Childhood 2.0: AI Friends and Cyberbullying on the Digital Playground

2025-07-22

Norton study shows 1 in 4 parents report cyberbullying; even more say kids turn to AI for emotional support

TEMPE, Ariz. and PRAGUE, July 22, 2025 /PRNewswire/ -- Norton, a global leader in consumer Cyber Safety and part of Gen (NASDAQ: GEN), released its **2025 Norton Cyber Safety Insights Report: Connected Kids**, offering a comprehensive look at the Cyber Safety challenges parents of school aged children are up against. The report reveals that 1 in 4 parents (24%) say their children have been victims of cyberbullying and another 41% say their child is turning to AI for companionship. As children are going digital earlier than ever—many starting on tablets by age 2* and getting their first phone by age 12 — parents are navigating uncharted territory. The report highlights the urgent need to equip families with tools to keep kids safe in a rapidly evolving digital landscape.

"Kids today are spending more time online than ever before, whether it's for school, gaming, shopping, or connecting with friends. As parents, we want to make the world a better place for our kids – and that includes the digital world." said Leyla Bilge, Global Head of Scam Research for Norton and mother of two. "Over 80% of cybercrime relies on emotional manipulation – and attackers don't care what age you are. But the digital world doesn't need to be a scary place. We are here to help empower parents with the knowledge and tools they need to help their children navigate the digital world safely."

From Offline to Cyber Bullying

While school yard bullying is nothing new, in 2025, it doesn't stop when the school bell rings. According to the report, over half (54%) of parents of cyberbullying victims say the perpetrator was a classmate or peer. Parents say this trolling and harassment spans numerous platforms with social media like Facebook (52%), YouTube (46%), Instagram (45%), Snapchat (40%), and TikTok (37%) leading the charge. But not all cyberbullying is taking place on social media – 39% of parents say their child is bullied via text messages.

Amid these troubling findings, there's a glimmer of hope: almost half (48%) of parents say their kids have asked for help with an online interaction. Yet despite seeking help, kids remain deeply entrenched in the digital world. A staggering number of parents say they try to manage their child's screen time (86%), but 56% of children have admittedly found a way to get around the limits or controls or sneak in more screen time thinking their parents wouldn't find out. Worryingly, parents report catching their children engaging in risky behaviors online, including going on devices past bedtime (30%), accessing blocked sites (25%), and in some cases watching explicit content (21%) or even cyberbullying others (9%).

Making AI Friends

Another crucial concern addressed in the report is the growing role of AI in children's digital lives. Notably, 41% of parents say their children use AI for companionship and emotional support, with 46% of parents

reporting their child uses ChatGPT.

While 40% of parents acknowledge AI's benefits for learning and creativity, concerns about its unintended effects remain high. Dads are more inclined to see the benefit of their kids using AI – 19% more than moms. As AI becomes increasingly integrated into daily life, understanding its opportunities and challenges is essential for shaping a balanced, forward-thinking approach to technology in childhood development.

"As students grow up in a digital world, school systems need to equip them with the skills to become tech-savvy and cyber resilient. By fostering digital literacy, we empower students to not only use technology effectively, but to excel in their academic, personal, and professional lives," said Catherine Dunlop, Senior Vice President of Corporate Partnerships at Discovery Education.

5 Tips to Help Keep Kids Safer in a Connected World

The **Connected Kids Report** underscores that as children engage with technology earlier and more frequently, it's essential for parents to stay proactive, informed and involved. Norton recommends the following steps to help create a safer and more supportive digital experience for kids:

Start the Conversation Early
Don't wait until there's a problem—talk to your children about online behavior, safety, and kindness from the moment they start using devices. Tools like **The Smart Talk** developed by Norton for National PTA is a free tool that helps make it easy to guide age-appropriate conversations around digital habits and expectations.
Use Parental Control Tools Thoughtfully
Take advantage of built-in device settings and trusted parental control tools to set screen time limits, block inappropriate content, and monitor online activity. Norton solutions, such as Norton Family with features like School Time, can help parents create healthy digital boundaries while fostering trust and transparency.
Teach Kids to Recognize Red Flags
Help children understand the signs of cyberbullying, scams, AI manipulation, or predatory behavior, and empower them to speak up if something feels off.
Model Healthy Tech Use
Kids mirror adult behavior. Set a positive example by putting devices down during family time, managing your own screen use, and showing how to engage responsibly online.
Stay Involved, Stay Curious
Regularly check in with your child about what they're doing online. Ask questions, explore apps together, and keep learning about new trends – whether it's AI chatbots or the latest social media platform.
For access to full results of the 2025 Norton Cyber Safety Insights Report: Connected Kids, please visit https://newsroom.gendigital.com/Norton-Cyber-Safety-Insights-Report-Connected-Kids

About the 2025 Norton Cyber Safety Insights Report: Connected Kids
The study was conducted online within the United States by Dynata on behalf of Gen from 24th April to 8th May 2025 among 1,000 adults ages 18 and older. Data are weighted where necessary by age, gender, and region, to be nationally representative. Within this report, mentions of parents refer to parents with children younger than 18 years old.

About Norton
Norton is a leader in Cyber Safety, and part of Gen (NASDAQ: GEN), a global company dedicated to powering Digital Freedom with a family of trusted consumer brands. Norton empowers millions of individuals and families with award-winning protection for their devices, online privacy and identity. Norton products and services are certified by independent testing organizations including AV-TEST, AV-Comparatives, and SE Labs. Norton is a founding member of the Coalition Against Stalkerware. Learn more at www.norton.com.

* Source: Common Sense Media, "The Common Sense Census: Media Use by Kids Age Zero to Eight, 2023."

Available here.

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