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# Teens, Kindness and Cruelty on Social Network Sites

*How American teens navigate the new world of "digital citizenship"*

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# Summary of findings

Social media use has become so pervasive in the lives of American teens that having a presence on a social network site is almost synonymous with being online. Fully 95% of all teens ages 12-17 are now online and 80% of those online teens are users of social media sites.<sup>1</sup> Many log on daily to their social network pages and these have become spaces where much of the social activity of teen life is echoed and amplified—in both good and bad ways.

We focused our attention in this research on social network sites because we wanted to understand the types of experiences teens are having there and how they are addressing negative behavior when they see it or experience it. As they navigate challenging social interactions online, who is influencing their sense of what it means to be a good or bad “digital citizen”? How often do they intervene to stand up for others? How often do they join in the mean behavior?

In our survey, we follow teens’ experiences of online cruelty – either personally felt or observed – from incident to resolution. We asked them about how they reacted to the experience and how they saw others react. We asked them about whether they have received and where they sought advice – both general advice about online safety and responsibility and specific advice on how to handle a witnessed experience of online cruelty on a social network site.

We also probed the environment around teens’ online experiences by examining their privacy controls and practices, as well as the level of regulation of their online environment by their parents. We further sought insight into more serious experiences that teens have in their lives, including bullying both on- and offline and the exchange of sexually charged digital images.

What follows are the main findings from a report conducted by the Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project in partnership with the Family Online Safety Institute and supported by Cable in the Classroom. The data discussed in this report are the result of a three-part, multi-modal study that included interviews with experts, seven focus groups with middle and high school students, and a nationally representative random-digit-dial telephone survey of teens and parents. The survey was fielded April 19 through July 14, 2011, and was administered by landline and cell phone, in English and Spanish, to 799 teens ages 12-17 and a parent or guardian. Black and Latino families were oversampled.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In this report, when we use the term “social media users” we mean people who use a social network site and/ or Twitter. When we use the term “social network site users” we are referring only to those who answered yes to the question, “Do you ever use an online social networking site like MySpace or Facebook?” Twitter use was determined from a separate question that may have been asked before or after the social network use question. There are separate references throughout the report to “social media users,” who are a combination of respondents who answered yes to either using social network sites or using Twitter. However, it should be noted that there is almost complete overlap among Twitter users and users of another social network site, so for practical purposes, social network users and social media users are nearly identical in this report.

<sup>2</sup> For more details about the impact of oversampling on this study, please visit: <http://www.people-press.org/methodology/sampling/oversamples/>

The margin of error for the full sample is  $\pm 5$  percentage points. The margin of error for the 623 teen social network site users is  $\pm 6$  percentage points.<sup>3</sup>

## **The majority of social media-using teens say their peers are mostly kind to one another on social network sites. Their views are less positive than those of social media-using adults.**

Most American teens who use social media say that in their experience, people their age are mostly kind to one another on social network sites. Overall, 69% of social media-using teens think that peers are mostly kind to each other on social network sites. Another 20% say that peers are mostly unkind, while 11% volunteered that “it depends.” At the same time, in a similar question asked of adults 18 and older, 85% of social media-using adults reported that people are mostly kind to one another on social network sites, while just 5% felt that people are mostly unkind.<sup>4</sup>

### **88% of social media-using teens have witnessed other people be mean or cruel on social network sites.**

Among social media users, 88% of teens have seen someone be mean or cruel to another person on a social network site. Asked, “When you’re on a social networking site, how often do you see people being mean or cruel?” teens who use social network sites say the following about how frequently they witnessed such behavior:

- 12% say they witnessed cruel behavior “frequently.”
- 29% say they saw meanness on social network sites “sometimes.”
- 47% say they saw such behavior “only once in a while.”

Overall, adults are less likely to say they have seen meanness on social media; 69% of adult social media users say they have seen people being mean and cruel to others on social network sites.

- 7% of adult social media users witness meanness or cruelty “frequently” on the sites.
- 18% say they saw meanness on social network sites “sometimes.”
- 44% say they saw such behavior “only once in a while.”

### **15% of social media-using teens say they have been the target of online meanness.**

Some 15% of teen social media users have experienced such harassment themselves in the past 12 months, while 85% of them have not.

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<sup>3</sup> For more details about how the study was conducted, please see the Methodology section at the end of this report.

<sup>4</sup> Adult data in this report come from Pew Internet’s August 2011 Tracking Survey among adults 18 and older, n=2260. For this analysis, the question asked of adults was slightly different than the one asked of teens: “Overall, in your experience, are people mostly kind or mostly unkind to one another on social networking sites?”

Adult social media users are just as likely to say that someone has been mean or cruel to them on social network sites in the last year. Some 13% of social media-using adults 18 and older report that someone had been mean or cruel to them on a social network in the last 12 months.

Among the social network site-using teens who have experienced cruelty or mean behavior on social network sites, there are no statistically significant differences by age, gender, race, or socio-economic status. In other words, those who experience mean or cruel behavior are equally as likely to be older teens or younger teens; girls or boys; and youth from higher-income families or those from lower-income families.

### **More teens report positive personal outcomes than negative ones from interactions on social network sites: 78% report at least one good outcome and 41% report at least one negative outcome.**

We asked social media-using teens about a series of experiences and interactions they may have had with other people on social network sites. Overall, these teens are much more likely to report positive experiences; 78% say they had at least one positive outcome from their interactions on social network sites.

- 65% of social media-using teens have had an experience on a social network site that made them feel good about themselves.
- 58% of social media-using teens have felt closer to another person because of an experience on a social network site.

Still, a substantial number of teens report specific negative outcomes from experiences on social network sites: 41% of teens who use social media say they have experienced at least one of the negative outcomes we asked about:

- 25% of social media teens have had an experience on a social network site that resulted in a face-to-face argument or confrontation with someone.
- 22% have had an experience that ended their friendship with someone.
- 13% have had an experience that caused a problem with their parents.
- 13% have felt nervous about going to school the next day.
- 8% have gotten into a physical fight with someone else because of something that happened on a social network site.
- 6% have gotten in trouble at school because of an experience on a social network site.

## 19% of teens have been bullied<sup>5</sup> in the past year in some form – either in person, online, by text, or by phone.

Overall, 19% of all teens report that they have been bullied in the last 12 months in at least one of the four scenarios about which we asked. Half of bullied teens say they were bullied in multiple ways.

- 12% of all teens report being bullied in person in the last 12 months.
- 9% of all teens have been bullied via text message in the last 12 months.
- 8% say they have experienced some form of online bullying, such as through email, a social network site or instant messaging.
- 7% say they have been bullied by voice calls over the phone.
- Girls are much more likely than boys to report they had been bullied in various ways, except in-person bullying, which happened to boys and girls in roughly equal proportion.

## How do people respond to mean behavior online? Teens say they most often see people ignoring cruelty, but a substantial number have witnessed others standing up for victims.

Social media-using teens who have witnessed online cruelty say that people most often appear to ignore the situation, with a slightly smaller number of teens saying they also see others defending someone and telling others to stop their cruel behavior.

- 95% of social media-using teens who have witnessed cruel behavior on the sites say they have seen others ignoring the mean behavior; 55% witness this frequently.
- 84% have seen people defend the person being harassed, with 27% seeing this frequently.
- 84% have seen others tell someone to stop; 20% report seeing this frequently.

## A majority of teens say their own reaction has been to ignore mean behavior when they see it on social media.

When asked about their own behavior, social media-using teens are most likely to say they ignore the behavior themselves, though others defend the victim and tell people to stop.

- 90% of social media-using teens who have witnessed online cruelty say they have ignored mean behavior on social media, and more than a third (35%) have done this frequently.
- 80% say they have defended the victim; 25% have done so frequently.
- 79% have told the other person to stop being mean and cruel; 20% have done so frequently.

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<sup>5</sup> The bullying question was worded as follows: “In the past 12 months, have you been bullied \_\_\_\_? In person? By phone call – that is, on a landline or cell? By text message? Online [such as through email, a social networking site or instant messaging]?”

## Two-thirds of teens who have witnessed online cruelty have also witnessed others joining in – and 21% say they have also joined in the harassment.

Despite the high likelihood of teens seeing bystanders responding positively by standing up for or defending the attacked individual, they are also likely to witness others joining in the mean behavior.

- 67% of social media-using teens have witnessed others joining in the harassment they have seen. Teens are more likely to say they see joining in “once in a while” (24%) or “sometimes” (23%), than they are to report seeing it frequently (19%).
- 21% of social media-using teens who have witnessed online cruelty say they have joined in. Most of these teens (12%) say they have joined in the mean behavior only “once in a while,” 7% say “sometimes” and 2% say they have done it “frequently.”

## Teens rely most heavily on parents and peers for advice about online behavior and coping with challenging experiences.

For general advice and influence, parents are still the top source for teen internet and cell phone users. However, teens receive advice from a wide array of sources.

- 86% of online and cell phone-using teens say they have received general advice about how to use the internet responsibly and safely from their parents.
- 70% of online and cell-using teens say they have gotten advice about internet safety from teachers or another adult at school.
- 45% have received advice from friends or classmates, 45% have received general advice from an older relative, and 46% have received internet safety advice from a brother, sister, or cousin.
- 58% of teen internet and cell phone users say their parents have been the biggest influence on what they think is appropriate or inappropriate when using the internet or a cell phone.
- 18% of teens say their friends have been their biggest influence on appropriate internet or cell phone behavior.
- 18% say “no one” has influenced them.

We also asked teens who had specifically witnessed or experienced online cruelty whether they *sought* out advice on how to cope with or respond to that experience, and who they went to for such information. Some 36% of teen social media users who have witnessed online cruelty seek advice on how to cope, and nearly all say the advice is mostly good.

- 51% of girls who have witnessed cruelty online have sought advice, as have 20% of boys.
- 92% of those who asked for advice say that the advice they received was “helpful.”
- 53% of the teens who have witnessed online cruelty and then sought advice for how to handle it have reached out to a friend or peer, while 36% sought advice from parents.
- Younger teen girls ages 12-13 are much more likely to rely on friends and peers than older girls.

## Most of these exchanges happening on social network sites are not taking place in full public view, as the majority of teens take various steps to manage their privacy online.

The vast majority of teens say they have private social network site profiles that are visible only to “friends.”

- 62% of teens who have a social media profile say the profile they use most often is set to be private so that only their friends can see the content they post.<sup>6</sup>
- 19% say their profile is partially private so that friends of friends or their networks can see some version of their profile.
- 17% say their profile is set to public so that everyone can see it.

This distribution is consistent regardless of how often a teen uses social network sites – in other words, there are no differences in this privacy behavior between teens who are heavy social network site users and those who are lighter users. However, the teens who have fully public profiles are more likely than teens who limit access to have had a bad experience on those sites (23% vs. 12%).

## 55% of all online teens say they have decided not to post content that might reflect poorly on them in the future.

Beyond social media sites, teens are at least occasionally thinking about the impact of their digital footprints online, and how the content associated with their names may affect their reputation. More than half of all online teens (55%) say they have decided not to post something online because they were concerned that it might reflect badly on them in the future. Teen social network site users are almost twice as likely as non-social network site-using online teens (60% vs. 34%) to say they have withheld content after considering the potential ramifications.

- Older teen internet users (ages 14-17) are more likely than younger teens (ages 12-13) to say they have reconsidered posting content online after thinking about the possibility of negative implications (59% vs. 46%).
- The oldest group of online teens—who are likely to be preparing for or in the midst of college and job applications—report the highest levels of this kind of digital withholding; 67% of online 17-year-olds say they have withheld content that might damage their reputation.

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<sup>6</sup> This figure is consistent with what we have found in the past. In a similar question asked in 2006, 59% of teens with “active profiles” said that their profile was visible only to friends. See: <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2007/Teens-Privacy-and-Online-Social-Networks/5-Online-Privacy--What-Teens-Share-and-Restrict-in-an-Online-Environment/05-Teens-walk-the-line-between-openness-and-privacy.aspx>

## A notable number of teens also engage in online practices that may have the potential to compromise their safety online.

Close to half of online teens have said they were older than they are in order to access a website or online service, and a third have shared a password.

- 44% of online teens admit to lying about their age so they could access a website or sign up for an online account. Social network site-using teens are twice as likely as non-users to say they misrepresent their age online in order to gain access to websites and online services (49% vs. 26%).
- 30% of online teens reports sharing one of their passwords with a friend, boyfriend, or girlfriend.
- 47% of online girls 14-17 say they have shared their passwords, compared with 27% of boys the same age.

## Most parents of teens talk with their child or use non-technical measures to manage their teens' online experiences.

The vast majority of parents have had conversations with their teens about safe and risky online practices.

- 94% of parents of online teens say they have talked with their teen about what kinds of things should and should not be shared online.
- 93% have talked with their child about ways to use the internet and cell phones safely.
- 87% have suggested ways to behave toward other people online.
- 87% of parents have talked with their child about what he or she does on the internet.

The majority of parents also say they have taken various steps to manage and monitor their child's online activities.

- 80% of parents who use social media and who also have a child who uses social media have friended their child on social media.<sup>7</sup>
- 77% of parents of internet users have checked which websites their child visited, up from 65% of parents who did this in 2006.
- 66% of parents have checked to see what information was available online about their child.<sup>8</sup>
- 61% of *teens* report that their parents have checked their social network site profile.<sup>9</sup>

About half of parents use parental controls to manage their child's online experience.

- 54% of parents of internet users report using parental controls or other means of blocking, filtering, or monitoring their child's online activities.
- 34% of parents say they have used parental controls to restrict their child's use of a cell phone.

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<sup>7</sup> Asked only of parents who used social media and had a child who uses social media – not asked of teens

<sup>8</sup> Asked only of parents who used the internet – not asked of teens

<sup>9</sup> Asked only of teens who use social network sites or twitter.



**39% of all parents of teens have connected to their child on a social network site, but that does not necessarily prevent online trouble for the teen.**

We find that even when parents friend their children on social network sites, it does not necessarily head off problems on those sites. Fully 87% of parents of teens are online and 67% of those online parents use social network sites. And of those social network site-using parents (who have children who also use social network sites), 80% have friended or connected with their child via social media. That translates into 45% of all online parents of teens and 39% of all parents of teenagers who are “friends” with their children on social media sites.

- Parents who have friended their child on social network sites are more likely to report using parental controls.
- Teens who are social media friends with their parents are also more likely to report that they had a problem with their parents because of an experience on social media.

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## About the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project

The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project is one of seven projects that make up the Pew Research Center, a nonpartisan, nonprofit "fact tank" that provides information on the issues, attitudes and trends shaping America and the world. The Project produces reports exploring the impact of the internet on families, communities, work and home, daily life, education, health care, and civic and political life. The Pew Internet Project takes no positions on policy issues related to the internet or other communications technologies. It does not endorse technologies, industry sectors, companies, nonprofit organizations, or individuals.

While we thank our research partners for their helpful guidance, the Pew Internet Project had full control over the design, implementation, analysis and writing of this survey. The presentation of these findings, as well as any omissions or errors, is the authors' responsibility alone.

## About Cable in the Classroom

Cable in the Classroom (CIC), the national education foundation of the U.S. cable industry, advocates for digital citizenship and the visionary, sensible, and effective use of cable's broadband technology, services, and content in teaching and learning. Since 1989, CIC has also supported the complimentary provision, by cable companies and programmers, of broadband and multichannel video services and educational content to the nation's schools. For more information, visit [www.ciconline.org](http://www.ciconline.org).

## About the Family Online Safety Institute

The Family Online Safety Institute (FOSI) works to make the online world safer for kids and their families by identifying and promoting best practices, tools and methods that also respect free speech. FOSI is a trusted, international convener, bringing together leaders in government, industry and the nonprofit sectors to collaborate and innovate new solutions in child safety in a Web 2.0 world. FOSI's members include: AOL, AT&T, BT Retail, Comcast, Disney, Entertainment Software Association, Facebook, France Telecom, Google, GSM Association, Microsoft, Motion Picture Association of America, NCTA, Nominum, Optenet, RuleSpace, Sprint, StreamShield, Symantec, Time Warner Cable, Telefónica, TELMEX, USTelecom, The Wireless Foundation, Verizon and Yahoo!. For more information, visit [www.fosi.org](http://www.fosi.org).

# Introduction

This study aims to understand the social and emotional climate that teens experience in spaces where they can interact with others online. There has been considerable concern among parents, teachers, policy makers, and advocates about the nature and intensity of online social encounters among teens. In this research, we pay particular attention to teens' experiences on social network sites, including Twitter.<sup>10</sup> Do teens find these relatively new online social spaces friendly or hostile or somewhere in between?

As in other aspects of their lives, teens witness a range of behaviors online. A Facebook profile can be the site of a budding romance or the staging ground for conflict. Exchanges that begin online can move offline and face-to-face conversations that are initiated in person can continue in social media spaces where they are then annotated with comments, photos, and videos. When a conflict arises, some choose to air their grievances in full view of their friends, while others feel that private communication channels are a more appropriate place to deal with relationship issues.

But these social media-based interactions are not face-to-face. They are mediated, in this case by a computer or cell phone or a tablet computer. In the past, mediated interactions might have taken place via paper letter or set of wires and a phone between the conversing partners. Now, all internet users have access to a broader digital audience. And in this new environment, social norms of behavior and etiquette are still being formed.

Norms are “rules, about which there is some degree of consensus, and which are enforced through social sanctions.”<sup>11</sup> These rules do not have to be written down or made explicit, but they are understood well enough by the group so that they shape people's behavior. Norms also vary from group to group and can cause problems in these new social media realms where users frequently intersect with a diverse array of groups whose norms may be different.

This navigational complexity makes these spaces especially interesting and challenging for teens because some of the “work” of being an adolescent is to incorporate community norms into their lives at the same time the teen is trying to craft a personal identity.

We focused our inquiry on social media sites because they are spaces of online interaction that a large number of teens use. We wanted to understand the types of experiences teens were having online and what kinds of other online – and offline – experiences resulted from those interactions. We examined what teens observe online and how they respond to those experiences. We asked where teens get advice about how to be safe online, and who they seek out for help when they have a specific situation

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<sup>10</sup> When initially conceiving the idea for this report, we had anticipated including networked gaming sites as spaces of online interaction, but unfortunately because of survey space considerations, we were unable to include them in this study.

<sup>11</sup> Horne, Christine. (2001) “Sociological perspectives on the emergence of social norms.” In *Social Norms*, (Hechter, M. and Opp, K-D., eds) Russell Sage Foundation: New York. p. 5

to discuss. We asked them who served as the greatest influence in their thinking about what behavior was appropriate and inappropriate online and on their mobile phones.

We also probed the environment around teens' online experiences by examining their privacy controls and practices, as well as the level of regulation of their online environment by their parents. We further probed more serious experiences that teens have in their lives, including bullying in a variety of locales and the exchange of sexually charged digital images.

Understanding bullying and what we call "social media meanness" has gotten more complicated even since we began this project just under a year ago. Researchers Alice Marwick and danah boyd have recently released research that complicates the term "bullying"<sup>12</sup> and suggests that some of the troubling interactions that adults label as bullying may be referred to as "drama" by teens. According to Marwick and boyd, the term "drama" is used by teens to assert a greater sense of agency – or control – in their social lives. The authors argue that the word "drama" sidesteps being positioned as a "victim" or "bully" and allows teens to see themselves as active participants in the things that happen to them.

This survey's construction of "mean and cruel" online behavior attempts to get at some of these behavioral distinctions, but it may not cover the entire landscape of teens' social experiences online fully, even in conjunction with our bullying questions.

In this study, we are using a variety of different terms to talk about these issues – "mean and cruel behavior," "social media meanness," "harassment," and "bullying." While "mean and cruel" behavior and harassment both appear in the same question and are used interchangeably, bullying is asked as a distinctly separate question. We at Pew Internet have treated bullying and meanness as different experiences, but we acknowledge that many of our respondents may not make the same distinctions.<sup>13</sup> In this survey, each of these offered terms is left undefined, and so each teen (or adult) respondent determined her or his own meaning when answering the question.

The focus on bullying and cyberbullying has become intense in the policy community over the past two years, much in the same way concern about online predators captured public attention in prior years. This report aims to provide impartial data and context to these important and evolving conversations about online safety by giving voice to teens' own experiences, however they may be defined.

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<sup>12</sup> Marwick, Alice E. and boyd, danah, *The Drama! Teen Conflict, Gossip, and Bullying in Networked Publics* (September 12, 2011). A Decade in Internet Time: Symposium on the Dynamics of the Internet and Society, September 2011. Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1926349>

<sup>13</sup> Many bullying researchers rely on the definition of bullying pioneered more than three decades ago by Dan Olweus. He stated that bullying required unwanted aggressive actions that are repeated over time and involve an imbalance of power between the participants (<http://olweus.org/public/bullying.page>). However, adolescents do not necessarily use these criteria to evaluate whether something they witness or experience is bullying or not.

## How the study was conducted

To answer these questions, we designed a multi-modal study. We began in December 2010 with a meeting of experts (for list of experts, please see Acknowledgements) to advise us on how to think about the concept of digital citizenship and to help us refine the focus of the project. In January and February 2011, we conducted 7 focus groups with middle and high school students in the greater Washington, DC metropolitan area. Each focus group had between 7 and 14 people, for a total of 57 participants across all groups. The groups were co-ed and the ages of participants ranged from 12 to 19. The participants crossed the socio-economic spectrum. Black youth were overrepresented. After finishing the groups and synthesizing the findings from both the experts meeting and the focus groups, we wrote and fielded a telephone survey. The survey was fielded April 19 through July 14, 2011 and was administered by landline and cell phone, in English and in Spanish, to 799 teens ages 12-17 and a parent or guardian. Black and Latino families were oversampled. The margin of error for the full sample is  $\pm 5$  percentage points. The margin of error for the 623 teen social network site users is  $\pm 6$  percentage points. In 11% of the interviews (90 out of 799), the interviewer noted that a parent listened to the child's interview. Very few differences were observed in the answers given by teens when parents were listening compared with interviews alone with teens. Any statistically significant differences between the responses of teens in parent-attended interviews and teen solo interviews are noted in footnotes to the text. For more details on this, or any other methodology question, please see the Methodology section at the end of this report.

