



KEEPING UP WITH GENERATION APP: NCSA PARENT/TEEN ONLINE SAFETY  
SURVEY  
A STUDY BY THE NATIONAL CYBER SECURITY ALLIANCE

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**FAST FACTS**

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**I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

As part of widespread efforts to promote online safety education and awareness for youth, the National Cyber Security Alliance conducted market research to better understand the dynamic between parents and teens regarding teens' online behaviors and experiences. Co-sponsored by Microsoft, the U.S.-based survey of 13- to 17-year-old teens and a separate sample of parents of online teens suggests that American teens may lead more complex digital lives than most parents realize and have experienced several undesirable– and even hurtful – online such as receiving negative messages and having concerns about exposure to extremist content. The survey also reveals a high reliance by teens on peer-to-peer support when facing online problems and a significant reluctance to seeking parental assistance.

The findings of NCSA's "Keeping up with Generation App" study explore a range of themes – including tech trends, online safety, privacy concerns, rules – in its effort to unpack the complex lives of American teens.

**II. THEMES AND SUPPORTING POINTS**

**1. How Teens Navigate the Current Tech Environment**

- Many teens have online activities and accounts without their parents' knowledge.
  - 60 percent say they have created an account that their parents were unaware of, such as on a social media site or for an app they wanted to use, with 31 percent saying no and 9 percent saying not sure
- In contrast, only 28 percent of parents say yes when asked if they think their children had created accounts without their knowledge, with 53 percent saying no and 20 percent saying not sure

- 24 percent of teens say they use the Omegle or YouNow apps, but fewer than 3 percent of parents are aware of these apps, both of which allow users to connect and interact with strangers

## **2. How Parents Regulate Their Teens' Use of Technology**

Parents of teens say they have a wide array of rules and regulations regarding their kids' use of technology; however, teens are much less likely to say they are asked to follow these types of rules.

- 67 percent of parents say their children have to report to them any online incidents that make them feel scared or uncomfortable, compared with 32 percent of teens who say they have to follow this type of rule
- 62 percent of parents say their teens are not allowed to share passwords with friends, compared with 41 percent of teens who report having such a rule
- 62 percent of parents report having limits to the kinds of personal information their children are allowed to post on social networks, with 39 percent of teens saying they have to follow such a rule
- 55 percent of parents say no devices are allowed during dinner time, compared with 36 percent of teens reporting this type of rule in their households
- 54 percent of parents say their children have to ask permission before downloading a new app or game or joining a social network, compared with 16 percent of teens
- 50 percent of parents say their children are required to share passwords to their online accounts with them, compared with 16 percent of teens
- 41 percent of parents say there are limits to the amount of screen time each day, compared with 15 percent of teens
- 40 percent of parents report there are hours during the day in which their children are not allowed to use devices, compared with 20 percent of teens
- 31 percent of parents report their children are not allowed to have devices in their bedrooms after a certain time in the evening, compared with 11 percent of teens
- Only 9 percent of parents report having "no rules" regarding their children's technology use, compared with 28 percent of teens
- 11 percent of parents report having limits on how many texts their teens can send per month, compared with 6 percent of teens

There is an apparent digital disconnect between American teens and parents – which may be the result of parents' overall low levels of awareness of their teens' activities. Parents and teens agree that parents are not very aware of their teens' activities online.

- Only 13 percent of teens report that their parents are completely aware of the full extent of their activities, with 17 percent saying they are somewhat aware, 32 percent saying neutral, 15 percent saying not very aware, 15 percent saying not aware at all and 9 percent saying not sure
- Only 3 percent of parents report being completely aware of the full extent of their children's activities online, with 8 percent saying they are somewhat aware, 32 percent saying neutral, 36 percent saying not very aware, 21 percent saying not aware at all and 1 percent saying not sure

Encouragingly, many parents are talking about online safety with their teens.

- 78 percent of teens say their parents have talked with them about ways to use the internet and cell phones safely (16 percent said no, and 6 percent said not sure)
- 78 percent of teens say their parents have talked about what kinds of things should and should not be shared online or on a cell phone (15 percent said no, and 7 percent said not sure)
- 73 percent of teens say their parents have talked to them about ways to behave toward other people online or on the phone (20 percent said no, and 7 percent said not sure)
- 68 percent of teens say their parents have talked to them about what they do on the internet or on their cell phones (22 percent said no, and 10 percent said not sure)

### **3. Negative Experiences and Online Safety Concerns**

Many teens are experiencing negative or unkind treatment online.

- 39 percent of online teens report someone has been mean or cruel to them online or when using apps in the past year. (49 percent said no, and 12 percent said not sure). Of those 39 percent, teens report the mean messages were about the following:
  - Something they said or did (52%)
  - Their appearance (45%)
  - Something they did not say or did not do (33%)
  - Their sexual orientation (27%)
  - Their gender (25%)
  - Their race or ethnicity (24%)
  - Another person or group they associate with (23%)
  - Their religion (20%)
  - A photo or video of them that was meant to remain private (15%)
  - Their culture (including language or traditions) (10%)
  - A disability (6%)
  - Other (5%)

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:

- Having someone access their account without permission (47%)
- Someone sharing personal information about them online (43%)
- Having a photo or video posted online that they wanted to remain private (38%)
- Having someone post untrue things about them online (35%)
- Receiving unwanted communications that make them uncomfortable (32%)
- Being pressured to participate in harassing or bullying someone else (32%)
- Being harassed or bullied for a sustained period (29%)
- Being approached by people they don’t know online (25%)
- Being called offensive names (25%)

While not as prominent as various privacy- and security-related concerns, worry about exposure to extremist content impacts a sizable minority of online teens.

