



The Secret Online Lives of Teens





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What Do You Really Know About Your Teens' Online Lives?

Do you know what your kids are doing online—whether they are talking to strangers or putting their computers and themselves at risk? Chances are, you know something about what your kids are doing on the Internet but not everything.

Today's young people are "digital natives" who grew up with the Internet and use it more skillfully and comfortably than many adults—for communication, education, and entertainment. However, their high level of online participation also opens them up to potential dangers, such as cyberbullying, personal information sharing, and online threats. It's important for you to understand the potential benefits and risks of your kids' online lives, so we can nurture the positive aspects, such as increased communication skills and online learning, while minimizing risks.

To help you better understand young people's relationships with the online world McAfee commissioned the "Youth Online Behavior Study for McAfee," conducted online by Harris Interactive from May 4 to May 17, 2010. The study surveyed 1,357 10- to 17-year-olds in the U.S. on how they use the Internet, what kind of content and media they view and download, and their level

of engagement in risky online behaviors. Where possible, the survey results from 13- to 17-year-old participants are compared with data collected in the "Teen Online Behavior Study," conducted in 2008 among 13- to 17-year-olds in the U.S.

The results point to a need for ongoing communication with your kids about how to behave in the online world. For instance, this year's survey showed that over one quarter of teens online had accidentally allowed their home computer to become infected with a virus or other malware. And, while almost all kids say that they knew how to be safe online, around half admit to giving out personal information to someone they do not know over the Internet.

Let's explore some other key findings.

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Key Findings

General online use and attitudes

Today's youth are online pros who know how to navigate through content, play games, and use communication services. Here's a picture of their general online usage:

- Half of kids surveyed say that they have been using the Internet for five years or more, and 58% consider themselves heavy users who access the Internet six or seven days a week.
- Communicating and downloading content are two primary uses of the Internet by young people, but education also plays an important role. Nearly 80% say they use the Web to do research for school assignments.
- Gaming is also a popular activity, with 61% of kids saying they play games online, including multiplayer online games.
- Social networking is a fast-growing online activity. 81% of 16- to 17-year-olds report having at least one social networking account; this number has grown significantly since 2008.
- Over half (53%) of kids say that they typically view and download media online.

Parental influence

Given the amount of time kids spend online, how much are you involved in their online habits? We found that, for the most part, parents try to stay informed about their kids' online lives, but they more closely monitor younger children. Here's what else we found:

- Nearly all kids (91%) say that their parents trust them to do what's right online. However, 56% say that their parents know some of what they do online, but not everything, and a quarter (26%) report that their parents don't have time to check up on what they do online.
- About a third (32%) say that they don't tell their parents what they are doing online, and would change their behavior if they knew their parents were watching (31%).
- Even though parents are less likely to monitor their children's behavior as they get older, young people are more inclined to hide what they do online from their parents as they get older. By the time they reach the ages of 16 or 17, 56% of teens hide their online activities.

- The most common ways that kids hide their online activities from their parents are by minimizing the browser when their parents are nearby (29%), hiding and deleting text messages (20%), and clearing the browser history (21%). Interestingly, girls are more likely to engage in the first two activities than boys.
- Parents should note that about one third of young people say that they “often” or “always” hide their online activities.

Risky online behavior

Despite the fact that there is roughly the same level of online danger today as in 2008, most (95%) kids who participated in the survey are confident in their ability to stay safe online, yet our report shows that they still engage in risky behaviors. Here are some of the areas where we saw red flags:

- Although teens are heavy Internet users, it’s still surprising that 27% say that they have accidentally infected their home computer with a virus or other malware, and 14% say that they shared their passwords with friends.
- Perhaps because girls tend to communicate more, they are more likely to engage in risky behaviors such as chatting with people they don’t know in the offline world (25% girls overall and 43% among 16- to 17-year-olds). Girls also report higher frequencies of being harassed and bullied online than boys.
- Almost a third (29%) of teens have downloaded a program without their parents’ knowledge and 16- to 17-year-old boys (45%) are most likely to download programs without parental knowledge, or those of x-rated content.
- While more than half (52%) of young people say they know someone who has experienced cyberbullying, only 29% say they have experienced it themselves.
- However, one in four kids (25%) report that they wouldn’t know what to do if they were bullied or harassed online.



