



## **Internet Safety: Realistic Strategies & Messages for Kids Taking More and More Risks Online**

The Polly Klaas® Foundation was startled and concerned with the responses of youth, aged 8-18, in our nationwide survey about online behavior and experiences. Most parents have no idea that half of teens (age 13-18) frequently communicate online with someone they've never met in person.

Or that one-third have talked about meeting someone whom they've only met through the Internet.

Or that nearly one in eight have learned that someone they were communicating with online was an adult pretending to be younger.

All of these practices put children at risk of online predators. Such risk-taking, combined with full integration of the Web in the lives of today's youth, means that a simple lecture or parental warning will have little effect on dangerous online practices. Young people need to hear realistic messages about online risks--messages that are based upon their actual online practices.

The poll shows significant differences between teens and "tweens" (aged 8-12.) Tweens are increasing their online presence, but they are also more concerned about safety and are less risk-prone than teens 13-18. Tweens need their caution confirmed. Teens need to be convinced about the risks and the appropriate safety measures needed to counteract those risks—typically through a wake-up-call about how other teens have been taken advantage of.

The Polly Klaas® Foundation is taking this new data and developing an Internet Safety Kit with realistic strategies and guidance for families. The Kit will be available in the spring, and the following page provides some of our initial recommendations and guidance.

Most children are more tech savvy than their parents—all the more reason for you to actively learn about what your kids are doing online.

**For parents**, we recommend:

- ❖ Learning enough about the Internet to protect your children.
  - Ask your children to show you how they use the Internet. They may not show you everything, but will see your interest—and that you are getting wise to the Web.
  - Ask a tech savvy adult friend to teach you about the Internet and show you how to check what your children do online.
- ❖ Asking your Internet service provider (AOL, Yahoo, etc.) to advise you on monitoring and blocking software for home or personal computers. Your local library may also be of assistance.

Tweens (ages 8-12) are cautious and more open to advice and rules. **For parents of tweens**, we recommend:

- ❖ Keep the computer in a public place with the screen facing out, which discourages prohibited behavior.
- ❖ Establish family rules and guidelines, which include never sharing personal information online.
- ❖ Reinforce the dangers of and penalties for sharing personal information.
- ❖ Clearly prohibit any meeting in person with someone the child only knows online.
- ❖ Set the expectation now that you will monitor Internet use in order to keep them safe.

Teens (13-18) take more risks and are more independent, and self-enforcement of safety rules is not always realistic. For **parents of teens**, we recommend:

- ❖ Share stories with real examples of teens that have been tricked or hurt because of unsafe online practices.
- ❖ Establish realistic rules. For instance, if a teen must meet someone in person they only know online, the smart way to do it is with a parent or trusted adult friend. They should meet in a very public place, and walk away and break off the relationship if the teen has been lied to.
- ❖ Reinforce the expectation that parents monitor Internet use and that safety rules must be followed.

## Topline Findings from Omnibuzz® Research

**Objectives & Methodology in-Brief:** The Polly Klaas Foundation sought to gauge insights into how teenagers behave online and the risks young people take online, such as providing personal information to individuals whom they've never met. With that research objective in mind, six questions were placed in the October 2005 fielding of Omnibuzz®, TRU's monthly online omnibus survey. The study was completed by 742 teens (ages 13 to 18) and, for added context, a supplemental sample of 726 tweens (ages 8 to 12), bring the total to 1,468 respondents. The sample is nationally representative of the U.S. tween and teen population (see data "results" for additional information about the study's methodology).

The survey questions are included in the appendix of this report (pp. 8-9).

