

Tech Giant Google Emailing Kids Directly on How to Disable Parental Controls Sparks Outrage

Google is sending emails directly to children approaching age 13, informing them they can “graduate” from parental supervision and disable parental controls on their Google accounts without requiring parental consent. The practice is drawing sharp criticism from child safety advocates and parent groups who say it undermines parental authority and exposes minors to online risks.

Parents typically use Google’s Family Link and other safety tools to limit screen time, filter inappropriate content, and monitor their children’s digital activity. But Google’s own policy and the email message notify children as they near their 13th birthday that they can choose to take full control of their digital accounts and remove supervision previously set up by their parents.

Melissa McKay, president of the Digital Childhood Institute, shared screenshots of such an email sent to her youngest child, prompting alarm among parents nationwide. McKay argues that a “trillion-dollar corporation” should not be positioning itself as an authority over family decisions about digital supervision. She said the email allows children to remove controls “without parental consent or involvement,” which she describes as “grooming for engagement, grooming for data, grooming minors for profit.”



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According to Google's support information, parents receive a notification before their child's birthday explaining that the child will soon be eligible to manage their own account. After the child turns 13, they may choose whether to continue under parental management or take control themselves. Under U.S. law, companies no longer require parental consent for data collection once a child reaches age 13, but critics say this legal threshold should not override parental rights in guiding children's online exposure.

Online safety advocates also note that parental controls serve as a critical tool for families to set boundaries, enforce appropriate content filters, and ensure responsible technology use.

Some parents who spoke publicly about the emails say their children received similar messages and were confused about what the communication meant. One parent reported that the email led to tension at home, with the child questioning why parental oversight was necessary if Google suggested they were ready for independence.

Advocates are now calling for regulatory scrutiny. McKay's organization previously filed a complaint urging the Federal Trade Commission to investigate Google's approach as creating "significant risks for young users" and potentially constituting an unfair or deceptive practice.

Critics say the issue highlights a broader cultural and technological trend in which major tech companies increasingly shape how children navigate online life, often without sufficient deference to parental judgment. They argue that digital independence should be a family decision rooted in each child's maturity and the family's values, not a corporate directive sent to a minor's inbox.

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