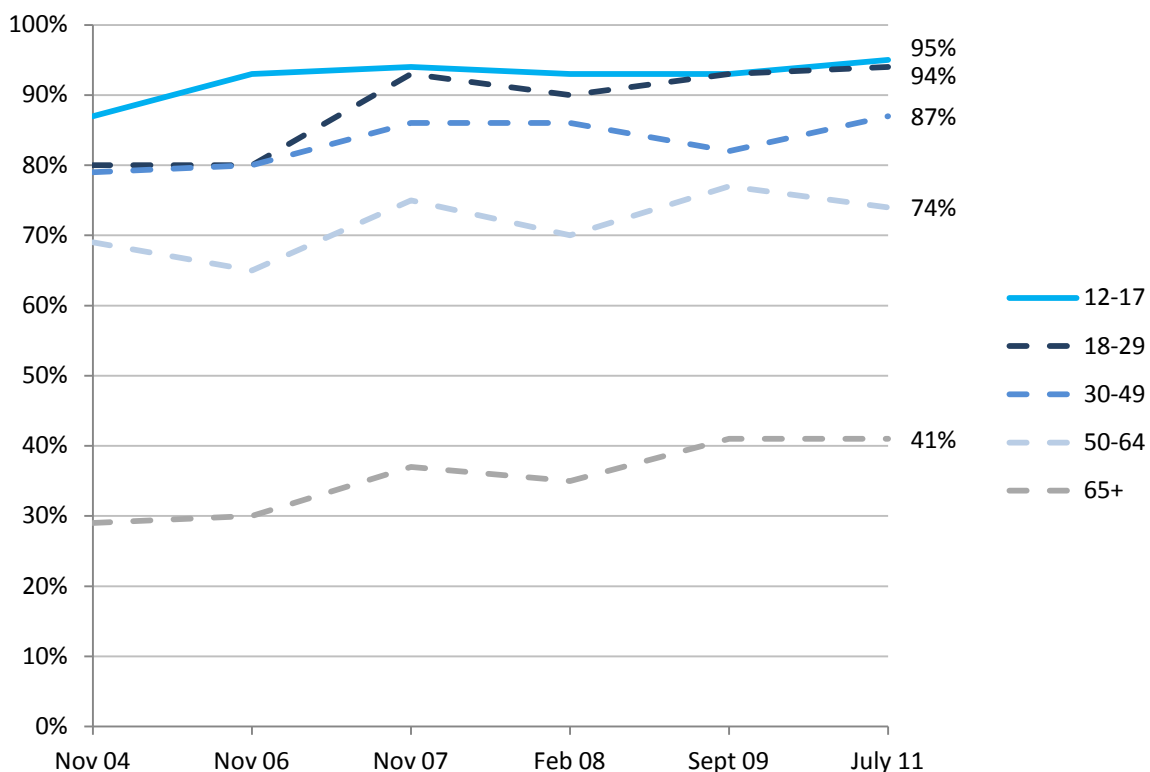
# Part 1

## Teens and Social Networks

Internet use is nearly universal among American teens; 95% of those ages 12-17 are internet users, up slightly from November 2004 (when 87% of teens went online). Internet usage is higher among teens than among adults as a whole (as of August 2011, 78% of all adults go online), although internet adoption rates among adults ages 18-29 are identical to those found among teens.

### Internet adoption over time by teens and adults

*% within each age group who go online*



**Source:** The Pew Research Center Internet & American Life Project Teen & Parent surveys. Methodological information for each survey is available from <http://pewinternet.org/Data-Tools/Download-Data/Data-Sets.aspx?topicFilter=aff4e2b2-7c23-4fdc-9ca6-fcf6815efd56>

Teen internet use has intensified over the years. In this sample, 70% of teen internet users say they go online daily: 46% do so several times a day and an additional 24% do so about once a day. One-quarter (24%) go online weekly, while the remaining 6% go online every few weeks or less often. The proportion of teen internet users who go online several times a day has nearly doubled since November 2004 (at that point, 24% of teen internet users reported going online several times a day) and has increased by 10 percentage points since September 2009, when 36% of teen internet users reported going online multiple times per day.

There are relatively few demographic differences when it comes to how often teens go online, although older teens are likely to do so with greater frequency than are younger teens. Fully 53% of teen internet users ages 14-17 go online several times per day, compared with 30% of users ages 12-13.

## **Eight in ten online teens use social network sites such as Facebook or MySpace, and 16% use Twitter.**

Eight in ten online teens (80%) now use social network sites such as Facebook or MySpace, up from just over half of online teens (55%) the first time we measured social network site usage among teenagers in late 2006. Social network site adoption among teens is significantly higher than it is among adults as a whole; 64% of all online adults use these sites. However, adults under the age of 30 use these sites at roughly the same rate as teens; 87% of online 18-29 year olds are social network site users.

Twitter adoption among teens pales in comparison to their use of social network sites as a whole. Yet, the number of teen Twitter users has doubled over the last two years; 16% of online teens now use Twitter, up from 8% the first time we asked this question in late 2009. Teens and adults now use Twitter at similar rates, as 12% of online adults are Twitter users.

Almost all teen Twitter users take part in other online social network sites as well—just one respondent in our survey reported using Twitter but not using any other social network sites.<sup>14</sup> Throughout the remainder of this chapter and in the report that follows, the 80% of online teens who use social network sites and/or Twitter will be referred to as **teen social media users**. They comprise 76% of **all** those ages 12-17.

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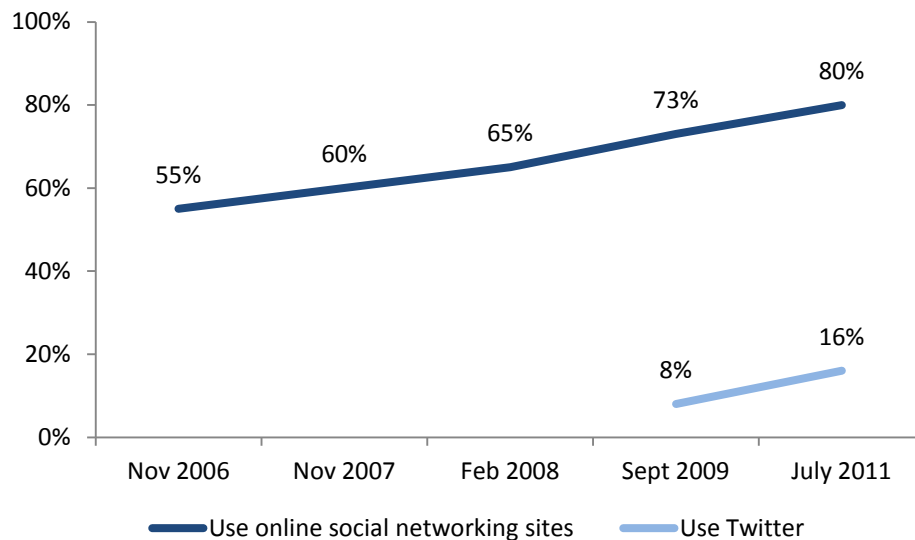
<sup>14</sup> Please note, this analysis only includes Twitter users who have an account on the service, and who think of Twitter as a social network site. Question wording for the question used for this analysis is: “On which social networking site or sites do you have an account?” [OPEN-ENDED RESPONSE]



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## Teen social network and Twitter use – trends over time

*Based on teen internet users*



**Source:** The Pew Research Center Internet & American Life Project Teen & Parent surveys. Methodological information for each survey is available from <http://pewinternet.org/Data-Tools/Download-Data/Data-Sets.aspx?topicFilter=aff4e2b2-7c23-4fdc-9ca6-fcf6815efd56>

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## Which groups of teens use social media?

Among teens, usage of social network sites is relatively consistent across a number of demographic categories. The youngest teenagers are less avid: 45% of online 12-year-olds use these sites. That figure nearly doubles between the ages of 12 and 13, with 82% of 13-year-olds saying that they are social network site users.

In contrast to social network sites, Twitter use among teens is marked by much more variation between groups. Specifically, girls are twice as likely to use Twitter as boys (22% of online girls use Twitter, compared with 10% of online boys), and black teens are three times as likely to be Twitter users than either white or Latino teens (34% of online black teens use Twitter). Twitter adoption is especially low among younger boys, as just 2% of online boys ages 12-13 are Twitter users.

## Twitter and social network site usage

*Based on teen internet users*

	Use a social network site	Use Twitter
<b>All teen internet users (n=770)</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>18%</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Boys (n=375)	78	10
Girls (n=395)	83	22*
<b>Age</b>		
12-13 (n=210)	64	12
14-17 (n=560)	88*	17
<b>Age/Gender</b>		
Boys, 12-13 (n=95)	60	2
Girls, 12-13 (n=115)	67	22*
Boys, 14-17 (n=280)	85*	13*
Girls, 14-17 (n=280)	92*	21*
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>		
White, non-Hispanic (n=434)	78	11
Black, non-Hispanic (n=120)	85	34*
Hispanic (n=155)	83	13
<b>Annual Household Income</b>		
Less than \$50,000 (n=283)	87*	18
\$50,000 or more (n=418)	76	14

\*indicates statistically significant difference between rows within each column and section.

**Source:** The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Teen-Parent survey, April 19-July 14, 2011. N=799 for teens 12-17 and parents, including oversample of minority families.

## Facebook dominates teen social media usage

In addition to asking about general social media usage, we also included a question on our July survey asking about the specific social media sites on which teens have actually created an account. Overall, Facebook is the dominant social media site among teens, as 93% of teen social media users have a Facebook account. MySpace ranks a distant second in overall usage, with 24% of teen social media users having an account on this site. Among teen social media users:

- 93% have an account on Facebook
- 24% have an account on MySpace

- 12% have an account on Twitter<sup>15</sup>
- 7% have an account on a Yahoo site
- 6% have an account on YouTube
- 2% have an account on each of the following: Skype, myYearbook, and Tumblr
- 1% have an account on Google Buzz

In total, 59% of teen social media users have an account on just one site, while 41% have accounts on multiple sites. Among teens with one social media profile, 89% maintain that one account on Facebook while the remainder is spread among a number of sites. And for teens with multiple accounts, fully 99% have an account on Facebook. Put another way, account ownership for the vast majority of teen social media users boils down to either “Facebook only” or “Facebook plus another site or sites.”

### Where teens maintain their social media accounts

*% of teen social media users*

	Among those with only one account	Among those with two or more accounts
Facebook	89%	99%
MySpace	4	54
Twitter	<1	29
YouTube	<1	15
Yahoo (unspecified)	2	13
Tumblr	0	6
Skype	0	6
myYearbook	1	2
Google Buzz <sup>16</sup>	0	2
Other (unspecified)	2	17
Don't know / Don't have own profile	2	0

**Source:** The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Teen-Parent survey, April 19-July 14, 2011. N=799 for teens 12-17 and parents, including oversample of minority families. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish.

**Note:** This chart is based on a question that asks users “On which social networking site or sites do you have an account?” and was asked of anyone who had answered yes to one or both of two previous questions “Do you ever use an online social networking site like MySpace or Facebook?” and “Do you ever use Twitter?”

<sup>15</sup> Note: This figure is lower than the earlier figure indicating that 16% of online teens use Twitter. This discrepancy may be due to the fact that this question measures *account ownership* rather than *general usage*. Additionally, teens may not consider Twitter when they hear the term “social networking sites”—our account ownership question asked teen social media users to indicate “on which social networking site or sites” they have an account.

<sup>16</sup> Google Plus was released after this survey was in the field, though anyone who had begun to use it immediately could have offered it as an answer to this open-ended question.

## Demographic differences in account ownership

Given the relatively broad overlap between the different social media sites noted above, it would stand to reason that any differences in account ownership are fairly minor. And indeed, there is fairly modest demographic variation in terms of where teen social media users maintain their accounts.

- **Facebook** – Nine in ten teen social media users have a Facebook account, and use of the site is quite prevalent across a range of demographic groups. Facebook account ownership is especially high among a few groups, including whites (96% of white teen social media users have a Facebook account, compared with 87% of blacks and 88% of Latinos), older teens (95% of 14-17 year-old social media users have a Facebook account, compared with 87% of those ages 12-13), and those whose parents have at least some college experience (96% of such teen social media users have a Facebook account, compared with 89% among those whose parents have no college experience).
- **MySpace** – MySpace profiles are most common among Latino teens (35% of Latino teen social media users have a MySpace account, compared with 22% of whites) and those whose parents did not go to college (32% of these social media using teens have a MySpace account, compared with 18% of those whose parents have at least some college experience).
- **YouTube** – Among teen social media users, boys (9%) are more likely than girls (3%) to have an account on YouTube.
- **Yahoo** – Young teen social media users are more likely than older teens to have an account on a Yahoo site. One in nine social media users ages 12-13 (12%) have an account on a Yahoo site, compared with 5% of those ages 14-17.

## Facebook eclipsed MySpace over the last five years.

When we asked teens about their social media accounts in November 2006, our question wording was substantially different from the version used in our 2011 survey. In 2006, we asked teens, “Where is the [social networking site] profile you use or update most often?,” while in 2011 we asked them, “On which social networking site or sites do you have an account?” However, even allowing for these differences in wording, it is clear that MySpace usage is far less prevalent among teens than it was five years ago. In 2006, more than eight in ten teen profile owners (85%) said that MySpace was the social network profile they ***used most often***; as of July 2011 just one-quarter of such teens (24%) report ***having a MySpace profile at all***.

As MySpace usage has grown less prevalent among teens over the last five years, Facebook usage has increased in kind. In 2006, just 7% of teen profile owners said that Facebook was the profile they used most often. In 2011, half (52%) of teen social media users have an account on Facebook ***but no accounts on any other social network sites***.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> This question was asked as an open-ended question and did not define “social networking site or sites” for the respondent.

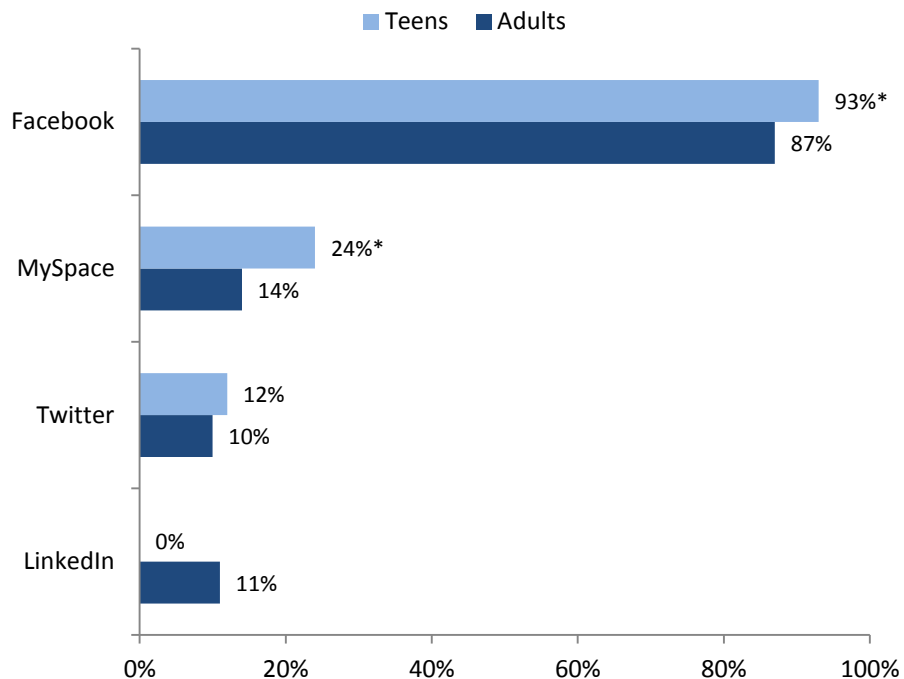
## With the exception of LinkedIn, teen and adult profile owners use similar social media sites.

The sites on which teen social media users have created accounts tend to be similar to those used by their adult counterparts, though teens are slightly more likely to use Facebook and MySpace.<sup>18</sup> Fully 93% of teens and 87% of adult social media users have a profile or account on Facebook, the most popular site for both groups; 24% of teens and 14% of adults have a profile or account on MySpace; and 12% of teens and 10% of adults have a profile or account on Twitter. Not surprisingly, usage of the professionally oriented site LinkedIn is far more prevalent among adults than it is among teens—11% of adult profile owners have an account on LinkedIn, while no teens in our survey mentioned having an account on that site.

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### Where do teens and adults maintain their online social media accounts?

*Based on teens/adults who use social network site(s) and/or Twitter*



**Source:** Teen data is from the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Teen-Parent survey, April 19-July 14, 2011. N=799 for teens 12-17 and parents, including oversample of minority families. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. Data for adults is from Pew Internet's August Tracking survey, July 25-August 26, 2011. Nationally representative, n=2260 adults 18+, includes cellphone & Spanish language interviews. \* indicates a statistically significant difference between bars.

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<sup>18</sup> Note that adults and teens received slightly different versions of this question. Teens were asked "On which social networking site or sites do you have an *account*?" while adults were asked "On which social networking site or sites do you currently have a *profile*?"

## How teens use social network sites

Teens engage in a wide range of activities on social network sites, with chatting and instant messaging, commenting on their friends' posts, and posting their own status updates leading the way—just under nine in ten teen social media users do each of these activities. On the other end of the scale, gaming is the least common activity we measured in our survey, as half of teen social media users play games within the context of these sites. Note that gaming outside the social media context is quite common among teens, as a total of 85% of all teens play video games on a computer or gaming console.

Overall, the median teen social media user takes part in six of the seven activities we measured in our survey.

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### How teens use social media sites

*Based on teens who use social network sites or Twitter*

Send instant messages or chat with a friend through the social network site	88%
Post comments on something a friend has posted	87
Post a status update	86
Post a photo or video	80
Send private messages to a friend within the social network site	76
Tag people in posts, photos or videos	69
Play a game on a social network site	50
<b>Median # of activities</b>	<b>6</b>

**Source:** The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Teen-Parent survey, April 19-July 14, 2011. N=799 for teens 12-17 and parents, including oversample of minority families. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish.

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Older teens tend to be more active users of social media than their younger counterparts. Social media users ages 14-17 are significantly more likely than those ages 12-13 to post comments on something their friends have posted; to post status updates; to post photos or videos; and to tag others in posts, photos, or videos. Younger teens stand out in their tendency to use these sites to play games. Among social media-using teens, fully 69% of 12-13 year-olds use these sites to play games, compared with 44% of those ages 14-17.<sup>19</sup>

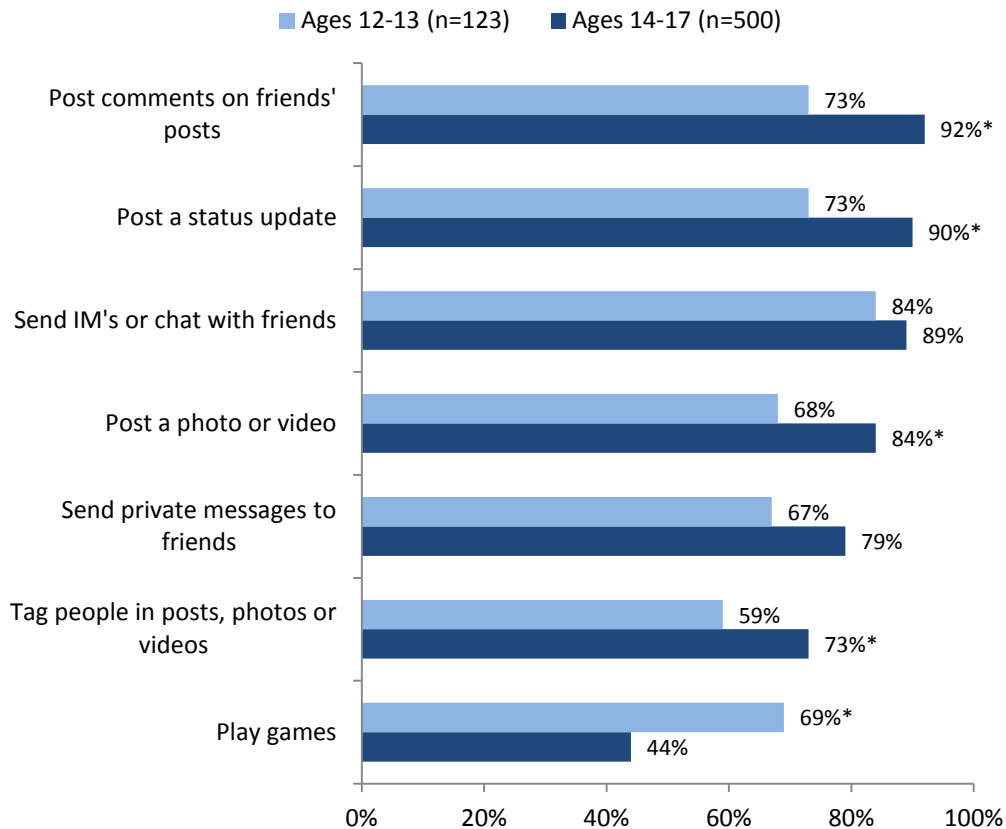
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<sup>19</sup> Previous Pew Internet research has indicated that young teens engage in higher overall levels of game play than older teens. See our report on Teens, Video Games and Civics for more details (<http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2008/Teens-Video-Games-and-Civics.aspx>)

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## How older and younger teens use social media

Based on social network site or Twitter users



\* indicates statistically significant difference between groups.

**Source:** The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Teen-Parent survey, April 19-July 14, 2011. N=799 for teens 12-17 and parents, including oversample of minority families. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish.

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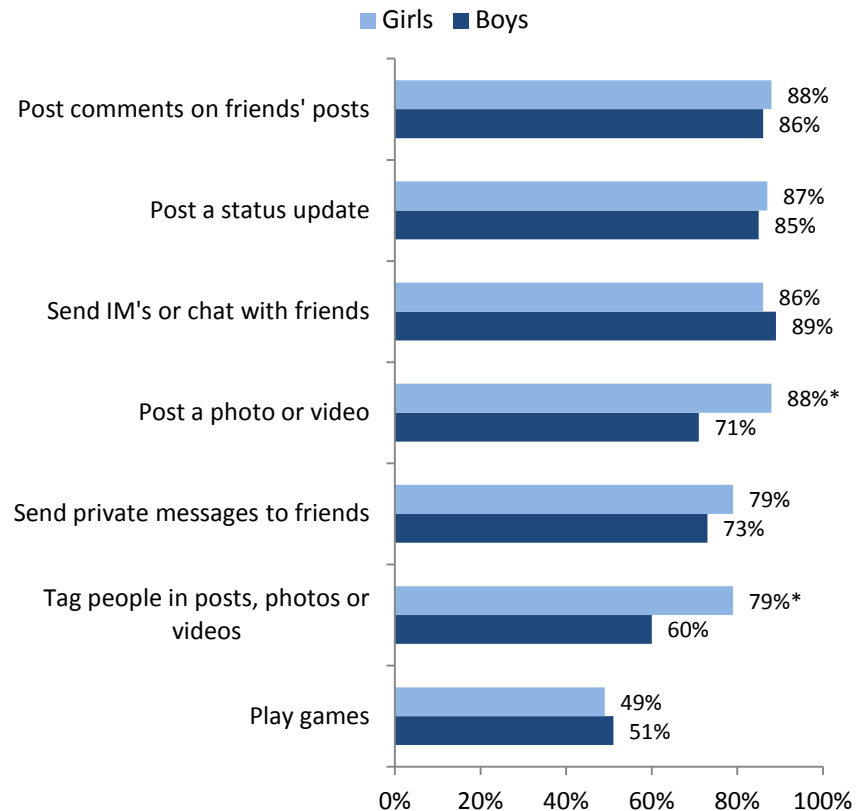
Girls and boys use social media sites in similar ways, although girls are somewhat more likely to use these sites to post photos or videos (88% of girl social media users do this, compared with 71% of boys) and to tag other people (79% vs. 60%). Similarly, there are few differences based on race or ethnicity, with two exceptions. White teens are more likely than black teens to post comments on their friends' posts (90% vs. 80%) and both white and black teens are more likely than Latino teens to post status updates (among social media using teens 90% of whites, 84% of blacks, and 70% of Latinos do this).

