REPORT

Forever connected:

the realities of parenting and growing up online

1Password + Malwarebytes

Introduction

> **Parents shouldn't miss out on their chance to play an essential role in educating their children about best practices online. The best way to start is to educate themselves, and then to model that behavior so that they can lead the way. Of course, parents often have a lot to learn from their children, as well, and it's important for parents to understand the unique threats their kids are facing and to incorporate that knowledge into their own practices."**

Jason Kelley
Associate Director of Digital Strategy and Activism
Electronic Frontier Foundation

"Have you posted those baby photos?"

Decades ago, this would have sounded like gibberish. Today, we hear it all the time. Underneath these words is the understanding that we'll share nearly everything online. And kids face the same expectation to build and maintain an "online presence" from day one.

Maintaining a digital identity brings a unique set of challenges not faced by previous generations, creating complexity for young people and parents alike. The impacts of digital immersion are coming into focus as the babies in those photos grow into adults and navigate life online.

1Password and Malwarebytes came together to dive deeper into the topic, exploring what it's like to grow up on the internet. We asked Gen Z kids (individuals born between the mid-90s and early 2010s) and adults in North America a series of questions to better understand their routines, challenges, and views about the future for a fully online generation.

Our research shows that, at best, many parents are unsure of how to help their kids protect themselves online; and, at worst, they are inadvertently exposing their children to security risks.

Parents can help their kids navigate the identity lifecycle, but that is only the start. This research underscores the importance of broad-based digital literacy education for both parents and kids.

Key findings

Online since birth

Four out of five (79%) parents post images, videos, or personal information about their kids online. And **39%** say it's fine to start posting images of their kids as soon as they're born.

The infinite digital footprint

Nearly half (47%) of Gen Z feel that a harmful effect of the internet is that "anything you do follows you forever."

Clashing expectations for privacy

While 73% of Gen Z wish their parents would ask permission before posting pics about them online at least some of the time, **only 34% of parents** ask permission and **39%** feel they don't need permission to post content related to their kids.

The dangers of the internet

96% of parents and 93% of Gen Z say that using the internet can have harmful effects, with cyberbullying **(73% of parents, 66% of Gen Z)** and being influenced by misinformation **(65% of parents, 64% of Gen Z)** as the top two.

Conflicting sense of reality

89% of parents say they monitor their child's activity, yet **66% of teenagers** say their parents have no involvement in their online accounts.

Problematic security advice

A majority of Gen Z (70%) report that their parents taught them about password security in some way, including problematic security advice like: use the same password for everything **(17%)**, make easy-to-remember passwords **(30%)**, and write down passwords on paper **(33%).**

Lacking parental support

Three-quarters (74%) of parents are confident they are keeping their children safe online, but only **51% of Gen Z** respondents agree with the statement: "I feel supported online by my parents."

Stealthy workarounds

72% of Gen Z admit to having tactics to avoid their parents' monitoring. Some kids even go above and beyond to avoid detection, with **13%** using a virtual private network (VPN), **9%** having a secret device parents don't know about, and **6%** performing factory resets on their devices.

Social media skepticism

72% of parents are glad they didn't have social media accounts when they were growing up and **35% of Gen Z** wish they had waited until they were older to start using it.

