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# The Online Generation Gap

Contrasting attitudes and behaviors  
of parents and teens





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Contrasting attitudes and behaviors  
of parents and teens

**Submitted to: The Family Online Safety Institute**  
**By Hart Research Associates**  
**November 14th, 2012**



## Executive Summary

- In October 2012, Hart Research Associates undertook a quantitative research project to explore parents' and teens' online behaviors and views of teens' online safety on behalf of the Family Online Safety Institute. The research consisted of two nationwide online surveys: one among 511 13- to 17-year-olds who use the Internet at least occasionally, and another among 500 parents of 13- to 17-year-olds who access the Internet. To simplify administration of the parent survey, respondents were asked to think about their child who had the most recent birthday in answering the survey's questions. The objective of the research is to better understand behaviors and attitudes toward online safety, parents' perceptions of and teens' self-reported use of various online/mobile platforms, and the types of tools used and actions teens and their parents take to keep themselves and their children safe online. Interviewing was conducted from October 2 to 10, 2012. This report details the key findings identified through the research.

## KEY FINDINGS

### 1. When it comes to monitoring teens' online activity, a substantial gap exists between how many teens say their parents monitor their online activities and their parents' reported oversight.

- When it comes to parents' monitoring of their teens online or mobile activity, 39% of teens say their parents monitor their activities very (11%) or somewhat closely (28%). On the other hand, more than four in five (84%) parents report that they monitor their teens' usage very (31%) or fairly (53%) closely—a 45-percentage-point gap in perceptions.

### 2. Similar to reports of online monitoring, parents also claim to be more informed about their teens' online activities than teens believe them to be.

- More than nine in 10 (91%) parents say they are well informed about what their teens do online and on their cell phone, including more than one-third (37%) who say they are very well informed. By a difference of 29 percentage points, teens are less likely to say their parents are informed about their online activities. Three in five say their parents are very (21%) or somewhat (41%) well informed about their online behavior.

# 84%

of parents report that they monitor their teens' usage very or fairly closely.

### 3. Social networking and media sharing Web sites expose the greatest gaps between teens' online activities and parents' knowledge of these activities.

- Differences in parents' degree of knowledge about their teens' activities and teens' perceptions of their parents' awareness are greatest when it comes to social networking platforms such as Twitter, Facebook or Google Plus, and media sharing Web sites like Tumblr and Pinterest. The largest gap exists around teens' use of Twitter, in which 38% of parents say they are well informed about their teen's use of the site, while just 14% of teen Twitter users say the same of their parents—a difference of 24 percentage points.
- There also are notable gaps between parents who say they are very well informed and teens who say the same of their parents when it comes to specific social networking services, such as Facebook (18-point gap), Pinterest (14-point gap), and Tumblr (15-point gap).
- For other online platforms asked about in the survey, parents' self-reported level of awareness is more in line with teens' ideas about how well informed their parents are. Gaps in perceptions are absent or smaller for online gaming (no gap), texting (3-point gap), instant messaging (7-point gap), and teens' use of YouTube (10-point gap).

### 4. Both teens and parents feel that teens generally are safe online.

- A large proportion of teens report feeling safe online. Fully 95% of teens say they feel very (37%) or somewhat (58%) safe online. Similarly, 94% of parents say they feel their teen is very (36%) or somewhat (58%) safe online. Just 5% of teens and 6% of parents say they feel unsafe.
- When teens were asked in an open-ended question what it means to feel "safe" online, the largest proportion (25%) of responses mention privacy and ensuring no one has access to personal or identifying information. Another 17% of teens say safety means preventing harm or harassment.
- For parents, avoiding "stranger danger" scenarios (29%) is top among their definition of a "safe" online experience, as is ensuring teens' privacy and the protection of their personal information (26%).



# 95%

of teens say they feel very or somewhat safe online.

**5. When it comes to specific concerns about teens' online activity, parents and teens largely are on the same page, but attitudes differ on the hazards posed by strangers and inappropriate content.**

- Parents and teens indicate similar levels of concern for a number of negative potential outcomes of teens' online behaviors and activities. Concerns about teens' postings "haunting" them or creating future problems with getting a job, applying to colleges, or with teachers at school are roughly the same for each audience.
- The biggest gaps in concern exist regarding teens being exposed to harmful or inappropriate content (79% of parents are concerned; 53% of teens) and a stranger learning something about a teen from online posts (78% of parents; 59% of teens), with parents reporting greater levels of concern for both.
- Smaller gaps in concern are reported for the following:
  - Identity theft from online posts is teens' greatest concern (64%) and likewise top among parents (78%).
  - Parents (57%) are slightly more likely than teens (43%) to show concern about teens being bullied for something they posted online, and for teens' being teased by friends about something they posted online (50% of parents say they are concerned; 41% of teens are concerned). The proportion of parents (61% versus 56% among teens) who are very concerned about a company

tracking teens' online behavior also is slightly above that of teens.

