be
safe online

AVG

Change

Parents across the world have taken part in the latest edition of AVG's ongoing study into the effect of technology on childhood. It is called AVG Digital Diaries and the latest research has brought to light some interesting results. Here, our Senior Security Evangelist, Tony Anscombe, takes a look at what parents have told us, analyses the trends and provides advice that will hopefully help parents tackle some of the issues they said are challenging them in an increasingly digital world.

Introduction

Our kids are the first to come of age in an online world where a connection to the Internet seems like it's almost always within arm's reach. Our kids are learning as they go along, and in many respects we are too. With technology evolving so rapidly, it's a good idea to pause for a moment and talk things through - so we can make a plan that works for us and our kids.

Tony Anscombe is AVG's Senior Security Evangelist and authored the book One Parent to Another: Managing Technology and Your Teen

A few years back, AVG launched the first of its AVG Digital Diaries studies, a series which takes a look at how technology is changing childhood, families and parenting. We've traced digital trends from pregnancy all the way through to the teenage years. Just like you, these topics are very much on our minds here at AVG, as technology professionals and as parents too. I'm no exception because I'm a father as well as being AVG's Senior Security Evangelist.

Our latest survey put the focus on younger children from birth up to 9 years old and reached out to more than 6,000 parents internationally. Looking at the results, a number of striking figures leapt off the page and conjured up some genuinely thoughtful conversations. In this eBook, we'll zero in on a few key stats about younger children - and how the Internet, digital devices, and a world full of apps and services are influencing the way our children grow up.

Our aim is to provide you with information that will make you pause and take a moment to think things through and consider some fresh ways of teaching digital skills and general life skills together. As parents, we're the ones who set our children on the right path in life. They look to our example. My hope is that this eBook will help make this easier by offering you at least one insight or piece of advice that can help.

Digital footprint

In our research, 80% of parents reported uploading images and information about their very young child (age 0 to 2 years) to share with grandparents and friends online. Does sharing trump privacy?

Well, it would sure seem like it does. One of the quickest ways for your child to make his or her first digital footprint in the world is through our natural desire to share the joy of our children with friends and family. In other words, we can't help ourselves. It's so quick and easy to do in the moment!

But even while our babies and toddlers are doing all kinds of shareworthy things, we might need to take a moment and think things through. With everything we share, we're creating a digital footprint, one that will perhaps last for some time. Enter the concept of "sharenting," where parents share details about their children's lives on social media. We amass all these pictures that we think are cute and put them out there in the world, but we have to realize that, one day, our kids might not want them out there. After all, these are pictures of them.

Right now, it may seem like we're posting these pictures for us and our friends, but in the long term we're really posting these things on behalf of our kids. A time will come (sooner than you think) that they'll want to have their rightful say about when and where they appear online.

So right now, we have to think of these things as part of their permanent record - their long-term digital identity. What will that picture say about them years from now when people are looking at those pictures and then forming all kinds of opinions about them?

Think of it this way: right now, you're the caretaker of your child's online identity.
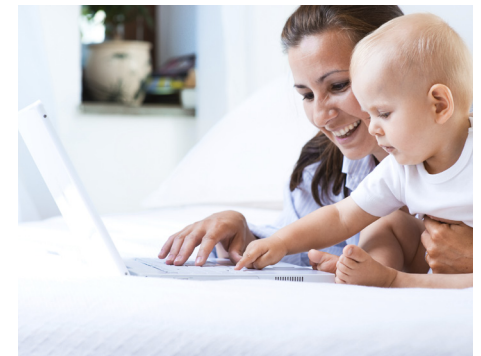
Right now, you're the caretaker of your child's online identity

Take care

Pause and think for one moment before posting that photo of your child anywhere online: why are you sharing it and who is seeing it? No status update is so important that you can't take a few seconds out to consider its impact.

Many of us have large groups of "friends" in our social media networks, but do all these people really need to see that picture of your child? Are they really all close "friends?" With that in mind, be selective by using privacy settings when you post. You can configure them so that only your close friends and family can see the personal things you post.

Also, find out if you are giving up the rights to those photos to someone else when you post them (some websites and social media services do just that).

And most of all, put yourself in your kid's shoes. Will that picture still be funny ten years from now? Twenty? Think of all your bad haircuts and messy pudding-face pictures from your childhood and answer that question honestly.

