⟩ Profile of Kids in Grades 8 and 9

Going Online

Students in grades 8 and 9 are most likely to connect to the Internet through laptops and cell phones or smartphones. We see the impact mobile devices like these are having on parents' ability to supervise their children's Internet use with half of these kids reporting going online without an adult around.

The majority of these young teens have access to a cell phone or smartphone and there is a significant leap in phone ownership from Grade 8 to Grade 9 (from 68% to 83%). Most are using their phones to stay in touch with friends and family and close to half admit to sleeping with their phone at night.

Favourite Activities

Social networking continues to grow with Facebook accounts jumping from 78 percent in Grade 8 to 87 percent in Grade 9. Twitter and Instagram are also gaining popularity: approximately half of Grade 9 students have accounts on these sites (53% and 47% respectively).

The top activities for this age group are:
- reading or posting comments and pictures on friends' social networking pages;
- playing online games;
- reading or posting comments and pictures on their own social networking pages; and
- downloading/streaming music, TV shows or movies.

Looking for news and current events starts to overtake searching for entertainment and sports online. Some Grade 9 students are also starting to use the Internet to get information on more sensitive topics, such as sexuality (10%) and issues relating to physical health (27%) and mental health (18%).

Privacy Attitudes

Many students in grades 8 and 9 pretend to be someone else online for a variety of reasons, including:
- to be older to register on age-restricted websites (51% and 57%);
- to protect their privacy (43% and 48%); and
- to play jokes on friends (39% and 47%).

They also actively manage their online privacy, with just over half of Grade 8 students and three quarters of Grade 9 students having deleted content to prevent someone else from seeing it.

There is a strong desire for general privacy in these grades, with asking for someone to take something down so 'no one' can see it as the most likely reason given for removing content (compared to keeping it from specific groups like parents, friends or teachers).

The likelihood of students talking to their parents about unwanted photos posted online drops significantly in these grades (from 26% to 12%).

Teens in this age group are moving away from parents and towards peers when it comes to sharing aspects of their online lives. For example, the majority say that their friends should be able to read their social networking posts (93% and 94%), distantly followed by their parents (67% and 59%). As well, they want any sharing with parents to be consensual: most feel that parents should not listen in on their kids' online conversations, read their kids' texts or force their kids to friend them on social networking sites.

The good news, however, is that an overwhelming majority believe that their parents trust them to do the right thing online, although there is a comparatively lower level of trust that parents can help them to solve online problems.

Online Meanness

Online conflict rises as kids hit the teen years and the use of social networks increases:

- A third of students in grades 8 and 9 have been mean or cruel to someone online, with name calling the most frequent type of bullying.
- Grade 9 is the peak period across all grades for making threats online and harassing someone in an online game.
- Four out of ten of these students have been recipients of mean or cruel behaviour: but most – three quarters – say this was rarely or never a problem for them.

The most common responses to being bullied online for Grade 8 students is ignoring it, asking friends for help, asking parents for help and talking face-to-face with the person. By Grade 9, fewer kids are turning to their parents for help, continuing the trend of teens seeking more autonomy in dealing with online issues.

While Grade 9 is the peak period for kids helping peers who are being bullied online (71%), it is also the grade where students are *least* likely to agree that it's important to speak out about racism and sexism online and most likely to say that "it's not my place to say anything." This may reflect a move into more adult-oriented online spaces where they feel less confident speaking out and trying to influence the values of the community.

Sexting Activity

Among students who own a cell phone, four percent in Grade 8 have sent a sext of themselves to someone. That number doubles to eight percent by Grade 9. Higher percentages – 17 percent for Grade 8 and 26 percent for Grade 9 say they have received a sext directly from its creator – suggesting that those kids who send sexts of themselves do so to multiple recipients.

The more troubling activity of forwarding sexts is quite low for this age group: in fact these students are actually less likely than those in Grade 7 to forward sexts on to others.

Learning Skills for the Internet

The most popular strategies for finding information online for students in grades 8 and 9 are searching inside reliable sites and using multiple search engines. If it's for school work, three quarters will compare their findings to other sources to double check what they've found.

Kids in this age group are least likely to have learned about the following topics:

- how companies collect and use personal information online (6 out of 10 mistakenly think that if a website has a privacy policy it won't share personal information with others);
- how to deal with racist and sexist content online (although three quarters say it's important to speak out so people know racist and sexist talk is wrong, half also say it's not their place to say something); and
- what's legal and illegal to do online (nearly half of Grade 8 students and 6 out of 10 Grade 9 students believe that illegally downloading is not a big deal).

Almost all of these students say that they've learned about online safety. Like younger students, they are also overwhelmingly confident that they know how to protect themselves online.

All statistics are from MediaSmarts' 2014 study *Young Canadians in a Wired World*, Phase III: www.mediasmarts.ca\ycww