

Researchers explore best practices for talking to kids about online privacy

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How can parents encourage their children to use online technology safely? Recent research by scientists at the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) suggests that a good strategy is to talk

to your kids directly about online privacy and security—from a young age through high school.

The research effort, which the NIST team members describe as an exploratory study, involved interviewing 40 parent/child pairs with kids between 3rd and 12th grades. The goal was to understand their knowledge about online privacy, security, and risky online behavior, and how the [parents](#) attempt to influence their kids' online activities and knowledge about privacy and security.

The NIST team's preliminary findings and suggested strategies include:

- It's never too early to talk to kids. Start when they first begin using technology. Children as young as [elementary school](#) knew about security, privacy and online risks, and were interested in learning more about how to stay safe online.
- Talking to kids helps them better understand how to navigate the digital world. Many parents felt hesitant to talk about online privacy and security, often citing their own lack of knowledge. But kids whose parents talked with them about online privacy and security were more knowledgeable. Conversations do not need to be highly technical—parents can discuss online activities and how to make good choices.
- Appreciate that kids may see the digital world differently. The kids viewed [online privacy](#) and security as things they can control. They also felt that all risks are not the same, requiring an understanding of each situation. Parents, though, saw most online activities as very risky, resulting in them often telling their [kids](#) what not to do, instead of what to do. It may be more helpful to talk about behavior options and the potential consequences of each.

The team is presenting the findings in two papers: one at the [Human-](#)

[Computer Interaction International conference](#) in July 2023, and the other at the [Symposium on Usable Privacy and Security](#) in August 2023. NIST has also created this video to introduce the [research](#) to a general audience.

More information: Olivia Williams et al, 'They're Not Risky' vs. 'It Can Ruin Your Whole Life': How Parent-Child Dyads Differ in their Understandings of Online Risk, *Social Computing and Social Media* (2023). [DOI: 10.1007/978-3-031-35927-9_36](#)

Youth understandings of online privacy and security: A dyadic study of children and their parents. www.usenix.org/conference/soup...resentation/williams

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