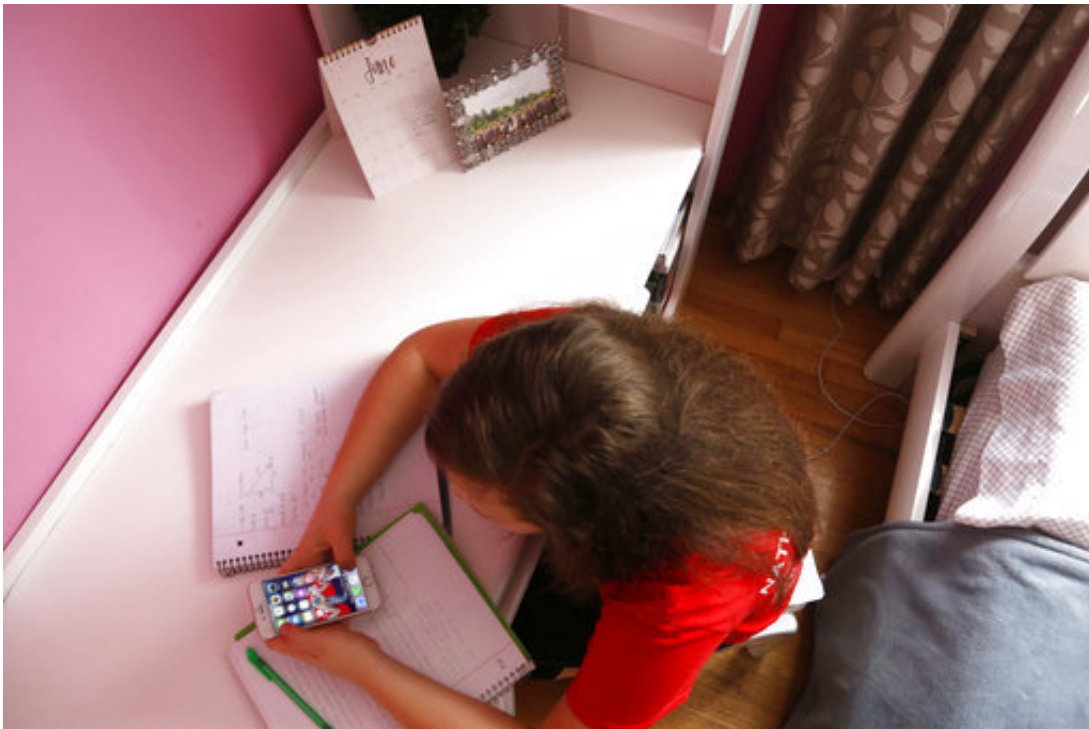


Do you really know what your kid's doing on that device?

June 26 2018, by Martha Irvine



Ewelina Cudzich, 13, checks her phone in her Chicago home, Friday, June 8, 2018. Cudzich, who starts high school this fall, says she understands that parents would want to monitor a phone sometimes but thinks teens should be given more freedom as they prove they can be responsible. "If they're not independent, how are they going to live in the new world?" she asks. (AP Photo/Martha Irvine)

The 7th grader looks desperate as she approaches. She's just been to a cybersecurity talk at her school, where she raised her hand when asked if

she has a social media account - Snapchat, in her case.

Most students at Chicago's Nathan Hale Elementary School, many of them younger than the required [social media](#) age of 13, did the same when retired police detective Rich Wistocki inquired about Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat or any other number of applications and games.

"Please, please, pleeeeeease, don't use my picture or a video of me raising my hand," this particular kid begs repeatedly, despite assurances that she was not caught on camera.

"Don't use mine either," a friend quickly pipes in, as they reclaim and then busily start scrolling through the mobile phones, which all students at Nathan Hale are required to give to their homeroom teachers during the school day.

They are pleading because their [parents](#) don't know they're on social [media](#), the gateway to the secret digital lives many of today's teens are living—and that, for a good number, might also include:

— Using video and chat functions to meet strangers on apps ranging from Musical.ly to WhatsApp and Houseparty;

— Storing risqué photos in vault apps that look like something as innocent as a calculator—and then trading those photos like baseball cards;

— Using Text Burner and other apps to harass and bully peers with anonymous messages;

— Using apps that secretly record messages on Snapchat and other apps before they disappear;

— Ordering pot and other drugs via any number of social media and communication apps or encrypted websites—or buying something else online that you don't want them to have using prepaid credit cards (makeup maybe?) and having it sent to a friend's house;

— Buying or borrowing "burner" phones to avoid parental monitoring or when phone privileges are lost.

— And giving their significant others or friends the password to social media accounts so they can "manage" their accounts when their phones are taken away.

How are they getting away with this in 2018? In a world where the words "cyberbullying" and "predator" have been etched on the collective parental psyche for some time? Well, for one, devices have gotten smaller and the kids receiving them—phones, tablets and iPods—are getting younger and, thus, savvier sooner. The number of apps and games also has exploded and those offerings continually morph.

Many parents are just plain overwhelmed—and often far too trusting, says Wistocki, now a cybersecurity consultant whose packed schedule has him crisscrossing the country to speak to parents and young people since he retired from the police department in Naperville, Illinois.