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Changes since 2008

The main changes we've seen in teens' online behavior over the last two years are a growth in social networking and sharing of information, as well as increased use of the Internet overall.

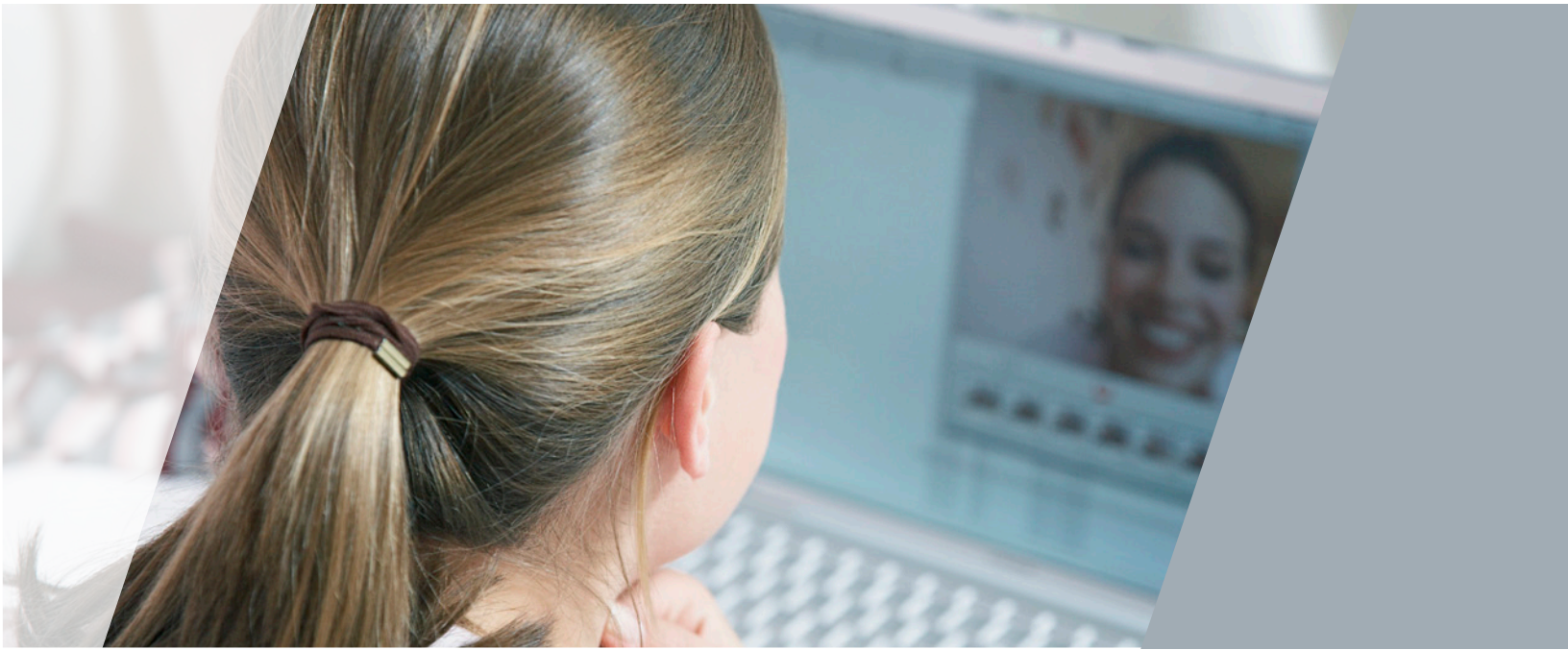
When it comes to social networking, 73% of 13- to 17-year-olds today say they have an account on a social networking site, compared to 59% in 2008. This increase in social networking could be the cause behind the increase in personal information sharing (56% of 16- to 17-year-olds) since teens now have more platforms and opportunities to share details about their lives.

