

KEEPING UP *with* GENERATION APP: NCSA PARENT/TEEN ONLINE SAFETY SURVEY

Research Findings Summary



OVERVIEW

A new National Cyber Security Alliance (NCSA) study reveals a “digital disconnect” between parents and teens regarding teens’ online behaviors, experiences and resolving online issues. The study suggests that American teens may have more complicated – and even hurtful – online experiences than their parents know, including receiving negative messages about things they had said or done or their appearance, sexual orientation, gender or race/ethnicity and having concerns about being directed to extremist content online. Key findings include that 60 percent of online teens ages 13 to 17 say they have created accounts their parents do not know about, and 39 percent say someone has been mean or cruel to them when they were online or using apps over the past year. Additionally, although a separate survey of parents indicates that they would overwhelmingly want their teens to turn to them first when they face problems online, 40 percent of teens say they would turn to their friends first.

NCSA conducted this survey as part of its widespread efforts to encourage consumer education and awareness about online safety for youth. The online survey was intended to provide a better understanding of the potential disconnect between parents and kids regarding exposure to negative and harmful content in digital spaces and their expectations for handling these experiences. Using the Zogby panel, NCSA surveyed a sample of 804 online teens ages 13 to 17 and a separate sample of 810 parents of online teens ages 13 to 17 between June 7 and 10, 2016.



KEY FINDINGS

- Online teens largely experience the online world through their use of smartphones, and their use of Snapchat (66%) and Instagram (65%) now surpasses their use of Facebook (61%). More than half (52%) of the teens surveyed reported using KiK Messenger.
- Most teens are engaged in some online activities that their parents don't know about; 60 percent say they have created accounts that their parents were unaware of, such as on social media sites or for apps they wanted to use.
- Just 13 percent of online teens say that their parents are “completely aware” of the full extent of their activities online; however, only 9 percent say that their online activities should be kept “completely private” from their parents.
- The majority of online teens report that they are expected to follow some kind of rules connected to their technology use at home, but 28 percent report that their household has no rules when it comes to their use of internet-connected devices. By comparison only 9 percent of parents of online teens ages 13 to 17 say they have no rules in their household for their children's use of these technologies.
- About four in ten online teens (39%) say someone has been mean or cruel to them when they were online or using apps sometime over the past year.
- The content of the mean or cruel messages was most often about something the teens said or did (52%) or something about their appearance (45%). About one in four online teens said the messages were about their sexual orientation (27%), their gender (25%) or their race or ethnicity (24%).
- Many of the top online safety concerns for teens relate to the privacy and security of their personal information; teens report that they are “very concerned” about someone accessing their accounts without their permission (47%), someone sharing personal information about them online (43%) or someone posting a photo or video of them online that they wanted to remain private (38%).
- While not as prominent as various privacy and security-related concerns, worry about exposure to extremist content impacts a sizable minority of online teens. One in four (27%) online teens say they are “very concerned” about being directed to online content about extreme political or religious activities that make them feel uncomfortable.
- Forty percent of online teens say that they would turn to friends first when facing serious problems online, while 33 percent cited parents.
- Fully 43 percent of online teens say that friends have sought their help because of things that happened online. The majority of online teens (62%) say they have responded by just listening and providing any advice they could.
- Even as teens and parents may diverge in a number of areas, they appear to have remarkably consistent priorities when asked about the online safety topics they would most like to learn about. Both parents and teens point to the topic of “preventing identity theft” as the online safety topic they would most like to learn more about.

HOW TEENS NAVIGATE THE CURRENT TECH ENVIRONMENT

Most teens have an array of tech resources at their disposal and spend many of their waking hours connected to them. Online video sites like YouTube, social media apps like Instagram and Snapchat and even email platforms like Gmail all figure prominently into the landscape of teens' online lives.

By far the most commonly-owned devices are smartphones (86%), followed by laptops and desktop computers (63%), gaming devices (54%) and tablets (50%). Wearables, such as Fitbits and smart watches are still fairly novel tech devices for teens; just 15 percent of online teens say they own these kinds of devices.

However, even when they don't have their own devices, some teens say they share access with family members. Among the more commonly-shared technology resources in families are gaming devices (33%), laptop and desktop computers (29%) and tablets (24%). Just 9 percent of online teens say they share access to wearables, and 7 percent report that they share smartphones with family members.

Teens spend a considerable amount of time using all of these devices. Fully 62 percent of online teens ages 13 to 17 say they spend at least 5 hours using internet-connected devices on a typical day; 23 percent say they spend 5 to 6 hours and 39 percent say they spend more than 6 hours per day online. The biggest increase in time spent online occurs between ages 13 and 14, when the percentage who spend more than 6 hours per day online jumps from 26 percent to 46 percent.

