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Parents around the world are largely unaware of their children's internet use, research suggests

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Primary Topic Channel: [Safety & security](#)

A recent survey by internet security firm Symantec Corp. suggests that many parents are unaware of their children's internet activity and typically underestimate how often their kids encounter online threats.

For Symantec's "Norton Online Living Report," research firm Harris Interactive surveyed more than 4,500 adults and 2,700 children ages 8 to 17 from the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, Germany, France, Brazil, China, and Japan from November to December 2007. To qualify as survey respondents, subjects had to report spending an hour or more online each month.

The findings show that internet users generally are confident, socializing with strangers online (21 percent of U.S. respondents said they do this) and making friends online (35 percent of U.S. respondents).

However, though parents and children share some of the same online activities, many parents are unaware of their children's online activities and the security threats that surround those activities.

Overall, parents appear to underestimate how often their children encounter indiscretions online, such as receiving requests for personal information, being approached online by a stranger, and experiencing cyber pranks or bullying.

In fact, although 25 percent of U.S. children report having experienced requests for personal information, fewer than 2 in 10 parents think this is happening to their children.

Although 13 percent of U.S. children report experiencing cyber pranks, only 2 percent of parents believe their children are being cyber bullied.

Also, although 16 percent of U.S. children report being approached by an online stranger, only 6 percent of parents think their children are being approached.

About one in five U.S. children say they do things online that their parents would not approve of. They also report spending 10 times more time online than their parents think they do. Parents think their children are online about two hours a month, but in reality, children report spending 20 hours a month online.

This "digital disconnect" between parents and their children can be attributed to a lack of communication, the report says. The survey reveals that only half of parents say they've spoken to their children about practicing safe online habits. This is upsetting, the report says, considering that 81 percent of U.S. children say they are comfortable talking to their parents about their online experiences.

What's more, this digital disconnect is not just happening in the United States--it's happening in most major countries

around the world.

"This report clearly demonstrated a global digital divide" between parents and their children, said Marian Merritt, internet safety advocate for Symantec. "We've always taught our children to not talk to strangers in the offline world, and now we must teach them how to safely exist in an online world filled with strangers."

Dave Cole, senior product manager for Symantec's Norton software, said this disconnect has arisen as a result of how quickly technology has permeated every aspect of life.

Two-way communication technologies have been seamlessly integrated into online games, eCommerce, and more, Cole said. However, "the integration happened so rapidly that we never stopped to think that we were really connecting with strangers," he said. "It's only natural that the relationships that were born online would eventually migrate to the offline world. What surprised us was how fast this migration has occurred and how deeply it has infiltrated nearly every activity."

Although half of the parents surveyed said they don't speak to their children about practicing safe online habits, that doesn't mean they don't care.

For instance, 79 percent of U.S. parents are concerned about their children being approached with inappropriate content or solicitations online, and 88 percent of U.S. parents believe the internet is not as safe for children as for adults.

Yet, fewer than half (48 percent) of U.S. parents set parental controls on their family's computer.

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<http://www.eschoolnews.com/conference-info/necc/>

Nancy Willard, head of the Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use, believes that internet "fear mongering" is interfering with parent-child communication about internet activities. She believes that many of the online-safety initiatives in the United States tend to focus heavily on the dangers of using the internet and are trying to scare parents into paying closer attention.

"What we need to do is to eliminate the fear mongering," says Willard. "Young people face risks online, just as they do in the real world. They need accurate information on these risks--along with practical strategies they can use to prevent themselves from getting into risky situations, detect when they are at risk, and respond effectively, including when they really need to talk with an adult."

Willard says an event to be held this October by the [National Cyber Security Alliance](#) will mark a big push to address internet safety and responsible web use by children. She hopes that many schools will host internet-safety presentations for parents during that month, as well as provide information for students.

Wiredsafety.org, another online safety organization, has a page for parents, giving them access to information about the internet and online resources that can help them talk to their children about internet safety.

Symantec also has a [Norton Family Resources](#) web site that includes information about how to talk to a child about internet safety, and all online users can take a [quiz](#) to see how much they know about the internet and online safety at the Norton Cyber Smackdown challenge.

Links:

[Norton Online Living Report](#)

[Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use](#)

[Wiredsafety.org](#)

Note to readers:

*Don't forget to visit the **Safeguarding School Data** resource center. It seems like you can't go a whole week lately without hearing about some major data security breach that has made national headlines. For businesses, these data leaks are bad enough—but for schools, they can be especially costly, as network security breaches can put schools in violation of several federal laws intended to protect students' privacy. Go to: [Safeguarding School Data](#)*

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