### Summary of Findings

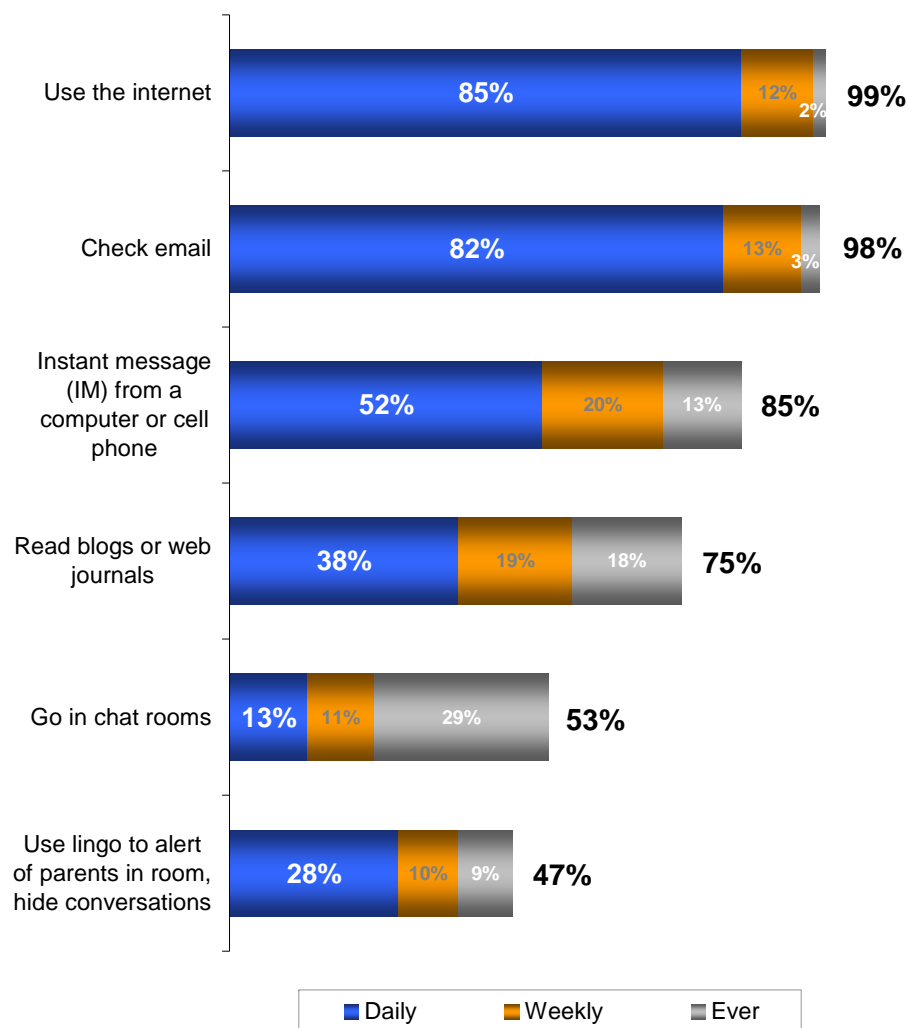
#### Potentially Risky Internet Behavior

- > Online teens frequently communicate virtually with someone they've never met: 54% have done so using IM; 50% via email; and 45% in a chat room.
- > Two in five online teens (42%) said they've posted information about themselves on the internet so others can see it and contact them.
- > More than half of the respondents (56%) said they've been asked personal questions online.
  - » One-fourth (25%) said they receive such questions weekly, while 11% say such requests come daily.
- > Nearly one third of online teens (30%) said they've talked about meeting someone whom they've only met through the internet.
- > More than one third of these online teens (37%) said they've received a link to sexually explicit content.

- > One in four (27%) said they've talked online about sex with someone they never met in person. And, nearly one in five (19%) reported knowing a friend who has been harassed or asked about sex online by a stranger.
- > Nearly half of the teen respondents (47%) admitted that they've used code words to alert others online to a parent's immediate presence—an effort to disguise a conversation about which a guardian might not approve.
  - » More than one in four (28%) said they use such lingo *daily*.
- > Girls reported more risky behavior overall than did guys.
  - » Significantly more online teen girls than guys said they've posted a profile (56% vs. 37%), shared personal information (37% vs. 26%), and been asked about sexual topics (33% vs. 18%).

*Please note: throughout this report, percents shown are among online teens aged 13 to 18 except where specifically noted; all differences termed "significant" are statistically so at the 95% level of confidence.*

