

# Parents' key fear: Kids bullied online

*Other concerns raised by parents in the survey included children downloading malicious programs or computer viruses, disclosing too much personal information to strangers online and being lured into meeting a stranger in the physical world.*

Parents in Singapore are fretting over their kids' online habits and getting bullied online.

But despite these jitters, many parents do not take active steps to ensure their children are protected from the dangers of the Web.

Only a third of parents took such steps last year, according to survey findings released yesterday.

Among the chief concerns of parents here were: children downloading malicious programs or computer viruses, and disclosing too much personal information to strangers online.

They were also concerned that children would be lured into meeting a stranger in the physical world, according to a survey by security technology firm Norton.

About two-thirds of people cited these issues.

The study also found that most parents - 71 per cent - said they allowed their children to access the Internet before age 11.

But just 39 per cent of respondents allowed their kids to access the Web only with parental supervision last year.

This is a slight increase from 2015's 35 per cent.

The report, which is in its second year, polled more than 400 parents here in September and October last year.

About 1,000 people here above the age of 18 were surveyed.

Only about a third of parents here had preventive measures in place to protect their children online last year - allowing access only to certain websites and allowing Internet access only in household common areas like the living room.

These are similar to 2015's figures.

But more parents are taking some form of action rather than none at all. In 2015, 32 per cent of parents surveyed said they took no action at all over their children's online activities.

This improved last year, falling to 11 per cent.

Mr Lawrence Tan, 36, who has two children aged eight and 10, said he limits their Internet exposure to assignments on their school website.

He occasionally allows them to watch YouTube videos and cartoons on his mobile devices.

"I make sure they are fully supervised and I take the opportunity to bond with them," said Mr Tan, who works in a healthcare firm.

More parents here are also worried that their children will be cyberbullied. Almost half of the parents surveyed - 48 per cent - believe their children are more likely to be bullied online than on a playground, up from 37 per cent in 2015.

While 9 per cent of parents said their child was a victim of cyberbullying last year, down from 15 per cent from 2015, Norton said the issue might be under-reported.

This is because parents may not recognise the signs of cyberbullying, which include appearing nervous when receiving texts or e-mail or deleting their social media accounts.

"A concern for many parents is that cyberbullying doesn't stop when their child leaves school - as long as your child is connected to a device, a bully can connect to them," said Mr Gavin Lowth, vice-president for consumer business unit in Asia-Pacific and Japan at Symantec, which owns the Norton brand.

Children may also be on the receiving end of aggressive people online, instead of full-blown cyberbullying, which is also a problem, said Mr Poh Yeang Cherng, principal consultant at cyberwellness consultancy firm Kingmaker Consultancy.

This is due to the ease of accessing the Internet now.

"Kids who play online games, for instance, may experience aggression there. Many games involve both young children and adults so what an adult can handle or deems acceptable could be a shock to children," he said.

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