

OUR MISSION

Common Sense is the nation's leading nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the lives of all kids and families by providing the trustworthy information, education, and independent voice they need to thrive in the 21st century.

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James P. Steyer, founder and CEO

Dear Friends,

2022 marked two years since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, and we've begun to see a fuller picture of the complex impact it has had on everything from the economy and health care to education and mental health. And when it comes to kids and media, the pandemic also had a significant impact. Our latest Common Sense Census told us:

- Kids' use of media accelerated more in the last two years than it did in the entire four years prior to the pandemic.
- The number of tweens using social media—before they're old enough to do so—is climbing.
- Teens have mixed feelings about social media and its impact on their lives.
- Online video is officially the most-used media format for kids age 8–18.

Supporting kids, families, and educators through this year of transition has required us to respond to these realities. And I'm proud to say we've met this challenge head-on.

To ensure we're keeping up with where kids are finding their content, this year we expanded our ratings and reviews work by looking at new formats like podcasts and virtual reality and evaluating them for both entertainment and safety. And in appreciation of today's diverse, multicultural families, we launched our Spanish-language ratings and reviews and our community pages to help families celebrate their unique cultures and histories.

Additionally, we're closer than ever to closing the digital divide. Our advocacy efforts helped secure historic funding last year to connect families to high-speed broadband internet and devices, and in 2022 we put boots on the ground and ads on the air in Phoenix for a best-practice campaign to help families find these resources and get connected.

And finally, we are seeing new and stronger protections for kids' online privacy and safety. California led the way, and other states followed to pass or introduce legislation to regulate how social media platforms can use kids' data, and to hold tech companies accountable hold for the harms they can bring to young people's mental health.

But we must keep the pressure on: Youth mental health—and social media's role in it—will be a main focus for us in 2023, and we're committed to conducting new research, providing new content and curricular resources, and building public awareness. It's clear that to thrive in a digital age marked by constant change, kids need skills in building and protecting both their digital and overall wellbeing, and we are evolving to meet that challenge.

Through it all, we will continue to be the trusted voice for families and leverage the powerful platform we have built to advance legislation to protect consumer privacy, close the digital divide, prevent exploitative data practices, and hold tech companies accountable for their impact on kids and families.

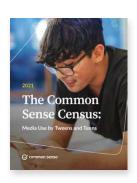
As we approach our 20th anniversary, I am proud of what we've been able to accomplish on behalf of kids and families. But I'm also inspired by the leadership role we will have in the years to come as the digital world that our kids are growing up in continues to evolve.

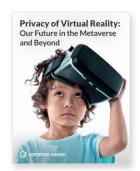
Thank you again for your support, your partnership, and your vision.











Our independent research is designed to provide reliable, independent data on children's use of media and technology and the impact it has on their physical, emotional, social, and intellectual development.

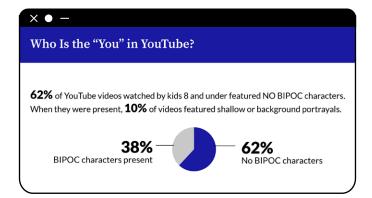
In 2022, we continued our crucial work of studying how kids consume media. Our research agenda provides up-to-date insights on the rapidly evolving media and technology landscape, and how it impacts young people's growth and development.

Throughout the year, we advanced research on kids and media in several important areas: kids' experiences in virtual reality and the "metaverse"; how diversity is represented on platforms including YouTube; and a deep dive into how tweens and teens use media—from their viewing habits and the platforms they prefer to how they're using and being affected by social media.

YouTube can take the lead to set a new standard for diverse, representative kids' media

Despite holding power and influence with kids and teens, YouTube is falling short when it comes to promoting diversity and realistic ethnic-racial representations. Nearly a third of kids age 8 to 18 say YouTube is the site they "couldn't live without." Yet many kids of color aren't seeing people who look like them in the videos they watch, and they often see stereotypes or biased content, which can negatively impact their developing identities.