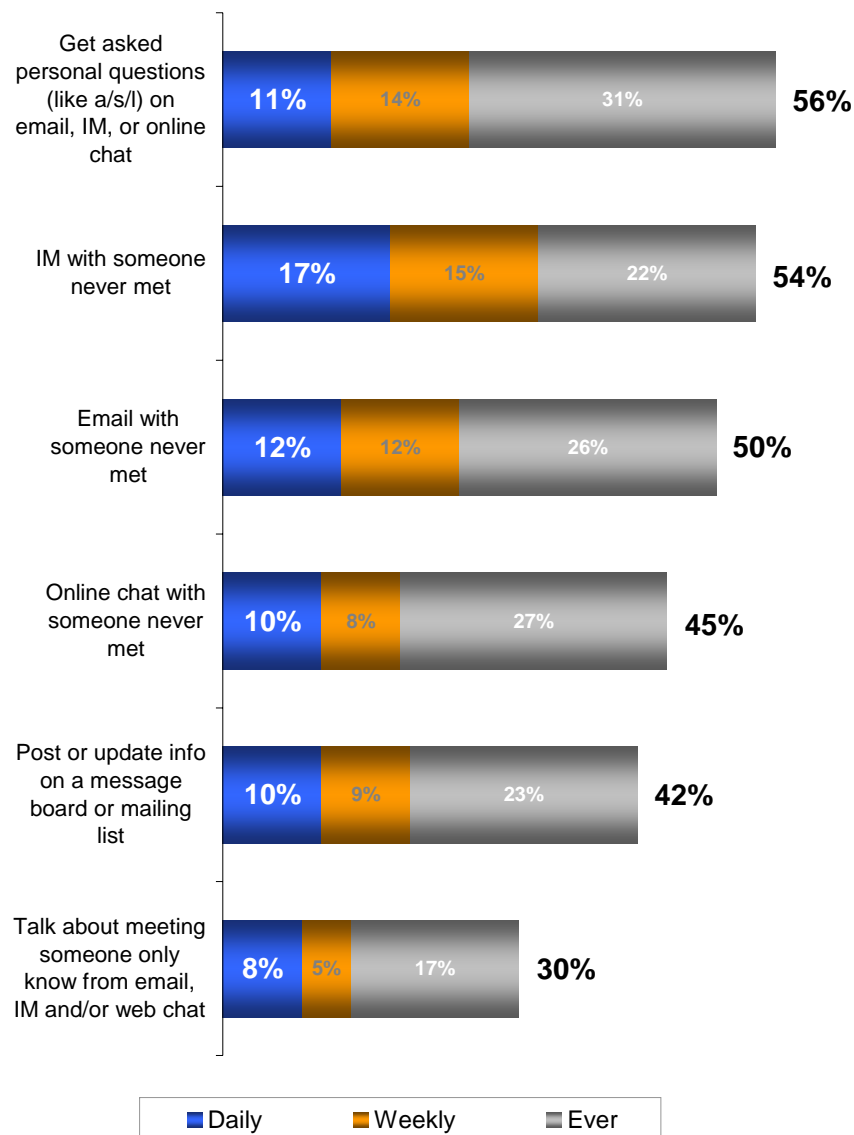
## Virtual Communication the Norm for Teens



Question: How often do **you**...?

- > The vast majority of these online teens reported that they use the internet and check email regularly—most at least once a day.
- > A strong majority (85%) also said they've sent an instant message (IM) to someone, either from a computer or their cell phone.
  - » More than half (52%) said they IM daily.
- > Three-fourths (75%) reported that they've read blogs or web journals.
  - » More than half (57%) read blogs or web journals weekly—and more than a third (38%) browse them daily.
- > More than half (53%) said they've been in chat rooms.
  - » Nearly one in four (24%) report visiting chat rooms weekly and 13% said they do so daily.
- > More than one in four (28%) said they use code words (e.g., "PIR" for "parent in room") daily to hide conversations from parents.

