Parents Voice Serious Concerns About Children's Internet Safety and Believe That Social Media and Tech Companies Aren't Doing Enough, Study Finds

78% of Parents Think Social Media Companies Aren't Protecting Kids from Dangerous Content, According to Survey from The New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children

NEW YORK – Seventy-nine percent of parents are concerned about the potential risks of their children interacting with strangers online through popular websites and apps – and nearly eight of 10 (78%) believe social media companies, such as Facebook, TikTok and YouTube, aren't doing a good job protecting their children from inappropriate and risky content, according to a survey of parents in the U.S. conducted by The New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (The NYSPCC), the world's first child protection agency.

It's not just social media companies that aren't doing enough. Seventy-two percent of parents think technology companies aren't doing a good job protecting their children from inappropriate content and 73% said the same for the government.

The NYSPCC study, *Perceptions of Internet Safety and the Risk to Children*, surveyed more than 500 parents in the U.S. with children younger than age 18 as part of the organization's mission to help prevent child abuse through its work with parents, teachers, children and foster care agencies. Only half of parents are aware of the serious internet crime "sextortion," which is when an adult convinces a person younger than 18 to share sexual pictures or perform sexual acts on a webcam.

"Parents are understandably concerned for their children's safety online, but they feel ill equipped to manage new safety features and monitoring tools," said Dr. Mary Pulido, Executive Director of The NYSPCC. "They want to see more being done about internet safety, not only by technology companies and the government, but also by schools. The vast majority of parents are in favor of having schools conduct annual sessions with children and teens about internet safety and risks."

Parents are Confused and Think Control Tools are Inadequate

Almost three-quarters of parents are concerned about the impact of "screen time" on their children's social skills development (74%) and the potential for their children to develop a screen time addiction (73%).

But only 33% of parents believe the parental control tools on internet platforms and apps are adequate to block their children's access to inappropriate online content. That number drops to about one out of five (22%) of the parents with children under age three.

What's more, parents are confused about how to handle their children's screen time. More than half (57%) feel it's getting harder to control the amount of time their children spend online outside of school. And about half (51%) said they need better information about how to use parental control tools to block children's access to inappropriate content. More than two out of five (44%) also said they need better information about what an appropriate amount of daily screen time is for children. The U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy recently released an advisory on how social media can pose risk to the mental health and well-being of children.

Parents are Aware of the Many Levels of Online Risk

But there is some good news: Parents are aware of the top internet safety risks for their children. Nearly two-thirds (64%) report they're aware that many popular apps used by children allow people and companies to track a child's location. More than half (58%) also report they know that many popular apps allow advertising that may display sexually explicit, violent or other inappropriate content.

"This familiarity and understanding of online risks may suggest why a significant majority of parents – 77% – favor the passage of two bills that have been introduced in Congress to address internet safety. The 'Invest in Child Safety Act' seeks to protect children from online exploitation, while the 'Kids Online Safety Act' would require software app and electronic service companies to implement stronger safeguards around data and location protection for minors," said Dr. Pulido. "As a society, we need to ensure we're doing whatever it takes to protect our children from sexual exploitation."

For more survey findings, please visit this page or reach out to NYSPCC@allisonpr.com.

Survey Methodology
The survey consisted of interviews in mid-July 2022 with a national probability sample of 511 parents in the U.S. with children younger than age 18. It was designed for The NYSPCC by Michaels Opinion Research and utilized the AmeriSpeak panel, which is funded and operated by NORC at the University of Chicago. Data have been weighted to national U.S. Census benchmarks and are balanced by gender, age, education, race/ethnicity and region. The tabulated results have a margin of error of ±6.0 percentage-points.

About The NYSPCC
The New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (The NYSPCC) is one of the most highly respected child protective agencies in the world. Founded in 1875, The NYSPCC helps the most vulnerable children of our community recover from trauma. And, more importantly, it helps prevent child abuse through its work with parents, teachers, children and foster care agencies. The NYSPCC's amazing work is used as a model for child welfare agencies across the nation. The NYSPCC has investigated more than 650,000 cases on behalf of over two million children and has educated over 53,000 professionals working with children on child abuse and neglect issues. Read more about The NYSPCC at http://www.nyspcc.org/.