(continued on next page)

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## How teenage girls and boys use social media

*Based on social networking site or Twitter users*



\* indicates statistically significant difference between groups.

**Source:** The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Teen-Parent survey, April 19-July 14, 2011. N=799 for teens 12-17 and parents, including oversample of minority families. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish.

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# Part 2

## **Social Media and Digital Citizenship: What teens experience and how they behave on social network sites**

### **Section 1**

**The majority of teens have positive online experiences, but some are caught in an online feedback loop of meanness and negative experiences.**

This section of the report examines teens' perceptions and social experiences online. We take readings on the overall emotional climate of social media spaces and then delve into their specific experiences, both positive and negative. In our survey, we follow teens' experiences of online cruelty – either personally felt or observed – from incident to resolution, by asking them about how they reacted to the experience and how they saw others react. We ask them about whether they sought advice and where – both general advice about online safety and responsibility, and specific advice on how to handle an experience of online cruelty on a social network site. Additionally, we ask whether the advice they got was good.

We also plumb the actions and interventions of parents – both through their eyes and also through the eyes of teens. Finally, we explore where parents figure in the constellation of influences in their child's digital life.

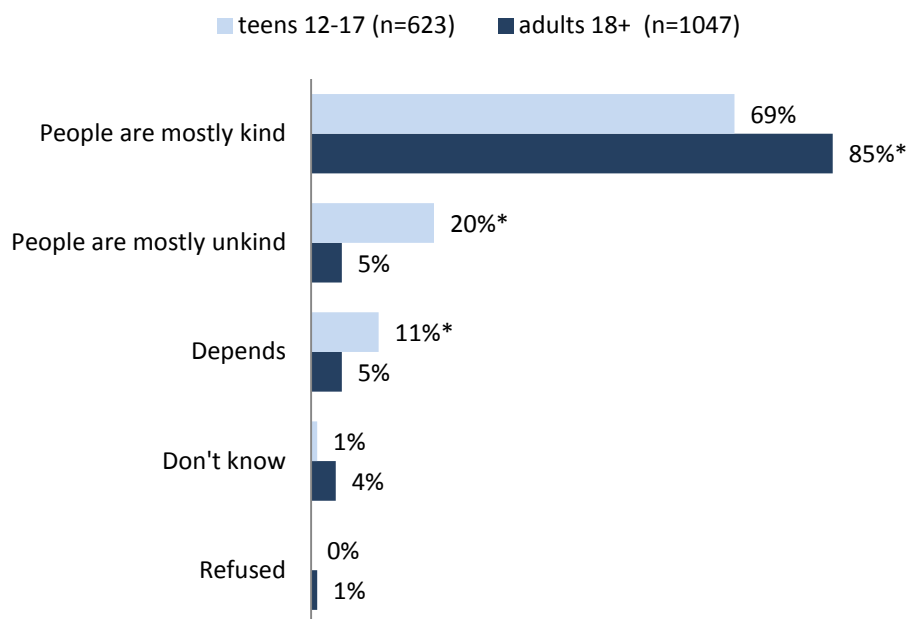
**The majority of social media-using teens say their experience is that their peers are mostly kind to one another on social network sites, but their views are less positive when compared with similar assessments from online adults.**

We asked teens the following question about what they see in social network spaces: “Overall, in your experience, are people your age mostly *kind* or mostly *unkind* to one another on social network sites?” Most of the 77% of all teens who use social media say their experience is that people their age are mostly kind to one another on social network sites. Overall, 69% of social media-using teens say their experience is that peers are mostly kind to each other in social network spaces. Another 20% say their peers are mostly unkind, while 11% volunteered that “it depends.” However, in a similar question asked of adults 18 and older, 85% of social media-using adults reported that their experience was that people are mostly kind to one another on social network sites, while just 5% reported that they see people behaving in mostly unkind ways.<sup>20</sup>

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**Overall, in your experience, are people your age mostly kind or mostly unkind to one another on social network sites?**

*% of teens and adults who use social media*



**Note:** The question wording for adults was “Overall, in your experience, are people mostly kind or mostly unkind to one another on social networking sites?” \* indicates a statistically significant difference between bars.

**Source:** The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Teen-Parent survey, April 19-July 14, 2011. N=799 for teens and parents, including oversample of minority families. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. Data for adults is from Pew Internet's August Tracking survey, July 25-August 26, 2011. Nationally representative, n=2260 adults 18+, includes cell phone & Spanish language interviews.

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<sup>20</sup> Adult data in this report come from Pew Internet's August 2011 Tracking Survey among adults 18 and older, n=2260. For this analysis, the question asked of adults was slightly different than the one asked of teens: “Overall, in your experience, are people mostly kind or mostly unkind to one another on social networking sites?”

## Girls ages 12-13 have the most negative assessment of social network spaces.

While teens across all demographic groups generally have positive experiences watching how their peers treat each other on social network sites, younger teenage girls (ages 12-13) stand out as considerably more likely to say their experience is that people are mostly unkind. One in three (33%) younger teen girls who uses social media says that people her age are mostly unkind to one another on social network sites, compared with 9% of social media-using boys 12-13 and 18% of boys 14-17. One in five older girls (20%) who uses social media says that in her experience people her age are mostly unkind to one another on these sites.

## Black teens are less likely to say their experience is that people their age are kind to one another on social network sites.

Black social media users are less likely than white and Latino users to report that people their age are mostly kind online. While 72% of whites and 78% of Latino youth say that their experience is that people are usually kind on social network sites, just over half (56%) of blacks say the same.

### How peers treat one another on social media

*% of teens who use social media*

	Mostly Kind	Mostly Unkind	Depends	Don't Know
<b>Race/ethnicity</b>				
White	72%*	20%*	9%	0%
Black	56%	31%*	9%	4%
Hispanic	78%*	9%	13%	0%
<b>Location</b>				
Urban	68%	23%*	8%	0%
Suburban	73%	14% <sup>+</sup>	13%	0%
Rural	57%	28%	12%	3%
<b>Household income</b>				
Less than \$30K	61%	22%	16%	2%
\$30-49K	67%	25%	9%	0%
\$50-75K	78%	15%	7%	0%
\$75,000 or more	72%	18%	10%	0%
<b>Age</b>				
Teens ages 12-13	70%	22%	8%	0%
Teens ages 14-17	68%	19%	12%	1%
<b>Sex</b>				
Girls	66%	23%	10%	0%
Boys	71%	16%	12%	1%

(continued)

## How peers treat one another on social media (continued)

% of teens who use social media

	Mostly Kind	Mostly Unkind	Depends	Don't Know
Age + sex				
Girls 12-13	65%	33%*	3%	0%
Boys 12-13	77%	9% <sup>+</sup>	14%	0%
Girls 14-17	67%	20%	13%	0%
Boys 14-17	69%	18% <sup>+</sup>	12%	1%

**Note:** \* indicates statistically significant difference between rows within each column and section. In sections with +, the data point with the \* is only statistically significantly different than the data points with + symbol.

**Source:** The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Teen-Parent survey, April 19-July 14, 2011. N=799 for teens and parents, including oversample of minority families. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish.

### Teens tend towards negative words when describing how people act online.

As a part of this project, we conducted seven focus groups with teens ages 12 to 19 to ask teens more in-depth questions about their experiences interacting with others on social network sites. In the groups, we asked the teen participants questions about how people usually acted online. In some cases, we asked students to tell us about their observations of online behavior and then tell us how they thought people *should* act in online spaces. In one exercise, we asked the participants to write down words or phrases that they felt captured these concepts. As the word clouds<sup>21</sup> created from the words they shared suggest, teens overwhelmingly chose negative adjectives to describe how people act online. Words that appeared frequently included “rude,” “mean,” “fake,” “crude,” “over-dramatic,” and “disrespectful.” Some teens did use positive words like the frequently mentioned “funny” and the less common “honest,” “clever,” “friendly,” “entertaining,” and “sweet,” but overall the frequency of positive words was substantially lower. Other terms shared by participants could be interpreted differently depending on the context of use – these include the popular term “different” and others like “emotional,” “cautious,” “outspoken,” “strange,” and “open.”

<sup>21</sup> Word clouds were created with wordle.net. The size of the word increases the more frequently it is found in the set of words included in the cloud. So, the most frequently occurring words are the largest.



*MIDDLE SCHOOL GIRL: I think people get – like when they get on Facebook, they get ruthless, stuff like that. ...They act different in school and stuff like that, but when they get online, they like a totally different person. You get a lot of confidence.*

*HIGH SCHOOL BOY: [There's] this real quiet girl who go to my school, right, but when she's on Facebook she talks like some wild – like, be rapping and talking about who she knew and some more stuff and you would, like, never think that's her. You would think that's somebody else ...*

Teens also identified specific online social spaces — open comment spaces and question and answer sites — that feel particularly unwelcoming:

*HIGH SCHOOL BOY: YouTube comments are pretty bad. They're, like, oh my God.*

*HIGH SCHOOL BOY: I have a friend who came out and he had a Formspring<sup>22</sup> and, like, a bunch of people from this school, like, attacked his Formspring and, like, wrote really, really homophobic things on it.*

Often teens felt bolder, ruder, or more empowered because they did not fear physical violence in the online space. One middle school girl told us that she thought people were ruder online “because you can’t hurt anybody online. You can’t punch nobody through the screen.”

*MIDDLE SCHOOL GIRL 1. “I think I act ruder to online people.*

*MODERATOR. You act ruder? How come?*

*MIDDLE SCHOOL GIRL 2. Because she doesn’t have to see them, so they can’t beat her up.”*

For some teens we spoke with — particularly middle school girls — fights and drama on social media flowed back and forth between school, the street, and Facebook, often resulting in physical fights during the in-person portions of the conflict.

*MIDDLE SCHOOL GIRL: I read what they were talking about online, then I go offline and confront the person who was saying something to her.*

*MIDDLE SCHOOL GIRL: ...Like that's how most people start fighting because that's how most of the fights in my school happen – because of some Facebook stuff, because of something you post, or like because somebody didn't like your pictures.*

One middle school girl detailed the circular flow of conflict between her social network site and her in-person life, and the ways that she, at her mother’s behest, tries to break the cycle.

*“...the other day, Monday, I was not cool with somebody and so they tried to put on their status something about me. But I didn't reply to that because my mother told me not to say nothing back because she didn't want anything more to happen.”*

She further explains a physical fight she was supposed to have and the ways in which others taunted her offline and online about her allegedly skipping out on the conflict. She describes her attempts to ignore online comments made about her “ducking” the fight, until the taunting escalated to insulting her friend.

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<sup>22</sup> Formspring is an anonymous question and answer website: <http://www.formspring.me>

*“...I was supposed to be fighting somebody Monday, but the security guard picked me up and brung me back inside the school. Yeah, they were like, ‘oh my man, [MIDDLE SCHOOL GIRL] ducked it.’ I was like, that’s crazy, but I didn’t reply back and then she said something about my best friend...”*

For other teens, the fact that they can act differently on social media translates into more real, positive experiences. Instead of seeing social media as a place that fomented conflict or bad behavior, some teens felt as though it increased a sense of closeness and allowed people to be authentic or more real than they could be offline:

*HIGH SCHOOL GIRL: I think people act different on Facebook because that’s like their – I mean, I think the self that they show you on Facebook could be their true self, like who they actually want to be.*

*MIDDLE SCHOOL GIRL: Yeah, I act the same how I act in school. Like online I’m still goofy and stuff like that.*

Several teens told us that they find friends and romantic interests easier to talk to and more open in these online social spaces.

*HIGH SCHOOL GIRL: But I feel like, since it’s on Facebook, I guess it’s easier to talk to people, or like, admit things and, like, you just have, like, open conversations because they’re not, like face-to-face, so it’s not as, like – they’re not, like, embarrassed or nervous or something.*

*HIGH SCHOOL BOY: [O]n Facebook definitely people ... can be more open in some ways than in real life. Like, they’ll say more than they will because it’s not, like, face-to-face, so. Like, some things that might be awkward in real life won’t be that awkward in a conversation on Facebook.*

At least one teen with whom we spoke attributed the ease of conversation in social media with a sense of privacy in social chat spaces:

*MIDDLE SCHOOL BOY: I don’t know, it just feels like in person, it can be awkward and weird if you’re trying to tell something, like, personal and secret because you’re looking at them... But like on a Facebook chat, it is very – it’s like there’s no one unless it’s like a hacker or something. But that’s rare. You can talk where you can actually tell them lots of things, or send them a private message, not, like, public.*

And others do not find friends changed when they talk to them online:

*HIGH SCHOOL GIRL: I don’t really have a like, kind of, issue, I guess. I mean, when I talk to someone online – like ... my best friend since sixth grade – she doesn’t change when she’s online or when I see her in person. I don’t really get to see her that often because she goes to a different school, but no, she doesn’t ever change.*

Other teens spoke of the challenges of managing disparate friend groups in the same public space visible to all of them:

*HIGH SCHOOL GIRL: Well, I think – I still – I think people still make personas in real life too. It’s just, like, like if I’m with a different group of friends I’ll be more one way than I am with another group of friends just because that’s how – it’s more comfortable for them and it makes it fun for the group.*

## Section 2

### Teens generally report positive personal outcomes from their interactions on social network sites.

We asked teens a series of questions about outcomes from experiences they may have had interacting with other people on a social network site (in total, we asked about two positive outcomes and six negative outcomes). The largest group of teens say they have had experiences that made them feel good about themselves and that made them feel closer to another person on a social network. Nearly two-thirds (65%) of social media-using teens say they personally have had an experience on a social network site that made them feel good about themselves and 58% say they felt closer to another person because of an experience on a social network site. In total, 78% of teens say they have had at least one of the two positive experiences we asked about in our survey.

Still, a substantial number of teens report specific negative experiences on social network sites. Fully 41% of social media using teens report having at least one negative experience out of the six unique experiences we measured.

Overall, boys and girls do not show any differences in their likelihood of experiencing either positive or negative outcomes from interactions with other people over social media. Bullied teens and teens who have directly felt meanness and cruelty through social media are more likely to experience any outcome except feeling good about themselves.<sup>23</sup> What follows below is a closer look at the teens who experience different positive and negative impacts on social network sites.

*(continued on next page)*

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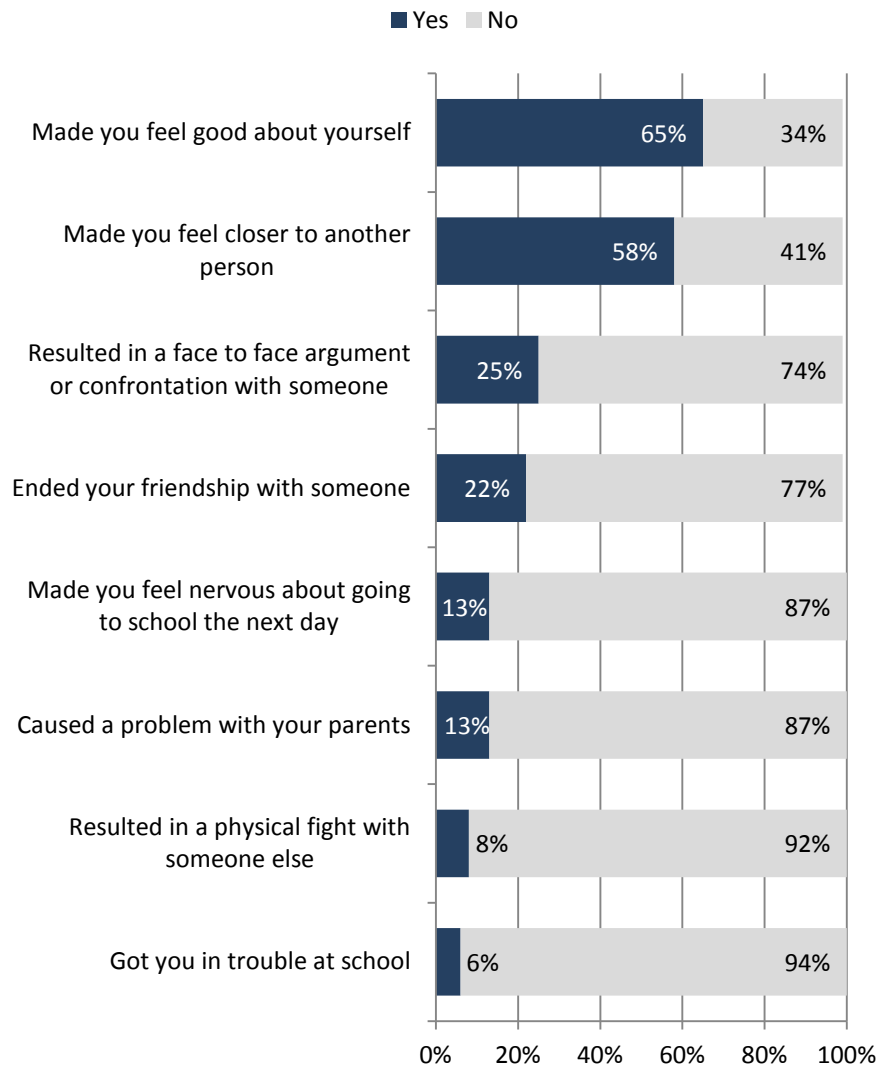
<sup>23</sup> This theme around teens with a history of bullying and negative experiences on social media will be explored in greater depth in Section 7 starting on page 45 in the report.



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## Have you, personally, ever had an experience on a social network site that...

% of teens who use social media (n=623)



**Source:** The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Teen-Parent survey, April 19-July 14, 2011. N=799 for teens and parents, including oversample of minority families. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish.

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### Made you feel good about yourself

Among older teens ages 14-17, 71% say they have felt good about themselves because of a social network site experience, compared with half (50%) of younger teens. Teens with more public online profiles more often reported feeling good about themselves because of a social media moment. While 69% of daily social network site users and 67% of weekly users said an experience there made them feel good about themselves, 43% of those who visit the sites less often said the same.

### Made you feel closer to another person

Teens from higher income households (earning \$50,000 or more annually) were more likely than those from lower income homes to say that an experience on a social network site made them feel closer to another person.

### Resulted in a face-to-face argument or confrontation with someone

Analysis of the data did not show any statistically significant differences among teens in their likelihood to report a having a face-to-face argument or confrontation with someone because of something that happened on a social network site.

### Ended your friendship with someone

Twitter users were more likely to report ending a friendship (34% vs. 20% of non-users) because of an experience on a social network site. Daily social media users were also more likely than less frequent users to say they had ended a friendship with someone because of an experience on a social network site, with 26% of daily users reporting this, as did 20% of weekly users and 8% of those who use the sites less often.

### Caused a problem with your parents

Black teens were more likely than whites or Latinos to say that they had an experience on a social network site that had gotten them in trouble with their parents: 27% of black social media-using teens report that, as did 11% of white teens, and 9% of Latino teens.

### Made you feel nervous about going to school the next day

Younger teens more often say that an experience on a social network site made them nervous about going to school the next day: 20% of younger teens reported this, compared with 11% of older teens. Drilling down, this nervousness is most often felt by younger girls, of whom 27% said they had felt this way after a social network site experience. Twitter users are more likely than non-users to say they have felt nervous about going to school (24% vs. 10%) because of incidents on social network sites.

### Resulted in a physical fight with someone

While a relatively rare occurrence overall, frequent users of social network sites were more likely to get in a physical fight because of an experience on the site – 9% of daily users and 10% of weekly users report this experience compared with just 1% of less frequent users.

### Got you in trouble at school

Teens from lower-income households (those earning less than \$50,000 annually) are more likely than higher-income teens to report getting in trouble at school because of an experience on a social network site (10% compared with 3%).

## Section 3

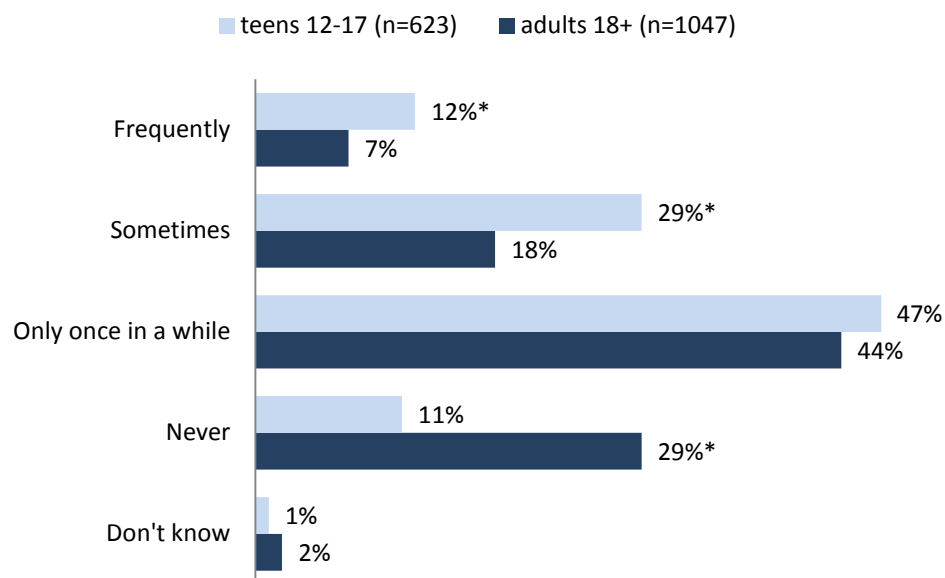
### Teens' experiences witnessing (or being subjected to) mean or cruel behavior on social network sites

**88% of social media-using teens have seen someone be mean or cruel on a social network site.**

In addition to all the specific outcomes asked of teens that we detailed above, the survey also asked about whether teens have witnessed or experienced “someone being mean or cruel online” when they are on a social network site. Among social media users, 88% say they have seen someone be mean or cruel to another person on a social network site: nearly half (47%) say they see such behavior “only once in a while,” while close to a third (29%) say they see meanness on social network sites “sometimes,” and 12% say they witness cruel behavior “frequently.” Teens are more likely than adults to report seeing mean or cruel behavior online – 69% of social media-using adults report seeing such behavior, compared with 88% of teens). Social media-using teens also see mean and cruel behavior more frequently than their adult counterparts.

#### How often do you witness online cruelty and meanness?

*% of teens and adults who use social media*



\* indicates a statistically significant difference between bars.