The survey asked about a wide range of websites and apps that teens might use. YouTube (91%) was by far the most popular site on this list, followed by Gmail (75%). Among social media sites, usage of Snapchat (66%) and Instagram (65%) surpasses that of Facebook (61%) for this group. Kik Messenger is used by more than half (52%) of online teens in the survey. Among the list of websites and apps that teens were asked about, the top ten are included below:

MOST POPULAR WEBSITES AND APPS REPORTED BY TEENS

% who report using the following teens (13-17)

YOUTUBE	91%
GMAIL	75%
SNAPCHAT	66%
INSTAGRAM	65%
FACEBOOK	61%
KIK MESSENGER	52%
SKYPE	43%
TWITTER	40%
VINE	31%
TUMBLR	24%

While the teen responses cannot be directly compared with those of parents, the parents of teens who were interviewed for the survey are generally less likely to report that their children use the websites and apps included on the list. More significantly, however, is the fact that 60 percent of online teens say they have created accounts that their parents were unaware of, such as on a social media site or for an app they wanted to use. Older teens (ages 15 to 17) are slightly more likely than younger teens (ages 13 to 14) to create accounts that their parents don't know about. However, girls and boys are equally likely to create accounts without their parents' knowledge.

HOW PARENTS REGULATE THEIR TEENS' USE OF TECHNOLOGY

Parents of online teens ages 13 to 17 say they also have a wide array of rules and regulations in place to help manage their children's use of internet-connected devices. However, when teens are asked about the same list of tech-related rules, they are much less likely to say that they are asked to follow these kinds of rules in their household. The parents interviewed for the survey were not paired with the teen interviews, but the comparisons between the two groups suggest that there may be a disconnect between the kinds of rules parents are reporting and those that teens believe they are expected to follow. It is also possible that some parents are reporting rules that may apply to other younger children in their households.

What is perhaps most striking about these differences is the high percentage of parents (67%) who say that their children are required to report to them any online incidents that make them feel scared or uncomfortable and the relatively low percentage of online teens (32%) who say they are asked to follow this kind of rule.

It is also notable that 28 percent of online teens report that their households have no rules when it comes to their use of internet-connected devices, compared to only 9 percent of parents of teens ages 13 to 17 who said they have no rules in their households for the use of these technologies.



Of those teens who do report having rules to follow, more than half (55%) say that they have difficulty following these rules at least some of the time. Half (51%) also say that they think their parents have a hard time enforcing these rules at least some of the time. By far, the most common consequence teens report for breaking these rules is having their devices taken away for a period of time (69%).

Among parents, fully 70 percent say that their children have difficulty following their tech rules at least some of the time; additionally, 62 percent of parents report that it's challenging to enforce these rules at least some of the time.

Part of the challenge that parents may face in enforcing these rules is their overall awareness of their teens' activities; only 13 percent of online teens say that their parents are "completely aware" of the full extent of their activities online. Yet, while teens greatly value having some level of privacy from their parents when using the internet, just 9 percent say that their online activities should be kept "completely private" from their parents.

A RULES DISCONNECT BETWEEN TEENS AND PARENTS?

% who report having various online safety rules	Parents of Online Teens (13-17)	Online Teens (13-17)
Child has to report to parent any online incidents that make them feel scared or uncomfortable	67%	32%
Child is not allowed to share passwords with friends	62%	41%
There are limits to the kinds of personal information the child is allowed to post on social networks	62%	39%
No devices are allowed during dinner time	55%	36%
Child has to ask permission before downloading a new app or game or joining a social network	54%	16%
Child is required to share passwords to online accounts with parent	50%	16%
Child is not allowed to share feelings or overly personal information on social networks	43%	N/A
There are limits to the amount of screen time each day	41%	15%
There are hours during the day in which child is not allowed to use devices	40%	20%
Child is not allowed to have devices in their bedroom after a certain time in the evening	31%	11%
There are no rules in our household about children's use of internet-connected devices	9%	28%
Child has limits on the number of texts they can send per month	11%	6%

Source: NCSA Online Surveys of Teens and Parents, fielded June 7-10, 2016. N=804 online teens ages 13-17 for the teen survey and N=810 parents of online teens ages 13-17 for the parent survey.

Teens also report that their parents are having conversations with them about a range of online safety issues. Fully 78 percent say that their parents have talked with them about ways to use the internet and cell phones safely, and the same number say that their parents have had conversations with them about what kinds of things should and should not be shared online or on a cell phone. Similarly, 73 percent say that their parents talked with them about ways to behave towards other people online or on the phone and 68 percent report that they have had conversations with their parents about what they do on the internet or on their cell phones. Most of these conversations about how to act appropriately or be safe online are happening at age 10 or older, but 18 percent of online teens said their parents spoke with them before age 10.

NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES AND ONLINE SAFETY CONCERNS

When online teens are asked if their peers are “mostly kind” or “mostly unkind” to one another when using the internet and cell phones, the most common response is it “depends.” While 30 percent say their peers are “mostly kind,” and 24 percent say their peers are “mostly unkind,” another 40 percent say it “depends.”

One in four online teens (25%) say that they witness mean or cruel behavior “frequently” when they are online or using apps, while one in three (34%) say they witness it “sometimes.” Another 30 percent say they witness mean behavior “once in a while” and just 6 percent say that they “never” witness other people being mean or cruel when they are online or using apps. Boys and girls and teens of all ages report seeing mean behavior with roughly the same frequency.

About four in ten (39%) online teens say someone has been mean or cruel to them when they were online or using apps sometime over the past year. Reports of mean or cruel behavior do not follow a clear pattern by age or gender.

The content of the mean or cruel messages was most often about something the teens said or did (52%) or something about their appearance (45%). About one in four online teens said the messages were about their sexual orientation (27%), their gender (25%) or their race or ethnicity (24%). In addition, one in five (20%) said the content of the mean or cruel messages was about their religion.

Many of the top online safety concerns for teens relate to the privacy and security of their personal information. Online teens report that they are “very concerned” about the following: someone accessing their accounts without their permission (47%), someone sharing personal information about them online (43%) or having a photo or video posted online that they wanted to remain private (38%). In addition, about one in three online teens say they are “very concerned” about having someone post untrue things about them online (35%), receiving unwanted communications that make them uncomfortable (32%) and being pressured to participate in harassing or bullying someone else (32%). Online teens also say they are “very concerned” about being harassed or bullied for a sustained period themselves (29%), being approached by people they don’t know online (25%), being called offensive names (25%).

Parents were asked many of the same questions about the kinds of online safety concerns they have about their children’s online experiences. Notably, even though these were not paired interviews, the parent and teen concern levels are very similar across many of these questions. However, when it comes to certain privacy- and security-related concerns, such as worries that a private photo or video might be posted or accounts might be accessed without permission, teens are more likely to express a high level of concern.

CONCERNS ABOUT EXPOSURE TO EXTREMIST CONTENT

While not as prominent as various privacy and security-related concerns, worry about exposure to extremist content impacts a sizable minority of online teens. One in four (27%) online teens say they are “very concerned” that they might be directed to online content about extreme political or religious activities that will make them feel uncomfortable. Another 19 percent say they are “somewhat concerned” about this, while 20 percent report that they are “not too concerned.” One in four (25%) say they are “not at all concerned” about exposure to extremist content online.

Online teens age 13 report the highest levels of concern about exposure to extremist content online; 40 percent say they are “very concerned” that they might be directed to online material about extreme political or religious activities that will make them feel uncomfortable. By comparison, just 20 percent of 17-year-olds who are online report this same level of concern about extremist content. Both boys and girls report roughly the same concern levels for this question.

When parents were asked a similar question, they reported a comparable level of concern; 31 percent of parents of online teens said they are “very concerned” about their children being directed to online content containing extreme violence or hateful views.

HOW TEENS HANDLE ONLINE SAFETY PROBLEMS

In general, teens report that they are not very likely to turn to their parents for help with the various problems they encounter online. Just 9 percent of online teens say they turn to their parents “all of the time,” while 28 percent say they “never” turn to their parents when they encounter problems online. But if they faced a serious problem online, parents would be among the top sources teens say they would go to for help. While 40 percent of online teens said that friends would be the first people they turned to if they encountered a serious problem online, 33 percent cited parents. Siblings ranked as a distant third, with just 8 percent of teens citing them as the first people they would turn to if they had to deal with serious problems online. Regardless of whom they said they would go to for help, most teens report at least a moderate level of confidence that they could help them resolve the situation.



Parents report a different set of expectations regarding how their children might handle the online problems they encounter online. For instance, 30 percent of parents of online teens say they think their children are likely to talk with them about the problems they encounter online “all of the time,” and just 3 percent say their children would “never” talk with them about these kinds of problems. Additionally, when asked whom they would want their children to turn to first when and if they encounter a serious problem online, 85 percent said they would want their children to come to them for help. Most online teens, however, say they would be at least “somewhat confident” handling a wide range of online safety problems on their own. Identity theft is the problem that they express the least confidence handling on their own, but 50 percent say they are at least “somewhat confident” they could handle it without any outside help or support. Similarly, if and when children come to their parents for help with these kinds of problems, parents report having a relatively high level of confidence that they could handle these issues without any outside help or support.

