

EXCERPT

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## Reaching into cyberspace for support in illnesses

Patients and their families bond and learn on the Internet

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... Dr. Arlette Lefebvre, a child psychiatrist at Sick Kids, not only encourages cyberspace support groups, she's actually initiated them as a form of cyberspace therapy.

Since 1992, the charitable organization that she co-founded, Ability Online Support Network ([www.ablelink.org](http://www.ablelink.org)), has electronically linked children with chronic diseases or disabilities to both disabled and non-disabled peers and mentors. The free e-mail service has 8,000 registered users.

"One role model is worth a thousand shrinks" is one of Lefebvre's often-quoted aphorisms.

No one practises what Lefebvre preaches more than Ayala Ravek.

Ayala, 12, is a patient of Lefebvre's who started her own Web page last May ([www.ordesign.com/nopainzone.com/](http://www.ordesign.com/nopainzone.com/)) to help her connect with others suffering from the same painful condition, called reflex sympathetic dystrophy.

Through her Web site, Ayala, who lives in Nepean near Ottawa, has received about 100 e-mails from around North America and as far away as Australia. She's been

contacted by people as young as 9 and by seniors over 65.

"Not only people who have RSD, but also others with conditions or diseases that are often painful, such as arthritis and fibromyalgia," she explains.

"My depression disappeared after I began to get e-mails from people who had RSD and were going through the same things I was. I originally made my Web site to help explain to others what RSD is like, and I found out that by helping other people, I've ended up helping myself."...

