Technology has become synonymous with communication for teens. 87% of teens ages 12-17 use the Inter-

net, and 75% of on-line teens prefer instant messaging to regular e-mail. An overwhelming majority of teens (84%) report owning at least one personal media device: a desktop or laptop computer, a cell phone or Personal Digital Assistant (PDA) (Lenhart, Madden, & Hitlin, 2005).

SOCIAL NETWORKING ONLINE

One of the more popular ways for teens to communicate is through social networking Web sites.

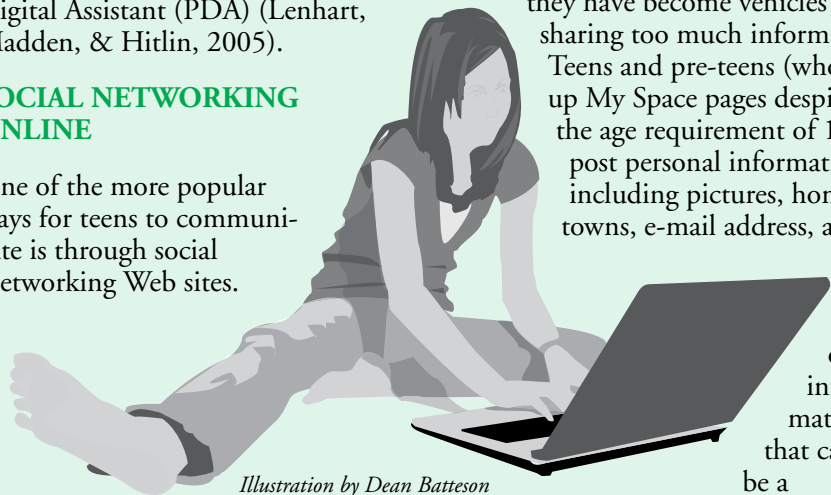


Illustration by Dean Batteson

Although there are a number of these Web sites, MySpace is currently one of the top ten Internet sites and has outstripped competitors to become the most popular English-language social networking Web site with higher traffic and just over seventy-nine million registered accounts <<http://www.answers.com>>.

MySpace allows users to share interests and hobbies, post photos and videos, post blogs and bulletins, and share messages and comments. For many teens, it’s a way to meet people, share

things about themselves, and communicate with friends. If it were that simple, it would be fine.

However, the reality of MySpace and similar networking Web sites is that they have become vehicles for sharing too much information. Teens and pre-teens (who set up My Space pages despite the age requirement of 14) post personal information, including pictures, hometowns, e-mail address, and

other information that can be a

target for on-line

predators. Many teens post provocative pictures and inappropriate comments and language. Some teens develop an “on-line persona” that may be very different from the person adults and peers see on a daily basis.

Teens report that their page is like their “personality” and that they like the fact that their page can get them recognized. Once you find one person, you can learn who their friends are, read what people say about them, learn what they do in their free time, read their “blogs” (which express their innermost feelings), and learn their likes, dislikes, heroes, and even their monthly schedules. It’s almost too much information, but, to teens, it’s the norm. For teens who are going through the stage where they are constantly looking for affirmation and validation and a response to everything they are, it’s addictive (Kornblum, 2006).



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SETTING BOUNDARIES

Many schools have begun to restrict access to MySpace since it has become a haven for student gossip and on-line bullying <<http://www.answers.com>>. Employers are checking MySpace pages of potential employees to learn more about their life style before deciding whether to hire them. Even summer camps are taking precautions to keep campers safe and prevent posting of pictures in inappropriate places (Belluck, 2006).

At the NJ 4-H Camp, the Camp Director learned that camp staff were communicating with young campers through MySpace and exposing campers to inappropriate pictures and comments on staff's MySpace pages. He took action, and informed staff of methods for appropriate communication including specific MySpace pages for camper and counselor communication <<http://www.myspace.com/campdirector>>. Inappropriate use of MySpace was also used as a vehicle to determine whether staff should be re-hired for summer camp positions.

Along with the popularity and preference by teens for on-line methods of communication, there is a growing trend that indicates that teens are losing their ability to communicate in person. When teens were asked about their communication style, some reported that they feel they are less able to communicate effectively in person since they do so much of it on-line.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR EDUCATORS

There are opportunities for Extension professionals and other educators to learn more about teens and communication, and to provide educational programs for teens and parents.

- Be aware. Pay attention to new trends and Web sites in use by teens. Visit these sites, and learn what they are about.
- Understand that these types of communication are here to stay (Instant Messaging text messages, MySpace, chat rooms, message boards, etc.). Today's teens have grown up in a world that relies on technology. Although the Web sites may change, the reliance on new technologies won't.
- Communicate "where they are" — via text messages, instant messaging, or through My Space. Being a presence on a 4-H MySpace page helps set guidelines and boundaries for communication among 4-H, school, and other youth groups.
- Take advantage of the opportunity to educate both teens and their parents on issues that affect them as a result of these new methods of communication. Workshops on Internet safety, interviewing and communication skills, and ethical decision-making can be timely and useful. Teach parents and teens how

to make their personal information private.

The world of technology and on-line communication can open up doors to learning and discovery, and can provide positive methods for networking with others. Educators and parents need to continue to stay aware and informed, and to help teens understand appropriate ways of communicating and sharing information with others.

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This article is online at <http://www.joe.org/joe/2007april/tt1.shtml>.