This year's survey also shows an increase in Internet use overall, most likely due to the proliferation of Internet-enabled smartphones and gaming consoles, as well as Wi-Fi hotspots. Teens now have easier access to the Internet. As usage increases, so do the possible risks.

Another change is the amount of teens downloading music or videos from a free service (from 28% in 2008 to 46% in 2010), which could be because of the popularity of portable digital music players like the Apple iPod. This could also be a factor as to why more teens are infecting their family computers—along with the free music, they may also be downloading viruses, spyware, and other malware.

More teens also admit to giving their cell phone numbers to someone online whom they don't know in the offline world (12% this year, compared to 8% in 2008), presumably because more teens have cell phones.

As Internet access and Internet-enabled devices continue to grow, there seems to be a greater need for education and awareness about how kids should behave online.



Discussion Points

Cyberbullying remains a problem

Although cyberbullying statistics are flat (14% of teens admitted to engaging in cyberbullying in 2010, versus 15% in 2008), this data shows that despite current efforts, engagement in cyberbullying isn't getting any better which may indicate that education efforts need to be increased or evaluated in order to decrease this behavior.

Furthermore, incidents, such as cyberpranking (sending anonymous emails to someone at school) and spreading rumors online, tend to increase as teens get older. This could mean that the large number of tweens that are online now could face more cyberbullying in coming years.

The growing popularity of social networking could also open the door to further incidents of cyberbullying because kids have more ways to contact and harass each other and can find out more personal information about one another posted on social networking profiles and Twitter feeds.

It is clear from the research that cyberbullying is not something that will go away anytime soon without increased education and prevention.

Girls versus boys

Girls seem to be more vulnerable online than boys, perhaps because communicating and sharing information are more typical behaviors for them. For instance, girls are more likely than boys to have a social networking account (72% versus 66%) and to say they always or often update their status (42% versus 29%).

While girls' openness may help them communicate better, it can also put them at higher risk. One quarter (25%) of girls—including 43% of girls ages 16 to 17—admit to chatting online with people they do not know. Girls are also more likely than boys to get harassed online, share their passwords with friends, give a description of what they look like to strangers, and share photos of themselves.

Meanwhile, boys are more likely to download programs without their parents' knowledge or those of "adult" content (35%), especially boys ages 16 to 17 (45%).

Given the differences in online behavior between genders, there is a need to talk to boys and girls about the different kinds of risks to which they may be exposed.



Conclusion

Kids today are living rich, active online lives that come with many benefits and some drawbacks, such as cyberbullying, predators, malware, and oversharing of information. That's why it's important for you to talk to your kids about potential dangers and how to avoid them.

We can safely assume that kids will continue to spend a large amount of time online and that new technologies, such as location-based services, will give them even greater opportunities to share personal information about themselves. You should try to make sure you have very clear conversations with your children about the kind of information that is safe to share and whom they should share it with. It's also critical that your kids understand that the information they put online could be there forever. Before posting sensitive information, they need to ask themselves whether they would want their grandmother or a future employer to see it because there's no guarantee that "deleted" online content is permanently deleted.

Acceptable online behavior is another important topic. Kids and teens need to be taught how to be good digital citizens—to avoid bullying or harassing their friends and classmates online—and how to keep their family computers safe and not to download software without your permission.

You might want to consider setting limits based on age, or use software like McAfee® Family Protection or McAfee® Family Protection for iPhone, iPod Touch, iPad Edition. These tools allow you to protect your kids from inappropriate content, sharing confidential information, talking to strangers, and other potentially dangerous activities. When education and awareness are combined with comprehensive security software such as McAfee® Total Protection, you can have more peace of mind knowing that your children and their computers are protected.

About McAfee, Inc.

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The "Youth Online Behavior Study for McAfee" was conducted online by Harris Interactive from May 4 to May 17, 2010. The U.S. study surveyed 1,357 10- to 17-year-olds (including 402 tweens, ages 10 to 12, 593 teens, ages 13 to 15, and 362 teens, ages 16 to 17). Results were weighted as needed for age, gender, race/ethnicity, and other key variables. Overall data in this report is representative of U.S. tweens and teens, ages 10 to 17.

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