In our report, "Who Is the 'You' in YouTube: Missed Opportunities in Race and Representation in Children's YouTube Videos," we found that 62% of YouTube videos



watched by kids age 8 and under didn't feature any Black, Indigenous, or people of color (BIPOC) characters, and another 10% showed shallow or stereotypical portrayals. Those videos that did feature BIPOC characters were significantly more likely to include interpersonal violence (e.g., bullying, meanness, pranks; 27% compared to 16% of videos with prominent White characters), bad language (32% vs. 13%), and higher drinking/drugs/smoking (7% vs. 2%)

At the same time, YouTube is also missing opportunities to elevate positive representations. Children age 0-8 watched a considerable amount (27% of the videos in our sample) of "colorblind" cartoons in which the main character doesn't have a clear ethnicity or race. Teaching about race and ethnicity was extremely rare: Of the 1,242 videos watched by children, only two discussed race and ethnicity.

YouTube should take accountability and exert its power to positively influence how race and ethnicity are represented and discussed on its platform. If it elevated diverse voices and real-life experiences, made it easier to flag biased content, and improved the quality of content across its entire platform, YouTube could have a positive impact on kids' view of the world by helping them build their ethnic-racial identities and promoting understanding that goes beyond stereotypes and tropes. Until then, we will continue to point families to the best content available featuring authentic, diverse representations.

Industry should set standards now to protect kids in the evolving metaverse

As virtual reality headsets grow in popularity and kids step into the emerging metaverse, poor privacy scores for VR headsets have raised the flag on privacy concerns. Our report, "Privacy of Virtual Reality: Our Future in the Metaverse and Beyond," revealed that virtual reality (VR) devices collect exponentially more data than any other digital device available—and take advantage of users' sensitive data for profit.

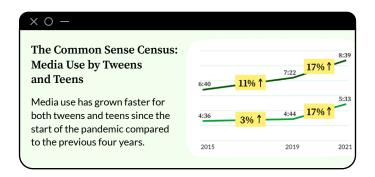
Spending 30 minutes or more in VR can create over 2 million unique data points, from where and how long we look at something, to whether our skin is perspiring, and minute fluctuations in skin color. As a result, kids may unintentionally share personal biometric data on their private interactions and emotions. That data can be used for myriad marketing purposes, including a new type of biometric personalized advertising that can be more invasive and exploitative.

Our report found that all of the privacy policies for these VR headsets were either unclear or said they use data for commercial purposes. More than half (57%) have no parental controls, and less than a third had any safety settings at all. Because of this, not a single VR headset that we tested in the market right now has earned our recommendation for kids and teens.

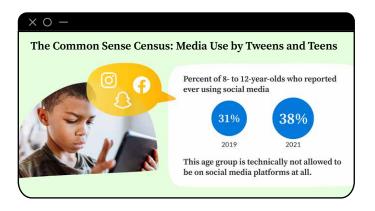
VR can be a positive experience for kids in so many ways. Families and educators can engage kids in new, immersive experiences, from virtual-reality tours of historical locations to role-playing different characters in books, trying out virtual musical instruments, and even learning new science concepts by shrinking to the size of a cell or exploring the solar system. As these and other use cases accelerate adoption of virtual reality at home and in the classroom, we need to ensure that any positive experiences should not come at the expense of kids' privacy.

It's time to take a closer look at how social media affects kids' mental well-being

Media use for tweens and teens continues to grow at a faster rate, and the landscape is changing quickly. In addition to consumption habits, our research looked at the content of the media that young people engage with, how they use it, and how they respond to it, focusing particularly on social media.



Our latest installment of the Common Sense Census, "The Common Sense Census: Media Use by Tweens and Teens, 2021," found that teens (13- to 18-year-olds) now spend nearly an hour and a half a day using social media, but they have conflicted feelings about the medium. Only a third (34%) of teens say they enjoy using social media "a lot," compared with 62% who say they enjoy watching online videos that much. At the same time, social media use by tweens climbed during the pandemic, with the percentage of 8- to 12-year-olds reporting that they had ever used some form of social media jumping to 38% in 2021, compared with 31% in 2019. Considering that tweens are not even technically allowed to use social media platforms, this trend toward younger and younger social media users should be at top of mind for those advocating for safer, healthier media use for kids.