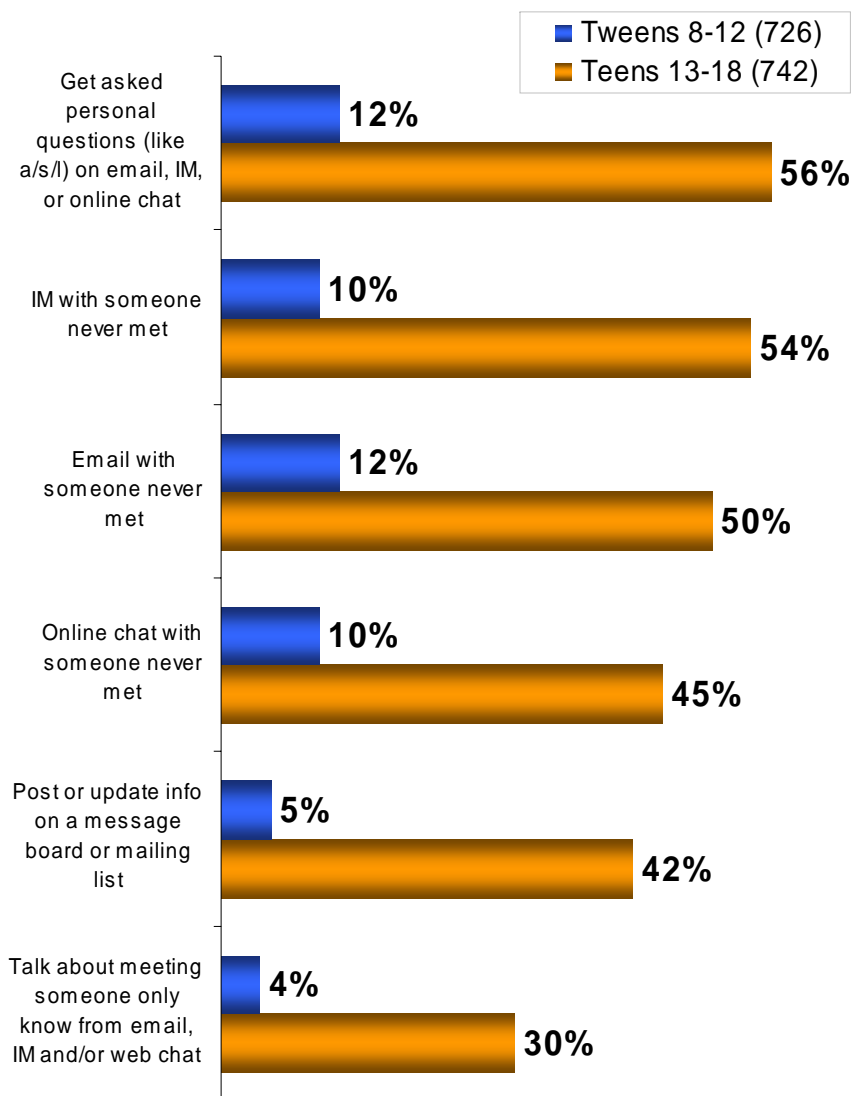
## Teens Frequently Asked Personal Questions Online by Someone They've Never Met



Question: How often do you...?

- > More than half of these online teens (56%) said they've been asked personal questions (such as their age, sex, or location) online.
  - » Notably, one in four (25%) said they are asked such information on a weekly basis; and one in 10 (11%) said requests for personal information come daily.
- > These teen respondents admitted to frequently communicating online with individuals whom they've never met.
  - » More than half (54%) said they've used IM to talk to someone they've never met. A third (32%) report chatting with such "strangers" via IM weekly, and 17% said they do so daily.
  - » Half (50%) said they've emailed someone they never met. Nearly one in four (24%) said they do so weekly.
  - » Almost as many (45%) have "chatted" online with someone they've never met; 18% said they engage in such chat weekly.
- > More than four in 10 (42%) of these teens said they've posted information about themselves online so others can see it and contact them.
  - » One in five (19%) post or update their information weekly.

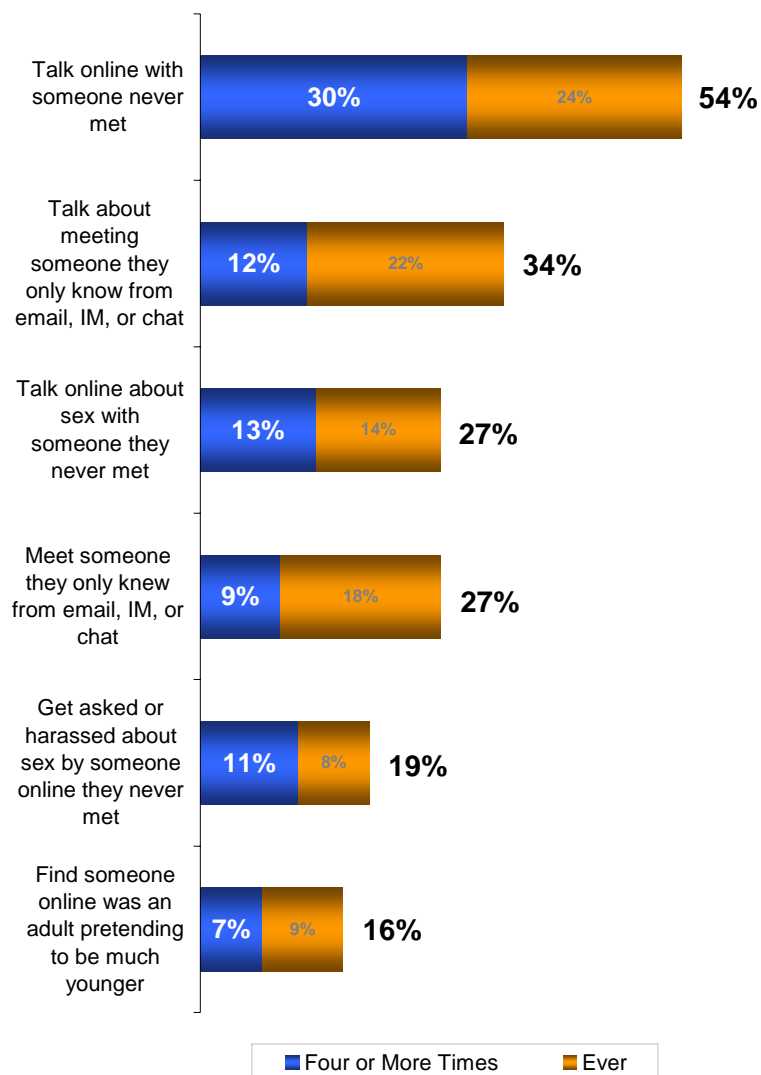
## Tweens Also Asked Personal Questions Online by Someone They've Never Met