During those talks, he holds up a mobile phone and regularly tells wide-eyed parents:

"When you give this kid, at the ripe old age of 11, this ominous device, it's like giving them the keys to their brand new Mercedes and saying, 'Sweetheart you can go to Vegas. You can drive to Texas, Florida, New York, wherever you want to go ..' And with wi-fi, device doesn't just mean a phone, but also tablets and iPods.

Wistocki was invited to speak earlier this month at Nathan Hale Elementary by the principal, Dawn Iles-Gomez, whose days are increasingly filled with drama that begins on social media.

And it's often not the usual suspects in her office, but rather a long and diverse parade of students she sees acting one way in person and very differently in the digital world.

"It's shocking—the language and the threats and the mean things that are said," she says. "And I would say, 75 percent of the time, I call a parent and their parent will say, 'Well, no, they said they didn't do that.'

"And I'm like, 'Well—they did.'"

To get parents to the meeting with Wistocki, she offered extra graduation passes and other incentives. About 70 showed up, in a school that has 930 students.

Kathleen Kazupski, a mom with two daughters, ages 13 and 17, was one of them—and she hung on Wistocki's every word.

"As parents, we need to wake up, no doubt," she said after the talk. She came, in part, because she discovered last year that her younger daughter was messaging with a boy she didn't know, until mom put an end to it. "I scared the hell out of her."

Jennea Bivens, another parent who attended, uses an app called MMGuardian to manage and monitor her 13-year-old daughter's phone use. She shuts it down during the school day, though her daughter can call her, and at bedtime. She turns off certain apps, sometimes as punishment, and monitors texts. To monitor most social media, though, she must either be on her daughter's phone, or check the accounts she knows exists from her own social media, most recently getting after her

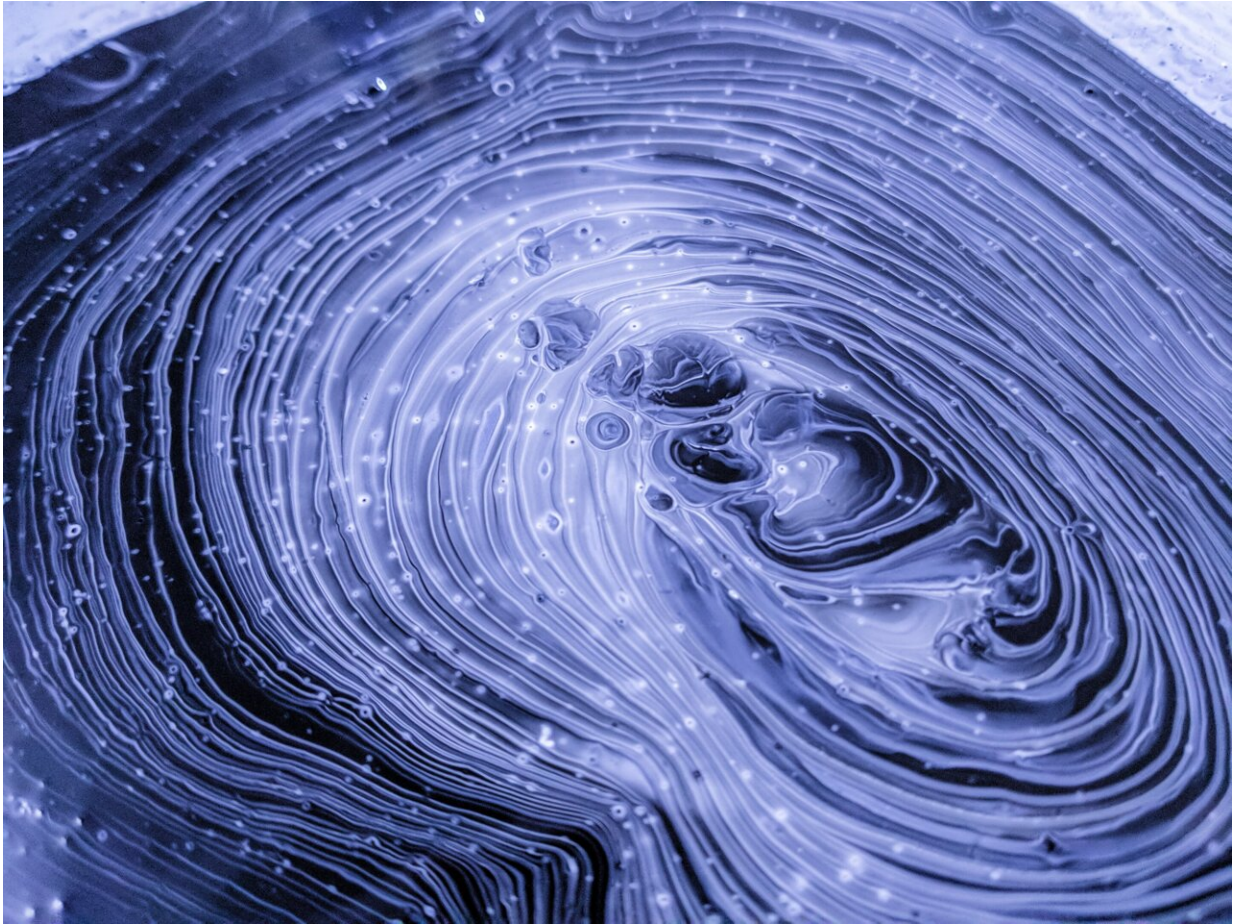
daughter for cussing on some of her video posts. "It's a full-time job," Bivens concedes.