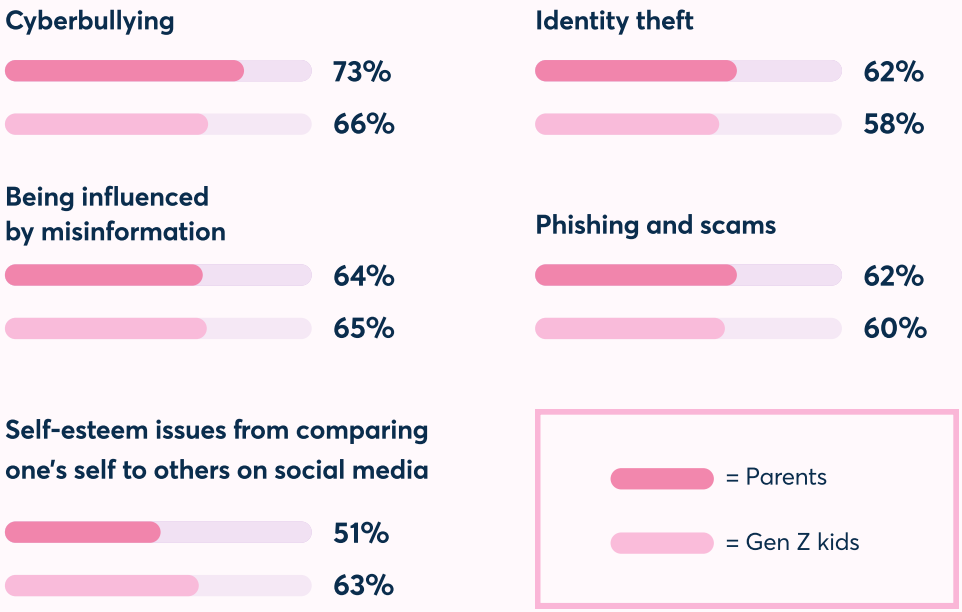
01

Kids need help when it comes to being online

For many kids, being online is inescapable - from the living room to the classroom. The vast majority (96%) of parents and kids agree that there are benefits to the internet (such as greater access to information, and the ability to learn new skills and hobbies). But it's impossible to ignore the risks of growing up entangled in the web. Not only are young people's private information and identities more vulnerable, their mental health may be negatively impacted. And it's not always as simple as "logging off" - the internet follows them wherever they go.

Gen Z and their parents agree: Connectivity comes with serious side effects

96% of parents and 93% of Gen Z say that using the internet can have harmful effects. But the interpretation of these downsides differs between parents and kids. The most significant issues are:



With the ease of sharing information online, kids may unintentionally open themselves up to other negative impacts, even serious threats to their privacy and safety. Unsharing is often impossible, so it's all too easy for them to inadvertently put their public image and even future career path at risk.

47% **of Gen Z feel that a harmful effect of the internet is that "anything you do follows you forever."**

Parental posting puts kids at risk

Parents can also unknowingly create risks for their kids when they post about them.

One in ten (11%) Gen Zers say they've been stalked or bullied because of something they or their parents posted online.

And **one in ten (12%) Gen Zers** say they've been hurt in other ways because of something they or their parents posted, such as:

Personal accounts being hacked.

Credit score being harmed.

Identity being stolen.

These risks and side effects won't simply vanish, especially considering that technology's presence in our lives shows no signs of diminishing. It's clear parents now have an important role in helping prepare kids for how to act online and protect themselves. But, in order to provide sound advice, parents need better information themselves.

12% **of Gen Z who say they've been hurt because of what they or their parents posted online.**

02

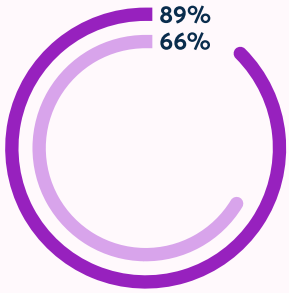
Parents and guardians share a major new responsibility

"We're learning together" can be a mantra when it comes to tech. But parents may have the most to learn, considering the impact they'll have. Even with the best intentions, many parents have a false sense of how to keep kids secure - or think their kids are more secure than they actually are.

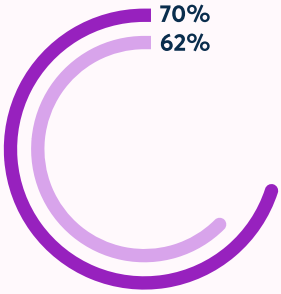
The security perception gap

Three-quarters (74%) of parents are confident they are keeping their children safe online, but **only 51% of Gen Z** respondents agree with the statement: "I feel supported online by my parents." **In fact, 62% of Gen Z say they know more about online safety and security than their parents do.** And parents might not be setting a good example with their own behaviors: **69% of parents** feel they have excellent online safety and privacy habits, but only **47% of Gen Z** agree with that statement about their parents.

Then there's the matter of how much oversight parents have (or don't have):



- **89% of parents** say they monitor their child's activity.
- **66% of teenagers** say their parents have no involvement in their online accounts.



- **70% of parents** claim to have parental controls set up on home devices.
- **62% of teens** say that none of their home devices have parental controls on.

Stealthy workarounds

Even with monitoring in place, some activity evades parents:

72% of Gen Z admit to having tactics to avoid their parents' monitoring.

Some kids even go above and beyond to avoid detection:

13% use a virtual private network (VPN).

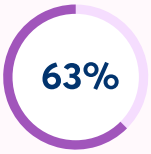
9% have a secret device parents don't know about.

6% perform factory resets on their devices.

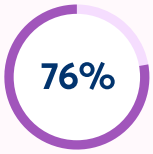
Parental tactics, security-style

So what steps are parents taking to educate and protect their kids online?