Question: How often do **you**...?

- > Online tweens also reported some risky behavior: at least one in 10 said they communicate with someone they've never met using email (12%), IM (10%), and online chat (10%).
  - » A similar number of tweens (12%) said they get asked personal questions while communicating online.

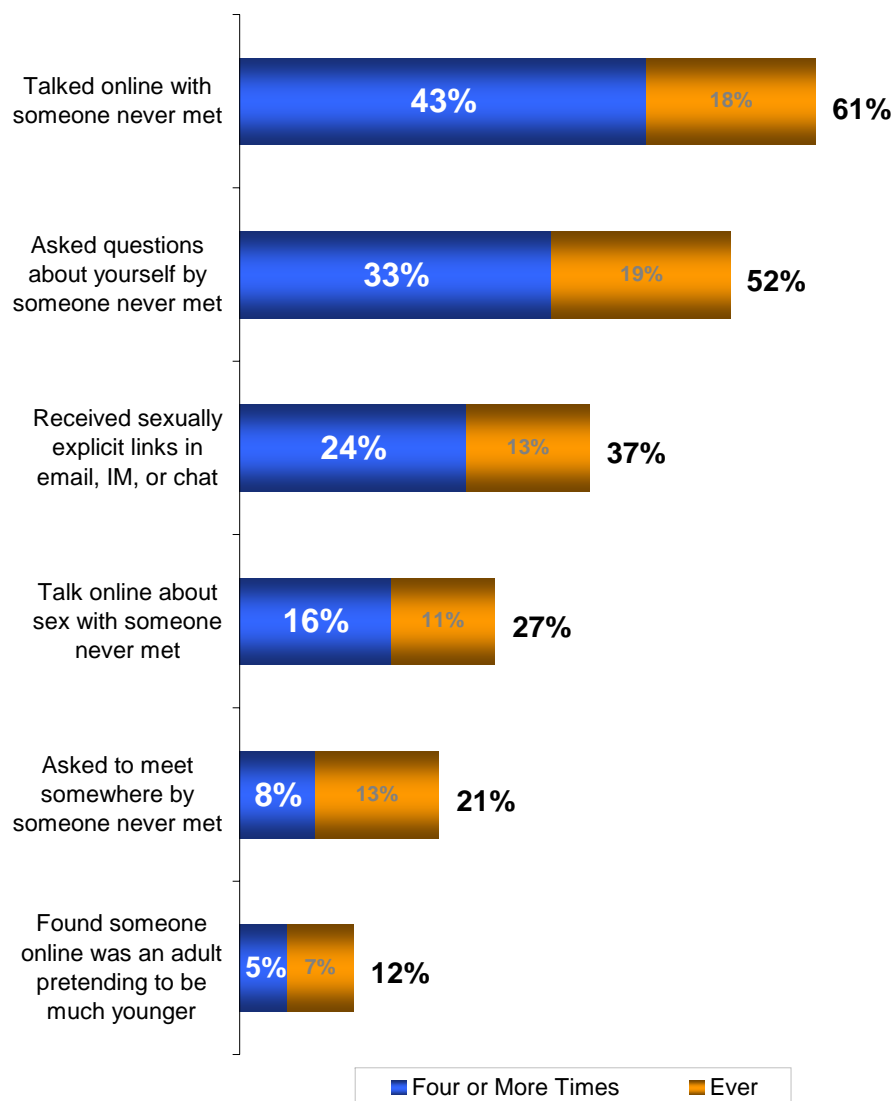
## Most Teens Know Friends Who Have Talked Online to “Strangers”—and that Talk of Meetings Not Uncommon