Not surprisingly, many teens are a step ahead of us parents when it comes to their photos and social media. The rising popularity of the "photo messaging" app Snapchat is a case in point. They're switching to services like Snapchat which make their photos and other content disappear after a set period of time -

And most of all, put yourself in your kid's shoes. Will that picture still be funny ten years from now? Twenty?

in some cases, even seconds after it's opened and viewed. Compare this to Facebook or Instagram where these photos are stored in a gallery. The significance of this is that these teens are thinking ahead about their digital footprint. So should we. However, nothing is foolproof - screen captures or taking pictures of pictures that appear on a phone will mean that even these photos can actually live on far beyond their intended lifespan. That's something to keep in mind with all digital content: once you put it on the Internet, it's nearly impossible to take it back.

Reality bites

78% of parents report that their children use the Internet for less than five hours a week. (Hmm, I think that figure seems a bit low, doesn't it?) Is there a difference between perception and reality?

We need to be more aware of when and where our kids are connecting to the Internet

This stat stirred up quite a bit of conversation when we saw it. Just 45 minutes or less of Internet usage a day? Based on what I've seen personally and professionally, my impression is that a good portion of these parents are underestimating the time their children are actually spending online. I'm going to chalk that up to a combination of things.

First, we should realize just how often we connect to the Internet. It's no longer just a sit-down session at the family computer. Our cameras, video game consoles, TVs, and of course our phones are all connected. We're sending and receiving information on the Internet numerous times a day, even when it's not through a traditional web browser.

This everyday reality inflates the number and offers us a slight note of caution - we need to be more aware of when and where our kids are connecting to the Internet. That way we can consider any risks. Many of these devices have the ability to browse, chat, and generally interact with others, even when it's over the course of simply playing a game.

Second, we have to wonder how well parents are tracking their children's Internet usage in the first place. How closely is it being monitored? This brings up a really interesting follow-on statistic.

We asked mothers of children aged 6 to 9 if the computers or tablets that their children use have any active parental controls. This time, 64% of them reported yes. Based on what I've seen, from other very credible sources, that figure seemed a bit high. When you get right down to it, there are lots of ways to define what "parental controls" are.

Parental control

Do you know exactly when and for how long your children are accessing the Internet? Be open and honest and work together as a family to ensure that appropriate measures are in place in your household.

To start with, parental controls are far more expansive than just selecting the "safe search" setting on Google or Bing. They're actually quite robust. For example, in our home all the devices that connect to the Internet use content filters which remove all kinds of inappropriate stuff before it even enters our home.

From there, I can use these filters to customize things even more by further filtering content on individual devices and individual users. This way, we can have general filters that let us block the kind of content, activities and sites that we don't want in our home. Then, from there, we can fine-tune that even more by adopting user profiles for each family member - adjusting the content that each person can see and how long they can spend online.

Here's an important note: I do all this in the open. As parents, we should keep no secrets about parental controls, so when I set them up I always have a conversation with my son about it first. I strongly suggest you do the same and follow up with some parental controls of

Your rules and how you enforce them are the most important parental control of all

your own. You can strike a balance of monitoring and control, adjusting it as the age of your child and his or her behavior calls for. Yes, it can seem like a bit of a daunting task at first, but feel free to take a look at my book for more on parental controls. It's free, and it has an entire chapter dedicated to the subject, along with a load of hands-on,

practical advice to get you up and running.

It's also worth noting that technology is not always the answer, I just had a question from a parent in Brazil about how to stop their child using the Internet on a tablet under the covers after bedtime. Remember, we're the parents. We make the rules in our homes. So, to me, the answer was simple: don't allow any tablets in the bedroom after a certain time. Hands down, your rules and how you enforce them are the most important parental control of all.

It's a revolution

According to parents of children aged 3 to 5, more kids can operate a smartphone (47%) or play a basic computer game (66%) than can tie their shoelaces (14%), or swim (23%). Have our priorities gotten a bit out of whack?

Remember when our parents used to tell us to turn off that TV and get outside? Now we're saying it too. Fears of slowly turning into our own parents aside, we can actually take some degree of comfort in knowing that the challenges we're facing aren't entirely new. We're still dealing with how much "screen time" children should get, and how to balance it out with a well-rounded, active life.

The trick today is that there are so many screens that demand our attention - and they're so portable. Makes you almost wish for the days of the big TV in the family room again (almost . . . who wants to go back to the days where the TV took 5 minutes to warm up? Not me!). The Internet and the connected lifestyle that comes with it is great.

We need to take it for what it is, which is nothing short of this generation's Industrial Revolution. Yet while we as adults tend to make distinctions between being online and offline, I suspect that there's increasingly little difference between the two for our kids. To them, it's all just part of life.