- Teens are only slightly more likely to worry about someone posting unflattering pictures of them (54%) than are parents (49%).

**6. Teens are taking many steps to protect their privacy and information online, particularly when it comes to the use of social networking sites.**

- Teens who use various social networks report taking proactive steps to ensure their online safety. Large proportions of teens say they have set privacy settings on their social networking account (81%), placed limits on who they share their posts with (65%), removed a tagged photo (54%), blocked someone from seeing posts (52%), unfriended someone due to an offensive post (50%), or marked a comment as "private" (49%). Twitter and Instagram users are active in setting privacy settings on their account (48% for Twitter, 44% for Instagram), but less likely to limit those who can follow their posts (26% on Twitter, 33% on Instagram).

**7. Parents also say they are doing several things to protect their child's safety, including many actions of which teens are unaware.**

- Significant gaps exist between what parents say they do to protect their children online and what teens say parents are doing in this arena, particularly when it

# 81%

of social networking teens have set privacy settings on their account.



comes to reviewing teens' browsing history, logging on to teens' Facebook accounts, and reviewing teens' text messages.

- Other measures to keep teens' safe that involve conversations with teens also demonstrate a disconnect between teens and parents. Significant gaps in awareness exist when it comes to:
  - Parents discussing rules or expectations with teens regarding time spent online or on a mobile device. Fully 93% of parents say they have done this, while 61% of teens report having a conversation with their parents.
- Setting limits or rules about the use of online or mobile platforms. Parents' reports exceed that of teens' when it comes to setting rules or limits for time spent online or on a cell phone, teens' online search capabilities, and the number of text messages teens can send.

**8. Despite actions taken by parents and teens to protect teens online, notable proportions of teens say they have done things online that would enable a stranger to learn personal information about them.**

- Teens were asked whether they have done a number of things online with someone they do NOT know personally, ranging from the innocuous (commenting on blogs, sharing recommendations for TV shows), to the risky (mentioning the town they lived in, sharing their first or last name), to the truly dangerous (sharing their address or password, making a plan to meet someone).
- When it comes to their online interactions with someone they do NOT know personally, the less risky actions (i.e. friending a stranger on Facebook or sharing TV recommendations) are most common.
- When it comes to riskier behaviors tested, more than half (51%) of teens report to have done at least one of the following: mentioned the city or town where they live; shared their first or last name; mentioned the school they go to; or shared their phone number. Few teens say they have done the most dangerous of behaviors tested.

# 43%

**of teens say they have posted something online that they later regretted.**

**9. While teens report steps they are taking to remain safe and vigilant while online, two in five admit to posting something online that they later regretted.**

- More than two in five (43%) teens say they have posted something online, either on a social networking site, Instagram, Twitter, or elsewhere that they later regretted; 57% of teens have never regretted a post.
- The most common reasons teens give for regretting a post are because they were mean to someone else, or they shared more information than they should have.
- Among those who admit to having regretted an online post in the past, fully 83% later deleted it.



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## Methodology

■ In October 2012, Hart Research Associates undertook a quantitative research project to explore parents' and teens' online behaviors and views of teens' online safety on behalf of the Family Online Safety Institute. The research consisted of two nationwide online surveys: one among 511 13- to 17-year-olds who use the Internet at least occasionally, and another among 500 parents of 13- to 17-year-olds who access the Internet. To simplify administration of the parent survey, respondents were asked to think about their

child who had the most recent birthday in answering the survey's questions. The objective of the research is to better understand behaviors and attitudes toward online safety, parents' perceptions of and teens' self-reported use of various online/mobile platforms, and the types of tools used and actions teens and their parents take to keep themselves and their children safe online. Interviewing was conducted from October 2 to 10, 2012. This report details the key findings identified through the research

# Overview

- These surveys indicate that teens' concerns about their online safety parallel parents' concerns more closely than parents realize and that many teens are taking steps to protect their privacy and personal information. Nonetheless, teens suggest that parents are not as informed about what their teens do online as parents think they are, and some teens are taking risks by providing personal information to strangers online. These gaps in perceptions between parents and teens reveal room to improve communication between parents and teens about online safety and to encourage teens to take steps to protect their safety and identity online.

While most teens and parents feel that teens generally are safe online today, notable gaps exist in perceptions about the degree to which parents are monitoring teens' online activity and are informed about what teens do online.

- Nearly all teens say they feel very or somewhat safe online, and a comparable proportion of parents say they feel their teen is similarly safe when online.
- However, parents are notably more likely to say they monitor their teens' online behavior closely than teens are to say their parent is closely engaged in monitoring their online activities.
- Furthermore, parents are more apt to say they are well informed about their child's activities online than teens believe their parents are, and the gaps in perceptions are largest when it comes to what teens do on social networking (e.g., Facebook, Google Plus, and Twitter) and media sharing Web sites (e.g., Tumblr and Pinterest).

