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Survey: Top 10 ways kids hide their online activity from parents

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From clearing their browser history to creating private email addresses, teens are increasingly leveraging their tech-savvy skills to hide their online activities from their parents, a new survey found.

More than 70% of teens surveyed said they have tricks for deceiving their parents about their online habits, up from 45% of teens in 2010 who said they used such tricks, according to a Teen Internet Behavior study released this week by McAfee, the online-security tech company.

By contrast, many parents said they feel overwhelmed and unable to keep up with technologies, with 23% saying they have thrown up their hands and "just hope for the best," according to the survey. An equal amount said they don't have the time or energy to monitor everything their teens are doing online.

One example of the disconnect between what kids are doing and what parents think they're doing: Only 12% of parents surveyed said they think their teens access porn online, while 43% of teens said they access it on a weekly basis. Moreover, 36% of teens (and more females than males) surveyed said they go online for information on sex-related topics such as STDs and pregnancy.

Here are the top 10 ways teens are hiding their online behavior from their parents, according to the survey:

- Clearing the browser history (53%)
- Closing/minimizing browser when a parent is around (46%)
- Hiding or deleting messages and videos (34%)
- Lying about online activities (23%)
- Using a computer parents don't check (23%)
- Using an Internet-enabled mobile device (21%)
- Using privacy settings to make certain content viewable only by friends (20%)
- Using a browser's private viewing mode (20%)
- Creating private email address unknown to parents (15%)
- Creating duplicate/fake social network profiles (9%)

The survey interviewed 1,004 teens and 1,013 parents online in May. It needs to be pointed out that McAfee released the survey as it's touting Safe Eyes, an online-monitoring software for parents.

But Robert Siciliano, McAfee's online security expert, said the survey documents what many parents already know but don't want to admit.

"Kids are growing up too fast," Siciliano said in an interview with the Los Angeles Times. And parental concern needs to go beyond what kids are watching online, he said, because they're increasingly hacking, illegally downloading and bullying -- activities that could end up blowing back on parents.

And most concerning of all, Siciliano said, 1 out of 10 kids has "actually connected with strangers on line, and then met them in the physical world."

Siciliano, a parent himself, said moms and dads need to go back to "the basics."

He said he does not suggest that parents spy on their kids. (Safe Eyes is meant to be installed with parents and kids sitting side-by-side, he said.)

"There needs to be an intervention" by parents into their kids' online lives. "We have to change the way in which we parent -- we have to add more to our plate," he said.

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