



Teens are posting their innermost thoughts on journal Internet sites

## **deardiary.com**

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AP

Tell me this: If reading your kid's diary is a big fat no-no, then why are they posting their innermost thoughts via online journals?

Kids are baring all and sharing all for thousands to see.

Deep, dark secrets and angst-filled entries, along with lots of mundane ramblings, are posted daily, sometimes by the hour, on free sites catering to this Web log phenomenon, including [livejournal.com](http://livejournal.com), [scribbles.com](http://scribbles.com), [deadjournal.com](http://deadjournal.com) and [diaryland.com](http://diaryland.com).

Using expressive usernames, and language and punctuation all their own, teens either make their Web entries public so other members can respond, semi-private so just friends have access, or totally private with password protection.



Megan, a Grade 11 student, is addicted to [livejournal.com](http://livejournal.com).

"It's like reading somebody else's mail," says the 16-year-old Toronto resident. "You're looking for the juicy parts -- although lots of it can be very boring."

She posts daily, sometimes three times a day, and often writes things she wouldn't dare repeat in person. "Nobody knows who I am and I find the whole thing cathartic."

"It's fun to be part of the community," says Erin, 17, who used to pen faithfully in her journal but now uses the computer version instead. "It's so easy and quick, plus I like getting comments from friends and strangers on my entries."

She says she's not comfortable sharing any deep secrets, although other members have no

problem spilling their guts.

So what's with the true online confessions?

"It's anonymous intimacy," according to Dr. Bonnie Eaker-Weil. "You can connect with other teens and not be judged."

## THE PROBLEMS ...



As teens naturally move away from family and assert their independence, the Internet becomes their new family where "they can expose themselves and feel safe," says the New York therapist. "It can be very healthy. And just because it's posted on the Internet, doesn't mean they want their parents to see it."

She recommends parents not go online snooping for their kids' entries unless there's a behavioural concern, such as drugs, drinking or suicide, and intervention is required. "There are boundaries to be respected," she adds.

According to Burlington therapist Marilyn Belleghem, writing is often easier than talking about sensitive subjects, especially for teens.

"The whole idea is that they can talk to like-minded people so they don't feel so alone," says Belleghem. "There's no social awkwardness involved, or need to be cool."

But there are problems with online journals: Discussing and joking about a painful menstrual cycle is different from discussing and normalizing suicidal thoughts or an eating disorder, she says.

"Plus young people don't have a lot of emotional control. They can easily get wrapped up into other people's problems," she says.

Belleghem says private journal writing is good "if it gets you somewhere and you make progress."

The value of journal writing is to help assess growth as earlier entries are examined. "It helps people get a grip on things," she says.

This isn't the case for online journals, unless they're private, protected and properly dated.