

New Research: 3 in 10 Parents Say Their Child Has an Internet-Connected Toy

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FULL TEXT

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 16, 2017 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- A new study of parents of connected children released today by the Family Online Safety Institute (FOSI) found that parents whose kids have their own connected device or social media account are notably more optimistic about the benefits of that technology than are those whose children do not have them.

The report, "Connected Families: How Parents Think and Feel About Wearables, Toys and the Internet of Things," explores the understanding and comfort level of parents whose children use connected toys and devices in the home. Other topics included top benefits and concerns for parents, the confidence for monitoring and controlling the use of these technologies, and what ages children are using or owning them.

The research showed that kids are heavily connected. Nearly half (45%) of parents of connected children indicated that their child has three or more of his/her own connected devices, a figure that rises to 53% among parents of color. Parents are also heavily connected, reporting an average of 6.2 hours per day spent using electronic devices at home. Smart TVs topped the list as the most widespread smart home device among parents of connected children, with two-thirds (67%) reporting one in the home. 38% of parents report owning other connected home devices such as Internet-enabled home security systems, smart thermostats or smart speakers.

Overall, seven in ten parents are comfortable with their child having a connected toy, but parents whose children have them are notably more comfortable with their child having a connected toy (94% are comfortable) than are parents whose child does not have one (59% are comfortable). Similarly, the majority of parents feel confident in their ability to keep track of and manage their child's technology use, and the more connected devices their child has, the more confident parents are. Generally, the more tech that is used in the home, the more confident parents feel.

"Connected toys, devices and wearables are the newest frontier of digital parenting," said Stephen Balkam, FOSI's CEO. "The Internet of Things offers incredible opportunities for children to learn, play, and interact, but from a parenting perspective they must be treated with caution and care."

The study found that the Internet of Things (IoT) is not a widely recognized term among parents of connected children, even though many have technologies in their households that are part of the IoT. Nearly one in four parents (23%) has a smart speaker (such as an Amazon Echo or Google Home) in their home, and nearly all (94%) of parents who have a smart speaker are comfortable with their child using it.

When presented with the benefits of connected toys, parents ranked the enabling of children with special needs as the most important. Other benefits included interactive learning, personalized and imaginative play, and enhanced social/emotional learning. When presented with negative impacts on children's safety and security, the prospect of online hackers or criminals communicating with children or locating them with GPS tracking surpassed all other

concerns. Data privacy and safety guidelines are seen as essential, and if they are in place, comfort levels among parents rise significantly.

Other relevant findings from the report include:

- Among parents of connected children, half (49%) have seen, heard, or read at least some about connected toys, and 31% say their child has one.
- Parents of children who do not already own a particular device indicate that their children may have to wait longer to get one - on average, children with a smartphone received it at age 7.6, while those without one can expect to receive it by age 12.9.
- On average, a child with his or her own tablet or iPad received it at age 5.5, while a child without one can expect to wait until age 11.8.
- Parents whose children do not yet have a social media account expect to allow their child to have one at age 14.1.
- Fully 93% of parents have an account on a social networking site such as Facebook.
- Two in three (66%) parents feel very or fairly confident in their ability to keep track of and manage their child's technology use.

FOSI will present the research results today at its Annual Conference in Washington, DC, "Trust and Civility in a Challenging World." The event addresses a wide range of current issues that weaken trust, safety and civility online, bringing together top experts to discuss positive ways to respond to these challenges. As an established convener in the online safety space for over a decade, FOSI creates dialogue from perspectives across the stakeholder spectrum of industry, government, education and academia. Panels will cover the timely topics of online privacy and ethics, illegal and ill-advised content, solutions to problematic online behavior, and digital parenting including special needs families. Notable speakers include the e-Safety Commissioner of Australia, multiple United States Government representatives, and leaders from social media and innovation industry including Amazon, Facebook, Google, Mattel, Toyota, Twitter, and more.

This research was made possible by the support of Amazon, and conducted for FOSI by Hart Research Associates. The study draws upon quantitative data from an online national survey of 601 parents of connected two- to 12-year-old children and qualitative findings from three focus groups among parents – two focus groups with diverse parents in suburban Philadelphia and one online focus group with parents from across the country whose children have connected toys.

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