"People laugh at me because I monitor her stuff. But I don't have the same problems as other people do."

A 2016 survey from the Pew Research Center found that, back then, about half of parents said they had ever checked their children's phone calls and text messages—or ever friended their kids on social media (if they knew what social media their kids were using). But they were less likely to use tech-based tools to monitor, block or track their teens.

Since then, built-in parental restrictions, including screen time limits and app blocking, have been added all the time for Google's Android via its Family Link. In addition to already allowing parental approval for app and music purchases, the upcoming Apple operating system—iOS 12 being widely released this fall—also will give parents more control over screen time, app usage and web surfing on iPhones, iPads and iPods.

Beyond that, independent monitoring apps also have proliferated, sometimes allowing parents even more control to view and manage some content from their own devices, often for a monthly fee. But, as Wistocki notes, only a few of those apps allow parents to see actual posts and messages on social media, such as Snapchat and Instagram. In his own talks with parents, he recommends monitoring apps WebWatcher and My Mobile Watchdog, which he says can dig most deeply into the more open Android system, in some cases, even notifying a parent when certain words are used or provocative images are taken or exchanged.



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Until his own sons turned 18, Wistocki monitored their locations and messages on various social media, controlled phone use and approved which apps they could download. He tells parents they should do the same.

"There is no such thing as privacy for children," is one of his most commonly used mantras, which he uses to prod reluctant parents.

Other tech experts agree that monitoring makes sense for younger kids.

But Pam Wisniewski, an assistant professor in the department of computer science at the University of Central Florida, is among those who suggest a gradual loosening of the strings as teens prove they can be trusted. She says she and her students are working on a different kind of monitoring app for parents called Circle of Trust that is based on that concept.

"I'm almost to the point where I feel like the world would be better off without social media," says Wisniewski, who studies human computer interaction and adolescent online safety. "But I'm also a pragmatist.. So how do we make the best of it?"

Rather than cutting off a kid from social media, she encourages parents to look for teachable moments. When inappropriate content runs through their feed, for instance, she suggests discussing coping strategies, such as hiding that person's content or blocking them, if necessary.

Sarita Schoenebeck, an assistant professor and director of the Living Online Lab at the University of Michigan, says her research also has found that shutting teens out of social media only tends to make them sneakier.

She also cautions parents against thinking a particular application is bad, simply because some use it inappropriately—say, for sharing "sexting" photos or videos, nude or semi-nude images that have become a very common part of teen dating life.

"Focus on the behavior, not the application," Schoenebeck advises.

A few more pieces of advice for parents:

— While he advocates vigilant monitoring, Wistocki also tells parents to offer their children the "Golden Ticket"—no punishment when they

come to them about mistakes they've made online or help they need with a social media problem. Don't take away the devices, he says, but do keep limits firm. And always make sure they delete naked content, which is viewed as child pornography in many states.

— David Coffey, the chief digital officer at IDShield, a company that helps its customers fend off identity theft, tells his own two teens: "Don't put anything on your phone you wouldn't want Grandma Judy to see and read."

— Many tech experts tell parents to stand firm and not allow children to charge their devices in their rooms overnight, removing the temptation to text and go on social media. Iles-Gomez, the principal at Nathan Hale, says her step-children initially protested and said they needed the phone to wake them up in the morning. She countered with, "They sell alarm clocks."

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Monitoring also isn't foolproof. Recently, Bivens' daughter, Ayrial Miller, went "live" on Twitter and came across a stranger who asked her to show her bare feet—a strange request that caused her to end the connection quickly.

"It is so hard to see and catch everything," Bivens, the parent who's so vigilant about monitoring her daughter's phone, concedes.

In this instance, Ayrial was using a tablet. But the good news was that she quickly told her mom what happened.

In recent days, they've been spending time going through her social media contacts, as Wistocki suggested they do. If her daughter doesn't know the person's name, how she knows them and where they live, the

contact gets deleted.

"It's annoying," a sometimes grumpy Ayrial says of her mother's monitoring. "But then I see that she cares about me."

Eventually, she hopes mom will "back up" a bit.

"When I'm in high school, that might get embarrassing sometimes, you know?" she says. "You need to learn your own—how do I put this?—discipline.. You need to learn from your own mistakes."

If she doesn't, she says she's always coming up with new tricks to get online secretly. And nope, she won't share how.

Online:

Wistocki's TEDx Talk: www.youtube.com/watch?v=k2buaziaNnE

University of Michigan Living Online Lab:
yardi.people.si.umich.edu/lol/

Google Family Link: families.google.com/familylink/

Apple's Family Page: www.apple.com/families/

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