**Source:** The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Teen-Parent survey, April 19-July 14, 2011. n=799 for teens and parents, including oversample of minority families. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. Adult data from Pew Internet's August 2011 Tracking survey with adults 18+, July 25-August 26, 2011. n=2260.

## Black teens more likely to say they see online cruelty “frequently.”

Black teens who use social media are more likely than Latino teens (though not white teens) to say they witness mean behavior on social network sites “frequently,” with 17% of black teens reporting seeing such behavior, along with 4% of Latino youth and 11% of white teens.

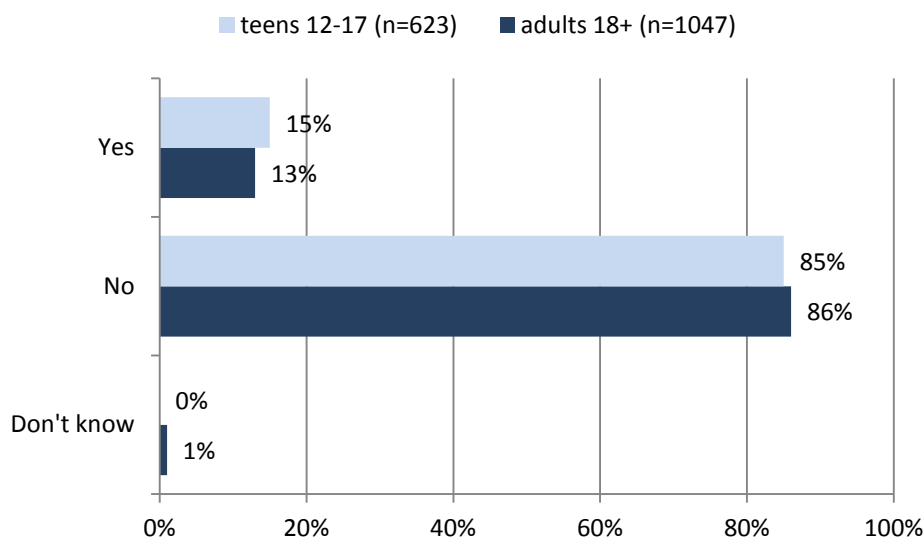
## Lower-income teens more likely to say they never see online meanness.

Teens from lower-income households are more likely than those from higher-income households to say they never witness mean behavior on social network sites. Among teens from households earning less than \$50,000 annually, 18% say they “never” see mean behavior on social media and 42% say they see it “only once in a while.” Just 7% of teens from wealthier families say they never see social media meanness and 50% say they see it only once in a while.

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### In the past 12 months when you have been on a social network site, has anyone been mean or cruel to you?

*% of teens and adults who use social media*



**Source:** The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Teen-Parent survey, April 19-July 14, 2011. n=799 for teens and parents, including oversample of minority families. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. Adult data from Pew Internet's August 2011 Tracking survey with adults 18+, July 25-August 26, 2011. n=2260. There are no statistically significant differences reflected in this chart.

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## 15% of social media-using teens have experienced someone being mean or cruel to them personally on a social network site.

Although a sizeable majority of social media-using teens have witnessed meanness or cruelty to others on a social network site, a much smaller number – 15% – have experienced such harassment themselves in the past 12 months.

Interestingly, adult social media users are just as likely to say that someone has been mean or cruel to them on social media in the last year as youth, with 13% reporting that someone had been mean or cruel to them on a social network site in the last 12 months.

### **Social network site-based meanness is experienced by all groups equally.**

Among the 15% of social media-using teens who have experienced cruelty or mean behavior on social network sites, there are no statistically significant differences by age, gender, race, socio-economic status, or any other demographic characteristic measured.

## **Section 4**

### **One in five teens say they were bullied in the past year. The most common occurrence was in-person bullying.**

Beyond mean and cruel behavior on social network sites, the more serious issue of bullying among youth has garnered increased attention in the U.S. in recent years. In March and September of this year, the White House convened special conferences on bullying prevention, and schools across the country have stepped up efforts to address bullying through strict policies and educational programs.<sup>24</sup>

Yet, new research suggests that the rhetoric adults use to talk about bullying may not align with the language teens use to describe the same kinds of behavior.<sup>25</sup> As such, reported instances of “bullying” may not be capturing the full picture of the sustained and hurtful harassment that is happening among youth.

Our construction of “mean and cruel” online behavior in this survey attempts to get at some of these behavioral distinctions captured by Marwick and boyd’s concept of “drama.” But neither our question language nor the term “drama” cover the entire landscape of teens’ social experiences online. For a

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<sup>24</sup> For more information, see: Background on White House Conference on Bullying Prevention <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/03/10/background-white-house-conference-bullying-prevention>

<sup>25</sup> In their research, Alice Marwick and danah boyd observed that the term “bullying” suggests a victim narrative and a level of immaturity that some teens do not wish to identify with, even if they have experienced behaviors that adults may label as such. Instead, teens more often use the term “drama,” which teens view as distinct from bullying, but allows them to “distance themselves from practices which adults may conceptualize as bullying.” See: Alice Marwick and danah boyd. (2011). “The Drama! Teen Conflict in Networked Publics.” Paper presented at the Oxford Internet Institute Decade in Internet Time Symposium, September 22. Draft version available at: [http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=1926349](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1926349)

subset of teens, bullying is a very real and very hurtful phenomenon, and that is why we asked both the “mean and cruel” and bullying questions in this survey.<sup>26</sup>

Overall, 19% of teens report that they have been bullied in the last 12 months under at least one of the four scenarios we queried in our survey—in person, by phone, text messaging, or online. And within that 19% who have been bullied, 50% of these teens say they were just bullied through one mode, while 50% said they were bullied in more than one place.

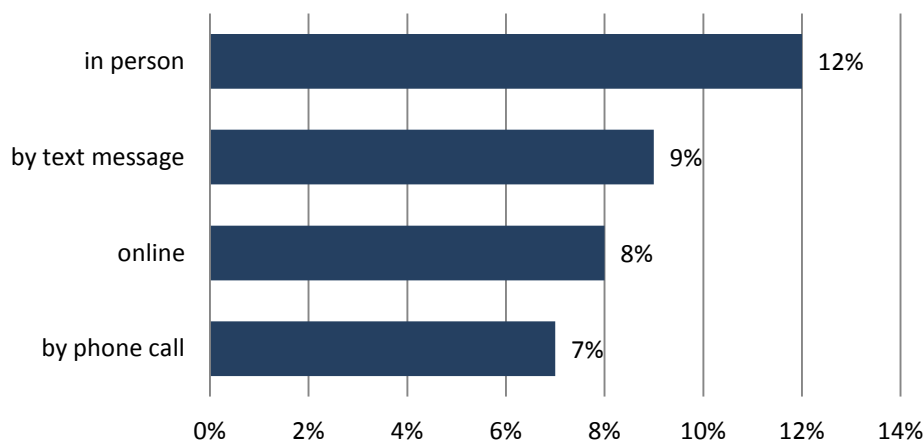
When teens were asked directly about instances of bullying over the past 12 months, the most common type of harassment reported was in-person. Some 12% of all teens ages 12-17 say they have been bullied face-to-face in the past year. Younger teens ages 12-13 are more likely than older teens ages 14-17 to say that they have experienced in-person bullying in the last year (17% vs. 10%). Looking more closely at variations by age, 12-year-olds stand out as reporting the most in-person harassment, with 22% saying they had to deal with bullying in the last year.

When younger teens and older teens are grouped together, there are no significant differences by gender and reported incidences of in-person bullying. There is a gap but not one that is large enough to be statistically significant: 9% of all boys ages 12-17 say they have experienced some form of in-person harassment in the past 12 months, compared with 15% of girls. However, when older and younger teens are sorted by gender, older teen boys ages 14-17 do stand out for being significantly *less* likely to say they have endured in-person bullying in the past year (only 5% report this compared with 15% of older teen girls).

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### In the past 12 months, have you been bullied \_\_\_\_?

*% of all teens*



**Source:** The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Teen-Parent survey, April 26-July 14, 2011. n=799 for teens and parents, including oversample of minority families. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish.

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<sup>26</sup> Our bullying question was based on Dr. Michele Ybarra's work and was asked as follows: "In the past 12 months, have you been bullied [INSERT IN ORDER]? In person? By phone call – that is, on a landline or cell? By text message? Online [IF NECESSARY, such as through email, a social networking site or instant messaging]?" Response options were yes or no to each sub question.

## Fewer than one in ten teens report being bullied by phone, text, or online.

While the vast majority of teens, 87%, say they haven't experienced in-person bullying over the past year, harassment that occurs through other communications channels can be equally hurtful. Overall, 9% of teens ages 12-17 say that they have endured bullying via text messaging. Another 8% say they have experienced some form of online bullying – such as through email, a social network site, or IM. And 7% say they have been bullied over the phone.

Surprisingly, although younger teens are more likely to experience in-person bullying, they are no more likely than older teens to report bullying in any other situation – via text messaging, online, or by phone. The situation with gender is just the opposite; while the gender differences with in-person bullying were not quite large enough to be significant, they are statistically significant for every form of technology-mediated bullying. Girls are more likely than boys to report bullying in every case. Teen girls are more likely than boys to report being bullied by text messaging (13% vs. 5%), online (12% vs. 4%), and by phone (11% vs. 4%).

## Section 5

### How teens see others respond to online cruelty

#### Most people ignore social media meanness, but a substantial number stand up for victims.

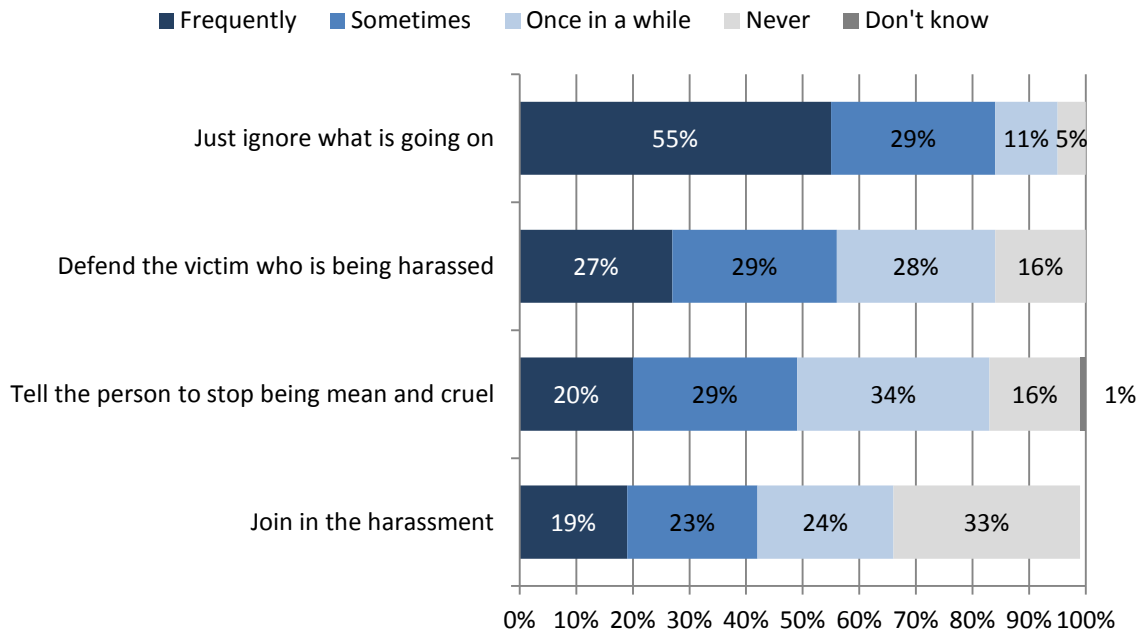
In the literature around bullying and harassment, much has been written about the power of the bystander to intervene (or not) in bullying incidents.<sup>27</sup> While we don't know whether the behavior teens see rises to the level of seriousness conveyed by the term bullying, teens witness a variety of responses to cruel behavior on social network sites. In this study, teens say that the most frequent thing they see when someone is being treated badly is for others to ignore what's going on: 55% of those who witness cruel behavior say that this the most frequent response from others. Some 27% say they frequently see others defend the victim, 20% say they frequently see others tell the person being mean to stop, and 19% say they frequently see others join in the harassment.

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<sup>27</sup> See *Empowering Bystanders in Bullying Prevention* By Stan Davis and Julia Davis, Chapter 1, for an overview of research around bystanders and their importance in combating bullying. <http://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=fQ0tOKaMg5sC&oi=fnd&pg=PR5&dq=empowering+bystanders+in+bullying+prevention&ots=PXXUxdKkJP&sig=86gAL4TLHJEHyZr283UQyD54Zw#v=onepage&q&f=false>

## When people act mean or cruel on social network sites, how often have you seen other people ...?

% of social media-using teens who have seen others be mean or cruel on SNS (n=551)



**Source:** The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Teen-Parent survey, April 19-July 14, 2011. N=799 for teens and parents, including oversample of minority families. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish.

In general, social media-using teens who have witnessed online cruelty are the most likely to report that others ignore the situation, with 95% of teens ever witnessing this, and 55% witnessing it frequently. Another 84% see people rising to the defense of the person being harassed, with 27% seeing people do it frequently. A similar 84% witness others telling someone to stop being mean or cruel, but teens see this behavior less frequently.

It is important to note that we are not arguing that those who ignore online cruelty are necessarily acting badly. In cases of online meanness and cruelty, it can be difficult to disentangle who, if anyone, is a “victim” and so it may be difficult to know who to defend, and who to tell to stop. Similarly, given that the intent and full context behind the meanness might be unknown to the viewer, ignoring online meanness can be a deliberate, viable, and effective strategy for addressing online meanness. Ignoring someone who is harassing someone else online could be the path of least resistance, or it could be an effective method for shutting down someone seeking attention. And it might be the case that people rise to the victim’s defense by using methods like private messages, emails, chats, or face-to-face interactions that outside observers cannot see.



Teens in our focus groups confirmed that they usually ignore drama and meanness when they see it on social media, and that the closeness of their relationship to the person under attack has great bearing on whether they intercede:

*MIDDLE SCHOOL GIRL: Unless it's like, my best friend. The only way I do it [comment in defense on someone else's mean post] is like if they offend me. Like if somebody says something about [Friend1] or [Friend2], I'm going to say something back....If you just a friend I see from day to day and somebody says something about you, I'm going to look at it and keep moving.*

Some teens are reluctant to report something they see on social media because they believe it is already so visible:

*MODERATOR: Do you ever see stuff online and then say, I've got to tell someone about this?*

*MIDDLE SCHOOL BOY: No.*

*MIDDLE SCHOOL GIRL: It's online, so everybody's going to see it.*

*MIDDLE SCHOOL BOY: So what's the point?*

Other teens said they have taken steps to intervene – though there are often hurdles to standing up for someone. And sometimes intervening does not go well:

*MIDDLE SCHOOL BOY: Once I was on [Google] Buzz and some person who was – I think he was a friend of one of my friends, I didn't really know him, and he started talking like – he started talking trash to one of my pretty close friends. Then I just told him to back off and then he started talking back to me. So then I reported him and two of my other friends also reported him.*

Other teens talked of using the social network site's features for reporting bad behavior:

*MIDDLE SCHOOL GIRL: I didn't want to intervene, because I was kind of scared, like, oh my god, like, why was this person – there's something wrong with this. And then later on, some – they called the person who had said that word – they called them another really derogatory term. And it's just kind of like this circle of anger and really, really bad language.*

*MODERATOR: So did you do anything in that instance?*

*MIDDLE SCHOOL GIRL: I hit "report" for the comment. I was like, no thank you.*

However, the sites' reporting features are also easily abused. One teen details how he and ten friends used the report button to torment a girl on Facebook:

*HIGH SCHOOL BOY 1: I was, like, with 10 friends and pretty much we just – like, we all logged in. Like, we'd log in, log out and we all, like, reported on, like, this random girl.*

*MODERATOR: You just reported? You all logged in and just reported her for anything? Anything specific?*

*HIGH SCHOOL BOY 1: We just, like, blocked her from, like, a fake account or something.*

*MODERATOR: And what happened? What was the result? Did she get blocked? Did she have problems?*

*HIGH SCHOOL BOY 1: We were hoping she would get blocked but nothing happened. Because she has, like, 700 friends and, like, updates her status every five seconds, so.*

*HIGH SCHOOL GIRL: Why did you dislike her?*

*HIGH SCHOOL BOY 1: I didn't dislike her. We were just messing with her.*

*HIGH SCHOOL BOY 2: Why were you messing with her?*

*HIGH SCHOOL BOY 1: Because it was a Friday night and we – it was late and we were bored and we wanted to have fun.*

### Two-thirds of teens who have witnessed online cruelty have also witnessed others joining in.

However, despite the high likelihood of teens seeing bystanders responding helpfully by standing up for or defending the attacked individual, they are also likely to witness others joining in the harassment. Two-thirds (67%) of teens on social network sites witness others joining in the harassment they have seen. Still, teens are slightly more likely to say they see piling on “once in a while” (24%) than “sometimes” (23%) or frequently (19%).

### While all teens mostly ignore the online harassment they see, black teens are more likely to see others joining in harassment.<sup>28</sup>

Among teens who have witnessed others being mean or cruel on a social network site, white teens are more likely than black or Latino teens to say they frequently see people ignore what is going on (62% of white teens see that frequently, compared with 45% of blacks and 36% of Latinos). Whites are also more likely to frequently see someone defend the victim (33% vs. 20% of blacks and 10% of Latinos) and to frequently see someone tell the person to stop (25% vs. 12% of both blacks and Latinos).

Conversely, black teens are much more likely to report seeing people frequently joining in on the harassment, with 35% of black teens reporting witnessing this frequently, compared with 15% of both Latinos and whites. Latino teens are the most likely to report that they do not see any of the behaviors – ignoring, standing up, or joining in – frequently. Half (50%) of Latino teens who have witnessed others being mean or cruel do not see any behaviors frequently, compared with 29% of blacks and 21% of whites.

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<sup>28</sup> Teens whose parent or guardian listened in on their interview for this study were significantly more likely to say they had “frequently” witnessed others defending a victim (49% vs. 25% of teens who completed their interview without a parent on the phone), and to say that they saw others telling people to stop their mean behavior on a social network site frequently (47% vs. 18%). There were no other statistically significant differences in responses to these reaction questions between these two groups, nor were there any difference in how the teen reported responding her or himself to online cruelty.

### **Older and higher socio-economic status teens are more likely to see others ignoring social media meanness.**

Teens from families earning \$30,000 or more annually and teens with parents with greater levels of education (some college coursework or a college degree) are both more likely to say they frequently see people ignoring the mean behavior they see on social network sites than are teens from lower income and education backgrounds. Older teens, more often older boys 14 to 17, are more likely to say that they frequently see people ignoring mean behavior when they see it on social network sites. Nearly 6 in 10 (59%) 14-17 year-olds and 62% of older boys say they frequently see people ignore mean behavior.

### **Girls and higher socio-economic status teens are more likely to see others defending victims of harassment.**

Girls and older teens are more likely to say that they frequently see others defend the victim; with 33% of girls, and 29% of older teens 14-17 doing so. The group least likely to see this behavior is the youngest boys, of whom only 7% frequently see others defend people from online cruelty.

### **Teens from wealthier families are more likely to see others telling the person to stop being mean and cruel.**

Fewer than half (42%) of teens from families earning less than \$30,000 annually see people ask others to stop their mean behavior on a social network site compared with 61% of teens from families that earn more annually.

## **Section 6**

### **How do teens respond themselves when they see online cruelty or meanness?**

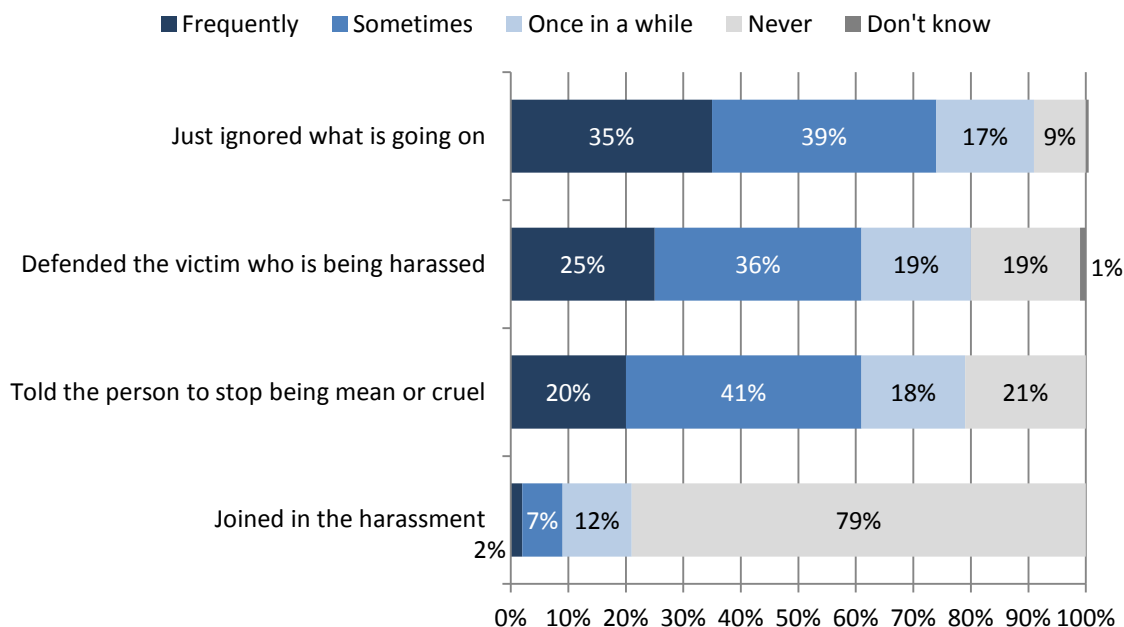
#### **Most teens say they just ignore the mean behavior they see on a social media platform.**

In addition to asking about the bystander behavior that teens witness in others on social media, we asked them about their own behavior. Social media-using teens are most likely to say they ignore the behavior themselves (91% of teens say they do this, and more than a third (35%) say they do this frequently). Social media-using teens are also likely to say they have defended the victim (80% have done so, 25% do so frequently) and to have told the other person to stop being mean and cruel (79%

have done this, 20% have done so frequently). For ignoring, defending, and telling someone to stop, the most common response of these teens was that they do these things “sometimes.”

## When people act mean or cruel on social network sites, how often have you ...?

% of social media-using teens who have seen others be mean or cruel on SNS (n=551)



**Source:** The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Teen-Parent survey, April 19-July 14, 2011. N=799 for teens and parents, including oversample of minority families. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish.

## 21% of social media users admit to joining in at least once in a while.

One in five (21%) social media-using teens who have witnessed online cruelty say they have joined in. Most (12%) say they join in the mean behavior “once in a while,” 7% say they do so “sometimes,” and 2% say they do it “frequently.”