- 27 percent say they are very concerned about being directed to content about extreme political or religious activities that make them uncomfortable
- 19 percent say they are somewhat concerned
- 20 percent say they are not too concerned
- 25 percent say they are not at all concerned
- 10 percent say they are not sure

Parents report a comparable level of concern about their children being directed to content containing extreme violence or hateful views.

- 31 percent say they are very concerned
- 27 percent say they are somewhat concerned
- 27 percent say they are not too concerned
- 12 percent say they are not at all concerned
- 3 percent say they are not sure

#### **4. How Teens Handle Online Safety Problems**

Teens indicate that they are not very likely to turn to their parents for help with the various problems they encounter online.

- Only 9 percent of teens say they would talk to their parents all the time about the problems they encounter online
  - 11 percent say most of the time
  - 24 percent say some of the time
  - 20 percent say rarely

- 28 percent say never
- 8 percent say not sure
- In contrast, 30 percent of parents say their children are likely to talk to them all the time about the problems they encounter online
  - 35 percent say most of the time
  - 25 percent say some of the time
  - 5 percent say rarely
  - 3 percent say never
  - 3 percent say not sure

Teens indicate the value of peer-to-peer relationships when it comes to dealing with online problems.

When faced with a serious problem online, teens report that the first person they would turn to for help is:

- A friend (40%)
- A parent (33%)
- A sibling (8%)
- A teacher or school administrator (4%)
- An older family member such as an aunt, uncle or grandparent (4%)
- A friend's sibling (3%)
- A friend's parent (3%)
- A cousin (2%)
- A youth or church group leader (1%)
- Other (2%)

In contrast, a large majority of parents want their children to come to them for help. When asked who they would want their children to turn to with their online problems, they say:

- Themselves (85%)
- The child's other parent/guardian (6%)
- A friend (2%)
- A sibling (2%)
- A sibling of a friend (2%)
- A teacher or school administrator (1%)
- An older family member such as an aunt, uncle or grandparent (1%)
- A youth or church group leader or coach (.3%)
- A friend's parent (.2%)
- A cousin (.1%)
- Other (1%)

## **5. Dealing With Hateful or Violent Content Online**

Both teens and parents express fairly high levels of confidence in their ability to handle teens' exposure to hateful or violent content online.

- 48 percent of teens report being very confident they could handle the situation on their own if directed to content containing extreme violence or hateful views that made them feel uncomfortable, 21 percent say they are somewhat confident, 14 percent say they are not too confident, 8 percent say not at all confident and 9 percent say not sure
- 50 percent of parents say they are very confident they could handle this issue on their own if their children brought it to them, with 37 percent saying they are somewhat confident, 7 percent saying not too confident, 3 percent saying not at all confident and 4 percent saying not sure

## **6. Teens Turning to Peers for Support**

Even as teens say they can handle many online safety problems on their own, many say they provide support for peers who encounter difficult situations online.

- 43 percent of teens say their friends have sought their help because of things that happened online that made them feel uncomfortable
- 42 percent say no
- 15 percent say not sure

## **7. Opportunities for Online Safety Messaging**

Parents and teens share many online safety interests and concerns. When asked what topics about being safer and more secure online they would like to know about, teens say:

- Preventing identity theft (54%)
- Keeping my devices secure (41%)
- How to identify fake emails, social posts and texts (39%)
- How to determine if a website is secure (35%)
- How to manage my privacy online (32%)
- Blocking people (30%)
- Dealing with a bully (30%)
- Risks of sexting (30%)
- How to handle harassment (28%)
- How young people are lured, groomed or recruited online (27%)
- How to report serious problems I encounter online (25%)
- Adjusting settings on social networks (21%)
- How to begin a conversation with my parents about staying safe online (17%)
- Other (3%)

The online safety topics parents report most wanting to learn more about were quite similar:

- Preventing identity theft (49%)
- Keeping my devices secure (48%)
- How to identify fake emails, social posts and texts (37%)
- How to determine if a website is secure (36%)
- How to report serious problems I encounter online (35%)
- How young people are lured, groomed or recruited online (34%)
- Dealing with a bully (33%)
- How to manage my privacy online (33%)
- Blocking people (31%)
- Risks of sexting (31%)
- How to handle harassment (31%)
- Adjusting settings on social networks (30%)
- How to begin a conversation with kids about staying safe online (16%)
- Other (4%)

### **III. METHODOLOGY**

Zogby Analytics was commissioned by NCSA and Microsoft to conduct an online survey of 804 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. Using trusted interactive partner resources, thousands of potential respondents were invited to participate in this survey. Each invitation is password coded and secure so that one respondent can only access the survey one time. Based on a confidence interval of 95 percent, the margin of error for 804 (and the margin of error for 810) is +/- 3.5 percentage points. This means that all other things being equal, the identical survey repeated will have results within the margin of error 95 times out of 100.