**Question:** *How many times have you seen or heard about **your** friends...?*

- > More than half of these online teens (54%) know of friends who have communicated online with someone they've never met. In fact, nearly one third (30%) said they know of friends chatting online with “strangers” on four or more occasions.
- > More than one fourth (27%) said they've known a friend to actually meet someone they only knew online.
- > The same number (27%) know a friend who has talked online about sex with someone they've never met in person..
- > One in five (19%) said they've known a friend who has been asked or harassed about sex online by a stranger.

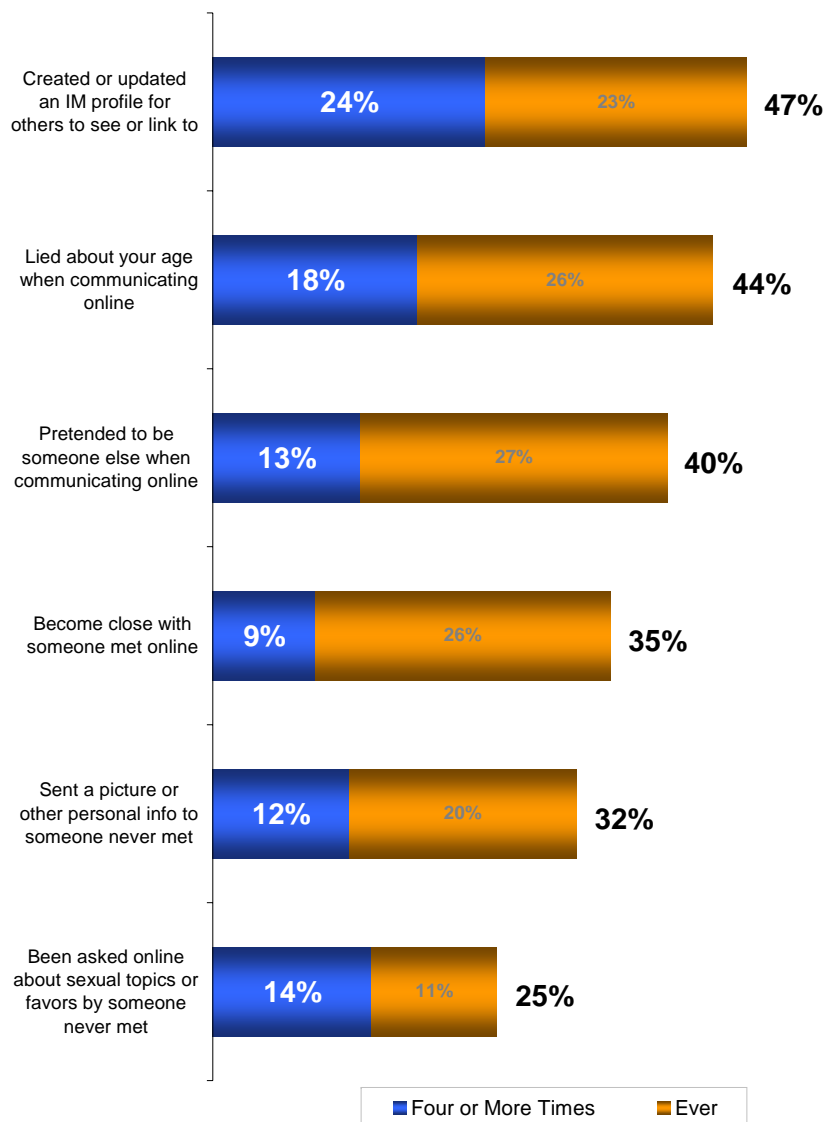
## Most Teens Report Having Talked Online to “Strangers” and Being Asked for Personal Information



Question: How many times have **you**...?

