Parental controls: advice for parents, researchers and industry

# Details

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English

## Authors

Zaman B.;Nouwen M.

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Short report

## Topics

* Online safety and policy regulation
* Risks and harms
* Social mediation
* Internet usage, practices and engagement

## Implications For Parents About

* Parental practices / parental mediation
* Parental digital literacy
* Parenting guidance / support

# Abstract

This research report provides:
-A thoughtful understanding of the functionalities of parental controls to guide families with children and adolescents to use them wisely;
-A fine-grained analysis of the characteristics of technical mediation, to support parental mediation researchers in the development of up-to-date scales and analysis schemes;
-A substantiated analysis of the potential for the design of the next generation of parental controls that may inspire industry.

The results highlight three important avenues for families, researchers and industry with respect to the use, investigation and design of parental controls:
-First, this report argues for a more nuanced approach towards parental controls that lies beyond a one-sided focus on child protection to avoid over-controlling and over-protective parenting, which is found negatively to affect the development of the child.
-Second, it outlines future avenues for parental mediation research, by pointing out
the need to refine existing measurement instruments of technical mediation, to focus more on how and when parents employ parental controls, and how these tools may work (instead of only questioning whether parents use them, and whether they are effective), and to move beyond the generalised notion of the parent as protector and (all knowing) teacher.
-Finally, this report addresses industry’s accountability in shaping future affordances of parental controls, and making the internet a better place for children.

# Outcome

-Parents of children aged 10-15 are more likely to adopt filtering software than parents of children aged 16-17.
-Currently, the functionalities of parental controls align well with parents’ strategies to restrict and supervise their child’s online activities. The effectiveness of these strategies is supported by the parenting literature. Proactive behaviour control, like rule setting and supervision, lets children know what is expected from them. However, restrictive measures come with certain drawbacks: 1. Punishments do not teach children values or norms, and increase the likelihood of secret misbehaviour. 2. Parents do not always understand the potential risks their children may encounter.
-"When parents want to prevent external online risks (such as harm caused by strangers or cyberbullying) from happening by enforcing topdown restrictions, they are likely to impede adolescents’ right to interact with peers and autonomously engage in the online world. Moreover, such actions may worsen internal family dynamics, e.g., children losing trust, lying about their use of media or refraining from discussions with their parents about unpleasant
experiences" (Zaman Nouwen, 2016, p. 4-5)
-Communication between parents and children about their online experiences is key to understanding online risky behaviour.
-Coping mechanisms should be reinforced, since parents can never fully protect their children online.
-Each attempt to decrease the likelihood of encountering risks is also likely to decrease potential online benefits and opportunities.