Late this year, U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy declared a youth mental health crisis, driven by the impacts of the pandemic and beyond. For parents, caregivers, educators, and policymakers across the country, kids' media use is an issue at the center of this conversation. In 2023, we will take a deeper dive into the relationship between teens' media experiences and their impact on mental health.

The New Hork Times

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<u>Kids as Young as 8 Are Using Social Media More Than</u> **Ever, Study Finds**

The survey, published by the nonprofit research organization Common Sense Media, found that overall screen use among teens and tweens increased by 17 percent from 2019 to 2021 — growing more rapidly than in the four years prior. On average, daily screen use went up among tweens (ages 8 to 12) to five hours and 33 minutes from four hours and 44 minutes, and to eight hours and 39 minutes from seven hours and 22 minutes for teens (ages 13 to 18).



Media profoundly affects kids' social, emotional, and physical development, and the goal of Common Sense Media's research-based rating system is to inform, educate, and guide families to make the best choices for their kids. Since we launched in 2003, we've consistently innovated through thoughtful new approaches to our ratings criteria and expansion of both our media categories and the audiences we serve.

We know from our research that media can be an important influence on kids' ethnic-racial development. What kids watch may meaningfully affect how they view and treat people, including people from their own and other ethnicracial groups. Quality representation matters, and positive, realistic, and well-rounded depictions of people may improve kids' views about their abilities and their place and culture in society. Whereas exposure to negative or narrow depictions of their own ethnic-racial group may harm kids' self-esteem, belief in their abilities, and future aspirations.

When our editors review a movie, TV series, book, game, app, podcast, or website for representation, one aspect they consider is how traditionally marginalized groups are represented, including gender, race, ethnicity, age, disability, religious backgrounds, socioeconomic status, and body shapes typically underrepresented in media.

Our team examines whether characters are realistic and relatable, or shallow and stereotypical, whether they have agency or simply support a dominant character, and whether there are any problematic viewpoints or stereotypes that need to be called out. And they take into account whether portrayals are age appropriate.

We provide this kind of guidance to help families find highquality media with the potential to spark conversations and entertain families of all kinds. We also work to disrupt problematic ethnic-racial messages and stereotypes that may be present in media, rather than passively reinforcing them. In 2022 our editors continued to assess the category of diverse representations in our back catalog of review titles to ensure we are providing the most robust guidance we can.

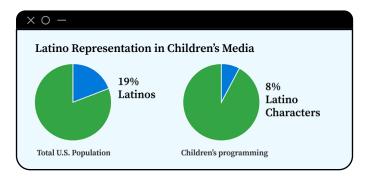
Celebrating diverse audiences through authentic understanding

The U.S. continues to grow racially and ethnically diverse, and our children are reflecting their diverse and multiracial identities. Media gives families a powerful opportunity to start dialogues around racial and cultural identity, and helping families celebrate their diverse heritages was a priority for our editors in 2022.

Common Sense Media's review of Rosie's Rules, a bilingual TV show



In October, Common Sense Media released <u>new ratings</u> and reviews in Spanish, expanding access to resources for Spanish-speaking parents and caregivers. Improving representation for Latino communities is especially important, given that research shows they're the least represented group in media proportional to their percentage of the population. Latinos make up 19% of the U.S. population, but only 8% of characters in children's programming, and only 5% of characters in top grossing films.



Understanding the nuances and specific needs of families and cultures is an important aspect of our mission to ensure digital well-being for kids. These new ratings and reviews are written by native Spanish speakers and specialists in Latino-focused content and parent advice, which lets us approach the material with a deeper level of understanding of Latino communities and their unique concerns. We expect these reviews to help Spanish-speaking families find more programs and films with positively represented Latino characters, as well as other great content.