- > The strong majority of these online teens (61%) said they've talked online with someone they've never met in person. Nearly half (43%) said they've done it four or more times.
- > Half (52%) reported that they've been asked personal questions online by someone they've never met. A third (33%) said they've been asked for such information four or more times.
- > More than a third (37%) said they've received links to sexually explicit material. One in four (24%) reported receiving sexual content four times or more.
- > One in four (27%) said they've talked online about sex with someone they've never met.
- > One in five (21%) reported that a person they only know through online communications have asked to meet them.

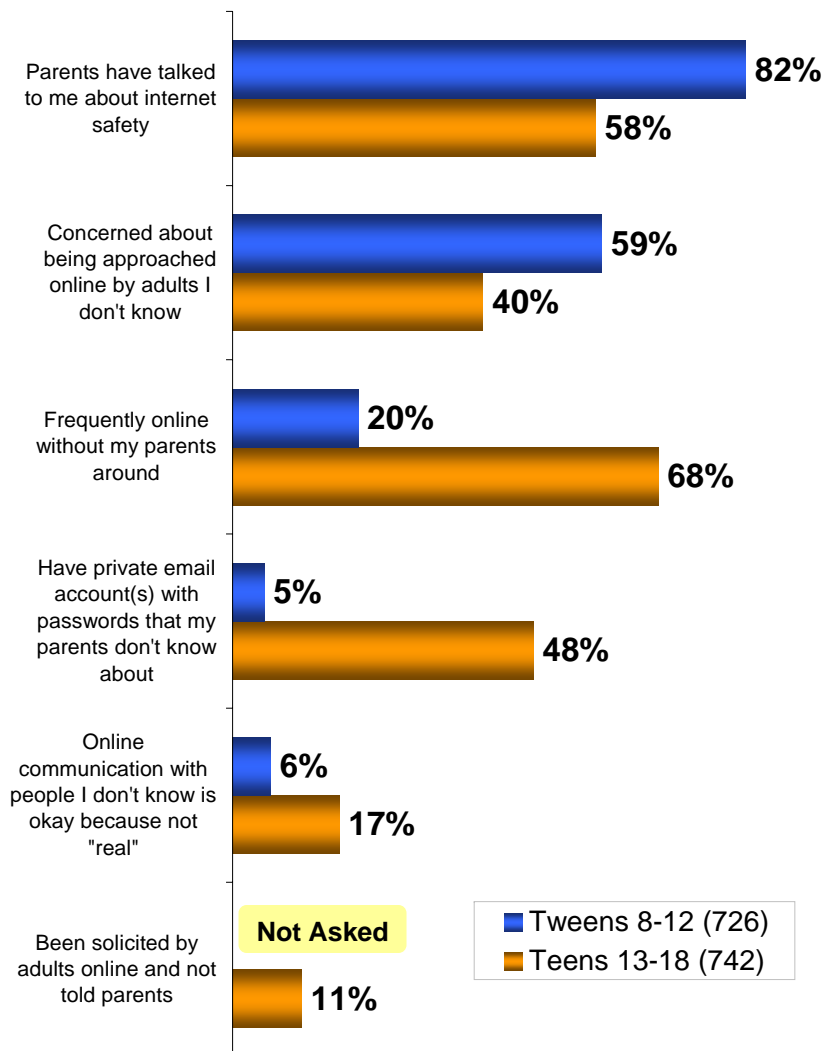
## More Teen Girls than Guys Involved In Risky Online Behavior



Question: How many times have **you**...?

- > Nearly half of these online teens (47%) have created an online profile containing personal information that others can access.
- > Nearly as many (44%) said they've lied about their age when communicating online—and 40% reported they've pretended to be someone else.
- > More than one third (35%) said they've become “close” with someone they met online; 32% reported having sent a picture or other personal information to an online acquaintance.
- > One in four (25%) said they've been asked by a stranger about sexual topics online.
- > Significantly more female than male teens have:
  - » Posted an IM profile that others can link to and view (56% vs. 37%, respectively).
  - » Lied online about their age (50% vs. 38%).
  - » Shared a picture or other personal information with someone they've never met in person (37% vs. 26%).
  - » Been asked online about sexual topics (33% vs. 18%).

