



# Pointers for Parents

## Connecting Through Online Communities

(NAPSA)—Thanks to the Internet, the world has gotten smaller and virtual communities have sprung up, bringing like-minded people together online. For example, a mother in New York can get advice from a mother in South Dakota about how to get her teen to finish homework or convince her toddler that it's bedtime.

However, many parents may not be sure how to find parenting communities or how to determine which ones will meet their needs, let alone how to jump into the conversation. Luckily, getting involved is easier than it may seem, and here are some get-started tips:

### What Is An Online Community?

An online community is a group of individuals who gather via the Internet and reach out to others with similar needs and interests. Parent-oriented communities are a specialized type of online community for sharing information and experiences and providing support. Within an online community, a group member can find even more defined subgroups, such as parents of kids with ADHD, parents of shy children, parents of kids with asthma, etc.

### Choosing The Right Community

Each community has its own character. Some are casual while others are more formal and include user agreements and privacy policies. A good place to start is with an established parent community such as iVillage.com or GreatSchools.com, both of which offer information, discussion forums and blogs (short for "Web logs," or online journals).

Many parents may also benefit from joining a parent community



**Online communities can be a great place for parents to swap helpful information.**

based on a shared interest, such as Community.LeapFrog.com, where parents whose children love LeapFrog toys can compare notes on what products keep their kids engaged and how they're developing and learning.

### Making The Most Of It

When first joining a community, you may want to observe for a while. Once you have a feel for the group, you'll get even more out of it by getting involved. Start by simply reading a few postings and forums, then work up to joining a chat or commenting on a blog. After adding to a few discussions, you may want to post more often as you begin to recognize some of the "regulars" with whom you share parenting situations. The next step could be forming your own subgroup or even writing your own blog. You can get a tremendous amount of information, advice and support from whatever parent community you choose while making contacts and having fun.