Our Celebrating Community pages also launched this year to help families find the best in entertainment and tech that features the faces, stories, and cultures of an increasingly diverse country. These five pages—Asian Stories, Black Voices, Latino Culture, LGBTQ+ Pride, and Native Narratives—are year-round resources that showcase authentic representations and provide families with unique opportunities to elevate and celebrate their family history and heritage.



Families love podcasts, but need help making great choices

Podcasts in the kids and family category have seen a 20% increase in listenership since 2019, and our own recent research revealed that nearly half of teens have listened to podcasts, with one in five saying they do so at least once a week.

That's why we're excited about <u>our new podcast review</u> <u>category</u>, the first of its kind in the market to provide families with comprehensive podcast ratings grounded in child-development principles and research.

We want our podcast ratings and reviews to serve as a screen-free space for kids and families to explore this growing medium, and—as with all our ratings and reviews we help take the legwork out of vetting this content for kids, parents, and educators. Thanks to the expertise of our editorial team, we now curate the Kids & Family category at Apple Podcasts. Our goal is to help parents, caregivers, kids, and educators safely and effectively find the right podcasts as a form of education and entertainment, while having a positive influence on the future of content production in the kids and family podcast space.







An Early Childhood Toolkit to help kids develop executive functioning skills

As trends in media use continue to age down, kids are encountering technology and devices earlier in life. Their first eight years represent a critical window for brain development, in which early experiences can have lasting and cascading impacts. Our new Early Childhood Toolkit includes a series of workshops, based on extensive research at Common Sense Media, to address the challenges parents face in guiding their children's media use.

The Early Childhood Toolkit is designed to help family intermediaries in school districts and organizations host workshops that support parents and caregivers in developing their young children's executive function (EF) skills. We strive to show families how to use their experiences with media and technology as "everyday" moments that can strengthen parent-child relationships as well as foster the development of essential life skills. Our intention is to facilitate meaningful conversations around media and tech, and help families build healthier digital habits.

To create the toolkit, we conducted an in-depth analysis of the relationships between children's use of high-quality media content and their screen time in connection with the development of executive functioning skills, with guidance and feedback from Ellen Galinsky, author and president of the Mind in the Making Institute.

The toolkit includes six workshops with useful strategies and tips to share with parents and caregivers on how to support healthy childhood development, with and without the use of screens. The workshops are available in both English and Spanish, and include a facilitator's guide, videos, slides, activities, handouts, and conversation starters that promote discussion about the connection between media and technology, and EF skills. We also include background information on EF skills and examples of how they pertain to early childhood development.

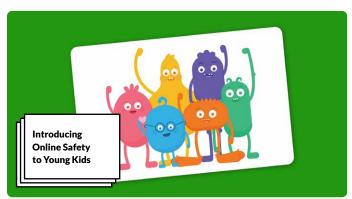
Topics and learning objectives in the six workshops include:

- Raising healthy kids in a digital world: Think about how technology has changed in our lifetime, and discuss the benefits and challenges of raising kids in today's digital world.
- Finding balance with media and tech use at home: Explore how to establish a healthy balance of activities for children, with and without media and tech.
- Choosing high-quality media for your kids: Highlight the importance of choosing the best media content for kids, plus get resources to make informed decisions.
- Making meaningful family connections using media and tech: Learn about the benefits of co-using media with kids, and practice using questioning strategies to strengthen important early childhood skills.
- Introducing online safety to young kids: Explore how to introduce digital citizenship and online safety to young children in an accessible way.

Using media and tech to build life skills in young kids: Discuss and reflect on how media and technology can affect key areas of children's development.

We know it's so challenging to raise kids in today's online world, and we want to help build parents' confidence with this toolkit by providing them with tools and strategies to help their kids develop the vital life skills they need to thrive.









Our core K-12 Digital Citizenship Curriculum continues to be the gold standard for helping students gain the skills they need to thrive in a digital world. But education, too, has evolved during the pandemic, and digital wellbeing skills have become critical in a world where technology is driving crises in both youth mental health and our democracy. This year we took a broader look at digital life and created collections to augment our core curriculum—sets of curated lessons about digital life focused on social and emotional skills and civic learning.

