Decreasing Risky Behavior on Social Network Sites: The Impact of Parental Involvement in Secondary Education Interventions

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## Topics

* Literacy and skills
* Risks and harms
* Online safety and policy regulation
* Social mediation

## Sample

207 pupils from the first 3 years of secondary education in 20 classes of five Flemish schools

## Implications For Parents About

Parental practices / parental mediation

# Abstract

Teenagers face significant risks when using increasingly popular social
network sites. Prevention and intervention efforts to raise awareness about these
risks and to change risky behavior (so-called ‘‘e-safety’’ interventions) are essential
for the wellbeing of these minors. However, several studies have revealed that while
school interventions often affect awareness, they have only a limited impact on
pupils’ unsafe behavior. Utilizing the Theory of Planned Behavior and theories
about parental involvement, we hypothesized that involving parents in an e-safety
intervention would positively influence pupils’ intentions and behavior. In a quasi\_x0002\_experimental study with pre- and post-test measures involving 207 pupils in sec\_x0002\_ondary education, we compared the impact of an intervention without parental
involvement with one that included active parental involvement by means of a
homework task. We found that whereas parental involvement was not necessary to
improve the intervention’s impact on risk awareness, it did change intentions to
engage in certain unsafe behavior, such as posting personal and sexual information
on the profile page of a social network site, and in reducing existing problematic
behavior. This beneficial impact was particularly evident for boys. These findings
suggest that developing prevention campaigns with active parental involvement is
well worth the effort. Researchers and developers should therefore focus on other
efficient strategies to involve parents.

# Outcome

"93 % reported having learned something during the course about intervention. When asked specifically what they had learned: 19 % mentioned cyberbullying. 15 % referred to sexual solicitation and 37 % alluded to privacy risks. This is a promising result considering that privacy risks and sexual risks lead to a significant amount of harm.While previous research has demonstrated the difficulty of involving parents in interventions about the risks on SNSs the
results of this study illustrate that a well-developed homework task provides an excellent opportunity to get parents to participate in an intervention. Additionally, parents become more involved in the educational process of their children at school if they perceive that teachers and pupils expect and desire their involvement.
Furthermore, it seemed that parental involvement is particularly beneficial for boys since parents are already more concerned about girls and therefore give them more e-safety instructions. Given that active parental involvement has a positive impact on at least some types of behavior and parental concerns about online safety vary significantly by family background, such as ethnicity, income and metropolitan status, future research and development
should focus on prevention strategies in environments where parents are particularly difficult to reach and difficult to involve in participatory interventions." (Vanderhoven et al., 2016, pp. 254-259)