The Digital Divide: How the Online Behavior of Teens is Getting Past Parents

**Parent Disconnect**
Despite the obvious disconnect between teens' online behaviors and parents' knowledge of them, parents continue to exude a sense of confidence and control. Most parents insist they're in control when it comes to mentoring their teen's online behaviors. Yet, many teens believe their parents are in the dark.

More than three in four parents express confidence they know how to find out what their teen is doing online, and half of parents live under the assumption that their teen tells them everything he/she does online. In reality, over two in three teens say their parents don’t need to know everything they do online and half of teens would actually change their online behavior if they knew their parents were watching.

**Issues around Usage**
- Teens spend a considerable amount of time online, even more than their parents realize. On average, teens spend about five hours a day online, while parents think their kids spend two hours a day online.
- There’s disconnect with parents awareness of their teens’ social network usage. Only 48% of parents think their teens check their accounts daily (compared to 60% of social network users) and only 22% believing their teens to check their accounts constantly (compared to 41%)

**Parent Monitoring and Involvement**
Three in four parents say they’ve had a conversation about online safety with their teens, yet only half of teens indicate that these conversations resonated with them. Parents have become aggressive of late with how they try to control their teen’s online behaviors.
- 49.1% install parental controls (the majority of parents doing this have teens between the ages of 13-15 (33.3%)
- 44.3% know their teens passwords
- 27% have taken their teens devices
- 10.3% use location tracking to monitor their teens
- 3.5% have consulted psychologists for help
- 36.2% of black parents say they do nothing to monitor their children's online behaviors (the highest amongst the races)

**The Work Around**
Although parents are attempting to become more involved in their teen’s online behavior, teens still seemingly manage to outsmart their parents. In fact, teens are taking a number of steps to hide their online behavior and/or undo parental controls, often unbeknownst to parents.
- 61% of teens feel confident that they know how to hide what they do online from parents and 71% of teens have actually done something to hide their online behavior (only 56% of parents are aware of this).
Parents are severely misguided when it comes to how their teens hide information from them. A classic, “not my kid” mentality:

- **Clear Browser History** – 53.3% Teens do vs. 17.5% Parents aware
- **Minimize Browser when in view** – 45.9% Teens do vs. 16.6% Parents aware
- **Hide/Delete Inappropriate videos** – 18.9% Teens do vs. 5.4% Parents aware
- **Lied about behavior** – 22.9% Teens do vs. 10.5% Parents aware
- **Uses phone** – 21.3% Teens do vs. 9.7% Parents aware
- **Manipulate Social Media Privacy Settings to block Parents** - 19.9% Teens do vs. 8.1% Parents aware
- **Utilize Private Browsing** – 19.5% Teens do vs. 3.7% Parents aware
- **Disable Parental Controls** – 12.8% Teens do vs. 3.8% of Parents aware
- 14.7% of teens have email addresses, and 8.7% of teens have duplicate social media profiles that their parents do not know about.
- **Females are more likely to manipulate and hide their online behaviors from their parents**

Furthermore, some parents throw their hands up in defeat. One in three believes their teens to be much more tech-savvy than they are, leaving them feeling helpless to keep up with their teen’s online behaviors.

- 23% admit that they are overwhelmed by modern technology, so they can only hope for the best.
- Just as many claim they don’t have the time or energy to keep up with everything their teen does online.
- 22% live in denial, claiming that their kids can’t get in trouble online.
- Only one in four parents is aware of this. 93% of teens who have witnessed cruel behavior took place on Facebook.

**Disconnect Around Online Dangers**

Only 21.7% of parents think their teens can get in trouble online. Parents seem blind to the negative effects of inappropriate online behavior, as only 2.5% of parents think their children are afraid to go to school due to digital issues, and only 2.6% of parents think their children engage in physical altercations due to online behavior. Despite the perceived dangers, many teens post personal information online anyway, often unbeknownst to parents:

- Photos 72% vs 63%
- Email 62% vs 33%
- Name of School 53% vs 43%
- Intimate Details 32% vs 17%
- Cell Number 29% vs 14%

The results of cyber bullying have real world consequences, as 5.1% have been afraid to go to school, and 4.5% have been in a physical fight due to it.

- Parents seem blind to this, as only 2.5% of parents think their children are afraid to go to school due to digital issues, and only 2.6% of parents think their children engage in physical altercations due to online behavior.
- Parent involvement does not seem to be the issue, as 78.6% of parents have claimed to talk to their teens about what to do if they are targets of cruel behavior online. The information just doesn’t seem to be getting through as 20.4% of teens say they wouldn’t know what to do if they were bullied online.
Consequences of Parent Disconnect

Many teens are accessing inappropriate content online, despite parents’ trust in them not to. However, three in four 3 in 4 teens feel trusted by their parents to do what’s right online.