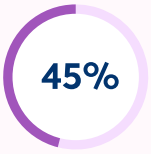
Nine in ten (92%) parents say they have tactics to help protect the identity of their children online. These include:



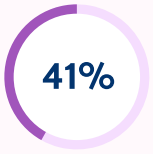
Talking with and educating them about online safety.



Installing antivirus software on devices at home.



Regularly monitoring their accounts.

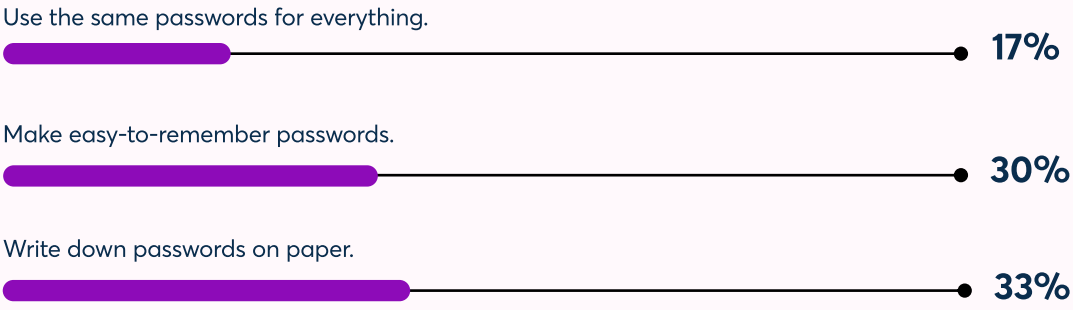


Limiting use of certain apps and websites.

Problematic password advice

We found that what parents perceive as good security advice may actually expose kids to risk, especially when it comes to password habits.

A majority of Gen Z (70%) report that their parents taught them about password security in some way. But this includes problematic advice that would be actively detrimental to their kids' online safety, including:



Proper password management might be the most important area for improvement in what parents teach their kids, given password issues are the single largest source of cyber attacks.

Self-taught security

Whatever advice parents are offering, younger generations often get their guidance elsewhere.

59% of kids say they've learned about online safety on their own.

Rather than:

21% through parents.

13% through school.

And, however they get their info, **91% of Gen Z** say they have personal practices to be more safe and secure online.

62% avoid sharing any personal information.

48% don't accept friend/follow requests from people they don't know.

23% install antivirus/cybersecurity software themselves.

Both groups contribute to establishing and maintaining secure habits. And as the primary influence and support for their kids, parents need to keep in mind that they continue to play a part, even as kids grow into curious and self-sufficient young adults.

03

The permission paradox

The digital identity lifecycle starts at birth, when parents decide if or what they will share. Today, parents often create social media accounts for their young children, and/or post personal information or footage of their children online. Both involve important privacy and security considerations that extend well into adulthood.

Clashing expectations for privacy

Kids and parents have conflicting opinions about reasonable expectations for privacy:

Gen Z:

73% wish their parents would ask permission before posting pics about them online at least some of the time.

Parents:

34% ask permission before posting about their kids online.

39% feel they don't need permission to post content related to their kids.

Yet, when asked about privacy, **75% of parents** said that a child's need for privacy related to online identity and internet usage should be considered before they become adults. Meanwhile, **24% of Gen Z** wish they could control what their parents post about them online.

The social cringe factor

35%

Parents who have seen something their kids posted online that made them uncomfortable.

30%

Parents who have made their kids remove or delete content.

20%

Parents who have had their child complain about something they posted online and/or asked them to take something down.

04

Age 13 is the magic number: setting kids up for success

Whether their parents are ready for it, kids are often fully immersed in the internet by the time they turn 13.

This is partly due to a decades-old law that restricts companies from knowingly collecting data about those younger than that. As a result, age 13 is when social media platforms in the United States open the floodgates for anyone who wants to make an account on their own.

Age 13 is also when most parents give their kids control of their social media accounts and when they feel comfortable with their kids having personal smartphones.

Antsy to get online

Many kids are getting started online earlier than age 13, though.

of Gen Z had their first online account at 12 years old or younger.

of Gen Z have lied about their age in order to sign up for an account and/or access a website.

Instant identities

Even without self-managed profiles, many kids have their lives broadcast by parents, sometimes from day one.

79%

of parents post images, videos, or personal information about their kids online.