## White teens and boys are more likely to ignore online cruelty.

There are fewer variations in the actions that teens report that they take to respond to online mean behavior. White teens are more likely to say that they frequently ignore what is going on than Latino teens (39% vs. 23%), and teens from families with better-educated parents (some college training or a college degree) are more likely than those whose parents lack a high school diploma to say they frequently ignore online cruelty.

Boys, particularly younger boys ages 12-13, seem to have more of a stay-out-of-it approach to social network site drama. They are more likely to report that they frequently ignore what is going on when they personally witness online cruelty. Two in five (41%) boys (vs. 28% of girls) and 64% of 12-13 year-old boys say they frequently ignore online meanness when they see it on social network sites.

Older teen boys are more likely than older girls to say they have personally joined in on the harassment of someone on a social network site frequently – 4% of boys 14 to 17 say they do this frequently, compared with 1% of girls the same age.

## Section 7

### Negative experiences online are tied to teens having negative feelings about social media.

One major relationship in the survey data was the clustering of negative experiences. Teens who have had one negative experience, outcome, or attitude toward social media, and teens who have experienced bullying of any kind, are much more likely to say they have experienced many of the other unpleasant experiences or outcomes on social network sites included on our survey. The relationship is not clear-cut, however, and in some notable cases, teens who have weathered a variety of difficult online experiences are also more likely than teens who have not had these challenges to report positive outcomes and experiences as well.

Nevertheless, independent of other demographic factors, the experiences a person has on social media are associated with how they feel about it. Some demographic groups and individuals may be more likely to experience some of these negatives because of socio-cultural attitudes toward aggression and standing up for yourself, or weakness and status seeking.<sup>29</sup> But overall, the data suggest it is the *experiences* that people have on social media that might color their attitudes toward it, as well as the likelihood that they will have other negative interactions and outcomes on those sites.

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<sup>29</sup> See: Alice Marwick and danah boyd. (2011). "The Drama! Teen Conflict in Networked Publics." Paper presented at the Oxford Internet Institute Decade in Internet Time Symposium, September 22. Draft version available at: [http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=1926349](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1926349). Ness, Cindy D. (2004) "Why Girls Fight: Female Youth Violence in the Inner City," in *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 595, pp. 32-48. Merten, Don E. (1997) "The Meaning of Meanness: Popularity, Competition and Conflict among Junior High School Girls." *Sociology of Education*, Vol. 70, No. 3, pp. 175-191. Simmons, Rachel. (2011) *Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls*. [revised and updated, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition]. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, New York. See especially chapter 8.

## Direct experiences with online cruelty on social media relates to a host of other negative experiences.

Having a direct experience with social media meanness is highly correlated with other negative outcomes and experience. Teens who say they have been harassed are more likely to say they have witnessed other people being mean on social media with some frequency. They are also more likely to say they have had negative outcomes from an experience on a social network site such as getting in trouble at school, getting into a physical fight, or losing a friendship, and are more likely to say they have

### **Teens who have experienced social media cruelty *personally* are more likely to:**

- Say people are mostly unkind on social media
- Report any negative outcomes
- Report more than 3 negative outcomes
- Witness cruel/mean behavior on social network sites, usually “frequently”

experienced three or more of these unpleasant results. And it may be that these direct negative experiences lead to a more negative view of their experiences with people on social media generally. Teens who have had others be mean or cruel to them on social network sites are more likely to say that their experience is that most people on social network sites are generally unkind to one another.

## Those who have experienced negative outcomes from social media activity such as in-person confrontations or fights are more likely to be bullied, see social media meanness, and believe that people on social media are unkind.

Experiencing negative outcomes<sup>30</sup> from interactions on social media also interacts with a teen’s likelihood of experiencing other negative things in his or her life. These teens are more likely to report being bullied anywhere – online, on the phone, by text message, or in person. Teens who have had any negative outcomes are more likely to witness social media meanness, and more likely to express gloomy views about the way they see people behaving on social media. The one exception to this is teens who report getting in trouble with their parents because of something that happened on social media; they are not more likely to believe everyone on social media is unkind.

On the flip side, teens who have negative outcomes from social media experiences are also more likely to have experienced positive social media outcomes. A greater proportion of these teens with unpleasant outcomes say they became closer to someone because of a social media experience and say they have had an experience on a social network site that made them feel good about themselves.

### **Teens who have experienced any negative outcomes are more likely to:**

- Be bullied anywhere
- Have witnessed meanness on social network sites
- Say their general experience is that people are mostly unkind on social network sites

...but these teens also say they became closer to someone else and felt good about themselves because of a social media experience.

<sup>30</sup> Negative outcomes refer to the following experiences that were the result of something that occurred on a social network site: a face-to-face argument or confrontation with someone, a problem with your parents, a physical fight with someone else, a friendship with someone ended, feeling nervous about going to school the next day, and getting in trouble at school.

## Teens who witness social media cruelty are more likely to experience nearly every other negative experience asked about on the survey.

A large group of teens witness cruelty on social media – 88% of social media users. These teens are also more likely to say they have experienced nearly every other negative item on our survey. These witnesses to cruelty are more likely to experience cruelty themselves, and to be bullied anywhere. They

### Teens who witness social media cruelty are also more likely to:

- Say that people are mostly unkind on social media
- Report any negative outcomes frequently
- Report more negative outcomes
- Be bullied anywhere
- Experience online cruelty personally

are also more likely to report any negative outcome instigated by a social media experience, and to report having more negative outcomes. And they are more likely to say that they believe people on social media are unkind.

But given how large the group of witnesses to online cruelty is, it may be better to ask, who are the teens who have *not* seen these events? Teens

who have not witnessed online cruelty are more likely to be teens who do not use social network sites that much; a full quarter of teens who use social network sites less than monthly have never seen online cruelty, as opposed to 12% of weekly users and less than 10% of daily users who have never seen it. These teens are likely to be disconnected in other ways as well, as they are substantially less likely to have a mobile phone. They are also more likely to come from lower-income households (earning less than \$50,000 annually) and from homes with younger parents (under age 40).

## Broad negative attitudes toward others on social media may shape or be shaped by other challenging experiences on those networks.

Teens who believe that other people are mostly unkind on social network sites are more likely to have witnessed or experienced negative things on social media. Those with a more negative attitude are more likely to have frequently witnessed and experienced meanness on social network sites. They are also more likely to have experienced bullying – in person, by text message, or online – and are more likely to have endured 2 or more of the negative outcomes of online social interactions we asked about on our survey.

### Teens who say people are mostly unkind on social network sites are more likely to:

- Personally experience meanness on social network sites
- Have 2 or more negative outcomes from interactions on online social networks
- Have been bullied anywhere
- Frequently witness meanness on social network sites

## Section 8

### Influencers and Advice-Givers

**Parents, teachers, and media are teens' biggest sources for general advice about how to use the internet and cell phones responsibly and safely.**

As teens navigate difficult online experiences, where do they get advice (solicited and not)? In our survey, we asked all teen internet or cell phone users a general question about the people and places from which they had ever received advice about how to use mobile phones and the internet “responsibly and safely.”

The data suggest that teens hear from a variety of sources, but most frequently say their parents give them advice about online safety and responsible behavior, with 86% of teens reporting advice from a parent. Another 70% of teens say they have received advice about online safety from a teacher or another adult at school, and more than half (54%) of teens say they have gotten advice from television, radio, newspapers, or magazines. Nearly half of teens have received advice from younger and older relatives – siblings, cousins, aunts, grandparents – and friends. About a third of teens (34%) say they have gotten online safety advice from websites, and about one in five (21%) have gotten information from the internet or mobile phone service providers. Slightly fewer than one in five (18%) have gotten safety information from a librarian, and another handful volunteered that they attended a school event on online safety.

The most noticeable aspect of teens' answers was the diversity of people and groups that came up – everyone from bus drivers to bosses, camp counselors, neighbors, doctors, police, at after school programs, and from billboards and flyers to a “random lady in Wal-Mart.” Teens are getting advice about online safety from many different parts of their lives.<sup>31</sup>

This question did not address whether the advice was requested or wanted, nor whether it was useful, accurate, or well-received. We explored some of these issues in an additional series of questions discussed later in this section.

**Girls are more likely than boys to receive advice from people other than parents.**

Everyone was equally likely to receive general advice about internet safety from their parents. With other sources of advice, variations emerge. Girls are more likely than boys to have received advice from teachers, media, siblings, older relatives, friends, and websites. Younger teens are more likely to have received advice from older relatives, siblings, and librarians. In keeping with an established pattern of

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<sup>31</sup> While this question on the survey offered a large variety of response options, many of the responses discussed here came from the recorded responses to the “someone or somewhere else” portion of the question. For the full questions wording, please see the questionnaire at the back of this report, or on our website <http://pewinternet.org>.



greater surveillance by parents, younger girls are the most likely to report receiving advice from teachers, media, older relatives, friends, siblings, websites, and librarians. For teens of all ages and genders, parents are the most commonly mentioned source for advice about online safety.

## Teens average 5 sources from which they receive advice about online safety and responsibility.

Almost all teens receive advice from someone – whether wanted or not – about how to use the internet safely and responsibly. Just 2% of teens said they had *not* gotten advice from anyone or any place about how to be safe online. Indeed, most teens are receiving advice from multiple sources. The average number of people or places a teen had received online safety advice from was 5. The bulk of teens received advice from between 3 and 6 different types of people, organizations, or entities.

### Who gives teens online safety advice (pt I)

Based on % of teen technology users (n=778)

	Parents	Teacher	TV, radio, newspapers, or magazines (media)	Sibling or cousin	Friend	Older relative
Teen internet or cell phone users	86%	70%	54%	46%	45%	45%
Gender						
Boys	83%	65%	42%	40%	38%	38%
Girls	89%	75%*	67%*	53%*	53%*	54%*
Age						
12 to 13	88%	70%	54%	50%*	44%	56%*
14 to 17	85%	70%	54%	45%	46%	40%
Race						
White	88%	74%	51%	42%+	45%	39%+
African American	80%	67%	62%	51%	50%	63%*
Latino	82%	64%	55%	58%*	49%	52%*
Locale						
Urban	85%	72%	59%	49%	49%	54%*
Suburban	86%	66%	51%	43%	41%	40%+
Rural	86%	79%	50%	49%	50%	46%
Household Income						
Less than \$50K	84%	69%	58%	54%*	49%	52%*
\$50 or more	87%	70%	53%	40%	44%	40%

**Note:** \* indicates statistically significant difference between rows. For sections with + symbols, the data points accompanied by an asterisk \* are only statistically significant relative to the data point marked with a + in the same column.

**Source:** The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Teen-Parent survey, April 19-July 14, 2011. N=799 for teens and parents, including oversample of minority families. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish.

Latino teens are more likely than white teens to get advice from siblings or cousins, and black and Latino teens are more likely than whites to get advice from older relatives.

Lower-income teens from families earning less than \$50,000 annually are more likely to seek advice from relatives – older relatives like aunts and uncles and younger relatives like brothers, sisters, and cousins. More than half of lower-income teens seek advice from relatives, while just 40% of higher income teens use relatives as a source of advice. Lower-income teens are also more likely than teens from wealthier homes to ask a librarian for general advice about online safety and responsible behavior (20% vs. 15%).

## Who gives teens online safety advice (pt II)

% of teen technology users (n=778)

	Youth/ church group leader, coach	Websites	Internet or cell phone service company	Librarian	Someone/ something else	Have not received advice from any of these sources
Teen internet or cell phone users	40%	34%	21%	18%	10%	2%
<b>Gender</b>						
Boys	36%	29%	21%	15%	8%	3%
Girls	44%	39%*	22%	21%	11%	2%
<b>Age</b>						
12 to 13	35%	33%	24%	26%*	6%	3%
14 to 17	42%	34%	20%	14%	11%	2%
<b>Race</b>						
White	39%	34%	22%+	17%	11%	2%
African American	41%	43%	34%*	22%	5%	3%
Latino	46%	31%	17%+	18%	7%	5%
<b>Locale</b>						
Urban	38%	33%	18%+	17%	6%+	3%
Suburban	39%	30%+	21%	16%	10%	2%
Rural	44%	48%*	32%*	24%	17%*	3%
<b>Household Income</b>						
Less than \$50K	41%	35%	22%	20%*	7%	3%
\$50 or more	38%	34%	21%	15%	13%*	3%

**Note:** \* indicates statistically significant difference between rows. For sections with + symbols, the data points accompanied by an asterisk \* are only statistically significant relative to the data point marked with a + in the same column.

**Source:** The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Teen-Parent survey, April 19-July 14, 2011. N=799 for teens and parents, including oversample of minority families. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish.

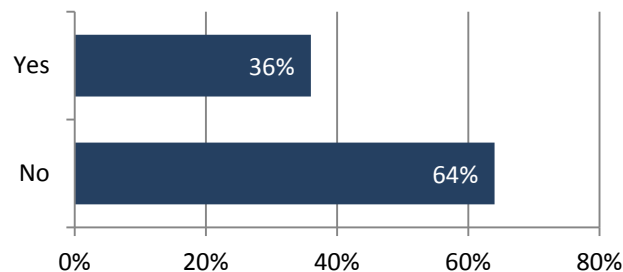
## About a third of teens who witness online cruelty seek advice.

In addition to the question we asked teens about who gives them advice, we also asked whether teens have sought out advice when they have a problem, and the sources of advice they choose. Not all teens are muddling through these negative (and positive) online experiences by themselves. A bit more than a third of teens (36%) who have seen others be mean or cruel on a social network site say they have asked or looked for advice about what to do. Girls, particularly younger girls, are more likely to seek advice about troubling social media experiences; 51% of girls have sought advice, compared with 20% of boys. Broken out by age, 58% of younger girls ages 12-13 and 48% of older girls ages 14-17 have sought advice, compared with 19% of younger and 20% of older boys.

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### When you've seen or experienced someone being cruel or mean online, have you ever looked for or asked someone for advice about what to do?

*% of social media-using teens who have seen others be mean or cruel on SNS (n=551)*



**Source:** The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Teen-Parent survey, April 19-July 14, 2011. N=799 for teens and parents, including oversample of minority families. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish.

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## Bullied teens and teens who have had negative experiences on social media are more likely to seek advice.

Teens who say they have been bullied are also more likely to say they have sought advice about what they witnessed or experienced online. More than half (56%) of bullied teens have looked for advice when they have witnessed meanness or cruelty, compared with 30% of teens who have not been bullied. Teens who have experienced cruelty on social network sites or who have had other negative experiences because of social media are also more likely than kids without these experiences to ask for advice. Nearly two-thirds (62%) of teens who have experienced cruelty have looked for advice, compared with 31% of those who have not experienced cruelty. Among teens who have had multiple (more than three) negative outcomes from experiences on social media, 55% of them have sought advice, compared with 29% of those who have not had any of the other negative outcomes from social media interaction detailed on the survey. However, teens who have had positive experiences on social media (strengthened friendships, felt good about themselves) also are more likely than those who have

not have any of the positive (or any negative) experiences to seek advice about online issues. Two in five (41%) teens with positive experiences sought advice, compared with 15% of those who have not had either of the positive experiences we asked about. Teens who have not had any of the positive or negative outcomes from online interaction that we queried are more often low-level users of social network sites – generally visiting them less than monthly.

### Boys are less likely to seek online advice after witnessing social media meanness.

Teens who report that they have *not* sought advice from someone after witnessing meanness or cruelty on social network sites are more likely to be boys than girls (80% of boys report they have not sought advice versus 49% of girls) and are also more likely to be older. Among teens who have witnessed social media meanness, 58% of younger teens ages 12-13 say they have not sought advice, nor have 66% of teens ages 14-17. There are no statistically significant differences between ethnic groups or by socio-economic status in the likelihood of seeking advice about witnessed meanness.

Teens who have not sought advice are also likely to have otherwise not suffered from much in the way of negative experiences on social media – they're more likely to report in their experience that most people their age are kind to one another on social media and are less likely to have experienced online cruelty directly themselves or been bullied anywhere in the last 12 months.

It may also be that teens who did not seek advice after witnessing social media meanness did not see something that required intervention or advice – either because it was not serious, the conflict resolved on its own, or they had experience with this behavior and knew how to handle it themselves.

### Peers and parents are the go-to source of advice to cope with online harassment.

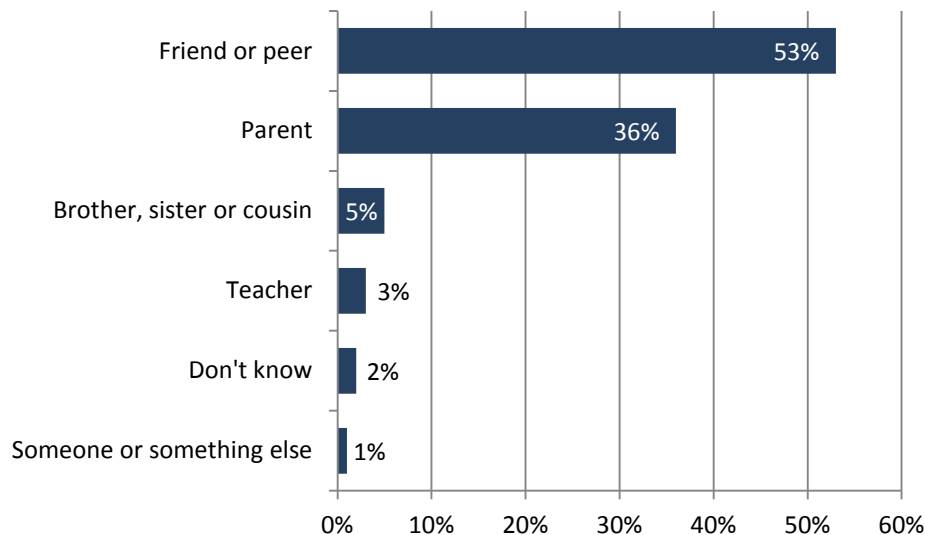
Among teens who have sought out advice on how to cope with or respond to a bad online experience, who do they go to for such information? Of the teens who have witnessed online cruelty and then sought advice for how to handle it, more than half seek help from a friend or peer. Another third seek out advice from parents. Much smaller numbers of teens say they look to a sibling or cousin for advice, or ask a teacher. A handful of teens seek advice from another relative like an aunt or uncle, or a youth pastor/religious leader, and another very small number visit websites for advice.

Girls and boys are equally likely to seek advice from difference sources, but younger teens ages 12-13 are much more likely to rely on friends and peers than older teens, while older teens are more like than younger teens to ask parents for advice. The youngest girls are the most likely to rely on friends for advice.

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## Who or what did you turn to for advice?

*% of all teens who sought help after witnessing online cruelty (n=203)*



**Source:** The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Teen-Parent survey, April 19-July 14, 2011. N=799 for teens and parents, including oversample of minority families. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish.

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## Teens say the advice they get from friends and parents about how to deal with online cruelty is helpful.

Overwhelmingly, those teens who ask for advice about online cruelty they witnessed or experienced think the advice they got was helpful. More than nine in ten of those asking for advice (92%) say that the advice was good. Another 6% say the advice they got didn't make any difference in their situation and 2% say they looked or asked for advice but did not find it or receive it. None of our respondents said the advice they got was not helpful.

## Parents: Most important in shaping teens' attitudes toward appropriate online behavior<sup>32</sup>

We asked teens who (or what) was the biggest influence on what they think is appropriate or inappropriate behavior on a cell phone or online, and a majority – 58% – say their parents have the greatest influence. White teens are more likely to say parents than Latino teens (63% vs. 42%), and teens from the wealthiest families (earning more than \$75,000 a year) are more likely to point to parents than teens from any other income group. Teens whose parents lack a high school degree are the only

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<sup>32</sup> Teens whose parent or guardian listened in on their interview for this study were notably less likely than teens whose parents did not listen to the interview to point to brothers or sisters as their biggest influence on appropriate online and cell phone behavior. However, this may be because teens whose parents listen to their interview are overwhelmingly younger, and they may be less likely to have siblings old enough to be a digital influence.

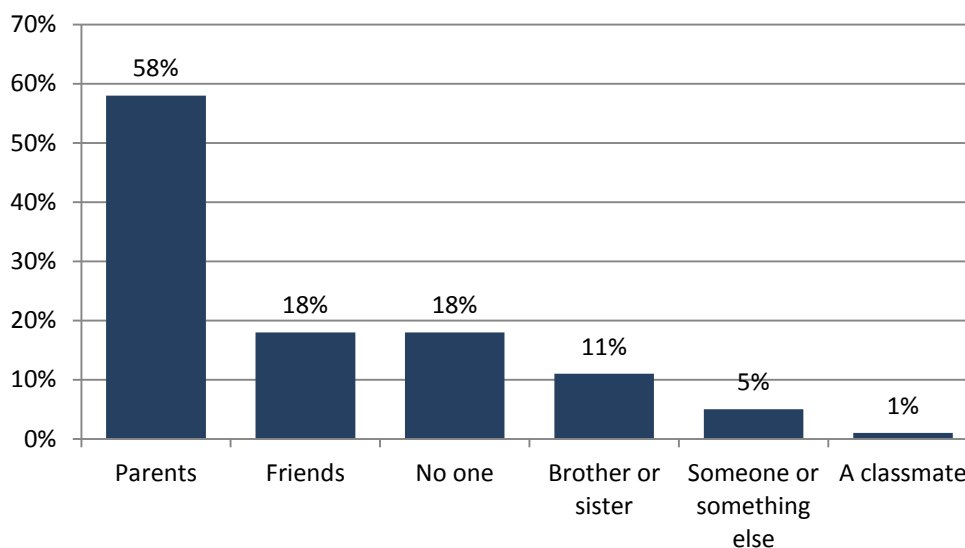
group for which parents are *not* the main source of influence – these teens are more likely to cite “no one” (36%) than to cite parents (28%). There are very few differences in influencers by age or gender of the teen. Older teens ages 14-17 are more likely to specify friends as their biggest influence, with 22% of that age group reporting that, while 10% of younger users point to friends as their source of their online attitudes.

Parent internet users are also more likely to serve as a teen’s biggest influence on online and cell phone behavior than parents who do not use the internet: teens with online parents are more likely to report that parents are their biggest influence than teens whose parents do not go online (60% vs. 37%).

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### Who has been the biggest influence on what you think is appropriate or inappropriate when you are using a cell phone or going online?

*% of teens who use the internet or cell phones (n=778)*



**Source:** The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Teen-Parent survey, April 19-July 14, 2011. N=799 for teens and parents, including oversample of minority families. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish.

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Teens who use social media are more likely than teens who do not to say that friends (21% vs. 6%) and siblings (13% vs. 4%) are their biggest influence. Teens who do not use social media (generally, younger teens, particularly boys) are more likely to say that their parents are the most influential (68% vs. 54%).

