

Kids take more online risks at home

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Kids are more likely to take online risk at home than at school, a new study reported Monday.

While home computer use for fun, games and e-mailing friends is common among youth, it also offers kids more opportunity to engage in risky Internet activities such as downloading illegal software and chatting with strangers, according to the results of a new nationwide survey released by the Business Software Alliance.

More than half (51 percent) of the kids polled said their school's computer usage rules were more stringent than home rules. The findings suggest that less rigid supervision at home increases kids' freedom to surf inappropriate Web sites, download digital copyrighted works such as software and music without paying for it and chat with strangers.

Among the results:

-- About half of older teens ages 16 to 18 report having downloaded software (52 percent) and music (52 percent) while on home computers this year, compared to just over one-third of younger teens ages 13 to 15 (36 and 38 percent, respectively).

-- Thirty-five percent of kids surveyed in all age groups said they are more likely to use a home computer rather than a school computer to chat with someone they don't know, divulge personal information online (24 percent) or go to Web sites they probably shouldn't visit (29 percent).

"We learned that schools are far more likely than parents to use blocking software and enforce safe online use policies. So, what the kids cannot do at school, they can more easily get away with at home due to less supervision. This is why it's so critical that teachers and parents take every opportunity to get involved and be observant when it comes to kids spending time online," said Diane Smiroldo, vice president of public affairs for BSA.

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