Parents underestimate teens' concerns about potential consequences of their online activity, whereas teens largely are on target when guessing parents' concerns.

- Similar proportions of teens and parents express concern about identity theft. However, parents are more likely than teens to express concern about strangers gaining information about teens and teens seeing inappropriate content.

- Interestingly, teens recognize that "stranger danger," inappropriate content, and identity theft are parents' top concerns regarding their online activity.
- Parents, however, are somewhat out of touch with teens' concerns: they are more likely to think their teens are concerned about ugly photos of themselves being posted and people making fun of them online than about identity theft.

Notable proportions of teens report protecting their privacy in various ways, and parents say they are doing a variety of things to protect their teens that many teens are not aware of.

- Many teens who use social networking sites, such as Facebook and Google Plus, say they have taken steps to protect their privacy and information. Large majorities have set privacy settings and limit who can see their posts. Among teens who use Twitter and Instagram, slightly less than half have set privacy settings and fewer limit those who can see their posts.
- Large majorities of parents say they have reviewed their teens' online browsing history, and among those who say their child uses a cell phone, a large majority say they have reviewed sent and received text messages. In both cases, teens are much less likely to think their parents have done these things.
- Though gaps in awareness of some actions that parents report taking may be explained by the fact that they can be done without a child's knowledge, the disconnect between parents and teens on having a conversation about how to be safe online is notable and suggests room to expand upon these conversations.

Despite actions taken by parents and teens to protect teens online, notable proportions of teens say they have done things online which would enable a stranger to learn private information about them



# Key Findings

## 1. Teens today are incredibly plugged in. Nearly all of these online teens report owning or having access to a computer, and majorities also say they have access to several other devices that connect to the Internet.

- Access to a computer is commonplace among nearly all teens surveyed (all of whom access the Internet), with 99% saying they have a computer or laptop (83%), or have access to one in their household (16%). Large majorities also report owning or having access to other Internet accessible devices such as a game console (90%), a cell phone (90%), and MP3 player/iPod with Internet capability (76%).
- Of those who own or access a cell phone (90%), 43% say they use a smartphone and 47% have a regular, feature phone device.
- When it comes to the ways in which interacting online helps teens, nearly three in four (74%) teens say posting online and reading posts of others is very helpful as a means of staying in touch with friends or meeting new people who share their interests (33%). Fully 45% also say online communication is very helpful when getting assistance with school assignments or getting information about colleges (30%).
- More than two-thirds (68%) of teens say text messaging is the most common means of communicating, while half (34%) as many say posting updates or messages on Facebook is the top way they stay in touch. Talking on a cell phone (28%) or communicating via e-mail (20%) are the next most common.

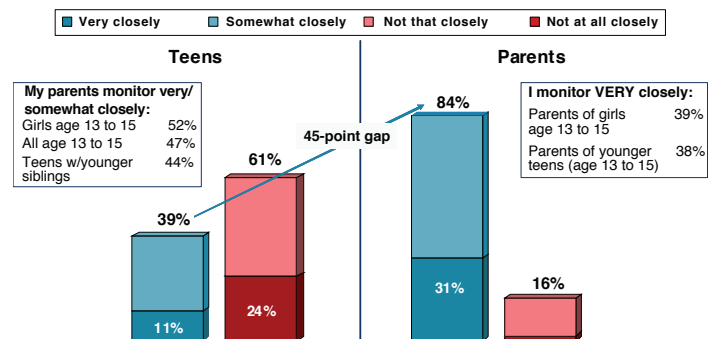
## 2. When it comes to monitoring teens' use of these devices, a substantial gap exists between how many teens say their parents monitor their online activities and their parents' reported oversight.

- When it comes to parents' monitoring of their teens online or mobile activity, 39% of teens say their parents

monitor their activities very (11%) or somewhat closely (28%). On the other hand, more than four in five (84%) parents report that they monitor their teens' usage very (31%) or fairly (53%) closely—a 45-percentage-point gap in perceptions. It is impossible to say for certain from these surveys whether parents overestimate the degree to which they monitor their children's online behavior or how much teens are unaware of what their parents are doing, but it is possible and likely that it is some of both.

## A gap exists between parents' and teens' perceptions of parents' monitoring.

*How closely do [your parents/you] follow or monitor what [you do/your child does] online or on a cell phone?*



### Among teens:

- 13- to 15-year-olds are notably more likely to say their parents monitor their online or mobile activities very/somewhat closely (47%) than are 16- to 17-year-olds (27%). Thirteen- to 15-year-old girls are the most likely to say this is the case (52%).
- Teens with both parents in the household (41% say parents monitor very/somewhat closely) report greater parental monitoring than do teens with only one parent in their household (31%).





# 29

By a difference of 29 percentage points, teens are less likely to say their parents are informed about their online activities.