Reimagining civic learning for the digital age

We are deeply polarized and divided as a nation, and are experiencing a widespread loss of confidence in our very form of government and civic order. Misinformation and fake news continue to infiltrate online platforms, as have conspiracy theories, which tend to gain popularity during times of crisis—like during a global pandemic, political crisis, or war. Additionally, as young people spend more of their time online, they're witnessing, and perhaps even participating in, online incivility, as evidenced by the ongoing rise in hate speech, trolling, and cancel culture.

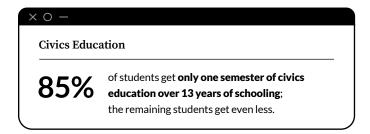
As the first true group of digital natives, Gen Z has regularly experienced both the challenges and opportunities that media and technology present. They're a unique generation, eager to defy the status quo to drive societal change. With technology at their fingertips and regularly in their hands, they're often more openminded and eager to advocate for a better world—both for themselves and for generations to come. But to do so, they'll need the skills and dispositions to use technology in meaningful and effective ways.

The reality is most young people today just don't have the media literacy skills to take part in democracy. Based on our report, "Teens and the News 2020," only 55% of kids age 10 to 18 felt they could tell if a news story was fake. Moreover, TikTok and YouTube are growing as top news sources for kids, with 77% saying they get news and

Media Literacy Skills

Only 55% of kids age 10 to 18 felt they could tell if a news story was fake.

headlines from social media. And while there is no doubt that a strong civic learning program is one of the most promising ways to rebuild our democracy, governments at all levels have had a longstanding history of providing very little support for high-quality civics curriculum development and teacher training. Civics classes have been cut to such a degree that now 85% of students get only one semester of civics education over 13 years of schooling; the remaining 15% get even less.



In response, this year we launched the new <u>Civics in Digital Life collection</u>, a set of lessons to empower students to harness technology in order to be curious learners, critical thinkers, and engaged citizens. Lessons in the collection currently include:

What Is Cancel Culture, and Does It Change Things for the Better?

Do Algorithms Influence Our Lives and Our Democracy? Why Are Conspiracy Theories So Appealing?

Future lessons will include Misinformation & Disinformation, Civil & Uncivil Discourse, Civic Participation Online, Civic Speech & Hate Speech, and Online Activism & Self-Care.

This collection provides educators with both high-quality civic learning resources and the professional development needed to engage and support students as they become informed and engaged, curious and not cynical, skilled in deliberation, and more deeply committed to civic participation and working toward a common good. But these lessons also help the public understand how media and technology shape kids' lives and how they perceive the news, which should drive demand for changes that will better prepare kids to be informed, productive, and civically minded members of our society.



Our advocacy efforts continue to secure wins for kids and families at both the federal and state levels. On the digital divide, we devoted our efforts to ensuring that the historic broadband funding secured last year is being put to good use and making its way to the families and communities who need it. And from powerful hearings in Congress, to new legislation in the states, it seems that Big Tech is on everyone's mind because of how social media can undermine the well-being of young people. This renewed focus on putting kids at the center of how the digital world is designed has resulted in some big changes that are already protecting kids—but there is much more work to be done.

Securing online protections for kids & families

September was a good month for the online well-being of kids and families in California. Thanks to advocacy from Common Sense and other organizations, and strong leadership in the California legislature, we saw two important social media bills signed into law:

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Social Media Bills Signed Into Law

Starting in 2024, social media users—especially young users will experience a safer, more transparent digital world.

- California Age-Appropriate Design Code Act (AB 2273) will take effect July 2024.
- A California social media transparency measure (AB 587) will take effect January 2024.

The California Age-Appropriate Design Code Act (AB 2273), authored by Assemblymembers Buffy Wicks and Jordan Cunningham, establishes the highest default privacy settings for users under the age of 18 and empowers young users to access, understand, and report terms of service and privacy policies that are concerning. Businesses will not be able to track kids' precise geolocation or profile them by default unless doing so is strictly necessary for the online service to function. Overall, the law requires businesses to design their platforms with kids' safety and well-being prioritized before profits. The new law takes effect in July 2024.