Teens who have witnessed cruel behavior online are more likely than those who have not witnessed meanness to say that their parents (57% vs. 37%) and friends (22% vs. 8%) are the biggest influences on their vision of appropriate online and on phone behavior. On the flip side, teens who have not witnessed online cruelty more often say that “no one” is their biggest influence around online behavior, with 46% of such teens saying so, compared with 15% of those who have been exposed to online cruelty.

# Part 3

## Privacy and Safety Issues

In this section of the report, we discuss some of the key issues that relate to teens' privacy practices and risks to their online safety. We present findings on certain behaviors that teens engage in that may, depending on the circumstances, serve as protective measures or have risky implications for the sanctity of their online information. Some of these risky behaviors, such as falsifying age information, are relatively common, while activities like "sexting" appear to be more isolated. The privacy choices that teens make when using social network sites serve as an important indicator for understanding the level of publicity that accompanies their interactions in these spaces.

### Close to half of online teens have said they were older in order to access a website or online service.

In order to comply<sup>33</sup> with the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA), many general audience websites that collect personal information from their users require that users they are at least 13 years old.<sup>34</sup> This includes popular sites like Facebook and YouTube, all of whom ask users to confirm that they meet this age requirement when setting up an account. Other websites that contain adult-oriented material such as alcohol-related advertising or sexually explicit material may require the user to be at least 18 or 21 years of age.

However, close to half of online teens (44%) admit to lying about their age at one time or another so they could access a website or sign up for an online account. When we asked a similar question in 2000, two years after COPPA's enactment, just 15% of online teens admitted to lying about their age to gain

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<sup>33</sup> Or more technically, to avoid having to comply with COPPA, which requires that companies that have knowledge of youth under 13 on their site gain verifiable parental consent for the collection of any personal information from that child.

<sup>34</sup> For more information on COPPA compliance, see: <http://www.coppa.org/comply.htm>

access to a website.<sup>35</sup> Websites are not currently required to *verify* a user's age, and there is an ongoing debate<sup>36</sup> about whether or not such verification is technically and practically possible.

Boys and girls are equally likely to say they were older to gain access to a website or service. These incidents of "inaccurate" reporting could have occurred at any point in the child's internet-using years, and as such, the variations by age are difficult to interpret. The youngest group of teens in our sample, those ages 12-13, are more likely than 17-year-olds to say they have lied about their age (49% vs. 30%).

## Teens who use social media are more likely than non-users to say they have lied about their age.

Online teens who use social network sites are twice as likely as non-users to say they have misrepresented their age online in order to gain access to websites and online services (49% vs. 26%). The teens who admitted to this practice did not specify the sites where they had been dishonest in reporting their age. These misrepresentations could have occurred anywhere online – while creating a social network profile or attempting to access another service intended for older audiences.

However, as we noted in our 2007 report, "Teens, Privacy and Online Social Networks," teen profile owners commonly provide false information. At that time, more than half said they had posted some fake information to their profiles, and many of the examples we heard about from teens in our focus groups at that time included instances of lying about one's age.<sup>37</sup>

As noted earlier, our latest survey shows that 45% of 12-year-olds who are online are social network users of sites like Facebook and MySpace, all of which have 13 as a minimum age.<sup>38</sup> Looking specifically at Twitter, 13% of all 12-year old internet users say they use the site, which could include reading or posting material. A Consumer Reports study from this year, which extrapolated estimates based on parent interviews, suggested that 7.5 million American children under the age of 13 were Facebook users, and that approximately 5 million were age 10 and under.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> In the December 2000 survey, the question wording was: "Have you ever said you were older than you are so you could get onto a web site?" And a further note: That question was asked at a time before the most popular forms of social media came into being, and just after the FTC finished rule-making guidance for COPPA. One major concern of the policy community then and now is children's access to adult content.

<sup>36</sup> Palfrey, J., Sacco, D., boyd, d. (2008) "Enhancing Child Safety and Online Technologies: Final Report of the Internet Safety Technical Taskforce," Berkman Center for Internet & Society, Harvard University.  
<http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/pubrelease/isttf/>

<sup>37</sup> For more detail, see: <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2007/Teens-Privacy-and-Online-Social-Networks/5-Online-Privacy--What-Teens-Share-and-Restrict-in-an-Online-Environment/04-More-than-half-of-teens-post-false-information-in-online-profiles.aspx>

<sup>38</sup> We are not able to report the number of 12-year-olds who use Facebook, or MySpace specifically because of a very small sample size.

<sup>39</sup> Survey findings available at: <http://www.consumerreports.org/cro/magazine-archive/2011/june/electronics-computers/state-of-the-net/facebook-concerns/index.htm>



Looking more closely at variations across different services, 49% of all Facebook-using teens say they have falsified their age in order to gain access to an online service, compared with 31% of those who do not use Facebook. And while Twitter users are a much smaller group (n=127 teens in our sample), 61% of them say they have lied about their age to gain access to a website or service somewhere online, compared with 41% of non-users. Again, these figures do not represent an estimate of lying that occurs on those specific sites.

Teens who maintain public profiles on social network sites are far more likely than those who have private profiles to report lying about their age (62% vs. 45%). However, falsifying age information does not vary according to the frequency of a teen's social network site use. For instance, teen social network users who go on the sites daily (49%) are just as likely as those who use the sites on a weekly basis (50%) to say that they have misrepresented their true age.

## **One in three online teens has shared a password with a friend or significant other.**

Roughly one in three online teens (30%) reports sharing one of their passwords with a friend, boyfriend, or girlfriend. While passwords may be guarded closely by some youth, password sharing among peers can be a sign of trust and intimacy. Online girls are much more likely than online boys to share passwords with friends and significant others (38% vs. 23%), and older teens ages 14-17 are more likely to do so than younger ones (36% vs. 17%). Looking more closely at older girls ages 14-17, nearly half (47%) admit to sharing passwords with friends or significant others.

Password sharing is especially common among users of social network sites; 33% of all teen social network site users say they have shared a password with a friend or significant other, compared with 19% of teen internet users who don't use social network sites. However, there are no significant variations according to the frequency of teens' social media use, nor by the kinds of privacy restrictions they place on their profile.

*(continued on next page)*

## Falsifying age information and sharing passwords

% of teen internet users in each group who have done the following

	Said they were older to access a website	Shared a password with a friend or S.O.
<b>All teen internet users</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Boys (a)	43	23
Girls (b)	46	38 (a)
<b>Age groups</b>		
12-13 (a)	49	17
14-17 (b)	42	36 (a)
<b>Age by year</b>		
12 (a)	45	13
13 (b)	54 (f)	21
14 (c)	53 (f)	29 (a)
15 (d)	47 (f)	43 (ab)
16 (e)	38	33 (a)
17 (f)	30	41 (ab)

**Note:** Columns marked with (a) or another letter indicates a statistically significant difference between rows. Statistical significance is determined within each column and section.

**Source:** The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Teen-Parent survey, April 19-July 14, 2011. N= 770 for teen internet users. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish.

## More than half of online teens have decided not to post something online because they were concerned it might reflect badly on them in the future.

Teenagers are often accused of being careless and naïve – particularly when it comes to the way they manage their privacy and digital footprints online. Yet, our data suggest that many online teens are considering the implications of their actions at least some of the time. Indeed, more than half (55%) of online teens say they have decided not to post something online out of concern that it might reflect poorly on them in the future.

As other prominent social media researchers have noted, the privacy-protecting behaviors of youth are complex, and involve a combination of application choice, profile settings, selective friending, and

message control.<sup>40</sup> Contrary to the public perception that teens and young adults simply “don’t care” about their privacy online, there is growing evidence that younger users’ privacy aspirations are not radically different from the views held by older adults. One recent study conducted by researchers at the Berkeley Center for Law and Technology suggests that while some younger users of social media may have false confidence in the protections afforded by privacy laws, their attitudes and expectations about privacy are largely in sync with older Americans.<sup>41</sup>

Our focus group conversations with teens also highlight various examples of how they think about the impact of their online postings, and how they adjust their behavior accordingly. Some teens, such as one middle school girl we spoke with, decide to refrain from using social network sites altogether:

*MIDDLE SCHOOL GIRL: I don’t want a Facebook. I’m afraid that like someday, something’s going to come back and it’s going to be like the end of my world because – I mean I don’t know what I would do [...] that would be so bad [...] But you hear stories and it just – it worries me. Like I tell all my friends who like take pictures, like, I’m like, you can’t tag me in that. You can’t tag anybody who’s not on Facebook.*

Older teen internet users (ages 14-17) are more likely than younger teens (ages 12-13) to say they have reconsidered posting content online after thinking about the possibility of negative implications (59% vs. 46%). However, online teens age 17—who are likely to be preparing for or in the midst of college and job applications—report the highest levels of this kind of digital withholding. More than two-thirds of online teens age 17 (67%) say they have decided not to post something online because they thought it may reflect badly on them in the future.

Older online girls ages 14-17 (63%) are more likely than the youngest boys ages 12-13 (40%) to say they have refrained from posting content because it might affect how they are perceived in the future. However, this difference may be related to the fact that older girls are much more frequent internet users and post content more often to social media sites.

Teen social network site users are almost twice as likely as non-social network site-using online teens (60% vs. 34%) to say they have withheld content after considering the potential ramifications.

Again, there were no notable variations according to the frequency of teens’ social network site use or the kinds of privacy settings they choose for their profile.

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<sup>40</sup> See: Ellison, N.B., Vitak, J., Steinfield, C., Gray, R. & Lampe, C. (2011). “Negotiating privacy concerns and social capital needs in a social media environment.” In S. Trepte & L. Reinecke (Eds.), *Privacy Online: Perspectives on Privacy and Self-Disclosure in the Social Web*. Heidelberg and New York: Springer, pp. 19-32. See also: danah boyd and Alice Marwick. (2011). “Social Privacy in Networked Publics: Teens’ Attitudes, Practices, and Strategies.” Paper presented at the Oxford Internet Institute Decade in Internet Time Symposium, September 22. [ssrn] Available at: [http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=1925128](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1925128).

<sup>41</sup> Hoofnagle, Chris Jay, King, Jennifer, Li, Su and Turow, Joseph (2010). “How Different are Young Adults from Older Adults When it Comes to Information Privacy Attitudes and Policies?” Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1589864>

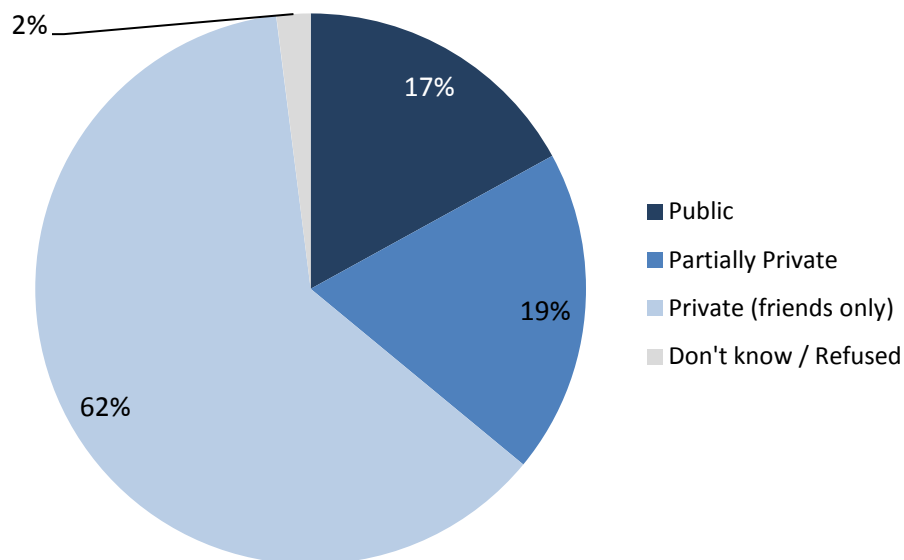
## The vast majority of teens say they have private profiles visible only to “friends.”

Beyond *what* they post, the choices teens make about *who* they share information with via their social media profiles suggest that most teens are cognizant of their online privacy and have made choices to try to protect it.<sup>42</sup> Close to two-thirds (62%) of teens who have a social media profile say the profile they use most often is set to be private so that only their friends can see the content they post.<sup>43</sup> One in five (19%) say their profile is partially private so that friends of friends or their networks can see some version of their profile. Just 17% say their profile is set to public so that everyone can see it. This distribution is consistent regardless of how often a teen uses social network sites.

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### Teens' privacy settings on social media sites

Based on teen SNS or Twitter users (n=623)



**Source:** The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Teen-Parent survey, April 19-July 14, 2011. n=799 for teens and parents, including oversample of minority families. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. Adult data from Pew Internet's August 2011 Tracking survey with adults 18+, July 25-August 26, 2011. n=2260.

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<sup>42</sup> The above noted research from danah boyd and Alice Marwick details how teen conceptions of “privacy” differ from their elders, and documents various messaging strategies beyond basic privacy settings that teens use to “achieve their privacy goals.” See: danah boyd and Alice Marwick. (2011). “Social Privacy in Networked Publics: Teens’ Attitudes, Practices, and Strategies.” Paper presented at the Oxford Internet Institute Decade in Internet Time Symposium, September 22. [ssrn] Available at: [http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=1925128](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1925128)

<sup>43</sup> This figure is consistent with what we have found in the past. In a similar question asked in 2006, 59% of teens with “active profiles” said that their profile was visible only to friends. See: <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2007/Teens-Privacy-and-Online-Social-Networks/5-Online-Privacy--What-Teens-Share-and-Restrict-in-an-Online-Environment/05-Teens-walk-the-line-between-openness-and-privacy.aspx>

However, teens in our focus groups did describe the important differences in how various applications are structured, and how the affordances of the privacy settings on different profiles affect their willingness to use them. One middle school-aged boy described how his privacy concerns ultimately led him to delete his Twitter account:

*MIDDLE SCHOOL BOY: I mean, I had a Twitter. But Twitter is scary because like it's so much more – like you can Google my name and it will have my Twitter account. And then it's not really as protected as Facebook [...] – because in Facebook, you can set a setting so it really can't see you. But like in Twitter, I always feel like that anyone can really see any tweet that I'm doing, which may be not true... There wasn't enough privacy, so I just deleted it. And just stick with Facebook.*

Similarly, another boy in the same group said that he had deleted his Buzz account because he felt it was too public:

*MIDDLE SCHOOL BOY: The same thing happened with me on Buzz, because I Googled my name on Google and all my like Buzz things that I'd posted and commented on came up. So I deleted my account.*

## **Those who have had negative experiences are more likely to have public profiles.**

Teens who have had at least one negative outcome from an experience on a social network site are almost twice as likely as those who have not had a bad experience to say that their profile is public (23% vs. 12%). Cutting the data another way, teens with public profiles are substantially more likely than those with more private profiles to say that they ended their friendship with someone because of something that happened on a social network site. Likewise, those who admit to lying about their age in order to access a website or online service are more likely to have public profiles when compared with those who say they have not misrepresented their age (21% vs. 12%).

Teens who have parents that express a high level of concern about the way teens treat each other online and via cell phones are somewhat more likely to report having profiles that are set to private; 87% of teens with very concerned parents have private profiles, compared with 77% of those whose parents are less concerned.

Younger social media-using teens (ages 12-13) are just as likely as older teens (ages 14-17) to say they have set their profile to private. However, social media-using girls are far more likely than boys to say they have restricted their profile to friends only. Three in four (74%) report this, compared with just half (51%) of social media-using boys. Likewise, 21% of boys have a profile that is set to public, while just 12% of girls report this. Looking at those who have a partially private profile, 25% of social media-using boys report this compared with just 13% of social media-using girls.

Teen social media users who are black (30%) are more likely to say they have a public profile when compared with white (15%) or Hispanic (11%) teens.

However, while this gives us a general sense of the ways teens are controlling who is able to view the updates on their profile, it does not tell us a great deal about the fine-tuning that is necessary to manage every aspect of one's profile online. For instance, basic profile information is often available by default, no matter what settings the user chooses. Facebook, the most popular social networking platform among teens, makes basic profile information such as a user's name, gender, and profile picture visible to every user of the service. Other information such as networks, likes, activities, and interests are available by default but can be restricted by changing the privacy settings.<sup>44</sup> Additional customization that allows users to place detailed restrictions on who sees individual posts, photos, or other content is possible, though our findings suggest that most teens are not practicing this kind of micromanagement.

Further complicating this picture is the fact that the default privacy settings on Facebook and other social network sites have changed over time, requiring users who may wish to maintain tighter restrictions over their information to actively "opt-out" of changes that encourage a more open profile. And it is not just teens who struggle with these moving targets. Research examining practices among adults suggests that social network site users may hold inaccurate beliefs about the level of public visibility of their content on the sites.<sup>45</sup>

### Teens with restricted privacy settings broadcast information widely within their networks and do not limit what certain friends can see.

Among those teens whose profile is at least partially private, the vast majority say that they do not take additional steps to limit what certain friends can and cannot see within that network. Instead, once teens choose the general privacy settings for their profile, most appear to be broadcasting the same status updates, photos, likes, and other content to everyone in their network of friends; 84% say that all of their friends see the same thing when they post, and just 15% say they limit what certain friends can see.

Teens of all ages in our focus groups repeatedly described the process of friending as their first line of defense in managing their privacy online:

*MIDDLE SCHOOL GIRL: There are some qualifications you got to pass if you want to be my friend [on Facebook]. You can't be over a certain age. If you over like – if you real old, I'm not going to accept that request – (laughter) – because you're old, ew. Why did you send me a friend request? If you're old and if I know you and I don't like you, I'm not going to accept your request. Now I think it's like 17 requests in my friend box? I'm not going to accept. They're going to sit there.*

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<sup>44</sup> This description was accurate at the time of this report's writing.

<sup>45</sup> Acquisti, A., & Gross, R. (2006). "Imagined communities: Awareness, information sharing, and privacy on the Facebook. In P. Golle & G. Danezis (Eds.), Proceedings of 6th Workshop on Privacy Enhancing Technologies" (pp. 36–58). Cambridge, UK: Robinson College. See also: Katherine Strater and Heather Richter Lipford. (2008). "Strategies and struggles with privacy in an online social networking community." In Proceedings of the 22nd British HCI Group Annual Conference on People and Computers: Culture, Creativity, Interaction - Volume 1 (BCS-HCI '08), Vol. 1. British Computer Society, Swinton, UK, UK, 111-119.

*HIGH SCHOOL BOY: I got my school up there, my name, all my friends. I block, like, certain stuff, like I might block everybody from seeing my profile pictures or block them from seeing a certain photo I don't want them to see. ... I just do it as a whole: [if] you're my friend, you can see everything, but if you're not my friend, you won't see nothing.*

However, many teens described large networks that included lesser-known acquaintances who they decided to friend for various reasons. Some described feeling as though they were obligated to friend everyone in their school, while others talked about friending people they had met or seen at school events:

*MIDDLE SCHOOL GIRL: Sometimes ... your friends on Facebook, you might not know all of them, but like, oh, you've seen them at a basketball game or you've seen them at a football game or, like, you've seen each other in person but you're not, like, really close friends. You're just, oh, hey, I know him; I have him as a friend on Facebook.*

There are no significant differences by gender, age, or race/ethnicity among those who customize what they share within their networks.

Teens who have parents that are friends with them on social network sites are no more likely to say that they customize their posts to limit what certain friends can see. However, we did hear stories in our focus groups that suggested some savvy teens alter their messaging when parents are part of their audience:

*HIGH SCHOOL GIRL: Like if I'm about to update a status and I don't like somebody to see it, I, like, block them from seeing my status. Say for my mother, for example. Like, I've got my mother on Facebook and I want to update something and I don't want her to see it, so I block [her from seeing it].*

## **Few teens say they have sent sexually suggestive images or videos, but 1 in 6 say they have received them.**

While many teens send them deliberately, perhaps the most extreme example of a breach of a teen's privacy is the sharing of sexually suggestive images beyond the intended recipient. As we have reported in the past,<sup>46</sup> parents, educators, and advocates are deeply concerned about the practice of "sexting," or the creating, sharing, and forwarding of sexually suggestive nude or nearly nude images by minor teens.

Previous Pew Internet Project research has focused on the cell phone as a site of this activity, and these new findings, which are technology agnostic, expand upon that work. In our 2009 report, we identified three scenarios in which sexting most often occurs among teens:

- Exchanges of images solely between two romantic partners
- Exchanges between partners that are then shared outside the relationship

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<sup>46</sup> Lenhart, A. (2009) "Teens and Sexting," Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project. <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2009/Teens-and-Sexting.aspx>

- Exchanges between people who are not yet in a relationship, but where often one person hopes to be.

In the current study, just 2% of all teens ages 12-17 say they have sent a “sexually suggestive nude or nearly nude photo or video” of themselves to someone else. That represents 3% of all teen cell users and has remained stable since 2009 when 4% of teen cell users answered a similar question.<sup>47</sup> A much larger segment of the teen population – 16% of all teens and 18% of cell users – say they have received a sexually suggestive nude or nearly nude photo or video of someone else they know. By comparison, in 2009, 15% cell-owning teens said they had received such images of someone they know.

As was the case in 2009, there are no significant gender or age differences among those who say they have sent a sexually suggestive message. However, in a trend that is also consistent over the past two years, older teens are much more likely than younger teens to say that they have *received* a sexually suggestive nude or nearly nude photo or video of someone they know; 21% of older teen cell users report this, compared with just 6% of those ages 12-13. Boys and girls across all age groups are equally likely to receive a sexually suggestive photo or video.

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<sup>47</sup> The 2009 question was asked only of cell phone users and used wording that specified an exchange that took place via cell phone: “Have you ever sent a sexually suggestive nude or nearly nude photo or video of yourself to someone else using your cell phone?” For more detail, see “Teens and Sexting,” available at: <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2009/Teens-and-Sexting.aspx>



# Part 4

## The Role of Parents in Digital Safekeeping and Advice-Giving

### Online safety and parent involvement

Parents in the United States are still the primary gatekeepers and managers of their teens' internet experience. As discussed earlier in the report, parents are the most often cited source of advice and the biggest influence on teens' understanding of appropriate and inappropriate digital behavior. Parents are also responsible for keeping their teens safe online and offline and have a number of tools at their disposal to do so.

There are a variety of approaches to engaging with teens on the topic of online safety. Parents can talk to their teens about safe and risky online practices and about appropriate and inappropriate behavior. Parents can also answer questions that teens have and give advice in response to questions. They can also take concrete steps to monitor or check up on their teens' online activities, including the relatively low-tech techniques of checking which websites a teen has visited, viewing his or her social media profiles, or friending him or her on a social network. This monitoring might also include use of parental controls on the computer or cell phone that a teen uses.

In this study, we asked parents (and often teens as well) about whether or not they engaged in the following actions:

- Talked with you/your child about ways to use the internet and cell phones safely
- Talked with you/your child about ways to behave toward other people online or on the phone
- Talked with you/your child about what you/he or she does on the internet
- Talked with you/your child about what kinds of things should and should not be shared online or on a cell phone
- Checked to see what information was available online about your child<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Asked only of parents who use the internet – not asked of teens.

