



A Proposal for a Network Protocol for Parental Controls

4th November 2025

Side Meeting Terms of Engagement

- All public side meetings are subject to the [IETF Note Well](#); participants are expected to follow the usual IETF policies on personal conduct, IPR disclosure obligations, etc.
- Public side meetings are open for any registered IETF meeting participant to attend. Remote side meeting attendees must also be registered for the meeting.
- All working group business needs to occur during scheduled working group sessions in ways that comply with [RFC 2026](#) and [RFC 2418](#). Working group business must not happen during side meetings.
- Side meetings do not record formal attendance ("blue sheets"). The organisers of side meetings may ask for participants' contact information; participants are free to withhold it.
- Organisers must seek participants' active consent for any side meeting that is desired to be recorded

Agenda

- Note Taking
- Introductions - All
- Context Setting – Andrew
- Discussion – All
- Summary and Next Steps – Andrew and David

Parental Controls

- Important for child wellbeing
 - Allow families to manage access to digital devices, screen time, content, and purchases
- Many Options
 - EG Operating System / Ecosystem - Apple (Family Sharing), Google (Family Link), Microsoft (Family Safety), Amazon (Parental Controls)
 - Application – eg individual applications
 - Network – eg ISP DNS-based offerings
 - Platform – eg social media platforms
- Proprietary Tools
 - Not interoperable – no coherent management
 - Reduced visibility, consistency, and ultimately effectiveness —parents forced to navigate multiple dashboards, apps, and settings
 - Steep learning curve – eg similar terminology with different definitions, different terminology with same meaning
 - Exacerbates digital inequality

The PARCEP Concept: A Network Protocol for Parental Controls

PARCEP will establish a framework for **interoperability, consistency, and coordination** across family management systems. Specifically, it will:

- **Define a shared data model** for screen time limits, application restrictions, age ratings, content category restrictions and purchase permissions.
- **Enable synchronised enforcement** of these controls across participating devices, regardless of vendor.
- **Support unified identity and role delegation**, allowing family managers to assign guardianship roles, set rules, and manage children's access across multiple households or care settings.
- **Respect privacy and security by design**, ensuring that data minimisation, user consent, and protection of children's personal information are embedded throughout the protocol.
- **Provide auditability and transparency**, offering families consistent insights into usage patterns, alerts, and override requests across platforms, with visible error messages on devices when any restrictions apply to an action.

It will be **vendor-neutral**, extensible, and adaptable to evolving policy and regulatory frameworks.

Context: Alignment with Policy and Regulation

The timing of PARCEP aligns with a growing international focus on child online safety and digital rights. Relevant frameworks include:

- **The UK Online Safety Act 2023**, which enshrines a duty of care on platforms to protect children from harmful content.
- **The UN General Comment No. 25 (2021)** on children's rights in the digital environment, which calls for tools that support both autonomy and protection.
- **The EU Digital Services Act**, which mandates risk assessments and mitigations for child users.
- **The US Kids Online Safety Act (KOSA)**, under discussion, which encourages safety tools and transparency mechanisms for families.

There is also growing emphasis on **interoperability as a safeguard in itself** — preventing platform lock-in, enhancing user control, and enabling consistency across digital services.

Context: The Risk of Doing Nothing

- Continuation of online harm
- Momentum behind mandatory age-gating of Internet access
- Momentum behind the “smartphone free” childhood movement

Technical Scope and Considerations

PARCEP is envisaged as a modular, extensible framework, with the following technical components:

- **Family Profile Schema:** A shared, vendor-agnostic schema to describe a child's age, permissions, restrictions, and device associations.
- **Policy Synchronisation Protocol:** A standard for issuing, updating, and revoking family control rules across registered devices.
- **Role and Delegation Model:** A mechanism for defining who can manage a profile (e.g., parents, carers, shared households, school), and with what permissions.
- **Activity Reporting Interface:** Optional modules to standardise how usage data, screen time metrics, and alerts are surfaced to authorised guardians.
- **Fallback Behaviours:** Guidance for non-compliant devices or platforms, ensuring transparency about what is and is not enforceable.

Technical Scope and Considerations contd

- **Device Management:** where feasible, making use of device management tools (eg MDM) to “lock down” settings on devices so that they cannot be changed by the user (eg DNS resolver) and to block or limit the ability to load new applications without permission from the profile manager.
- **Content Filtering:** A mechanism to specify categories of content that should not be accessible, with the ability to appeal access (by a user to the profile manager or a profile manager to the list provider) in the event of incorrect categorisation.

Like MIMI and MLS, PARCEP will prioritise end-to-end trust, platform neutrality, and user autonomy. It will not require a single “master app” — existing tools can add support for it, allowing families to manage controls from the system(s) they already use.

Further Reading

PARCEP Paper for the IAB/W3C Workshop on Age-Based Restrictions on Content Access

<https://datatracker.ietf.org/doc/slides-agews-paper-parcep-a-network-protocol-for-parental-controls/>

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