- Teens with older siblings report that their parents monitor somewhat less closely (37% very/somewhat closely) than do those with younger siblings (44%).

#### Among parents:

- Little difference exists in how closely moms (30% very closely) and dads (32%) monitor their children's activities, but parents of 13- to 15-year-olds are appreciably more likely to say they monitor their child's activities very closely (38%) than are parents of 16- to 17-year-olds (21%). Parents of 13- to 15-year-old girls are most likely to say they monitor closely (39%).

### 3. Less than half of teens who report close parental monitoring say they are bothered by their parents' knowledge of their online or mobile activities.

- A majority of teens say a parent looking over their shoulder does not present a great nuisance or annoyance, and more than half of teens say they are not that bothered (32%) or not at all bothered (22%) by their parents following or monitoring what they do online or on their cell phone. Just 17% say they are very bothered and 29% say they are somewhat bothered by their parents' monitoring.
- Less than half (48%) of teens who report that their parents very closely monitor their online activity say they are very (31%) or somewhat (17%) bothered. Teens who are smartphone users are more likely to be very bothered by their parent's online monitoring (22%) than are non-smartphone users (12%).

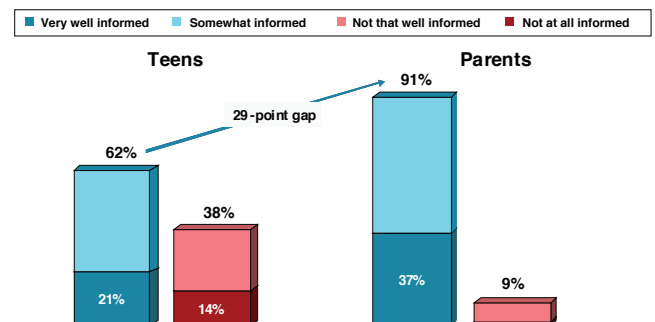
### 4. Similar to reports of online monitoring, parents also claim to be more informed about their teens' online activities than teens believe them to be.

- More than nine in 10 (91%) parents say they are well informed about what their teens do online and on their cell phone, including more than one-third (37%) who say they are very well informed. By a difference

of 29 percentage points, teens are less likely to say their parents are informed about their online activities. Three in five say their parents are very (21%) or somewhat (41%) well informed about their online behavior.

### Parents feel better informed about teens' online activity than teens do.

*How well informed do you think [your parents/you] are about what [you do/your child does] online and on a cell phone?*



- Parents of 13- to 15-year-olds feel more informed (42% very informed) than do parents of older teens (31% very informed). Moreover, parents with lower levels of educational attainment are more likely to say they feel very informed about their child's online activities (43% high school education or less; 38% some college; 32% Bachelor's degree or higher).
- Likewise, younger teens (23% very informed) feel their parents are slightly more informed about what they do online than older teens (18%). Younger girls are particularly more inclined to believe their parents are very well informed (26%) than are younger boys (19%).

# Social networking and media sharing web sites expose the greatest gaps between teens' online activities and parents' knowledge of these activities.

## 5. When it comes to the ways teens communicate and engage digitally, parents' notions of their teens' routine activities generally align with teens' reported behavior.

- Texting and the use of social networks rise to the top of teens' online and cell phone behaviors. Nearly nine in 10 teens report sending or receiving text messages (86%) and using an online social networking site such as Facebook and Google Plus (88%) in the past 30 days.
- Daily use of both platforms is higher among girls (75% send daily text messages, 76% use social networking sites daily) than boys (71% text messaging; 71% social networking sites), and among 16- to 17-year-olds (81% text messaging; 78% social networking sites) than 13- to 15-year-olds (68% text messaging; 71% social networking sites).
- Nine in 10 (90%) teens say they send an e-mail or communicate using an online instant messenger (78%) on a daily basis or have in the past month, and two-thirds (68%) use the Internet to collaborate on homework or school projects.
- For other online and mobile behaviors tested, including several specific social network services, less than half of teens report doing these things daily or in the past 30 days.

## Teens and parents are largely in sync on teens' use of online and mobile platforms.

*[I have/my child has] done this in the past 30 days/daily*

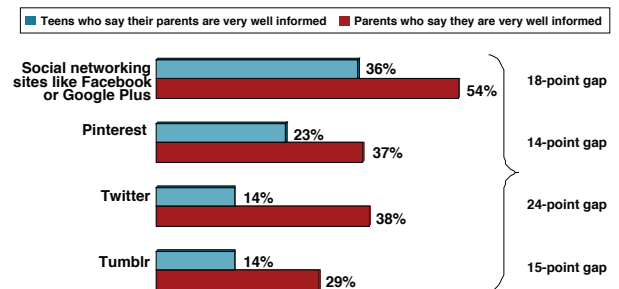
	Teens	Parents		Teens	Parents
Sent an e-mail	90%	89%	Posted a video on YouTube	29%	29%
Used online social networking site (Facebook/Google Plus)	88%	86%	Posted a photograph on Instagram	28%	35%
Sent/received text message	86%	90%	Posted or received comments on Instagram	24%	34%
Used online instant messenger like Facebook chat or Google chat	78%	75%	Post or blog on Tumblr	23%	20%
Collaborated on homework or a school project online	68%	76%	Pinned something or commented on something on Pinterest	23%	26%
Communicated by text or headset with other players while playing a game online	45%	54%	Used a service on cell phone like Foursquare or Loopt to "check in" to locations or share location with friends	17%	25%
Sent or received messages on Twitter	42%	40%			
Posted a comment on a blog post or news article	42%	40%			