- Checked your social network site profile<sup>49</sup>
- Checked which websites you/your child visited
- Friended your child on social media<sup>50</sup>
- Used parental controls or other means of blocking, filtering or monitoring your/your child's online activities
- Used parental controls to restrict your/your child's use of your/his or her cell phone.

In this study, we find that parents are more likely to talk with teens about digital safety and behavior issues, and are somewhat less likely to take a more hands-on approach to restrict or monitor their child. Both parents and teens confirm these tendencies.

## **The vast majority of parents of online teenagers have had serious conversations with their kids about the do's and don'ts of online behavior.**

We asked both teens and parents about whether parents talk with their children about online safety, and overwhelmingly, both groups said that parents are talking to teens about these issues. From the teen perspective, more than four in five parents engage their kids in conversations about ways to use the internet and cell phones safely, ways to behave toward other people online or on a mobile phone, what kinds of things should and should not be shared online, and what the teen is doing online or on his or her phone. As we often see when we ask questions of both parents and teens, parents are statistically more likely than their teens to say that they talk to their child about various issues. In this case, the discussion topics that parents and teens reported differently include ways to use the internet and cell phone safely, what their child does on the internet or cell phone, and what kind of things should and should not be shared online or on a cell phone.

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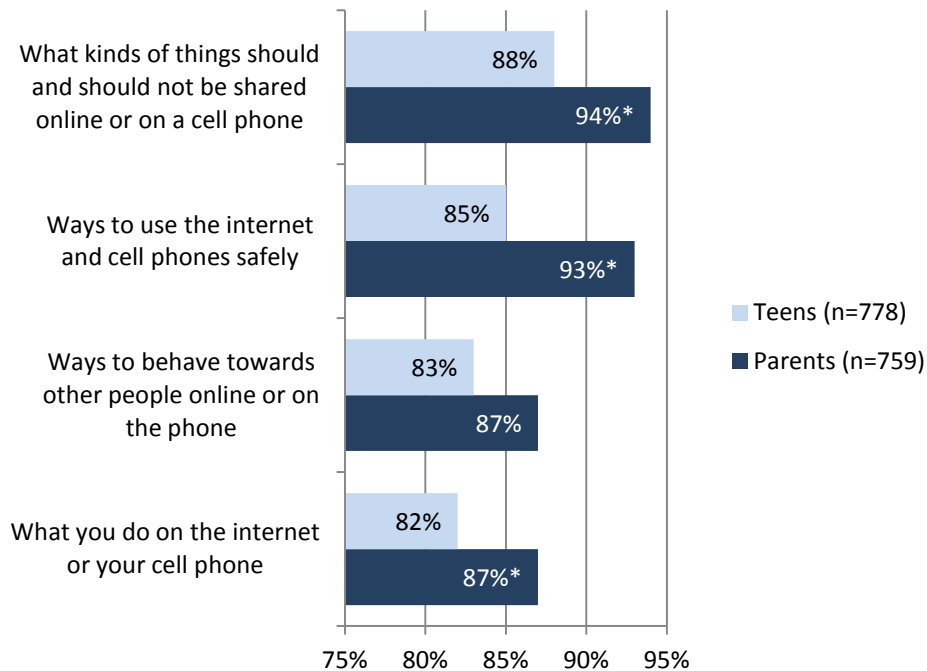
<sup>49</sup> Asked only of teens who use social network sites or Twitter.

<sup>50</sup> Asked only of parents who use social media and had a child who uses social media – not asked of teens.

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## Parents and teens report that they talk together about online safety

*"Have you ever talked about...?" (% of teens who use the internet or cell phones, and % of parents of those teens)*



**Source:** The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Teen-Parent survey, April 19-July 14, 2011. N=799 for teens and parents, including oversample of minority families. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish.

**Note:** \* indicates statistically significant difference between bars. Also note -- the phrasing in the chart reflects the wording asked of teens. The questions asked of parents did not include references to cell phones, but were otherwise identical.

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Virtually all parents of online teens (98%) have talked to their children about the way to behave online and cope with problems in sometimes-challenging internet realms. These important conversations do not appear to have fallen on deaf ears; when we asked teens about the conversations they had with their parents, there was considerable overlap in the topics covered. Parents and teens report that they have discussed a wide range of safety and behavioral issues that relate to online life.

**94% of parents – and 88% of online teens – report discussing what kinds of things should and should not be shared online.**

Fully 94% of parents of online teens say they discuss what kinds of things should and should not be shared online with their child. Latino parents of online teens are somewhat less likely than whites or blacks to say they have done this. Those in households earning more than \$50,000 annually are more likely than those in lower-income households to have done it.

When we asked teens about these conversations with parents, younger teens ages 12-13 are somewhat more likely than their older counterparts to report parents discussing what kinds of things should and should not be shared on a cell phone or online (93% vs. 86% of older teens).

According to teens, parents who use social media are more likely to talk with their teen about what kinds of things should and should not be shared online or on a cell phone. Teens report that parents who are friends with their teens on social media are more likely to have these conversations than parents who have not friended their child (92% vs. 79%). Parents who do not use social media are more likely to have teens who report that their parents do not talk about any online behavior or safety issues with them.

Teens who had received sexts were *less* likely to report parents talking with them about what kinds of things should and should not be shared on a cell phone.

### **93% of parents and 85% of teens say they have discussed ways to use the internet safely.**

Parents of online teens ages 12-13 are more likely than parents of older kids to have had these conversations about how to use the internet safely. Among parents who are friends with their teen on a social network site, 97% report that they have talked about these issues with their child, while 87% of parents who do not use social network sites at all have done the same.

When the question was asked of teens, younger teens 12-13 are more likely to say their parents discuss ways to use the internet and cell phones safely (89% vs. 83% of older teens). Girls are also more likely than boys to report their parents talking with them about digital safety (89% vs. 81% of boys). Younger girls are more likely to have these conversations with their parents than older boys, with the data trend visible even more strongly among younger girls who have a cell phone and use texting.

Teens who think peers are mostly unkind on social network sites and those who have been victims of online cruelty are also more likely to say that their parents have talked with them about ways to use the internet and cell phones safely (94% vs. 83% for those who think peers are unkind vs. kind, and a similar 94% vs. 83% for those who have and have not been victims of online cruelty).

### **87% of parents have discussed with their teen what she or he has been doing online.**

A total of 87% of parents (and a slightly smaller 82% of teens) say that parents have talked with their teen about what she or he has been doing online. Mothers are more likely than fathers to have done this (91% vs. 82%).

When the question is asked of teens, online teens who do *not* use social network sites are more likely to report having this discussion with their parents than those who use social media. Among social media users, teens who keep their online social media profile private are more likely than teens who have an entirely public profile to report having talked with their parents about what they do online or on their

cell phone – 87% of private profile owners say they have talked with their parents about what they do online compared with 73% of those with a public profile. Similarly, those who have experienced online cruelty also are more likely to report that a parent talked with them about what they do on the internet or their phone.

### **87% of parents have suggested ways to behave toward other people online.**

Parents of online girls are more likely than parents of boys to say they have discussed this with their teen. Among teens asked this question, those teens who have received sexually suggestive texts and those who have experienced any type of bullying in the past 12 months – whether online, on the phone, or in-person – are *less* likely than teens who had not received or experienced these things to say that their parents had talked with them about how to behave online.

## **Parental monitoring: Non-technical steps are preferred by parents.**

Beyond simply talking with teens about online safety and civility, parents and other adult caregivers have other actions and technical tools at their disposal to help maintain their awareness of their child's online activities.

Overall, parents are more likely to favor less technical steps for monitoring their child's online behavior. More than three-quarters (77%) of parents say that they have checked to see what websites their child has visited. Two-thirds of parents of online teens have checked to see what information was available online about their child. More than six in ten teens report that they know their parents have checked their social media profile, and 41% of parents of online teens have friended their child on a social network site.

### **66% of parents of online teens have checked to see what information about their teen is available on the internet.**

In the age of widespread use of social network sites by teens, many parents have become vigilant about monitoring their child's activities online, the information that is available about them, and their comings and goings on social network sites.

Two-thirds of parents (66%) say they have searched for their child's digital footprints online. Mothers who use the internet (75%) are considerably more likely than fathers (55%) to report checking on their teenage child's digital reputation, and higher-income parents are more likely to do this than those who live in households with more modest incomes. White and black parents are more likely to report this type of searching than Latino parents, as are parents with greater levels of education.

The oldest girls ages 14-17 are more likely to have their parents search for information about them online than the youngest boys, with 72% of the parents of older girls searching, compared with 55% of the parents of younger boys. Social media and use of mobile phones also relate to parents searching online for information about their child. Teens with cell phones, teens who have sent and received sexts,

as well as social media users are all also more likely to have their parents check and see what information is available about them online.

Parents who themselves have experience using social media are more likely to perform these checks. The most active parents checking on their child's digital material are those who have connected with their children via social network sites.

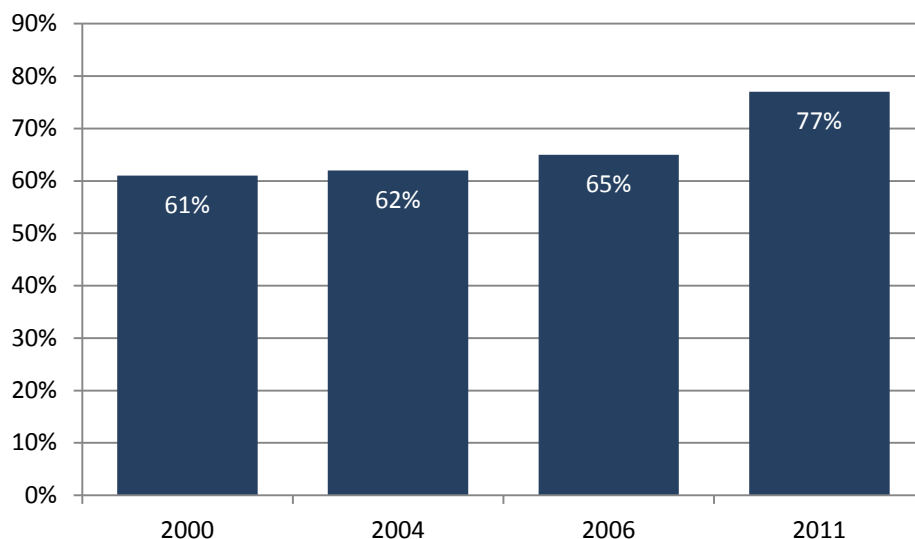
### Parents are becoming more vigilant in monitoring their teen's online browsing.

The proportion of parents who say they check on the websites their child visits online has risen since 2006. Some 77% of the parents of online teens say they do this, compared with 65% who said they did so in our 2006 survey.

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#### Parents who check on the websites their teen has visited

*% of parents of online teens*



**Source:** The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Teen-Parent surveys. All available at <http://pewinternet.org/Data-Tools/Download-Data/Data-Sets.aspx?topicFilter=aff4e2b2-7c23-4fdc-9ca6-fcf6815efd56>

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White parents of online teens (83%) are more likely to check the websites of their browsing teens than black parents (75%) or Latino parents (64%). Parents in higher-income households and those with at least a high school diploma are also more likely than others to check up on their teen's online travels. The age and gender of the teenager are not associated with this kind of parental vigilance. The parents who have become friends with their teen on social network sites are also more likely to have done this.

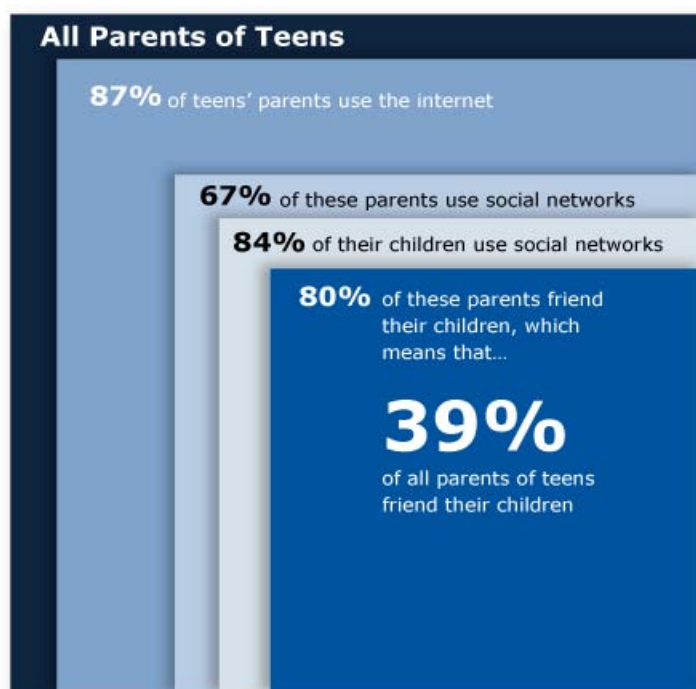
## Checking the social network site profile of teen<sup>51</sup>

Nearly two-thirds (61%) of social media-using teens report that their parents have checked their social network site profile. White and black teens were more likely than Latino teens to report that their parents had checked their social media profile. According to teens, parents with a high school education and above were more likely than parents with lower levels of education to check the content of the teen's online profile. Teens who had directly experienced online cruelty were also a bit more likely than those who had not to have parents who checked their online profile.

## 39% of parents have friended their teenager on social network sites, but being connected to a child that way does not necessarily ward off problems.

Taking monitoring social media a step further than simply checking their child's profile or web usage, some 39% of all parents of teens are friends with or otherwise connected to their children via social network sites. That translates into 45% of online parents. We arrive at that overall figure by noting that 87% of parents of teens use the internet. Of them, 67% use social network sites. Of those parents who use social network sites, 84% say they have children who use social network sites. Finally, 80% of those social media-using parents whose teens also use social media have friended or connected with that child via social media.

Interestingly, there are no notable demographic differences among parents who make this kind of online connection with their teenagers and those who do not – either by gender, race, age, or class.



<sup>51</sup> This question was asked only of teens – about their parents' activity.

## Parents who friend their teens on social media are more likely to implement other online safety or parental control measures.

Parents who have friended their teen on social media are more likely to use some forms of parental controls. Nearly two-thirds (63%) of parents who friend their teens use parental controls, while only 31% of parents who are not social media friends with their teens use these tools on their computer. Those who connect with their kids via social network sites are also considerably more likely than others to have checked on the material that is available online about their teenager: 85% of the parents in this group have checked to see what information is available online about their child, compared with 45% of the parents who belong to a social network site but have not friended their teen. However, parents who friend their teen are just as likely as those who do not to say they use parental controls on their child's cell phone (33% vs. 29%).

## Friending parents on social media is associated with an increased likelihood of parent-child conflict over social media.

Friending a teen on social media may have some protective effects, but it is not without its costs, too. Teens whose parents report that they are friends with their child on social network sites are more likely than teens who aren't friends with their parents to say that they had a problem with their parents because of an experience on social media (18% vs. 5%).

Teens themselves have mixed feelings about being friended by their parents on Facebook. Some teens saw it as a normal part of a parent's job and were relatively unbothered by it:

*MIDDLE SCHOOL GIRL: [Parents] should just check in every once in a while.*

*MIDDLE SCHOOL BOY: I friended my mom without even thinking about it. For one thing, she's never on Facebook. And for another, I don't really care if she sees what I do. I'm not going out and drinking or whatever with bunches of people I don't know, so she can look.*

Others thought parents friending teens was more of an affront:

*MIDDLE SCHOOL GIRL: My mother is [on Facebook]. She doesn't have me as a friend. That's crazy serious.*

And some teens explained that other people in their lives like coaches and cousins kept an eye on them through Facebook:

*MIDDLE SCHOOL BOY: My parents check my wall. Sometimes even coaches check my wall.*

*MIDDLE SCHOOL GIRL: My coach is my [Facebook] friend...he's like 'oh, bring the spikes' or 'oh our uniforms are here.' He posts random stuff on my wall. Our whole track team has their own page.*



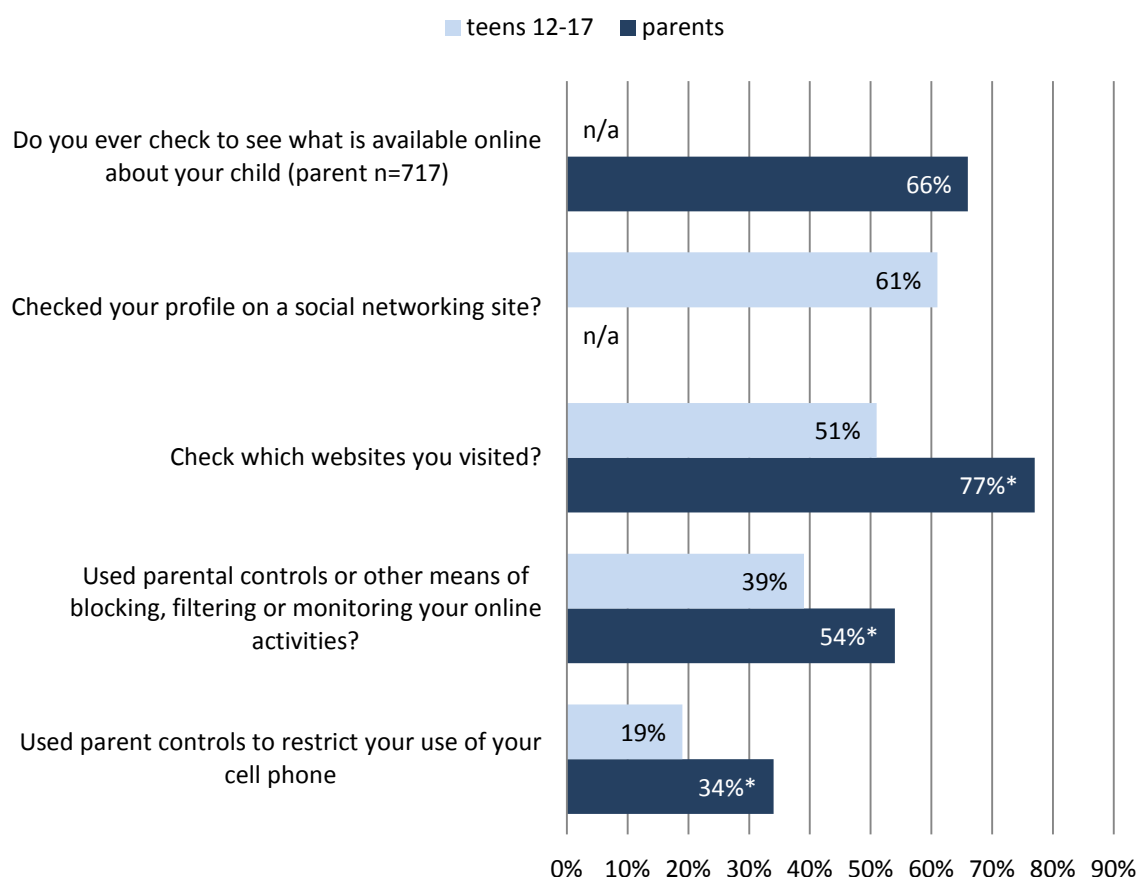
## More than half of parents say they use parental controls to manage teens' internet access; another third use parental controls on teens' mobile phones.

Parents are also using hardware and software-based tools to monitor their teens' online activities or block them from accessing certain content. These tools can be standalone software that is purchased or downloaded, or can be built into a browser or a computer operating system. More than half (54%) of parents say they use parental controls or other means of filtering or monitoring their child's computer-based online activities, while 39% of online teens report that their parents use this type of software or feature in a browser or operating system to manage their teen's computer-based internet experience.

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### Have you or your parents ever done any of the following things?

*% of parents and teens who have/use technology*



**Note:** \* indicates statistically significant differences between bars. Also, the websites visited, basic parental controls and "available online" questions asked of internet users or parents of internet users, parental controls on cell phone asked only of cell phone users/parents of teens cell users and checking a social network profile was only asked of teens who use social network sites or Twitter.

**Source:** The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Teen-Parent survey, April 19-July 14, 2011. N=799 for teens and parents, including oversample of minority families. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish.

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White parents (58%) and black parents (61%) are more likely than Latino parents (35%) to have done this. And the parents who have become friends on social network sites with their children are also more likely to report using parental controls.

Teens with parents who have been to college are also more likely to have parent controls in-use than teens with parents with a high school diploma. In a similar vein, teens from the lowest income households (under \$30,000 annually) were much less likely to report use of parental controls than teens from the highest income households (more than \$75,000 annually). There are no differences by gender or age in the report of use of parental controls by teens.

### About a third of parents use parental controls on their teens' mobile phone.

Given that so many mobile phones now incorporate easy internet access, and because of the ways that information in the form of text, photos, or videos can be recorded and shared with others on phones, companies have responded to parent and policy maker requests for parental controls for phones on family plans.<sup>52</sup> Teens and parents report that parents are taking advantage of these controls for cell phones, with 34% of parents reporting use of parental controls to restrict mobile phone use and 19% of teens reporting their parents' use of the tools. Two percent of teens do not know if their parents use the controls. Parents of younger teenage boys (those ages 12-13) are the most likely to have restricted their teen's cell use.

### 17% of all parents use both forms of parental controls; 41% do not use any parental controls.

Half (54%) of parents whose child uses the internet have used parental controls to restrict access to or content on the internet, and 34% of parents whose child uses a cell phone have used parental controls on their child's device. When looking at all parents of teens, regardless of their computer or phone ownership or use, 42% of parents use one parental control, either for internet or on a cell phone, and 17% of parents say they use parental controls in both locations. Another 41% of all parents say that they do not use any parental controls. According to another recent study, the bulk of the parents who do not use parental controls report that they feel they are unnecessary, either because of rules already in place, or because they trust their child to be safe.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> 77% of teens have a cell in this study. The cell phone data from the study will be treated more fully in a later Pew Internet report.

<sup>53</sup> Hart Research (2011) "Who Needs Parental Controls? A Survey of Awareness, Attitudes and Use of Online Parental Controls." Family Online Safety Institute, Washington, DC. September 14, 2011. [http://www.fosi.org/images/stories/research/fosi\\_hart\\_survey-report.pdf](http://www.fosi.org/images/stories/research/fosi_hart_survey-report.pdf)

# Part 5

## Parents and Online Social Spaces: Tech tool ownership and attitudes towards social media

**Parents see the internet and cell phones' role as a mixed blessing for their teenagers: Tech helps their kids to be connected and it can bring distressing things into their lives.**

In our survey, we asked parents about their feelings about a series of positive and negative impacts of digital technology. Generally, people said the internet and cell phones help their children connect to others and to information, and that technology helps their children become more independent. At the same time, they generally express concerns about the material to which their children are exposed online, the tone of the social world of the internet, and how kids' time spent with digital technology might take away from their face-to-face engagement with others. Overall, parental views tilted a bit toward the positive assertions, but there was still plenty of angst in their answers.