Yet, many teens do, anyway.

- 44.8% of teens visit a website parents disapprove of (only 23.6% of parents are aware of this)
- 43% of teens intentionally access simulated violence online (only 15% of parents are aware)
- 36% of teens intentionally access sexual topics online (only 11% of parents are aware)
- 32% of teens intentionally access nude content or porn online (only 12% of parents are aware)
- Of those who have intentionally accessed pornography, 43% do so on a weekly basis and only 18% of parents are aware of this.

Disconnect also leads to teens’ participation in dangerous and even illegal online activities.

- Some are making decisions to put themselves in danger: 15% left an open chat to go into a private chat with someone they met online. 12% met up in person with someone they met online. Only 5% and 4% of parents are aware of this, respectively.
- Others are taking part in illegal activities: 31% of teens pirate music or movies online and 17% have hacked into someone else’s social media account or email. Only 12% and 4% of parents are aware of this, respectively.
- This includes cheating in school, which is much more common that parents realize: Only 23% of parents express concern about their teen going online to cheat in school, yet half of all teens admit they’ve looked up answers to tests or assignments online.
  - 48% Intentionally looked up answers to tests/assignments online (only 23% of parents aware)
  - 22% Cheated on a test via online or mobile phones (only 5% of parents are aware)

The Fix

Parents must be jolted out of their complacency. A huge gap exists between what teens are doing online and what parents really know. Parents must take an active role to ensure their teens are practicing safe online behavior.

- This involves frequent one-to-one conversations with teens to get through to them about the choices they're making online and the risks and consequences of their choices.
- Parents must also be diligent about setting parental controls, which includes keeping a watchful eye to know if/when teens discover ways around them, as many already have.
- Parents should be upfront with teens about monitors and controls implemented on their internet devices, as half of teens say they would think twice about their online activities if they knew parents were watching.
Parents must stay in-the-know. Having grown up in an online world, teens are often more online savvy than their parents, making it difficult for parents to provide the necessary guidance, and therefore, reinforcing teens’ online vulnerability. But, parents cannot give up. Parents must challenge themselves to become familiar with the complexities of the teen online universe and educate themselves about the various devise their teens are using to go online.

**Overwhelmed Parents, Under-Cautious Kids**

**Fooling Parents**
- 70% of Teens have hidden their online behavior from their parents, up from 45% in 2010.
- Half of teens said they would change their online behavior if they knew their parents were watching.
- HOW –
  - Clearing the browser history (53%)
  - Close/minimize browser when parent walked in (46%)
  - Hide or delete IMs or videos (34%)
  - Lie or omit details about online activities (23%)
  - Use a computer your parents don’t check (23%)
  - Use an internet-enabled mobile device (21%)
  - Use privacy settings to make certain content viewable only by friends (20%)
  - Use private browsing modes (20%)
  - Create a private email address unknown to parents (15%)
  - Create duplicate/fake social network profiles (9%)

**Parents Overwhelmed**
- 29% of parents feel overwhelmed by technology and hoping for the best when it comes to their kids online.
- 1 in 3 believes their teen to be much more tech-savvy then they are, leaving them feeling helpless to keep up with their teen’s online behaviors.
- 22% of parents do not believe their kids can get into trouble online

**So What is at Stake...?**
- **Friendships** - 20% said they had ended a friendship with someone because of something that happened on a social network.
- **Physical Safety** - 7% responded fearing for their safety because of something that happened online, and 5% reported getting into a physical fight because of an online problem. ... More than 1 in 10 (12%) of teens have met someone in real life that they only knew online
- **Crime Record** – Surprisingly, 15% report they have hacked someone’s social network account, 31% reported pirated movies and music and 8.7% have hacked someone’s email online.
  - Nearly 16% of parents are aware their children are engaging in any of these behaviors
- **Education** - 16% of teens having admitted to looking test answers on their phone, and 48.1% of teens having looked up assignment and test answers online.
  - 77.2% of parents are not worried about their kids cheating at school.
• **Innocence (Pornography)** - 36% have access to sexual topics online, and 32% have accessed nude content or pornography online.
  - Only 12% of parents thought their children accessed pornography online

• **Bullying** - 62.1% of all teens have witnessed cruel behavior online and 23.3% have claimed to be targets of cyber bullying. 9.5% of teens actually bully, and 24.9% posting mean comments.
  - Only 10% of parents believe their teens have been targeted online.

**For more information:**
Media Contact – Jaime_Le@mcafee.com, 408-346-5276

###