

**Subject: Children Online Newsletter**

# CHILDREN ONLINE

## Internet Safety Newsletter from Marje Monroe and Doug Fodeman

**Issue: #24****May 2009****24th Edition of the Children Online Newsletter.**

In this month's issue of our newsletter we would like to share with our readers the statistics we have collected during this academic year 2008 - 2009. Please keep in mind that these statistics reflect what the children and teens report to us about their own Internet behavior. They are not absolute values, but more likely reflect generalizations and trends across age groups. If anything, it is safe to assume that children and teens are more involved in various Internet activities than what they reported. We say this because our years of experience working with children and teens on Internet safety has taught us some valuable generalizations.



1. Children and teens will under-report any activity in which they think adults would disapprove of their participation.
2. Whatever children and teens are doing on the Internet this year, they will be doing the same thing next year at a younger age.

We had the privilege to survey 2749 students from independent schools across New England, New York and New Jersey. 61.9% of the students were from urban schools and 38.1% were from suburban schools. Students surveyed were from grades four through twelve, single-sex and coed schools, religious and secular.

Survey sample sizes for individual grades ranged from 331 students to 420 students in grades four through eight, and between 124 and 237 students in high school. Below is a link to a pdf of the complete details, including many graphs. This newsletter contains

some of the highlights.

[www.childrenonline.org/2008-2009research.pdf](http://www.childrenonline.org/2008-2009research.pdf)

This summer we will design survey questions for next year's research. If you would like to suggest questions or behaviors to study we would welcome your input. We also plan to survey parents for the first time next year.

As always, we welcome your comments. Our telephone number for Children Online is 413-214-1225.

Best wishes,  
Marje Monroe and Doug Fodeman

Contact Marje or Doug via email at [marjem@childrenonline.org](mailto:marjem@childrenonline.org) or [dougf@childrenonline.org](mailto:dougf@childrenonline.org) for information about our programs or consulting services.

### **Research from 2008 - 2009 Academic Year**

Though any expert in the field of Internet safety will tell you that it is not a healthy practice for children and younger teens to have Internet access behind the closed doors of their bedrooms, we consistently find this to be the case. 69.5% of all students surveyed claimed to have Internet access from behind bedroom doors. These percentages consistently peaked for high school students between 87.3% and 89.6%. However, even children in grades 4 - 6 claimed to have access ranging from 42.3% to 63.1% and middle school students' access ranged from 75.6% to 83.6%.

One might think that given such high "behind-closed-door Internet access", most parents must have strong software in place to help protect their children, provide boundaries online and keep a watchful eye on their children's activities online. On average though, 75% of children and teens with Internet access from their bedroom report not having any parental software installed to monitor or filter their activities.

Parents of children in grades four and five sometimes aren't aware that these younger children already have email and or instant messaging accounts. 71% of fourth graders surveyed and 80% of all fifth graders said that they have at least one email and/or IM account. In fact, if you survey those fourth and fifth graders who admit to having email or IM accounts, the average is 1.6 accounts per fourth grader and 1.8 accounts per fifth grader. That number rises consistently through high school to 2.8 accounts per teen. On average, 4.5% of fourth through sixth graders admit that their parents do not know about their accounts. That figure rises to about 14% for middle school students (grades 7-8) and then jumps to about 23% for high school students. Overall, boys are slightly more likely to have accounts than girls that parents do not know about (54% versus 46%). However 36.7% of those students with more than 1 account

are boys, while 63.3% are girls.

Instant messaging is extremely popular amongst all students. 21% of fourth graders and 31% of fifth graders claim to have used IM in the previous four weeks before the survey was taken. That number jumps to 60% in sixth grade, 72% in seventh grade and then ranges from 80% to 88% thereafter. However, a similar rise related to age is not evident when children/teens are asked if they had visited a chat room or used the chat feature in an online gaming environment during the previous four weeks. For example, the smallest percentage was reported by high school juniors (14.9%) while the highest percentage was reported by eighth graders (31.1%). We feel that fourth through sixth graders report greater use of chat services because there has been a tremendous increase in chatting ability in online game sites where this age group spends much of their time.

The question we feel most often under-reported is whether or not the child has a Facebook, MySpace or other adult social network. For example, we reported in a previous newsletter that 17% of one school's seventh grade class reported having a Facebook or MySpace account on their surveys. When asked in person, after their teacher had left the room, 60-70% of the students admitted to having an account.

2.7% of fourth graders, 4.5% of fifth graders and 10% of sixth graders admit to having accounts with adult social networks. The fall of 2008 was the first time a fourth grader admitted having one of these accounts. The previous year was the first time a fifth grader admitted the same. The percentage of those with adult social network accounts jumps to 26.1% for seventh graders and then 62.7% of eighth graders. Our "guesstimate" is that about half of seventh graders and about 80% of all eighth graders have Facebook or MySpace accounts.

While the popularity of social networks such as Facebook rises sharply as children get older, there is one site that has consistently been the most popular site of all children and teens at every age group. YouTube. At the low end 11.5% of fourth graders admit to having a YouTube account, while 31.1% of eighth graders have accounts at the high end. We interpret this to mean that about 31% of all eighth grade students are posting videos on YouTube.