DEALING WITH HATEFUL OR VIOLENT CONTENT ONLINE

The majority of online teens are fairly confident that if they were directed to online content containing extreme violence or hateful views that made them feel uncomfortable, they could handle this kind of scenario on their own (48 percent say they are “very confident” they could manage it on their own, and 21 percent are “somewhat confident”). Another 14 percent say they are “not too confident,” and 8 percent report that they are “not at all confident” that they could handle a situation like this on their own.

Similar to the findings about variations in concerns about extremist content by age, 13-year-olds who are online report the lowest levels of confidence in their ability to deal with online content containing extreme violence or hateful views; 41 percent say they are “very confident” that they could deal with this kind of situation on their own, compared with 57 percent of 17-year-olds. Boys are more likely than girls to say they are “very confident” they could handle this on their own (52% vs. 44%).

Parents of online teens also express relatively high levels of confidence in their ability to help their children deal with this kind of scenario. Half (50%) say they are “very confident” that if their children came to them for help after being directed to content containing extreme violence or hateful views that made them feel uncomfortable, that they could handle this situation on their own. Another 37 percent said they are “somewhat confident” they could handle this situation on their own, while 7 percent felt “not too confident.” Just 3 percent of parents of online teens said they felt “not at all confident” that they could handle this kind of experience on their own.

TEENS TURNING TO PEERS FOR SUPPORT

Even as the teens interviewed for the survey say that they can handle many online safety problems on their own, many also report that they are providing support for peers who encounter difficult situations online. Fully 43 percent of online teens say friends have sought help from them because of online issues. Among this group, 60 percent said their friends sought help because they were being bullied, 54 percent said that friends had turned to them after receiving harassing posts or texts and 31 percent said that friends turned to them after being threatened online. Notably, 14 percent said friends had sought their help because someone had directed them to extremist content that made them feel uncomfortable.

When friends turn to them for help, the majority of online teens (62%) say they respond by just listening and providing any advice they can. Many also say they offer technical solutions; 42 percent say they have given their friends information about how to block people or how to use other technology to help stop the incidents. More than a third (37%) say they have encouraged their friends to tell parents or other trusted adults, and nearly a quarter have encouraged them to report the incidents to police or school authorities (23%) or websites or app companies (23%).

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ONLINE SAFETY MESSAGING

Echoing the concerns about identity theft and online security more broadly in the survey, both parents and teens point to the topic of “preventing identity theft” as the online safety topic they would most like to learn more about. Second on the list for both parents and teens is the desire to learn more about “keeping my devices secure,” followed by “how to identify fake emails, social posts and texts.”

A substantial group expressed interest in learning how to begin a conversation about staying safe online at home – 16 percent of parents of online teens said they’d like to learn more about talking to their kids, and 17 percent of online teens reported wanting to learn more about talking to their parents.

Although they primarily rely on peers for support when handling difficult situations online, teens point to their parents as the most important source of online safety and security information. When asked to cite their top three sources, teens pointed to parents (59%), friends (58%) and siblings (32%). Traditional news media also plays a role, as 27 percent of online teens cite media in their top three sources.

For parents, the top three sources for online safety and security information that they cite are friends (42%), other family members (33%) and the information provided by the services they use (32%). As with online teens, the importance of traditional news media is also apparent – 31 percent cite it as one of their top three sources.



PARENTS AND TEENS SHARE INTEREST IN ONLINE SAFETY

% who say they would like to know more about...	Parents of Online Teens (13-17)	Online Teens (13-17)
Preventing identity theft	50%	55%
Keeping my devices secure	48%	41%
How to identify fake emails, social posts and texts	37%	39%
How to determine if a website is secure	36%	35%
How to report serious problems I encounter online	35%	25%
How young people are lured, groomed or recruited online	34%	27%
How to manage my privacy online	33%	32%
Dealing with a bully	33%	30%
Blocking people	31%	30%
Risks of sexting	31%	30%
Adjusting settings on social networks	29%	21%
How to begin a conversation with (kids/my parents) about staying safe online	16%	17%

Source: NCSA Online Surveys of Teens and Parents, fielded June 7-10, 2016. N=804 online teens ages 13-17 for the teen survey and N=810 parents of online teens ages 13-17 for the parent survey.

Even as teens and parents may diverge in a number of areas – both in their reporting of the rules and regulations they have at home and in their expectations about how to best handle the problems they encounter online – they appear to have remarkably consistent priorities when asked about the online safety topics they would most like to learn about. This presents a unique opportunity to coordinate messaging campaigns for both youth and parents, with the assumption that some messages will spread across peer networks and others will be reinforced when parents have conversations with their children.