



Family  
Online Safety  
Institute

Policy & Research

# Parents, Privacy & Technology Use

Research Overview



Research conducted by:

**HART** RESEARCH  
ASSOCIATES

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# RESEARCH OVERVIEW

## Priorities, Benefits, and Concerns

Children's technology use is not at the top of parents' list of day-to-day concerns. In fact, they believe that technology positively affects their child's life in many ways, with the notable exception of their child's physical fitness. Parents make distinctions between different devices and platforms when weighing the benefits vs. the harms.

- Among various worries that parents might have for their child, they express more concern about their child's personal safety (75% a lot or fair amount) and privacy (67%) than any of the others tested, including their child's performance in school (55%), social relationships (54%), physical health (51%), technology use (48%), and behavior (47%). Overall, 16% worry a lot about their child's technology use, 32% worry a fair amount, 33% worry only a little, and 19% do not worry at all.
- Parents believe that technology use has a positive effect on many areas of their child's life, most notably on their child's technology skills (92% positive effect), their child's ability to do research (89%), and his or her future, career, and life skills (78%), and to a lesser degree they think the impact on their child's performance in school and communication skills has been largely positive. The only area in which parents think their child's technology use has a more

negative than positive effect is their child's level of physical fitness (27% positive effect, 44% negative effect).

- Parents weigh the benefits and the harms of their child using devices differently, depending on the device. They are more optimistic about the benefits that will come from their child using feature phones (43% benefits outweigh, 19% harms outweigh) and smartphones (37% benefits outweigh, 31% harms outweigh) than social media (26% benefits outweigh, 47% harms outweigh).

## Knowledge and Confidence

The majority of parents are highly confident in their ability to manage their child's technology use, and most feel they know a lot about what their children do when using technology; yet they admit to knowing more about their child's activity on some platforms than on others. Additionally, while many parents believe that they know more than their child does about technology, some parents acknowledge that they have learned something from their child about using a device or platform.

- Today, 59% of parents have a high level of confidence in their ability to keep track of their child's technology use, with parents of younger children (69%) more confident than those with teens (54%).
- Fully 81% of parents think they know a lot or most of what their children do when using technology or going online, and the more parents think they know, the more confident they feel about their ability to manage their child's technology use. Just as parents of younger children tend to register higher levels of confidence in their ability to manage their kids' technology use, they are also more likely to say they know most of what their child does online:
  - ♦ 70% among those with children age six to nine,

# 78%

*of parents believe that technology use has a positive effect on their child's future, career, and life skills.*

# 54%

*have learned something from their child about using their smartphone or tablet.*

- ◆ 44% among those with children age 10 to 13, and
- ◆ 34% among those with children age 14 to 17.
- Parents profess different levels of knowledge about what their children do when using a variety of platforms, and are the least likely to proclaim a high level of knowledge about what their children do while texting/messaging or using social media such as Twitter or Snapchat. They are more likely to think they know what is going on when their child is using social networking sites such as Facebook than when he or she is using Twitter and Snapchat.
- Parents believe they know more about technology and online activities than their child does: 65% I know more, 20% my child knows more. Nonetheless, many parents say they have learned something from their child about using a device or platform. More than half say they have learned something from their child about using their smartphone or tablet (54%), and just under two in five have learned something about using online social networks (39%) and texting (38%).

## Parental Controls

Thirty-six percent (36%) of parents say they have used parental controls (a tool, program, or app) to limit or monitor their child's Internet use. Their top reason for not using them is that they think these controls are unnecessary, either because they trust their child or they already have rules in place

to limit their child's Internet use. It is notable that another 37% of parents indicate that they have done other things to limit or oversee their child's use of mobile devices and social media.

- The main reasons parents indicate they do not use parental controls are because they think they are unnecessary because they trust their child to be safe and act appropriately (41% among parents who have not used parental controls) and because they have rules and limits in place for Internet use (39%). Fewer parents doubt the effectiveness of controls (12%) or think their child will just get around them (11%). On the other hand, some parents simply are not sure how to use them (18%) or did not know they existed (8%).
- Parents have done some other things to monitor or limit their child's technology use—even if they say they are not using parental controls—including requiring their child to accept them as a friend or follower, b) disabling in-app purchases on their child's smartphone or tablet, c) turning off the location function on their child's mobile device, and d) turning off the data on their child's cell phone.

## Technology Rules

Most parents have rules for their child's technology use, and their rules relate to what, when, and how their children can get online. Additionally, the large majority of parents have limited their child's access to technology as a punishment for his or her undesirable behavior, whether online or off.

# 87%

*of parents say they have rules for their child's technology use.*

# 3 in 4

*parents have taken away or limited their child's access to technology, social media, or the Internet as a consequence for the child's behavior.*

- Fully 87% of parents say they have rules for their child's technology use. These rules include what sites the child can access (79%), what online accounts the child can have (77%), and what the child can post online (75%), among others.
- When it comes to rules on the amount of time parents say their child can spend per week using electronics or going online, 35% of parents say they have no such rules, 19% allow their child five hours or less, 21% allow six to 10 hours, and 25% allow more than 10 hours. Whereas 17% of parents of six- to nine-year-olds say they have no time limits, fully 54% of parents with children age 14 to 17 do not limit their child's amount of time online.
- Three in four parents have taken away or limited their child's access to technology, social media, or the Internet as a consequence for the child's behavior. About half (49%) have done so because the child broke a household rule, 41% who have done so because their child was spending too much time online, 32% have because of poor grades that the child received in school, and 16% did so because their child did something inappropriate online.

## Parents as Models

Most parents believe they are doing a good job in modeling good technology behavior to their children, and many say that they go online together with their children. One in five parents admits to some missteps, however.

- More than nine in 10 parents give themselves an "A" or a "B" grade for the job they are doing in being a good role model for their child when it comes to online behavior and use of technology.
- Fifty-five percent (55%) of parents go online and use technology with their children often, and the proportions are even higher for parents of younger children and parents who are younger themselves.
- Yet some parents admit to oversharing about their child: 19% say they have posted something online about their child that the child has found embarrassing, has asked the parent to take down, or may find embarrassing in the future.

# 19%

*of parents say they have posted something online about their child that the child has found embarrassing, has asked the parent to take down, or may find embarrassing in the future.*

To view the full report, visit:

<https://www.fosi.org/policy-research>

## Methodology

*In the fall of 2015, Hart Research Associates conducted qualitative and quantitative research among parents on behalf of the Family Online Safety Institute.*

*On September 9, 2015, Hart Research convened three focus groups in Bala Cynwyd, Pennsylvania, among parents whose children access the Internet. The groups were divided by age of child, with one group among parents of six- to nine-year-old children, one group among parents of 10- to 13-year-olds, and one group among parents of 14- to 17-year-olds.*

*From October 5 to 8, 2015, Hart Research conducted an online national survey of 589 parents of six- to 17-year-olds who access the Internet. To simplify survey administration, parents of multiple children in the age bracket were asked to answer questions about their child who had the most recent birthday.*

*The research's objective is to explore how parents view the role that technology plays in their child's life, how informed they feel about what their children do online, and how they oversee their child's use of online technology. This report details the research's key findings.*



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