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PARENTS FEARS ABOUT THE INTERNET WELL FOUNDED

New research into children's internet usage, exposure and safety and parents' monitoring released

*Almost every parent has strong concerns regarding their child's safety online.
And rightly so, as 2 in 3 children aged 8-15 years have encountered inappropriate content.
Yet almost half of parents rarely or never monitor their child online.*

A widespread study commissioned by gizmo, Australia's leading home computer support service, has revealed that children are naive to the dangers of the internet, and although their parents are aware of the dangers they don't possess the technological know how to implement effective safety measures. The research is being released to coincide with the launch of National Cyber Security Awareness Week, which aims to promote education and safety awareness into what children are doing online.

This study conducted by **Lonergan Research**, surveyed 1,025 parents and their children aged 8-15 years old and demonstrates that while most kids don't understand the dangers, almost all parents do, yet many have not implemented effective safety controls.

Parents have a range of concerns about their child's internet use. The main concerns are coming into contact with sexually explicit material (89%), being targeted by online predators (86%), and being infected by viruses and spyware (86%).

These concerns are well founded as **the naivety of children can lead them into trouble**, with two in three children 8 – 15 coming into contact with inappropriate material online but merely 13% of them perceive the internet as dangerous, compared to the majority of their parents. Furthermore, the older a child becomes the more confident and safe they are likely to feel online, with 84% of 13-15 year olds perceiving the internet as safe compared to 78% of 8-10 year olds.

Most children use the internet for homework/school projects, online games, and watching videos and most parents are aware of these activities but this doesn't mean they're safe. The **likelihood of children coming into contact with inappropriate materials increases with age**, which corresponds with children's increased confidence in feeling the internet is safe for them as they grow older. Even though the majority of children are innocent, they are still quite sophisticated and do more than their parents realise online.

- Almost one in three (32%) children have seen images of naked people;
- 29% have seen violent images;
- 29% have played games rated MA15+;
- 29% have been contacted by someone they don't know online;
- 17% have been asked for personal details;
- 14% have been teased or bullied online; and
- 7% have had someone post pictures or videos of them without their permission.

Almost half (49%) of primary school children know how to engage in illegal activities online, even if they have never done it. This most commonly includes:

- Downloading music without paying (35%)
- Giving their friends copied games or songs (29%)
- Downloading TV shows (27%)
- Using a neighbour's wireless internet without them knowing (13%)

While most parents are aware when children use the internet for study and homework purposes, **parental awareness is lower for many other activities**. Of the children who post videos online only half (47%) of their parents are not aware they do this.

Although most kids are good, **two in five have tried to hide what they do on the internet** from their parents. The most common methods are accessing the internet when their parents are not at home (29%) and clear browser history (16%). Older children aged 13-15 are much more likely to have hidden their internet activities from their parents (61% compared to 14% 8-10 year olds).

There are simple things that parents can do to monitor and help protect their children whilst online, however many are not doing this despite being very concerned:

- **22% of parents have never installed or checked parental controls** on their home computers. Just one in four (26%) parents always install parental control.
- Whilst 50% of parents always make sure their child aged 8-15 years uses the internet in public spaces, three in ten parents do not.
- Whilst 20% of parents always watch their children online, and 40% often do, the remainder sometimes, **rarely or never watch their child online.**

Ben Ashton, CEO for gizmo says:

“gizmo conducted this research to show how important it is to educate parents on safe internet use for their kids, including establishing an open dialogue with them and putting safety control features in place. There are a variety of these provided for Microsoft and Apple computers and parents should ensure these are properly installed and considered a standard safety measure. Educating parents on their kids’ safe internet usage and installing parental controls should be as commonplace as putting them in the appropriate child restraint in the car or teaching them about stranger danger or looking both ways when crossing the road.”

Peter Coroneos, Chief Executive for the Internet Industry Association (IIA), Australia’s national industry body for internet business in Australia, says:

“The IIA is a firm advocate of parents being empowered to take personal responsibility for providing a safe environment for children in the home. This new research presented by gizmo, the most comprehensive study to have been undertaken in Australia on this topic in many years, confirms that a good percentage of children are more technologically savvy than their parents and demonstrates how widely children use the internet. It reinforces how important it is to educate parents about internet usage and safety so that they feel confident in speaking to their kids and putting the necessary measures in place to protect them.”

gizmo takes this issue so seriously that they have developed a unique tailored service providing specialised in-home service to assist parents in safety-proofing their home computer, while teaching them the mechanisms for monitoring, engaging and educating their child on safe internet practices. Considering almost all parents admit to being concerned about the dangers presented by the internet, gizmo’s Kid Safe Online teaches them how to take control of the situation by learning the processes to create a safe environment.

For more information on gizmo’s Kid Safe Online service go to www.gizmo.com.au or call 1300 275 449.

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