The Washington Post

Why 2022 Could Be a 'Watershed Year' for Tech Regulation

"I don't think there's any question that 2022 will be the watershed year when it comes to tech policy and regulation ... 2022 is the year that the rubber is going to meet the road," said Jim Steyer, CEO and founder of Common Sense Media, a group that advocates for greater federal oversight of kids' online safety and data privacy.

A social media transparency measure (AB 587), authored by Assemblymember Jesse Gabriel, will require social media companies to publicly post their policies regarding hate speech, disinformation, harassment, and extremism on their platforms, and report data on their enforcement of the policies. Californians will have access to more transparent terms of service and clear processes for flagging harmful content. Platforms will also publish public reports detailing how a company's terms and conditions address racism, extremism, harassment, and more. The new law takes effect in January 2024.

Thanks to these laws, social media users—especially young users—will experience a safer, more transparent digital world beginning in 2024. This year we saw an amazing showing by parents, advocates, and policymakers that drew national headlines and the support of California Governor Gavin Newsom for these two bills.

We have to keep the pressure on, in California and in Washington, D.C. A child's data privacy and well-being should not be dependent on the state they live in. That's why, in addition to our California advocacy, we will keep pushing Congress to pass federal legislation, like COPPA 2.0 and the Kids Online Safety Act, that would give young people more control over their data and add new protections from online harm.

There is still more to do to protect kids and teens from the harm they experience online and to make the internet a healthier place. But these wins were a big step forward.

Supporting a historic opportunity to close the digital divide

Connectivity is essential for modern life, yet millions of Americans live without it. People who are stranded by the digital divide lack access to countless benefits that connectivity offers: education, employment, health care, community, government services, and many more. But for the first time in history, we have an opportunity to close the digital divide for good.



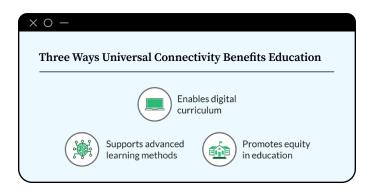
Advertisements for the Affordable Connectivity Program appeared in bus shelters and billboards throughout Phoenix.

Last year, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) created the \$14 billion Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), a first-of-its-kind program that provides lower-income households with \$30 a month to pay for internet service and \$100 to buy a device. Our new public awareness campaign and website—GetMyInternet.org—is designed to help eligible families access this potentially life-changing benefit. And it's working: During our pilot program this fall in Phoenix, Arizona, more than 52,000 families leveraged their ACP benefits to get connected to high-speed internet.

Then, on Dec. 29, 2022, President Biden signed into law the Computers for Veterans and Students Act (COVS), another important priority in Common Sense's campaign to close the digital divide. COVS allows the federal government to donate out-of-service computers to nonprofit refurbishers who will repair and distribute them to veterans, students, and those who would otherwise be unable to afford them. Currently, the lack of affordable, high-quality computers is one of the leading causes of the digital divide (14 million

U.S. households currently lack a computer), and so the COVS Act is a much-needed update to federal policy. These historic funding opportunities give states the potential to expand services and close the digital divide for good. By ensuring that everyone has access to affordable high-speed internet, devices, and the skills to use the internet effectively, the quality and efficiency of essential services can be improved for everyone.

Our newest report, "Closing the Digital Divide Benefits Everyone, Not Just the Unconnected," with Boston Consulting Group, looked at how essential services like health care, education, government services, and employment are not able to take advantage of all the benefits that technology provides because too many underconnected families would be left behind. As an example, with high-speed internet, health care patients gain better and faster access to services, telemedicine, medication maintenance, and appointment scheduling. It's also easier for those outside of major metro areas to access specialists, including mental health providers. When barriers are removed, families are more likely to access the care they need, and providers are more likely to invest in their online services.



Closing the digital divide in the United States, particularly for students and teachers, has been a top priority at Common Sense for more than 10 years, and in 2022 we made significant progress toward this goal. We have been at the cutting edge in identifying the cause and scope of the digital divide, crafting solutions to close it, and helping to usher in new state and federal policies that will ensure every school and household in America has access to affordable, reliable internet, and that kids and families have the skills they need to use the internet safely and effectively.