## 6. Social networking and media sharing Web sites expose the greatest gaps between teens' online activities and parents' knowledge of these activities.

- Differences in parents' degree of knowledge about their teens' activities and teens' perceptions of their parents' awareness are greatest when it comes social networking platforms such as Twitter, Facebook or Google Plus, and media sharing Web sites like Tumblr and Pinterest. The largest gap exists around teens' use of Twitter, in which 38% of parents say they are well informed about their teen's use of the site, while just 14% of teen Twitter users say the same of their parents—a difference of 24 percentage points.
- There also are notable gaps when it comes to specific social networking services, such as Facebook, Pinterest, and Tumblr.

## Notable gaps exist in perceptions of how well informed parents are.

*How well informed do you think [your parents/you] are about what [you do/your child does] online on each of the following?*

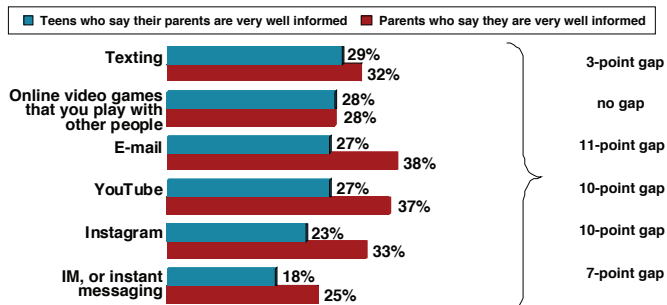


\*Each item asked of teens/parents who say they have/their child has used it in the past 30 days

- For other online platforms asked about in the survey, parents' self-reported level of awareness and teens' ideas about how well informed their parents are about their activities are more in line. The table on the next page summarizes the reports of teens and parents for these other online platforms. All results are shown among teens who use these online platforms and parents who say teens use them.

## For other online platforms, perceptions are more aligned.

*How well informed do you think [your parents/you] are about what [you do/your child does] online on each of the following?*



\*Each item asked of teens/parents who say they have/their child has used it in the past 30 days

well informed feel the same. And parents who monitor their teens' time online very closely (43% feel their teen is very safe online) feel more at ease than parents who monitor somewhat closely (32%) or not at all closely (35%).

- When teens were asked in an open-ended question what it means to feel "safe" online, the largest proportion (25%) of responses mention privacy and ensuring no one has access to personal or identifying information. Another 17% of teens say safety means preventing harm or harassment.
- For parents, avoiding "stranger danger" scenarios (29%) is top among their definition of a "safe" online experience, as is ensuring teens' privacy and the protection of their personal information (26%).

## 7. Both teens and parents feel that teens generally are safe online.

- A large proportion of teens report feeling safe online. Fully 95% of teens say they feel very (37%) or somewhat (58%) safe online. Similarly, 94% of parents say they feel their teen is very (36%) or somewhat (58%) safe online. Just 5% of teens and 6% of parents say they feel unsafe.
- Boys report feeling somewhat safer than girls (41% of boys report feeling "very safe"; 33% of girls say the same) and 44% of 16- to 17-year-old boys report feeling very safe online. Parents of boys, both older (39%) and younger (39%), also are more likely than parents of girls (33%) to report feeling their teen is very safe online. Parents of younger girls feel their children are least safe (31%).
- In addition, the more informed or engaged a parent feels about their teens' online activity, the more likely they are to report feeling confident their teen is very safe online. Nearly half (48%) of parents who say they are very well informed about their teens' online activity feel their child is very safe online, while only 28% of parents who say they are somewhat or less

**The more informed or engaged a parent feels about their teens' online activity, the more likely they are to feel their teen is very safe online.**

# 65%

of teens are very or somewhat concerned about their privacy online.

**8. When it comes to getting information about staying safe online, teens rely on parents and other adults, while parents look most to the media for information on keeping their teens safe.**

- When teens look to seek out information about how to stay safe online, nearly three in four (74%) turn to their parents. Other adults also play a key role in educating teens about online safety. Two-thirds (66%) of teens say they go to school or teachers for information, and half (51%) also consult other adults such as coaches, relatives, and parents of friends. Lesser yet notable proportions of teens say the general news media (48%), friends (40%), or social media (29%) are places they seek out information on online safety.
- Parents, on the other hand, turn to the general news media for information on how to best protect their son or daughter online. Fully 59% say the media is their top source. Other parents (46%) and adults such as coaches and relatives (44%) also play an advisory role. Fewer parents consult their teen's school or teachers (33%), social media (30%), or their children (21%) for advice on keeping their teens safe online.