23%
of children aged 3 to 5 can swim

47% of children aged 3 to 5 can use a smartphone

Show the way

If our kids are missing out on some key life skills, is it all too easy to just blame technology? As parents, we set the standard - so let's make it a high one.

As with any major social change (and the advent of the Internet is just that), people will need time to adjust. So, as we look at the stats we have to wonder what role we're playing in this shift. For example, are we consciously creating situations where we're letting our kids get more time with screens than bikes - and one at the expense of the other?

Or is it far more subtle than that? Like when we hand the phone to our toddler while on a long drive without thinking much about longer term learned behaviors and their implications... Everyone will have their own answer to that, but it's likely to be a mix of the two. I recently heard an interesting anecdote while listening to the radio that cited how our kids no longer know how to play "I Spy" while traveling in the car. Should we start a movement to bring it back on those long journeys?

So while we're not afraid that our kids will never learn to tie their shoes, this stat does beg the question: what impact is technology having on their childhood? My point of view is that we should take an active hand and regulate not just "screen time" but also the mix of options and activities our children engage in. Again, our kids are looking to us, and while we're busy and can't always entertain them, we should offer up channels for all their energy.

Give them choices; expose them to new things when we can; foster their inclinations to cook, read or just to learn how to deal with being bored (now there's a life skill that will pay off later!) Sound familiar? It should. You see, much of the same advice that parents had to dish out with the advent of the radio, the TV and game consoles still applies.
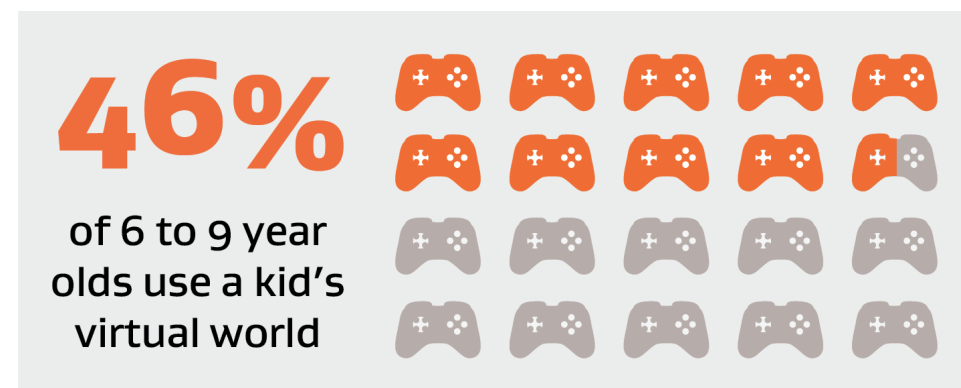
Life will always present choices about how to spend our time, and we have to help our children navigate that. As human beings, in particular as little human beings, we're wired to interact, to hang out with each other, and simply get out and run around from time to time. Yes, sometimes it takes a bit of effort to overcome the inertia of sitting in front of a screen, but when we do, we're usually glad we did. Let's keep that in mind for our kids, and ourselves.

Game time

Also reported by parents, 46% of 6 to 9 year olds use a kid's virtual world and 16% are on Facebook. How do we prepare for these big moments in (online) life?

Wow, 46% of young kids are playing in a virtual world? In some countries we saw the figure climb up to 54%. Wow again, right? That number may seem large at first, but when you get to thinking about it, it starts to make sense. After all, these virtual worlds are yet another place your kids will naturally want to play, a place where they not only have fun, but also develop a sense of independence.

To support this very natural inclination, many parents and kids have turned to online worlds and experiences designed specifically for children, such as Club Penguin or WebKinz.
As you might imagine, these environments tend to be heavily moderated. Controls are in place to make these worlds as safe as possible for young ones. In some ways they're like a kiddie pool set off from the rest of the open water Internet. Still, it's up to us to monitor the time they spend in there and make sure all's well in their world. Heck, play some games with them. See what makes it so fun for them. What's more, spending this time together will open some doors to lots of teaching moments about the Internet, like how to stay safe, how to protect passwords, and so on. As with anything else at this age, playing in an online world is great provided you keep an eye on what they're up to and offer guidance as needed.

46%
of 6 to 9 year olds use a kid's virtual world

Thumbs down

Facebook is not the place for kids under the age of 13 - don't allow them to grow up too fast by diving into these choppy waters.

Now here's what really surprised us: Facebook. Really, 16% of 6 to 9-year-olds are on it? Right away it gets us to wondering what business a young child has on there.

