

Teenager Accessing Password-hacking Website

How concerned should a parent be if their teenager is accessing a website to hack passwords? Should the parent be more concerned if the parent works from home?

More info, please. Does the website belong to the parent? Some other individual? A private business? A government? Likewise, whose passwords? The parent's password to access Netflix or the U.S. Government to divert social security benefits? Etc...

Amy A. Breyer, California

I think this could get parent into a heap of trouble. If it's being done from the parent's ISP, parent can be blacklisted and will not be able to send out email, in addition to being found responsible for whatever damage the kid causes. Not that I know anything about this kind of troublemaking, since I have no kids, and no one has access to my computer, but I'd be very worried.

Miriam N. Jacobson, Pennsylvania

My eldest is 19 and has been hunkered down here in his bedroom since I picked him up from school in mid-March. He's a computer security major with an understanding of the nitty-gritty of computers which is far superior to mine. The reality is, I have no control whatever over the actions he takes as an emerging adult in the privacy of his bedroom on his computer. That might have been different when he was 16 or 17, but those days are gone.

L. Maxwell Taylor, Vermont

If a 19-year-old child, under the circumstances described in Max's post, were to hack into something sensitive and subsequently get caught, would the parent -- the owner of the hardware and network that provided a conduit to the internet, thereby

enabling the child's criminal activity -- be at least partly liable as an accessory to the crime?

I'm not anything even remotely resembling a criminal lawyer. I'm just curious.

Andrew C. McDannold, Florida

Where I live, a 19-year-old is not a child; he's a legal adult. I'm his parent, but I have no legal obligation to monitor his internet conduct--how could I have such an obligation? And assuming for purposes of argument that he was doing something nefarious, how would a prosecutor prove mens rea in a parent who simply has internet access in his home?

L. Maxwell Taylor

Crime, probably not. But they are likely civilly liable for knowing the child was engaging in that activity, using their equipment, and not stopping it.

Kind of like the negligent use of a car.

Erin M. Schmidt, Ohio

Erin, if they had actual knowledge, that's one thing. But I doubt anyone is chargeable with constructive notice about the internet activities of another adult in their household.

L. Maxwell Taylor

How concerned should a parent be if their teenager is accessing a website to hack passwords? Very. This can get the teen in a lot of trouble. It can also get the parent in a lot of trouble--which is to say that you may be named as an accomplice, etc. And even if you get sued and win, you may lose money, pay lawyers, etc. You may also find your IP is on a blacklist.

Control the kid. Turn off the Internet if need be.

Should the parent be more concerned if the parent works from home? Yes. This means the parent's IP address will be linked to everything. It also means that the kid is interacting with hackers which increases risk to everyone else--hackers like nothing better than hacking other hackers to prove dominance. Hire a high level knowledgeable helper; get a new router, lock down everything w/ passwords, assume you're compromised, make the kid pay for it all.

What to do if the kid is 19 and won't listen? Well, if you're not willing to force the issue: Warn them properly and make them buy, install, and pay for their own internet, in their own name. Lock them out of yours. At least they will be less likely to get you in trouble.

Erik Hammarlund, Massachusetts

Would a homeowner's inability to monitor, or ignorance that it's even possible to monitor, the traffic that flows across his or her router be a defense against any sort of accomplice liability?

I suppose a hacker worth his or her salt would encrypt the traffic leaving his or her computer, making such monitoring nearly impossible because it wouldn't be obvious what sites are being accessed. Still, it seems like the homeowner, much like in Erin's car analogy, would have SOME responsibility to ensure the "borrower" is using the borrowed item in a lawful and responsible manner.

But, what do I know?

Andrew C. McDannold

They wouldn't be asking the question on what to do if they didn't know or suspect.

Erin M. Schmidt

Yes, I agree, but Andrew wasn't responding to the original question; he stated he was sketching out a hypothetical based on the circumstances I outlined.

L. Maxwell Taylor

I think the difference here comes down to relationship. This isn't someone hacking into their internet and using it without their knowledge. Someone steals your ar, you aren't liable for their damages. Someone steals your internet, you aren't liable.

But when the person is living in your house and you are asking questions about hey this activity seems bad should I stop it, yeah you are on the hook for letting them continue to use the internet. Just like you would be on the hook for allowing your 19-year-old, who has multiple DUIs to borrow your car.

Erin M. Schmidt

As a parent of a now responsible child whose friend hacked into the school computer it may or may not be a concern. Both the hacker and my child turned out to be responsible adults and no harm was done. The kids were in 7th grade. On a child's 18th Birthday they are an adult and treated as such. Even developmentally disabled adults are treated as an adult.

If the parents are not the geeky types who did this kind of stuff, I suggest they talk to someone they know who was, and sit with their child and that person and talk through what is going on. The problem may be more than the hacking, or they may just be that kid who has fun hacking stuff then ends up with a job as the anti-hacker for a big company like my son's friend did. At 19, I would give them first and last month rent and help them move and let them know they are now on their own, if they are in college then pay for a dorm room, even if they are mostly online for school, make them pay for everything except food and shelter. A 19-year-old with this kind of skill needs to be treated as the adult they legally are.

If the parents know their 19-year-old is doing something criminal it could be aiding and abetting. It sounds like they are thinking a 19-year-old is a child. If a 14-year-old and 19-year-old do the same act the 13-year-old gets a slap on the hand, the 19-year-old gets a felony, even if the 14-year-old is the mastermind

Martha Jo Patterson, California

I think the best solution might be more technical- why not invest in a VPN and some more robust security tools at the router? If there are problematic sites, take control of the network to ensure those blacklisted sites cannot be accessed.

Employers do it all the time.

Parents run their work on a VPN that child cannot access and the parents set up restrictions on the kid's access points.

Seems like a reasonable solution for a kid that knows they are doing things they should not, but then, parents cannot control the acts of their children forever. I lost control of my son when he was about 13. He encountered some difficulties, but they were not looking at me just because he was a minor.

Drew Winghart, California

If the kid is a good hacker, they will get around the parental controls, etc. They will hack you. I lost control of my son and the internet around age 12 or 13 too. There were some bad days, fortunately there were some great mentors who directed the brilliant kids to a good direction. If this is a 19-year-old, the problem is much deeper.

Martha Jo Patterson

I note the alarm in many posts. Password hacking is simplistic. There are a lot of 10-year-olds who experiment. Insufficient information exists to comment.

Speculatively, parent does not have much technical insight. Parent has no idea what teenager is doing. Such is the case in many households.

Control outside of serious conversations between parent and child that are based on relationship and trust is a nonstarter. If there are substantial differences in technical skills, changing equipment and passwords at home is just temptation and time for a teenager to establish a workaround.

In my own household, I had the technical chops and a relationship that kept me from fitting the parental stereotype. It worked. Said child now holds a PhD and

spends most of his day programming. He long ago surpassed my skill level, but it worked when he was a teenager.

Darrell G. Stewart, Texas