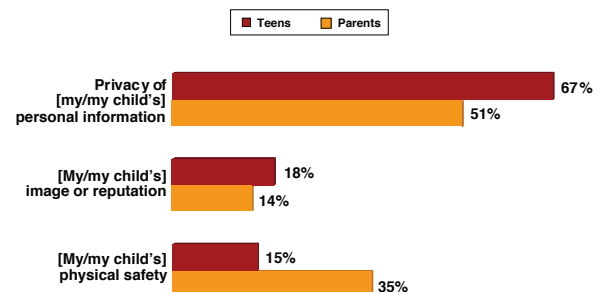
**9. Both teens and parents worry about the privacy of teens' personal information, while more than one-third of parents also are concerned about teens' physical safety being affected by their online activities. For teens overall, physical safety is a much lower concern, though this varies significantly by age and gender.**

- Parents and teens were asked about their level of concern for the following being harmed by teens' online activities: the privacy of their personal information, their image or reputation, and their physical safety. The survey shows that concern for the privacy of teens' personal information is greatest among both teens and parents, with 80% of parents saying they are very or somewhat concerned about privacy, including 45% who are very concerned. Nearly two-thirds (65%) of teens are very or somewhat concerned about privacy, including 35% who are very concerned.

- That said, when teens and parents are asked which of three issues relating to their daily online activities they are most concerned about, both groups rank the privacy of personal information as their top concern. More than two-thirds of teens (67%) and half of parents (51%) note privacy as their greatest concern. Both audiences rank a teens' image or reputation as lesser concern (18% of teens and 14% of parents rank it as their top concern).
- However, when it comes to concern over teens' physical safety, attitudes diverge. Only 15% of teens rank physical safety as their top concern, while more than one-third (35%) of parents say this their main worry. When asked specifically about concern over physical safety, more than half (58%) of teens say they are not very concerned or not at all concerned (42% say they are very/somewhat concerned), but 60% of parents say they are concerned about their child's physical safety online, including 35% who are very concerned.

**Privacy tops teens' and parents' concerns about teens' online activity.**

*This concerns me most about [my/my child's] online activity:*





- While not a main worry for teens and parents, both exhibit concern about teens' image or reputation being harmed online. Two-thirds (66%) of parents are very or somewhat concerned and half of teens feel this way (55% are very/somewhat concerned). Interestingly, boys are more likely to say image or reputation is a top concern (22%) than girls (15%).
- In terms of those groups who show the greatest concern across these three areas, the following themes emerge:
  - Parents of girls are more concerned than parents of boys by an average of nine points.
    - Concern over the privacy of personal information is highest among parents of girls (49%), but slightly less so among parents of boys (40%).
    - 39% of parents of girls report being very concerned about their daughter's physical safety, and 31% of parents of boys report feeling the same.
    - Concern over image or reputation is higher among parents of girls (38%) than it is among parents of boys (28%).
  - Greater oversight corresponds to greater concern. Parents who monitor closely report higher levels of concern, as do teens who say their parents closely monitor their online activity.
  - Younger teens are more concerned than older teens, particularly regarding physical safety. Girls also are more likely to cite physical safety as a top concern (17%) than are boys (12%), and it increases to 22% among 13- to 15-year-old teen girls. Moreover, parents of girls are just as concerned about physical safety (42%) as they are about privacy of personal information (44%).
  - Pestering has an impact. Teens who are most bothered by their parents' monitoring of their online activity demonstrate higher levels of concern across the three areas. On average,

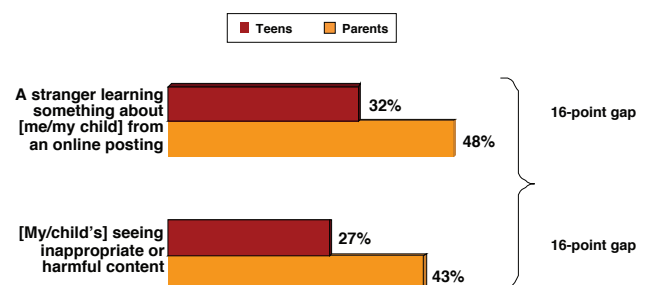
the proportion of teens who say they are "very concerned" about each issue is 11 points higher than that of teens who are not bothered by their parents' active monitoring.