The 4-H Education Center at Auer Farm

Located on 158 Auer Farm Road in Bloomfield, Connecticut

The 4-H Education Center at Auer Farm is a private, non-profit education farm located off route 185 in Bloomfield, Connecticut. This historic community resource, minutes from Hartford, was once the model farm of Beatrice Fox Auerbach, the president of G. Fox & Co; Inc. The farm was do-

nated in parcels by the Auerbach Family to the CT 4-H Development Fund, Inc. starting in 1976. The last parcel was donated in 2007 bringing the total land mass owned by the Connecticut 4-H Development Fund to 125 acres.

Auer Farm is open 12 months a year offering seasonal and year-round programs to school classes, community groups and the public. The animal barn, gardens, farmlands and orchards are part of a real life science classroom. Annually, more than 17,000 students from 45 plus towns schedule formal inquiry science lessons while an addi-

tional 14,000 informal visitors come to enjoy the ambiance of the open space and to purchase or pick their own apples, raspberries, blueberries, corn, hay and Christmas Trees. The 4-H Center at Auer Farm, in collaboration with the



University of Connecticut, is open to all and provides hands-on educational experiences and recreational opportunities so that visitors may gain a greater awareness of – and appreciation for – the complex interrelationships between people, agriculture, technology, and the environment.

Guided by a trained educational staff, students have age appropriate lessons in biology, biotechnology, horticulture and math. The lessons support the objectives recommended in the Connecticut State Department of Education's Core Science Curriculum Framework and the Preschool Benchmarks. The lessons encourage critical thinking and curiosity, while providing concrete discovery experiences essential to motivate and inspire scientific inquiry. There is also an extensive Summer Farming Academy that allows children from preschool age through 6th grade to attend one or more of the Academy Sessions.

Since its origin, the 4-H Education Center has enjoyed a unique and productive collaboration with the University of Connecticut, College of Agriculture and Natural Resources and the Connecticut 4-H Program. In 2002 during a strategic planning process, the board of directors voted to continue this relationship but to change the name of the non-profit from the 4-H Farm Resource Center to The 4-H Education Center at Auer Farm to more accurately reflect its present day focus. At this time the purpose of the Fund was also changed from a state wide respon-

sibility of raising funds for 4-H and Cooperative Extension programming and management of the 4-H Education Center to concentrate its fund raising efforts for the 4-H Education Center at Auer Farm. The Board of Directors of the Fund continues to be the management arm of the 4-H Education Center. Today, UCONN continues to provide agricultural research and educational staff that are key components to the success of the 4-H Education Center's outstanding educational programs.

There are many opportunities to help at the 4-H Education Center from serving on the board and various committees or working on one or more of the farm projects. For example working together with the Hartford County Master Gardeners, 2500 pounds of food were raised for FoodShare in 2007. Each year approximately 500 individuals donate their time and talent to projects on Auer Farm. We hope to see you this spring either at an upcoming program or volunteering on the farm!



Upcoming Programs:

SATURDAY MAY 17TH
11:00 -1:00

Baby Plants, Baby Animals

We'll be filling up the garden with new plants, eating the first leafy greens and looking ahead to a bountiful summer harvest. \$6

SATURDAY JUNE 7TH
11:00 -1:00

Hard Working Farmers

Be a farmer for a day! We'll be taking care of our animals, weeding and watering our gardens to ensure a great harvest. \$6

Call 860.242.7144 X 10 to reserve a spot, or to learn more about the Center visit us online at www.auerfarm.org.



The *Connecticut 4-H Newsletter* is a publication of the Cooperative Extension System, 4-H Youth Development Program which provides educational and current information to 4-H members and volunteers.

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North Haven, CT 06473-4451 (203) 407-3161

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4-H Center at Auer Farm

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Bloomfield, CT 06002 860-242-7144

Hartford County 4-H Camp

c/o Elsie Woolam, Camp Administrator
1225 Main Street
South Windsor, CT 06074 860-289-4177

Middlesex County Camp

P.O. Box 687
Moodus, CT 06469 860-873-2294

New London County 4-H Camp

Box 6002
Norwich, CT 06360 860-886-7476

Windham-Tolland 4-H Camp

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2008 Teen Connection Conference CSI: UConn

Imagine! You are 25 years old. You have a job. What type of job is it? What do you do on that job? What training did you need for this job? If you think about these things now as a teenager, then Teen Connection 2008- Career Search Investigations: UConn – is the place to be on June 29 through July 1. At the three day Teen Connection Conference at the University of Connecticut, you will collect information about careers that interest you, search the possibilities of those careers with career investigation workshops located on campus or at nearby businesses and then finally interpret the data on what you have learned by participating in a simulation that projects you into the future as that 25 year old! Will you like what you see?



CSI: UConn

2008 CAREER SEARCH INVESTIGATIONS TEEN CONNECTION CONFERENCE AT UCONN

horizons and explore career options. In addition to career investigation workshops, community service projects and other social events will encourage you to connect with yourself, with others and the world around you!!! And of course, Teen Connection is fun! Any youth between the ages of 14 and 19 is welcome to attend. For more information contact your local 4-H office or call 1-888-FOUR-H-CT.

But this conference is more than workshops! Opening ceremonies kick the Conference off with a chance to try Latin Dancing and salsas from around the world. We end Monday with our traditional dinner and DJ dance. And that's not all!!! All the staff, dorms, and recreational facilities of the university are available to help you experience new things, broaden your



4-H is a community of young people across Connecticut learning leadership, citizenship and life skills.