## Tweens Informed, Cautious; Teens Less Concerned—and Often Unsupervised Online



Question: *How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?*

- > Significantly more tweens (82%) than teens (58%) report having discussed internet safety with their parents.
- > Correspondingly higher levels of tweens (59%) than teens (40%) report being concerned about being approached by adult strangers online.
- > Dramatically more teens (68%) than tweens (20%) say they “frequently” go online in their parents’ absence.
  - » Such freedom may explain why nearly 10 times as many teens (48%) as tweens (5%) report holding accounts with passwords their parents don’t know.
- > Disturbing to note is that 11% of teens reported being solicited online by adults and keeping the incident from their parents.
- > Almost one in five teens (17%) agreed that online communication with people they don’t know is okay because it’s not “real.”

## APPENDIX (survey questions as they appeared to respondents)

### 1. How often do you...

	<u>More Than Once a Day</u>	<u>Once a Day</u>	<u>4-6 Times a Week</u>	<u>1-3 Times a Week</u>	<u>1-2 Times a Month</u>	<u>Less Than Once a Month</u>	<u>Never</u>
1 Use the Internet							
2 Check email							
3 Read blogs or web journals							
4 Go in chat rooms							
5 Instant Message (IM) from a computer or cell phone							
6 Use internet lingo (like "POS", "PIR", or "BRB") to alert someone that your parents are in the room and hide those conversations							

### 2. How often do you...

*When answering, please think only about individual people—not companies or brands. Please answer honestly; your responses are confidential and will never be linked to you personally.*

	<u>More Than Once a Day</u>	<u>Once a Day</u>	<u>4-6 Times a Week</u>	<u>1-3 Times a Week</u>	<u>1-2 Times a Month</u>	<u>Less Than Once a Month</u>	<u>Never</u>
1 Communicate by email with someone you never met face-to-face							
2 Communicate via Instant Message (IM) with someone you never met face-to-face							
3 Talk in an online chat room with someone you never met face-to-face							
4 Get asked personal questions (like your age/sex/location) on email, IM, or online chat							
5 Talk about meeting someone you only know from email, IM, and/or web chats							
6 Post/update or send information about yourself on a message board or electronic mailing list							

### 3. How many times have you seen or heard about your friends...

	<u>10 or More Times</u>	<u>4-9 Times</u>	<u>2-3 Times</u>	<u>Once</u>	<u>Never</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Decline to Answer</u>
1 Talking online with someone they never met face-to-face							
2 Found out someone they were talking to online was an adult pretending to be much younger							
3 <u>Talked about meeting</u> someone they only know from email, IM, and/or web chats							
4 <u>Actually meeting someone</u> they only know from email, IM, and/or web chats							
5 Talking online about sex with someone they never met {ASKED OF AGES 13-18 ONLY}							
6 Being asked or harassed about sex by someone online they have never met {ASKED OF AGES 13-18 ONLY}							

4. How many times have you...

10 or More  
Times      4-9  
Times      2-3  
Times      Once      Never      Don't  
Know      Decline  
to Answer

- 1 Talked online with someone you never met face-to-face
  - 2 Found out someone you were talking to online was an adult pretending to be much younger
  - 3 Been asked questions about yourself by someone you never met face-to-face
  - 4 Been asked to meet somewhere by someone you never met face-to-face
  - 5 Received sexually explicit links in email, IM, or web chats **{ASKED OF AGES 13-18 ONLY}**
  - 6 Talked online about sexual topics with someone you never met face-to-face **{ASKED OF AGES 13-18 ONLY}**
- 

5. How many times have you...

10 or More  
Times      4-9  
Times      2-3  
Times      Once      Never      Don't  
Know      Decline  
to Answer

- 1 Become close with someone you met online
  - 2 Lied about your age (higher or lower) when communicating online
  - 3 Pretended to be someone else when communicating online
  - 4 Sent a picture or other information about yourself to someone you never met face-to-face
  - 5 Created or updated a profile that others can see or link to from your screen name
  - 6 Been asked online about sexual topics or favors by someone you never met face-to-face **{ASKED OF AGES 13-18 ONLY}**
- 

6. How much do you agree or disagree that...

Strongly  
Disagree      Somewhat  
Disagree      Don't Agree  
or Disagree      Somewhat  
Agree      Strongly  
Agree      Decline  
to Answer

- 1 I have one or more private email accounts with passwords that my parents do not know about
- 2 I am frequently online without my parents around
- 3 Communicating with people I don't know online is okay because it is not really "real"
- 4 My parents have talked to me about Internet safety
- 5 I am concerned about being approached by adults I do not know online
- 6 I have been solicited by adults online and not told my parents **{ASKED OF AGES 13-18 ONLY}**