**10. When it comes to specific concerns about teens' online activity, parents and teens largely are on the same page, but attitudes differ on the hazards posed by strangers and inappropriate content.**

- Parents and teens indicate similar levels of concern for a number of negative potential outcomes of teens' online behaviors and activities. Concerns about teens' postings "haunting" them or creating future problems with getting a job (54% of teens and 51% of parents are concerned about this), applying to colleges (53% of teens, 50% of parents), or with teachers at school (44% of teens, 48% of parents) are roughly the same for each audience.
- The biggest gaps in concern exist regarding **teens being exposed to harmful or inappropriate content** and **a stranger learning something about a teen from online posts**, with parents reporting greater levels of concern for both.

**Parents' and teens' attitudes differ on "stranger danger" and content.**

*I am VERY concerned about this happening as a result of [my/my child's] online activity:*







- When it comes to teens being exposed to harmful content, there is a 26-point gap in overall concern (79% among parents; 53% among teens) and a 16-point gap among those who are very concerned about this issue (43% among parents; 27% among teens).
- A 19-point gap exists between the proportion of parents who are concerned overall about a stranger learning something about a teen from their online posts (78% among parents; 59% among teens) and a 16-point gap exists among those who are very concerned (48% among parents; 32% among teens).
- For both items, parents of girls exhibit greater levels of concern than do parents of boys.
- Smaller gaps in concern are reported for the following:
  - Identity theft from online posts is teens' greatest concern (64%) and likewise top among parents (78%).
  - Parents (57%) are slightly more likely than teens (43%) to show concern about teens being bullied for something they posted online, and for teens' being teased by friends about something they posted online (50% of parents say they are concerned; 41% of teens are concerned). The proportion of parents (61% versus 56% among teens) who are very concerned about a company tracking teens' online behavior also is slightly above that of teens.
  - Teens are only slightly more likely to worry about someone posting unflattering pictures of them (54%) than are parents (49%).

#### 11. There is some misunderstanding between parents and teens about the areas in which concerns about online safety are greatest.

- When presented with the same lists of concerns as mentioned previously, parents and teens were asked

which two or three items most concerned them, as well as their perception of what items the other audience would report as their top worry. The survey shows some disconnect for teens and parents as to what they believe the other is really worried about, particularly among parents.

- Teens are most likely to say that their parents are worried about someone stealing their identity (46%), a stranger learning something about them (41%), or seeing inappropriate content (41%), and they are largely correct; parents do in fact report these as being among their top concerns (38%, 42%, and 32%, respectively).
- However, teens' perceptions are wrong in two areas: 33% of teens believe parents are concerned about their child getting in trouble with colleges and 26% have similar concerns about getting into trouble with employers, but fewer than 10% of parents raise either issue as a top concern.

### Some misunderstanding emerges about parents' greatest concerns about online safety.

#### *Parents' top two or three concerns about their child's online activities*

	Parents say:	Teens say:
Child providing too much personal information online	46%	N/A
Child communicating with a stranger online	43%	N/A
Stranger learning things about child from online post	42%	41%
Someone stealing child's identity from info posted online	38%	46%
Child seeing inappropriate or harmful content	32%	41%
Child being bullied for his/her online post	17%	18%
Child posting something unacceptable/inappropriate	16%	N/A
Company tracking child's online behavior for marketing	11%	8%
Child's online post creating job application problems	8%	26%
Someone posting unflattering/unattractive picture of child	7%	4%
Child's online post creating college application problems	7%	33%
Friends making fun of child for online post	6%	7%
Child's online post getting him/her in trouble with teachers	6%	13%
I am/my child is not concerned about any of these	4%	14%

- Discrepancies between parents' perceptions of teens' top concerns and teens' actual worries are more notable.
  - For instance, just 21% of parents say teens are most concerned about identity theft, when this is the top concern for a plurality of teens (44%).
  - Parents overestimate teens' concerns about unflattering pictures of themselves being posted

online: 30% of parents say this, but only 19% of teens say this is one of their top concerns.

- Fewer than 10% of parents say teens are worried about online posts creating problems with colleges or employers, when in reality 30% of teens say these are top concerns.
- Most interestingly, 22% of parents say that teens are not concerned about ANY items queried, yet just 11% of teens say that is the case.

## There is even more misunderstanding about teens' greatest concerns about online safety.

*Teens' top two or three concerns about their online activities*

	Teens say:	Parents say:
Someone stealing my identity using info posted online	44%	21%
My online posts creating college application problems	32%	9%
My online post getting them in trouble with parents	30%	N/A
My online post creating job application problems	30%	8%
Stranger learning things about me from online posts	29%	23%
My seeing inappropriate or harmful content	19%	11%
Someone posting an ugly or unflattering picture of me	19%	30%
Company tracking my online behavior for marketing	15%	5%
My being bullied for online post	15%	25%
Friends making fun of me for online post	14%	29%
My online post getting me in trouble with teachers	10%	17%
I am/my child is not concerned about any of these	11%	22%

### 12. Teens are taking many steps to protect their privacy and information online, particularly when it comes to the use of social networking sites.

