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CONTACT: Justin Pierce  
(310) 962-6001

## **Family Time Decreasing With Internet Use**

**USC Annenberg Center for the Digital Future Survey says  
Internet households spending less face-to-face family time,  
growing concerns about children's Internet use**

LOS ANGELES, June 16, 2009 – More and more of America's Internet-connected households report erosion of face-to-face family time, increased feelings of being ignored by family members using the Web, and growing concerns that children are spending too much time online.

Researchers at the Center for the Digital Future at the USC Annenberg School for Communication report the percentage of people who say they spend less time with household members since being connected to the Internet at home had nearly tripled, from 11 percent in 2006, to 28 percent in 2008.

Total hours devoted to family socializing contracted sharply over this three-year period. Through the middle of the decade, reports of shared family time had fluctuated around an average of 26 hours per month (ranging from 22.6 to 29.8 hours). By 2008, shared time had dropped by more than 30 percent, to 17.9 hours. Reports of feeling ignored, at least sometimes, by family members using the Internet grew by 40 percent over the same period.

Michael Gilbert, author of *The Disposable Male* and a senior fellow at the Center, says diminishing family time coincides with the explosive growth of social networks and the importance people place on them, a trend first reported in the Center's 2007 surveys. While friendship and social circles are not contracting, these reduced family time Internet patterns apply across most demographic categories although higher income households may be suffering greater family time erosion: 35 percent report a reduction in face-to-face time.

Women report being ignored by a family Internet user more often; almost half say they are sometimes or often ignored (49.2%) vs. less than forty percent of men (39.1%). Gilbert, who focuses on family and gender issues, thinks this may reflect the varying emphasis the sexes place on relationships, the balance women appear to maintain in their home computer use, or the persistent call of their other family and household responsibilities.

The Center has also been tracking steadily rising misgivings about the amount of time kids and teens spend online. In 2000, when its surveys began, just 11 percent of respondents said family members under eighteen were spending too much time online, a concern that had grown to 28 percent by 2008.

All of this suggests increasing technological pressures on the family structure. American families have always been resilient, Gilbert points out, easily absorbing new technologies, from the telephone to television, and turning them to advantage. “But the Internet delivers an engrossing interactive universe into our homes and demands much greater individual commitment.” This can play havoc with our personal boundaries, he says.

“The family is our social foundation, society’s basic building block. We need to guard its health in what otherwise seems to be a boundless digital future.”

*Through findings developed in annual surveys conducted among 2,000 American households, the **Digital Future Project** provides a broad year-to-year exploration of the influence of the Internet and online technology on Americans by examining the behavior and views of a broad national sample of Internet users and non-users.*

*The **USC Annenberg Center for the Digital Future** also created and organizes the **World Internet Project**, which conducts similar surveys and studies in twenty-seven countries around the world.*

*Located in Los Angeles at the University of Southern California, the **USC Annenberg School for Communication** ([annenberg.usc.edu](http://annenberg.usc.edu)) is among the nation’s leading institutions devoted to the study of journalism and communication, and their impact on politics, culture and society.*

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