Cinching a late-game victory by passing CAMRA in Congress

The Common Sense advocacy team will start 2023 with a feeling of optimism, as one of our long-term priorities, the Children and Media Research Advancement (CAMRA) Act, passed at the end of 2022.

CAMRA is a bipartisan law that authorizes the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to conduct a research program on the impact of digital media and technology on child development. We started advocating for this program over a decade ago, and the CAMRA bill has seen many iterations and Congresses since then. With our continued outreach to congressional leadership, perseverance, and a lot of support from some like-minded organizations and lawmakers, we finally saw it through to the finish line.

CAMRA is small in nature but big in impact. This bipartisan victory demonstrates the huge interest and concern sparked over the last year—in part because of our longtime research work and advocacy in the area—about the harm that kids and teens experience online.



CAMRA will lead to research on the impact of technology on cognitive development, physical health, and mental health for infants, children, and teens over time. In her testimony before the House Energy and Commerce Committee, pediatric researcher and frequent Common Sense collaborator Dr. Jenny Radesky stated, "CAMRA is unique in that it envisions a sustained commitment to this field, which needs to keep up with the rapidly evolving technology around us."

We are encouraged by CAMRA's passage, and hope to see more action taken to address kids' and teens' privacy and well-being online this year. We will work with NIH to ensure they quickly start this important research and have the adequate funding to do so. The sooner this research is conducted, the sooner the public will no longer be so in the dark on how technology is affecting our young people and their development and health.

"CAMRA is unique in that it envisions a sustained commitment to this field, which needs to keep up with the rapidly evolving technology around us."

Dr. Jenny Radesky, University of Michigan/Mott Children's Hospital

COMMON SENSE IN THE NEWS



New Report Reveals the Dangers of Virtual Reality for Young Children

NBC News, Today Show, March 24, 2022

The New York Times

Kids as Young as 8 Are Using Social Media More Than Ever, Study Finds

The New York Times, March 24, 2022

The Washington Post

How to Screen Remote-Learning Apps for Privacy

Washington Post, June 7, 2022



Kamala Harris anuncia una nueva estrategia para combatir el acoso y las amenazas por internet (Kamala Harris Announces New Strategy to Combat Online Bullying and Threats)

Univision, June 16, 2022

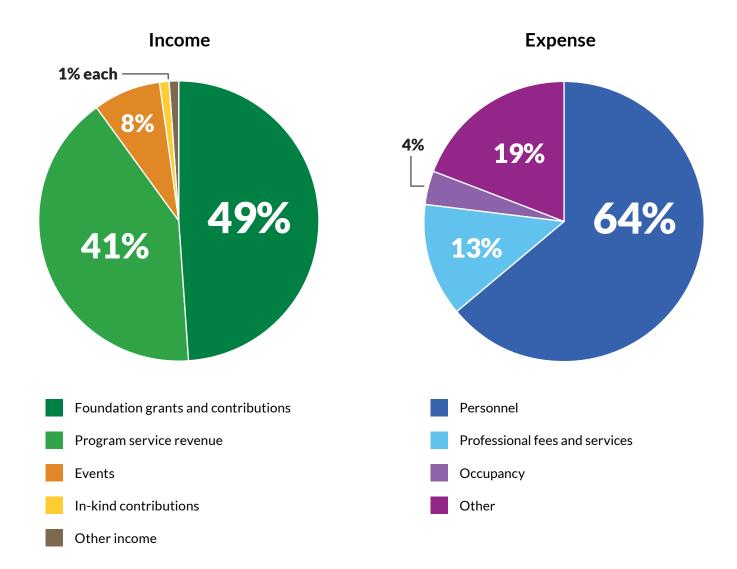


Your Biggest Questions About Kids and Phones, Answered

Time Magazine, September 6, 2022



2022 FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS



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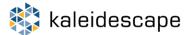


























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