- Teens report having taken a number of steps to protect themselves online. Among those who use various social networks, the proportion of teens who have taken proactive steps to ensure their safety are particularly high: 81% have set privacy settings on their social networking account, 65% have set limits on who they share their posts with, 54% have removed a tagged photo, 52% have blocked someone from seeing posts whom they previously allowed, and 50% have unfriended someone due to an offensive post. Just less than half (49%) of teens also say they have marked a comment as "private."

**81%**  
of social networking teens  
have set privacy settings  
on their account.

- Fewer numbers of teens have asked someone to remove a picture of them from a social networking or photo site (36%) or have chosen a particular social networking site because they knew their parents would not see their posts (30%).
  - Twitter and Instagram users are active in setting privacy settings on their account (48% for Twitter, 44% for Instagram), but less likely to limit those who can follow their posts (26% on Twitter, 33% on Instagram).
- ### 13. Parents also say they are doing several things to protect their child's safety, including many actions of which teens are unaware.
- Significant gaps exist between what parents say they do to protect their children online and what teens say parents are doing in this arena:
    - Reviewing teens' browsing history (79% of parents have done this; 29% of teens say their parents have done this)—a 50-point gap;
    - Logging on to teens' Facebook account (71% of parents; 22% of teens)—a 49-point gap;



70%  
of parents whose teens  
use a cell phone say they  
review text messages.

- Reviewing text messages on teens' phones (70% of parents; 30% of teens)—a 40-point gap;
- Setting up parental controls on a tablet or home computer (33-point gap; 59% of parents; 26% of teens) or cell phone (27-point gap; 38% of parents; 11% of teens);
- Using GPS technology to track teens' whereabouts (22% of parents; 8% of teens) — a 14-point gap.
- Though gaps in awareness about the actions above may be explained given that most actions can be done without a child's knowledge, several other measures to keep teens' safe that involve conversations with teens also demonstrate a disconnect between teens and parents:
  - Parents discussing rules or expectations with teens regarding time spent online or on a mobile device. More than nine in 10 (93%) parents say they have done this, while only 61% of teens report having had such a conversation with their parents.
  - Setting limits or rules about the use of online or mobile platforms. Significant gaps in awareness

exist when it comes to teens' and parents' reports of rules or limits on the amount of time a teen can spend online (36-point gap), or on a cell phone (39-point gap), as well as limits on teens' online search capabilities (28-point gap) and the number of text messages they can send (15-point gap).

**14. Despite actions taken by parents and teens to protect teens online, notable proportions of teens say they have done things online that would enable a stranger to learn personal information about them.**

- Teens were asked whether they have done a number of things online with someone they do NOT know personally, ranging from the innocuous (commenting on blogs, sharing recommendations for TV shows), to the risky (mentioning the town they lived in, sharing their first or last name), to the truly dangerous (sharing their address or password, making a plan to meet someone).
- When it comes to their online interactions with someone they do NOT know personally, the less risky actions are most common. Teens are most likely to have friended a stranger on Facebook (49%), shared recommendations for TV, music, or games (49%), chatted online through an instant messaging program (44%), or commented on a stranger's blog post (32%).
- When it comes to riskier behaviors tested, more than half (51%) of teens report to have done at least one of the following items listed on the following page. Boys (55%) are more likely than girls (48%) to have done one of the items below, as are 16- to 17-year-olds (59%) over their younger counterparts (47%):
  - 35% have mentioned the city or town where they live
  - 31% have shared their first or last name
  - 25% have mentioned the school they go to
  - 21% have shared their phone number



- Few teens say they have done the most dangerous of behaviors tested. These include making a plan to meet a stranger (11%), sharing their address (6%), or sharing their password to a social networking site or online account (3%).
- These findings highlight the importance of parents having a conversation with their teens about safe online behavior, particularly given that teens are less likely than parents to say their parents have discussed rules or expectations with them about time online.

**15. While teens report steps they are taking to remain safe and vigilant while online, two in five admit to posting something online that they later regretted.**

- More than two in five (43%) teens say they have posted something online, either on a social networking site, Instagram, Twitter, or elsewhere that they later regretted; 57% of teens have never regretted a post.
  - Teens who say their parents are very well informed about their online activity are much less likely to have regretted a post (29%) than are teens whose parents are only somewhat (49%) or less informed (44%) about their time spent online.
  - And those who post daily to Twitter (52%), Instagram (51%), and Facebook or Google Plus (48%) are most likely to regret a past post.
- The most common reasons teens give for regretting a post are because they were mean to someone else (28%), they shared more information than they should have (28%), because other people teased them about it (21%), or because it got them in trouble with a parent, teacher, or boss at work (20%).
- Among those who admit to having regretted an online post in the past, fully 83% later deleted it.

43%

of teens say they have  
posted something online  
they later regretted.