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## **NO MORE PLAYTIME: CHILDREN SPEND THEIR FREE TIME STARING AT A SCREEN INSTEAD**

- **Generation square eyes: outside of school hours, children spend 3 hours a day either watching TV or surfing the web** <sup>[1]</sup>
- **Goodbye Bagpuss, hello Bebo: children spend 10 hours a week online, only marginally less than the 11 hours they spend watching TV** <sup>[1]</sup>
- **Midnight hour: almost 1 in 3 kids (29%) have a computer in their bedroom and two thirds (63%) use it before going to sleep** <sup>[2]</sup>
- **Freedom leads to doubt: 30% of parents worry about images their children have seen when unsupervised** <sup>[3]</sup>
- **Exposed: 34% of parents have no filters on their computers, potentially leaving children completely unprotected** <sup>[4]</sup>
- **In the dark: a third of parents (32%) are unaware of the control features available on their broadband service** <sup>[5]</sup>
- **Simpler controls: 8 out of 10 believe websites should be classified like films - U, PG, 14, 18.** <sup>[6]</sup>

A new generation hooked on digital content is shunning traditional playtime in favour of watching TV and surfing the internet, according to new research from [uSwitch.com](http://uSwitch.com), the independent comparison and switching service. The report also reveals a high proportion of children using the internet and watching TV unsupervised in their bedrooms after being sent to bed, while an alarming number of parents have yet to set up the necessary control measures to protect them from viewing unsuitable content.

In a typical day, outside of school hours children spend an average of 1.4 hours online and 1.6 hours watching television. Not only does this mean that they are spending 3 hours a day staring at a screen, but it suggests that surfing the internet is set to take over from watching TV as the most popular children's recreational activity. <sup>[1]</sup>

But where does this leave old fashioned playtime, and are we creating a new generation of internet addicts? Children today have a plethora of digital distractions whether they are in the form of games consoles such as the Wii, or social networking sites such as Bebo, with

traditional playtime all but lost. Worryingly, 29% of children now have a computer in their bedroom and almost two thirds (63%) of these use it before going to sleep.<sup>[2]</sup> Similarly, nearly half (49%) have a TV in their room and 64% regularly watch this in bed.<sup>[7]</sup>

Despite nearly a third (30%)<sup>[3]</sup> of parents worrying about information or images that they have found their child looking at on a website or on TV, just 41% of parents always supervise their children using the internet and 11% never do.<sup>[8]</sup> Over half of parents (55%) leave it up to their children to decide which websites to visit, based on either guidelines they have set or common sense.<sup>[9]</sup>

Taking the issue of parental control extremely seriously, all major broadband companies offer filtering facilities in their broadband packages, usually for free, enabling parents to have more control over the information and images viewed by their children. Yet over a third of parents (34%) have not set up any filters or blocks on their home internet: 22% believe that it's too time consuming, and a further 21% simply haven't got round to setting it up. A third of parents (32%) are unaware of the parental control features available with their service.

**Jason Glynn, communications expert at [uSwitch.com](http://uSwitch.com), says:** "In an age where engaging content such as on-demand TV will only increase the amount of hours our children spend online, we urge parents to contact their internet providers to see what controls are available to them. Speed and price should take second place to safety – but with most broadband services including filtering software for free, there really is no excuse not to take action.

"We fully support the measures being laid out by companies to help families tackle this issue, such as TalkTalk's plans to classify websites with U, PG, 14 and 18 certificates<sup>[6]</sup>. Our research shows that 8 out of 10 parents would back such a system."

Protect your family with broadband filters:

- AOL enables customers to set up parental controls for free. Controls can offer a different level of security for each member of the family, allowing children more freedom to roam the internet as they grow older.
- BT has teamed up with McAfee® to offer all BT Total Broadband Option 2, 3, or Broadband Anywhere customers BT NetProtect Plus at no extra cost.
- Orange has teamed up with McAfee to offer McAfee Privacy Service with parental controls, free to all Orange Broadband customers.
- O2 offers security software from McAfee at no extra cost, which along with parental control settings includes anti virus protection and spam filters.
- Sky Parental Alert, costing £3.50 a month or £35 a year, monitors children's Instant Messaging (IM) or chat room conversations for grooming patterns and alerts you via email or text message when those patterns are detected.

- Talk Talk offers Magic Desktop, available for free in an exclusive offer for TalkTalk customers. The service allows parents to introduce young children to a computer in a child-friendly environment and encourages families to use the internet safely.
- Tiscali's Crisp technology costs £3.50 per month. It scans instant messages for grooming behaviour and complements existing parental controls and filters for internet chat and social networking sites. Parents are alerted to problem conversations.
- Virgin Media broadband packages come with free PCguard Total internet security, including firewall, pop-up blocker and parental control, updated regularly.

**For more information visit [www.uSwitch.com](http://www.uSwitch.com) or call 0800 093 0607**

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**Notes to Editors:**

Research referred to in the notes below was carried out by uSwitch.com in October 2009 among 650 UK parents.

1. Parents said that their children spend 1.4 hours a day online and 1.6 hours a day watching TV. This is a total of 3 hours a day staring at a screen outside of school hours and adds up to 10 hours a week online and 11 hours a week watching TV.
2. 29% of children have a computer in their bedroom and 63% use it before going to sleep.
3. 30% of parents have found their children looking at images that concerned them on the internet or on TV
4. 34% of parents said that to their knowledge they had no filter system on their home internet
5. 32% aren't aware of the parental control features available on their home internet
6. 83% of parents think internet sites should be classified much like films are classified i.e. U, PG, 14, 18
7. 49% of children have a TV in their bedroom and 64% watch it before going to sleep.
8. 41% of parents always supervise their children using the internet and 11% never do.
9. 16% of parents ask their children which websites they have visited, 22% give them guidelines to follow and 17% rely on their children's common sense. In total this is 55%.
10. 32% aren't aware of the parental control features available with their home internet service.