There were no overall demographic trends to the answers. As a rule, all kinds of people expressed satisfaction and concern in equal measure.

Still, there were a few things to note in survey answers to these questions about parental attitudes:

- Relative to Latinos, whites were more likely to feel that technology helps their child connect to friends and information. Parents with a college degree or some college experience, as well as those in higher-income households (those earning \$75,000 or above) were also more likely to see positive benefits of this nature. At the same time, those same groups of parents were more likely to express concern that digital technology exposed their kids to inappropriate content.
- The parents of teens who use Facebook were more likely than others to say that digital technology did a good job connecting their kids to family and friends, to say that the technology helped their child be independent, and that it helped connect their child to information.
- The parents of girls and teens who are frequent users of any social network site were more likely than others to worry about the impact of digital technology on the way teens in general treat each other online or on their phones.

## Parents' feelings about the impact of the internet and cell phones on their kids

**Positive impacts:** The % of parents of teen cell or internet users who rate the job of the internet and cell phones this way...

	Excellent	Good	Total saying positive impact	Fair	Poor	Total saying not positive impact
Connecting your child to information	48%	40%	88%	9%	2%	11%
Connecting your child to friends and family	40%	48%	88%	9%	3%	11%
Helping your child be more independent	21%	46%	67%	22%	8%	31%

**Negative impacts:** The % of parents of teen cell or internet users who say they are concerned about these issues...

	Very concerned	Somewhat concerned	Total citing concerns about negative impact	Not too concerned	Not at all concerned	Total saying they have little concern
Your child's exposure to inappropriate content through the internet or cell phones	47%	34%	81%	9%	9%	19%
How teens in general treat each other online or on their cell phones	45%	35%	80%	10%	9%	19%
Your child's internet or cell phone use taking time away from face-to-face interactions with friends or family	31%	33%	63%	20%	16%	36%

**Source:** The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Teen-Parent survey, April 19-July 14, 2011. N=799 for parents, including oversample of minority families. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. Data in this chart based on parents of teen cell phone or internet users.

## 13% of parents of online teens say they know their child has been bothered by something that happened or something they saw online.

Despite those concerns, a much smaller portion of teens have actually had problems online that their parents know about. Some 13% of parents of online teens say their child has experienced a problem online either in something that happened or something they saw online.

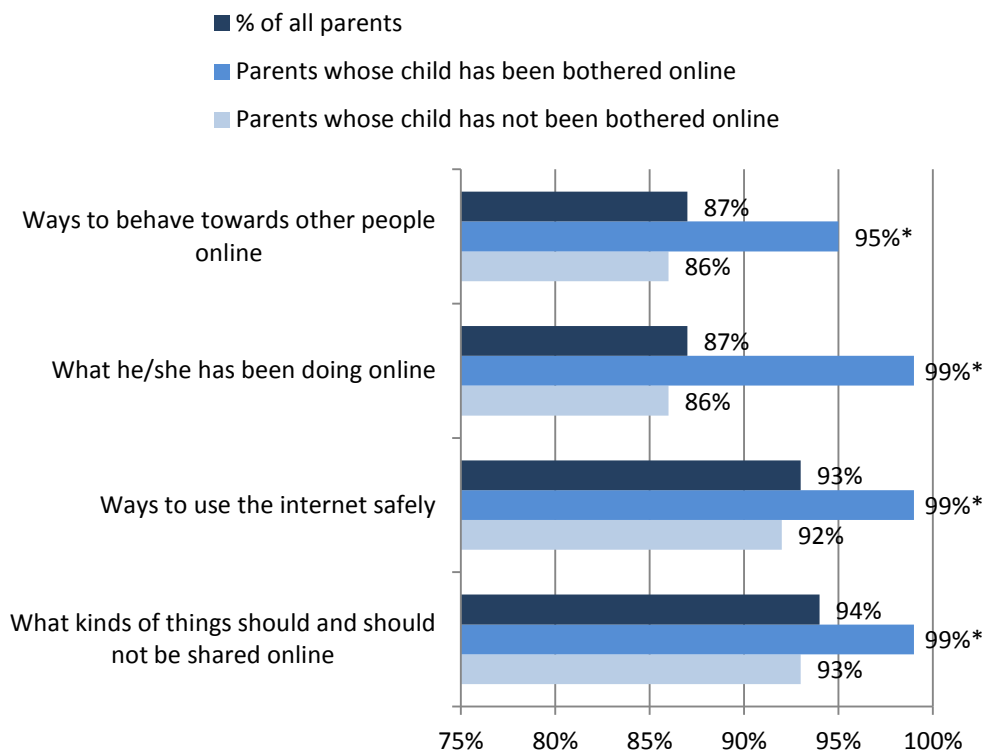
There are no demographic differences tied to these reports. Parents of girls and boys, parents of younger and older teens, parents of different races and ethnic groups, parents in relatively well-off and relatively poor households, parents in all kinds of communities are equally as likely to say their child has had a bad experience online. Internet-using parents are more likely than non-users to say their child has had some difficulty (14% vs. 5%).

Most strikingly, the parents who know their teenager has been bothered by something that happened online are also the most likely to talk with their teens about online safety strategies.

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### Parental discussions with their online teens

*% of parents of teen internet users who have talked with their child about...*



\* indicates statistically significant difference between “bothered” and “not bothered” bars.

**Source:** The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Teen-Parent survey, April 19-July 14, 2011. N=799 for teens and parents, including oversample of minority families. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish.

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More heartening, among parents who say their child has been bothered by something online in the past year, none of their children reported any greater likelihood of having negative or positive experiences on social media.

## **The parents of teenagers are steeped in technology and are increasingly involved with their kids' lives in online environments.**

The vast majority of parents of online teens have had serious conversations with their kids about online life, the problems associated with it, and ways to navigate those spaces. A majority of parents monitor their kids' online behavior. Relatively high numbers of parents have become friends with their offspring on social network sites.

This is all spurred by the fact that families are saturated with technology. Tech adoption and tech-usage rates by teens' parents are higher than the general population:

- 91% of parents of children ages 12-17 own cell phones, and 86% of those cell owners send and receive text messages. The most recent Pew Internet Project survey of the general population in August showed that 84% of all adults have cell phones and 76% of them exchange text messages.
- 87% of parents of teens are internet users (vs. 78% of those in the overall adult population) and 82% have broadband connections at home (vs. 62% of those in the overall population).
- 86% of parents of teens own laptops or desktops, compared with 76% of those in the overall adult population.

Online parents are just as likely as the general population of adult internet users to use social network sites; 67% of online parents of teens use social network sites like Facebook or LinkedIn, compared with 64% of all adult internet users.

Even though there is widespread adoption and use of technology among parents, there is some variance by class, age, and race to some aspects of technology use. Generally, families that are relatively well off and where the parent has a high level of education are more likely than others to own a cell phone, own a computer, and use the internet. In addition, white parents of teenagers are more likely than minority parents to own a cell phone or a computer and to use the internet. At the same time, once a parent owns a cell or uses the internet, she is just as likely as other parents to be a text message user and a participant on a social network site.

## Teens' parents and their technology profile

% of parents of teens who have/use technology

		Have cell phone	Text message user (% of cell owners)	Have desktop/ laptop	Use internet	Use social network sites (% of internet users)
<b>All parents of those ages 12-17</b>		<b>91%</b>	<b>86%</b>	<b>86%</b>	<b>87%</b>	<b>67%</b>
<b>Gender</b>						
Men	a	95 <sup>b</sup>	80	86	87	62
Women	b	88	91 <sup>a</sup>	86	86	71
<b>Age</b>						
Under 40	c	90	92 <sup>d</sup>	79	87	72
Over 40	d	91	83	89 <sup>c</sup>	86	66
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>						
White, non-Hispanic	f	94 <sup>h</sup>	87	91 <sup>g h</sup>	92 <sup>g h</sup>	68
Black, non-Hispanic	g	88	81	78	81	67
Hispanic (English- & Spanish-speaking)	h	83	85	74	70	61
<b>Household Income</b>						
Less than \$30,000	i	82	80	70	68	76 <sup>j k</sup>
\$30,000-\$49,999	j	92 <sup>i</sup>	77	83 <sup>i</sup>	83 <sup>i</sup>	56
\$50,000-\$74,999	k	93 <sup>i</sup>	88	93 <sup>i</sup>	97 <sup>i j</sup>	60
\$75,000+	l	99 <sup>i j k</sup>	91 <sup>i j</sup>	98 <sup>i j</sup>	99 <sup>i j</sup>	69
<b>Education level</b>						
Less than high school	m	72	71	49	47	58
High school grad	n	92 <sup>m</sup>	84	84 <sup>m</sup>	84 <sup>m</sup>	67
Some college	o	94 <sup>m</sup>	90 <sup>m</sup>	92 <sup>m</sup>	95 <sup>m n</sup>	72
College+	p	95 <sup>m</sup>	89 <sup>m</sup>	99 <sup>m n o</sup>	98 <sup>m n</sup>	66
<b>Geographic location</b>						
Urban	q	91	80	83	81	70
Suburban	r	91	87	89	91 <sup>q</sup>	63
Rural	s	89	91	84	83	72

**Note:** Cells marked with (a) or another letter indicates a statistically significant difference within that column between row marked and the row indicated by the letter. For instance, in the first column, the 95% of men (a) who have a cell phone is significantly more than the 88% of women who have a cell phone (b).

If no letters were indicated, there are no statistically significant differences; for instance, in the last column, there is no statistically significant difference between the 62% of male internet users who use social network sites and the 71% of women who use these sites.

**Source:** The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Teen-Parent survey, April 19-July 14, 2011. N=799 for teens and parents, including oversample of minority families. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish.

# Methodology

## 2011 Teens and Digital Citizenship Survey

Prepared by Princeton Survey Research Associates International for the Pew Research Center's Internet and American Life Project

**JULY 2011**

### Summary

The 2011 Teens and Digital Citizenship Survey sponsored by the Pew Research Center's Internet and American Life Project obtained telephone interviews with a nationally representative sample of 799 teens ages 12 to 17 years old and their parents living in the continental United States. The survey was conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates International. The interviews were conducted in English and Spanish by Princeton Data Source, LLC from April 19 to July 14, 2011. Statistical results are weighted to correct known demographic discrepancies. The margin of sampling error for the complete set of weighted data is  $\pm 4.8$  percentage points.

Unless otherwise noted, the adult data presented in this report are from the Pew Research Center's Internet and American Life Project's August Tracking survey of adults 18 and older. The survey was conducted from July 25 through August 26, 2011 with a sample size of 2260 adults, including 916 from cell phone interviews. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. The margin of error for the entire sample is  $\pm 2$  percentage points and  $\pm 3$  percentage points for results based on social media users. Social media users are defined as those who report that they use a social network website or Twitter.

In addition to the two surveys, this study conducted 7 focus groups with teens between the ages of 12 and 19 in the greater Washington, DC metro area in January and February 2011. Participants were recruited via word of mouth, email, schools, and non-profit organizations. A total of 57 youth participated in the focus groups, though each group averaged 8 to 14 people. Groups were co-ed, but were broken into middle school and high school aged youth. The groups were balanced for gender and crossed the socio-economic and family structure spectrum. Black youth were over-represented. All participants were required to have access to either a computer or a cell phone to participate. Participants were paid a \$40 cash incentive for their participation. Parental consent was obtained for all minor participants, as was the assent of the minor participants themselves. Eighteen and 19 year-old participants consented to their own participation.

Further details on the design, execution, and analysis of the teen and parent telephone survey are discussed below.



## Design and Data Collection Procedures

### *Sample Design*

A combination of landline and cellular random digit dial (RDD) samples was used to represent all teens and their parents in the continental United States who have access to either a landline or cellular telephone. Both samples were provided by Survey Sampling International, LLC (SSI) according to PSRAI specifications.

Both samples were disproportionately stratified to increase the incidence of blacks and Latinos. The same stratification scheme was used for both sample frames and was based on the estimated incidence of minority groups at the county level. All counties in the continental United States were divided into ten strata based on the estimated proportion of African American and Latino populations. Strata with higher minority densities were oversampled relative to strata with lower densities. Phone numbers were drawn with equal probabilities within strata. The disproportionate sample design was accounted for in the weighting and does not affect the representative nature of the sample.<sup>54</sup>

### *Contact Procedures*

Interviews were conducted from April 19 to July 14, 2011. As many as 7 attempts were made to contact and interview a parent at every sampled telephone number. After the parent interview, if the teen was not immediately available, an additional 7 calls were made to interview an eligible teen. Sample was released for interviewing in replicates, which are representative subsamples of the larger sample. Using replicates to control the release of sample ensures that complete call procedures are followed for the entire sample. Calls were staggered over times of day and days of the week to maximize the chance of making contact with potential respondents. Each telephone number received at least one daytime call in an attempt to complete an interview.

Contact procedures were slightly different for the landline and cell samples. For the landline sample, interviewers first determined if the household had any 12 to 17 year-old residents. Households with no teens were screened-out as ineligible. In eligible households, interviewers first conducted a short parent interview with either the father/male guardian or mother/female guardian. The short parent interview asked some basic household demographic questions as well as questions about a particular teen in the household (selected at random if more than one teen lived in the house.)

For the cell phone sample, interviews first made sure that respondents were in a safe place (for example, not driving) to talk and that they were speaking with an adult. Calls made to minors were screened-out as ineligible. If the person was not in a safe place to talk a callback was scheduled. Interviewers then asked if any 12 to 17 year-olds lived in their household. Cases where no teens lived in the household were screened-out as ineligible. If there was an age-eligible teen in the household, the interviewers asked if the person on the cell phone was a parent of the child. Those who were parents went on to complete the parent interview. Those who were not parents were screened-out as ineligible.

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<sup>54</sup> For more information on oversampling, see the Pew Research Center for People and Press's website and their discussion of the implications of this survey technique: <http://www.people-press.org/methodology/sampling/oversamples/>

For both samples, after the parent interview was complete an interview was completed with the target child. Data was kept only if the child interview was completed.<sup>55</sup>

Interviewers were given instructions to tell parents – if asked – that they should not remain on the phone with the child during the interview, but that if they were concerned they could sit nearby. The interviewer then coded whether or not the parent remained on the phone with the child. In this survey, 90 of the 799 interviews (or 11%) had a parent listening on the phone during the child’s interview. Parents who elected to remain on the phone while their child completed the interview were more likely to be listening to the interviews of girls and children age 12 and to a lesser extent, age 13. These parents were also more likely to be white. Teens whose parents listened to their interview were less likely to use the internet, use social network sites, or go online using a mobile phone. Among those teens whose parents attended their interview who do use social network sites, they were more likely to report using Facebook than teens whose parents did not listen in. We elected to retain these interviews as a part of our larger sample – first because there were very few statistically significant differences between the responses of teens whose parents listened in, and those whose parents did not. Second, in the places where we did see modest differences, understanding what might be behind those differences was difficult to tease out – the age of the child may have been a factor, or how the parent parented that child, or the fact that the parent was listening to the interview. So rather than introduce additional bias into the data, we elected to leave the cases in the data set, and note in the text where the parent’s listening made a statistically significant difference in the responses of the teen.

## Weighting and analysis

Weighting is generally used in survey analysis to compensate for patterns of nonresponse and disproportionate sample designs that might bias survey estimates. This sample was weighted in three stages. The first stage of weighting corrected for the disproportionate RDD sample designs. For each stratum the variable SAMPWT was computed as the ratio of the size of the sample frame in the stratum divided by the amount of sample ordered in the stratum.

The second stage of weighting involved correcting for different probabilities of selection based on respondents’ phone use patterns. Respondents who have both a landline and a cell phone have a greater chance of being sampled than respondents with access to only one kind of phone. To correct for this we computed a variable called PUA (Phone Use Adjustment). Respondents with one kind of phone (either landline or cell) were assigned a PUA of 0.5 while respondents with both types of phones were assigned a PUA of 1.0. SAMPWT and PUA were then multiplied together to use as an input weight (WEIGHT1) for post-stratification raking

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<sup>55</sup> At the start of the field period, we used a modified screener that allowed us to complete a teen interview prior to a parent interview. After a few weeks in the field (April 19-June 1), it became clear that completing the teen interview first was not productive. Therefore the screener was modified to the one described here where a parent was always interviewed first. There are 16 “teen-first” interviews included in the overall sample.

The interviewed sample was raked to match national parameters for both parent and child demographics. The parent demographics used for weighting were: sex; age; education; race; Hispanic origin; number of 12-17 year-olds in household; phone use and region (U.S. Census definitions). The child demographics used for weighting were gender and age. The parameters came from a special analysis of the Census Bureau's 2010 Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC) that included all households in the continental United States. The phone use parameter was derived from recent PSRAI survey data.

Raking was accomplished using Sample Balancing, a special iterative sample weighting program that simultaneously balances the distributions of all variables using a statistical technique called the *Deming Algorithm*. Weights were trimmed to prevent individual interviews from having too much influence on the final results. The use of these weights in statistical analysis ensures that the demographic characteristics of the sample closely approximate the demographic characteristics of the national population. Table 1 compares weighted and unweighted sample distributions to population parameters.

**Table 1: Sample Demographics**

	<u>Parameter</u>	<u>Unweighted</u>	<u>Weighted</u>
<u>Census Region</u>			
Northeast	17.9	14.3	15.8
Midwest	22.2	16.4	20.7
South	36.4	41.6	38.9
West	23.5	27.8	24.5
<u>Parent's Sex</u>			
Male	43.8	32.0	43.8
Female	56.2	68.0	56.2
<u>Parent's Age</u>			
LT 35	10.3	9.9	8.5
35-39	18.6	15.0	18.6
40-44	25	21.7	24.2
45-49	25.5	25.8	26.6
50-54	13.6	16.2	14.3
55+	7.0	11.4	7.7
<u>Parent's Education</u>			
Less than HS grad.	12.4	11.2	12.6
HS grad.	34.3	21.5	30.8
Some college	23.4	22.5	23.4
College grad.	29.9	44.8	33.3
<u>Parent's Race/Ethnicity</u>			
White~Hispanic	63.4	56.4	61.0
Black~Hispanic	11.7	15.7	12.8
Hispanic	18.1	21.9	19.6
Other~Hispanic	6.8	6.0	6.6

**Table 1: Sample Demographics (continued)**

<u>Parent's Phone Use</u>			
Landline only	9.0	6.6	8.9
Dual Users	62.8	85.2	68.3
Cell Phone only	28.2	8.1	22.8
<u># of 12-17 Kids in HH</u>			
One	70.3	67.5	69.8
Two	25.0	27.2	24.9
Three+	4.7	5.4	5.3
<u>Kid's Sex</u>			
Male	51.0	48.9	51.4
Female	49.0	51.1	48.6
<u>Kid's Age</u>			
12	16.7	13.9	16.9
13	16.7	14.3	16.3
14	16.7	17.8	16.9
15	16.7	15.9	16.2
16	16.7	17.6	16.1
17	16.7	20.5	17.7

## Effects of Sample Design on Statistical Inference

Post-data collection statistical adjustments require analysis procedures that reflect departures from simple random sampling. PSRAI calculates the effects of these design features so that an appropriate adjustment can be incorporated into tests of statistical significance when using these data. The so-called "design effect" or *deff* represents the loss in statistical efficiency that results from systematic non-response. The total sample design effect for this survey is 1.95.

PSRAI calculates the composite design effect for a sample of size  $n$ , with each case having a weight,  $w_i$  as:

$$deff = \frac{n \sum_{i=1}^n w_i^2}{\left( \sum_{i=1}^n w_i \right)^2} \quad \text{formula 1}$$

In a wide range of situations, the adjusted *standard error* of a statistic should be calculated by multiplying the usual formula by the square root of the design effect ( $\sqrt{deff}$ ). Thus, the formula for computing the 95% confidence interval around a percentage is:

$$\hat{p} \pm \left( \sqrt{deff} \times 1.96 \sqrt{\frac{\hat{p}(1 - \hat{p})}{n}} \right) \quad \text{formula 2}$$

where  $\hat{p}$  is the sample estimate and  $n$  is the unweighted number of sample cases in the group being considered.

The survey's *margin of error* is the largest 95% confidence interval for any estimated proportion based on the total sample— the one around 50%. For example, the margin of error for the entire sample is  $\pm 4.8\%$ . This means that in 95 out every 100 samples drawn using the same methodology, estimated proportions based on the entire sample will be no more than 4.8 percentage points away from their true values in the population. It is important to remember that sampling fluctuations are only one possible source of error in a survey estimate. Other sources, such as respondent selection bias, questionnaire wording and reporting inaccuracy, may contribute additional error of greater or lesser magnitude.

## Response Rate

Table 2 reports the disposition of all sampled callback telephone numbers ever dialed. The response rate estimates the fraction of all eligible respondents in the sample that were ultimately interviewed. At PSRAI it is calculated by taking the product of three component rates:<sup>56</sup>

- **Contact rate** – the proportion of working numbers where a request for interview was made<sup>57</sup>
- **Cooperation rate** – the proportion of contacted numbers where a consent for interview was at least initially obtained, versus those refused
- **Completion rate** – the proportion of initially cooperating and eligible interviews that agreed to the child interview and were completed

Thus the response rate for landline sample was 12 percent and the response rate for the cell sample was 7 percent.

Please see the next page for the sample disposition table.

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<sup>56</sup> PSRAI's disposition codes and reporting are consistent with the American Association for Public Opinion Research standards.

<sup>57</sup> PSRAI assumes that 75 percent of cases that result in a constant disposition of "No answer" or "Busy" are actually not working numbers.

**Table 2: Sample Disposition**

<b>Landline</b>	<b>Cell</b>	
209894	98227	<b>T</b> Total Numbers Dialed
10139	1364	<b>OF</b> Non-residential
9484	151	<b>OF</b> Computer/Fax
118	0	<b>OF</b> Cell phone
119777	34759	<b>OF</b> Other not working
10321	2467	<b>UH</b> Additional projected not working
60055	59486	Working numbers
28.6%	60.6%	Working Rate
3440	822	<b>UH</b> No Answer / Busy
12565	26222	<b>UO<sub>NC</sub></b> Voice Mail
206	60	<b>UO<sub>NC</sub></b> Other Non-Contact
43844	32382	Contacted numbers
73.0%	54.4%	Contact Rate
3251	5251	<b>UO<sub>R</sub></b> Callback
29595	21279	<b>UO<sub>R</sub></b> Refusal
10998	5852	Cooperating numbers
25.1%	18.1%	Cooperation Rate
518	204	<b>IN1</b> Language Barrier
9541	5389	<b>IN2</b> Child's cell phone
939	259	Eligible numbers
8.5%	4.4%	Eligibility Rate
321	78	<b>R</b> Break-off
618	181	<b>I</b> Completes
65.8%	69.9%	Completion Rate
12.1%	6.9%	Response Rate