I think it also begs the question: Do parents really know what's going on? How are these kids getting onto Facebook - on their parents' phone, a sibling's account, through a friend? At this age, is it too much too soon? Yes. It's clearly against the terms and conditions of Facebook, which limit the membership age to 13 and up. Plus, and

Don't allow the online world to be the reason they grow up too quickly

this is important, these kids are simply too young to wade through the waves of unmoderated content that Facebook will hurl at them, which is all designed for the 13+ age group. Those news feeds and ads aren't meant for young kids. That's the real rub here.

One day your kid will leave the kiddie pool and jump into the "big pool" of the

Internet. That water is deep in there, and it can be pretty cold too. Put plainly, this is a massive jump. We cannot be complacent. Our job right now is to help them get ready for that moment.

Virtual worlds, using kid-friendly search engines, and eventually setting up an email account can set them up, gradually, to stand on their own. Your kids need you to help them make that transition - and to be available and ready to offer up sound advice when they do. Don't allow the online world to be the reason they grow up too quickly.

16% of 6 to 9 year olds are on Facebook

Take action

Of the mothers we surveyed, 89% said that, to their knowledge, their child hasn't been teased by peers via the Internet or a mobile device, yet 16% said they knew of their children's peers who had. How much of this is really going on, and how can we help these kids?

Make a clear decision on whether what you see is banter or bullying, and then do what's right for your child

Teasing and bullying online. It's a huge topic, and another one that gets an entire chapter dedicated to it in my book. It's that important, so I hope you'll click that link and take a look.

It contains very straightforward advice and lists a number of resources that you can turn to in need. For example, you'll be glad to know that many schools are becoming an immediate go-to resource to address cyberbullying among students, even if it does not occur on school grounds. Believe me, there's plenty to talk about here, but my advice is this: if you see something that feels like bullying, it probably is. Act on it, but keep an even keel when you do. Kids always tease each other, so make a clear decision on whether what you see is banter or bullying, and then do what's right for your child.

So as we look at this stat, it would appear that 11% of moms have a child who's been teased by peers via the Internet. Looking at broader industry statistics, the generally accepted number is around 15%. We can speculate quite a bit about what's creating that 4% gap, but one thing we can be sure of is the fact that our children won't always come to us when there is a problem. So, like everything else in raising children, we have to tune into our parental "sixth sense" and be alert for signs that something is up. It's on us to take an active interest in our children's moods and activities. At a young age, when your child is down or out of sorts, there's typically a reason they can point to (they're not moody teenagers yet). We should look out for other children as well. Happy, healthy and safe children are in everyone's interest.

Have fun online

While it can be a scary place at times, the Internet generally is a positive and fun environment in which to interact. It's important that your kids are given the right foundations to enjoy it.

One of the best ways to keep children happy, healthy and safe is to keep those lines of communication open with your child. Should teasing or bullying ever occur, you want it so that your child feels like he or she can talk to you without feeling pressured or pumped for information.

Resist that urge to interrogate or even overreact in the heat of the moment. Be the example that you want to set. Finally, take the proactive approach. Talk to your child before this is an issue. Help them understand what cyberbullying is and

We want our kids to see the Internet as a good thing

what to look out for. But keep fear from being the focus - the Internet is a fun place overall. Even though we have to address some serious issues from time to time, we want our kids to see the Internet as a good thing.

There's little doubt that it will be with them for their entire lifetime. Let's start them off with the right foundation.

89% of mothers claimed to have no knowledge of their child being cyberbullied

16% said they knew their children's peers had been victims of cyberbullying

In a nutshell

While most parents will react quickly to scares surrounding food and medicine, there seems to be a reluctance to address the issues surrounding their child's online presence. However, with technology evolving at such a rapid pace, these security and privacy issues aren't something we can afford to ignore.

Whether it's taking steps to manage and secure a child's online information or educating them about navigating the online world, we have a responsibility to ensure we give our children the very best digital start possible.

It's my hope that this eBook gives you a little insight into what's going on with other children and other parents like you. From there, I hope it also gives you a little nudge - to actively think about how you'd like to raise your child who is part of the first fully digital generation. It's important to step back every once in a while and think about the kind of life we want to lead amidst all this technology.

We're all rather new at this, and that's okay. There are time-honored lessons we can apply to this new world, in addition to other resources and parents who are doing a good job at figuring out the rest. The important thing is to figure out what works for your family, then to follow up by being a living example of these good behaviors yourself. The Internet is a cool thing, and there's much we can do to keep it that way.

Enjoy

So, there it is. The digital world is engaging and challenging both parents and children and if your interest in our AVG Digital Diaries survey has been piqued then visit our dedicated section on the AVG site for more information:

www.avg.com/digitaldiaries

Learn more about internet security at www.avg.com