Our children are growing up online. Children, age 10-18, routinely report having friends online whom they have never met in person. 16.7% of all students surveyed report such "virtual" friends. The lowest number of virtual friendships is reported by high school seniors (10.6%) while the highest percentage is reported by eighth graders (26.3%). Boys are slightly more likely (56.9%) to make virtual friends than girls (43.1%).

We had 446 responses informing us how or where the students had become friends via the Internet with someone they previously didn't know. "Friend of a friend" was the

most common reason given. In second place were friendships made through online gaming. These could have been via a game on a website or through game consoles such as Playstation 3 or Xbox Live. Grouped in third place as a means for making new friends were the social networks - both Facebook/MySpace and ClubPenguin/WebKinz. The next most common reasons, though occurring much less frequently, were meeting friends through IM, role-playing games such as Runescape, and within the YouTube community. Some less common explanations included "we had the same last name", Blog.tv (a social broadcasting site), via email, "random websites", "people I chat with", Stardoll.com (a dress-up doll site which is littered with sexual posts), and "everywhere."

Another question under-reported is whether students have ever been made to feel uncomfortable online because of something that happened to them, something they saw or something that someone did to them. 23.5% of all students responded affirmatively. The percentage of students reporting affirmatively to this question remains fairly consistent across every grade level, with a low of 20% (sixth grade) to a high of 29% (eighth grade). Perhaps it will come as little surprise that affirmative responses came from girls more often than boys (58.6% compared to 41.4%). Less than half (45.4%) of children and teens who reported that they had felt uncomfortable by something online also said that they told an adult. Girls were twice as likely to tell their parents as boys (66.3% versus 33.7%). Younger children were slightly more likely to tell their parents (50.7% to 58.3%) than high school teens (30.8% to 36.1%).

Regardless of age, children and teens express common concerns that make them feel uncomfortable online. First, and foremost, is contact from strangers. Tied for second place, and not far behind first place, are offensive pictures or videos and being tricked or fooled online by others. Following these top three concerns which make children and teens feel uncomfortable online are "being made fun of online" and bullying/harassment. Least of all in the list of their concerns, but still measurable, are threats and offensive ads.

Parents are often caught unaware that their children are posting photos and videos of themselves online, especially at young ages. We believe that the majority of postings happen on their social network accounts. 72% of high school juniors and 81% of high school seniors admit to posting images and videos of themselves online. 9% to 16% of fourth through sixth graders admit to posting images or videos of themselves online. That percentage jumps to 52.5% in eighth grade and 76.1% by tenth grade. Some of the issues presented by posting photos or videos develop because they think their content is private. They don't realize that these videos and photos are sometimes seen by parents, counselors, college admission officers, police, and other kids. For example, I recently spoke to a parent who commented about a photo he saw through his son's account. The picture showed a group of teens smoking a bong. Photos like this can have very serious consequences for teens. No doubt, the photos and videos students post that contain illegal activity, or are humiliating or embarrassing to themselves or

others are a small minority.

Up through eighth grade more urban children report having cell phones than suburban children. (No rural schools were surveyed in 2008-2009.) In high school, however, that disparity seems to disappear. It is interesting to note that there is little or no difference between urban and suburban students when asking those with cell phones if they also have texting capability on their cell phone (91.1% urban vs. 91.0% suburban) (Overall, 81.3% of urban students had cell phones while only 68.3% of suburban students owned cell phones.)

Anyone who has been watching the news over the last few months is likely aware of "sexting", whereby teens send out nude or partially nude pictures of themselves or other teens via cell phones. Cell phone technology, like the Internet, has little or no boundaries in place or parental supervision. They present another opportunity for some children and teens to make poor decisions. In addition, cell phones have become another method by which scammers target children and teens. Cramming, unauthorized or fraudulent charges on a cell phone bill, is such a phenomenon.

Perhaps the most unexpected results from all of our survey work were these statistics regarding those students who had cell phones with texting versus those who had cell phones without texting:

	Received Ads	Received Calls from Strangers	Received Offensive Images	Received Harassing or Mean Text
Cell Phones with Texting	33.9%	39.2%	4.0%	8.0%
Cell Phones without Texting	7.8%	5.9%	1.3%	1.3%

36.4% of all students report that someone had played a joke on them online. The percentage of those who report having a joke played on them online jumps from 11-15% in grades 4-6 to 72-81% in grades 10-12.

### About Children Online

**Children Online offers innovative and comprehensive workshops on Internet safety and online education to students, parents, faculty and administrators. Our approach, unique in the field of Internet safety, combines a thorough understanding of Internet technologies, child development and counseling, to focus on the impact of the internet on the social, emotional**

and language development of young people.

**Doug Fodeman and Marje Monroe, experts in technology, counseling and education, work together to provide invaluable research and tools for parents and schools with practical real-life solutions to the issues faced by young people online. Since 1997, Marje and Doug have spoken to thousands of students, teachers and parents. They have several publications in the area of Internet safety and offer a free online newsletter. More detailed information can be found at [ChildrenOnline.org](http://ChildrenOnline.org).**

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