39%

of parents say it's fine to start posting images of their kids as soon as they're born.

Factoring in privacy

Some parents may not realize the privacy implications when posting about their kids, but many are now taking steps to mitigate the issue and keep privacy in mind, including:

Restricting who can see posts **(58%).**

Blurring or obstructing private info in posted photos or videos of children **(23%).**

Social media skepticism

Even as parents proudly share cute photos or school accomplishments, they don't envy the social world their kids are growing up in: **72% are glad they didn't have social media accounts when they were growing up.**

These mixed feelings are highlighted in kids' own experience - not only in the mental health and safety implications of being online, but in the general stress of managing an online presence, which is often learned the hard way:

49% of Gen Z regret things they posted on social media when they were younger.

35% of Gen Z wish they had waited until they were older to start using social media.

These particular challenges are something kids will have to manage, as will their parents when it comes to giving advice: **45% of parents feel that making mistakes online is now simply part of growing up.**

No matter the age they begin or gain full access to their online profiles, children need greater support and education around how to protect themselves online.

> **This research shows that there is often a big gap between what parents believe they've taught their children about online safety, and what young people actually know and do. Also, it's good evidence that many young people and parents have conflicting views of how to protect themselves while using social media - in no small part because parents aren't aware of best practices, and young people teach themselves online security more often than parents realize. There is a clear need, based on these results, for more nuanced and more comprehensive digital literacy education for both children and parents."**

Jason Kelley
Associate Director of Digital Strategy and Activism at Electronic Frontier Foundation

05

Lessons for the future

The long-term effects of growing up online are just beginning to be understood, but our research points to important lessons that parents and kids alike can bring forward into the future.

The future of parenting

More than half (59%) of parents wish they'd handled things differently with their kids and the internet. Based on an open-response question, these changes include:

- Easing kids onto the internet, and not letting them use it all at once.
- Providing them with proper ground rules from the beginning.
- Giving them less internet time when they were younger, so they knew better how to disconnect.

Around 84% of Gen Z say they would raise their own kids differently compared to their parents, knowing what they know now. The changes they would make include:

- Monitoring what their children watch and limiting screen time.
- Respecting their privacy and trusting their decision-making.
- Letting them figure things out on their own (more freedom, less stress).
- Exposing them to less technology in exchange for more hands-on and outdoor activities.
- More teaching about online safety, and giving them a phone early to learn about the internet.

> **Whatever age you are, when you go online, you deserve security and privacy. It is essential that parents and young people learn how to protect those rights, because at least for now, many online platforms, bad actors, and in many ways the entire ecosystem of the internet are working against them."**

Jason Kelley
Associate Director of Digital Strategy and Activism at Electronic Frontier Foundation

Methodology

Malwarebytes and 1Password conducted this research using online surveys prepared by Method Research and distributed by Dynata among n=1,000 Gen Z respondents and n=1,000 parents. Gen Z respondents were born between 1997–2009 with n=750 from the United States and n=250 from Canada. Parent respondents had at least one child between the ages of 8 to 17 with n=750 from the United States and n=250 from Canada. Both samples were equally split between gender, with a spread of ages, child's ages, and geographies represented, including readable race groups. Data was collected from August 3 to August 16, 2022.

About 1Password

1Password's human-centric approach to security keeps people safe, at work and at home. Our solution is built from the ground up to enable anyone – no matter the level of technical proficiency – to navigate the digital world without fear or friction. The company's award-winning credentials management security platform is reshaping the future of authentication and is trusted by over 100,000 businesses, including IBM, Slack, Snowflake, Shopify, and Under Armour. 1Password protects the most sensitive information of millions of individuals and families across the globe, helping consumers and businesses get more done in less time – with security and privacy as a given. Learn more at 1Password.com.

About Malwarebytes

Malwarebytes believes that when people and organizations are free from threats, they are free to thrive. Founded in 2008, Malwarebytes CEO Marcin Kleczynski had one mission: to rid the world of malware. Today, that mission has expanded to provide cyber-protection for everyone. Malwarebytes provides consumers and organizations with device protection, privacy, and prevention through effective, intuitive, and inclusive solutions in the home, on the go, at work, or on campus. A world-class team of threat researchers and security experts enable Malwarebytes to protect millions of customers and combat existing and never-before-seen threats using artificial intelligence and machine learning to rapidly catch new threats. With threat hunters and innovators across the world, the company is headquartered in California with offices in Europe and Asia. For more information, visit https://www.malwarebytes.com/.