

National Advisory Council
for Online Safety

Report of a National Survey of Children, their Parents and Adults regarding Online Safety 2021



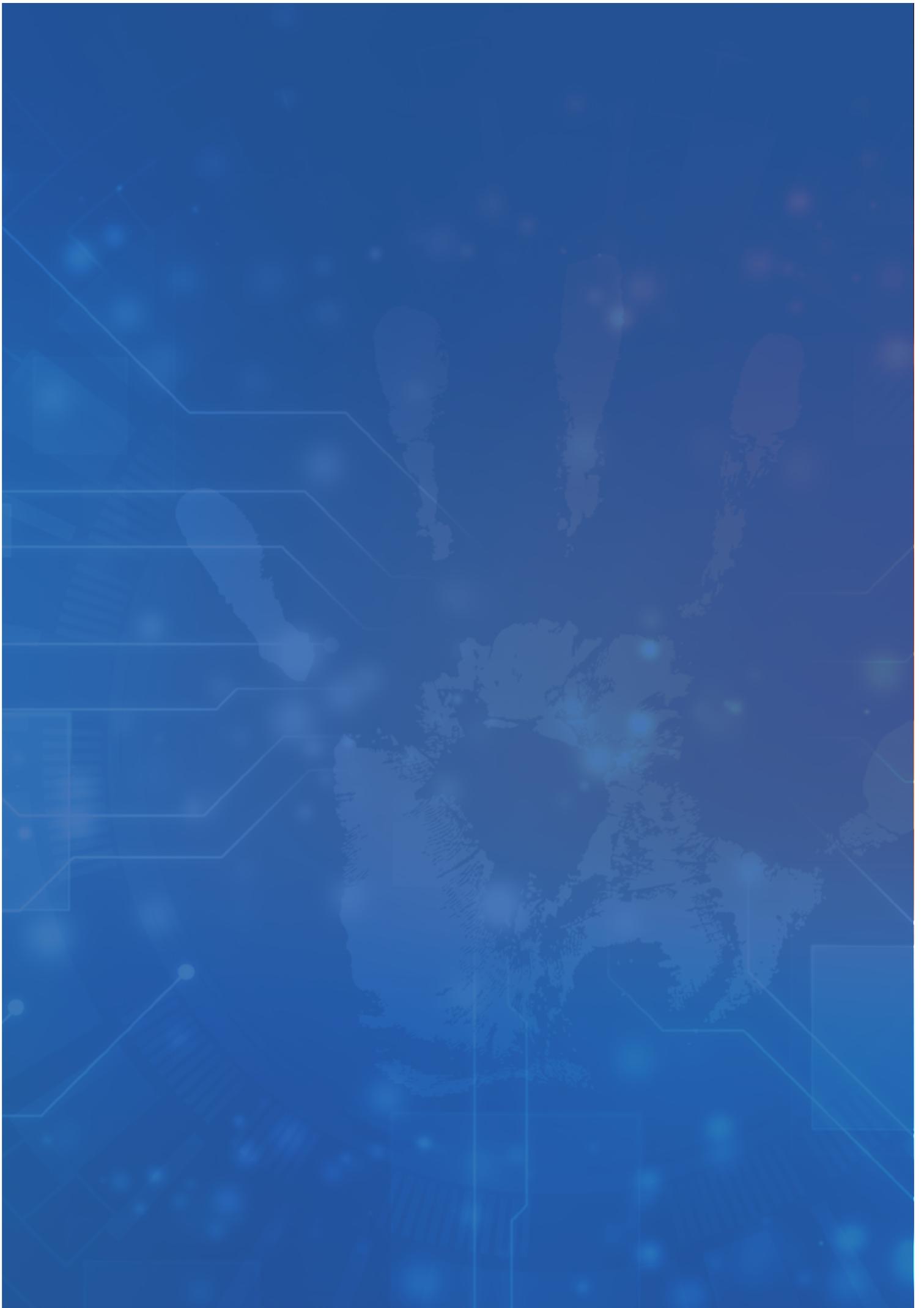


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Executive Summary

Executive Summary

Overview

This report presents findings of three national research surveys, one of children, one of their parents and one of adults, in respect of online risks and safety. The report is presented in separate parts to accurately present the research findings on children's experiences of online safety, parents' responses regarding many of the same issues raised in the children's questionnaire, and adults' experiences of digital technology use, online safety practices and negative experiences online.

The research was commissioned following a recommendation of the National Advisory Council for Online Safety (NACOS) in 2019 that research be undertaken to address gaps in the evidence base about the state of online safety in Ireland. Fieldwork for the research was carried by Ipsos MRBI between December 2019 and October 2020, covering the period both before and after COVID-19 restrictions.

The surveys of children and their parents were linked and a nationally representative sample of children, aged 9-17 years, as well as one of their parents, were interviewed in-person on a range of aspects dealing with their use of digital technologies and experiences of risks and safety. A total of 765 children and 765 parents were interviewed. A separate survey of a nationally representative sample of adults, 18 years and over, was undertaken. A total of 387 respondents participated in the survey of adults' experiences of online safety.

The research with children and parents is based primarily on the EU Kids Online questionnaire¹ previously undertaken in Ireland in 2010² and 2014³. The questionnaires were adapted and updated to take account of changing patterns of use and technological trends. A new short survey of adults' experiences of risks and safety online was also undertaken adapting with permission an equivalent survey undertaken by the eSafety Commissioner in Australia. All surveys were conducted using face-to-face interview methods undertaken in-home with respondents.

Role of the National Advisory Council for Online Safety

NACOS was established in October 2018 as a forum for non-governmental, industry, and academic stakeholders to discuss and work on online safety issues. Established as part of the Action Plan for Online Safety 2018-2019, the role of NACOS is to provide advice to Government on online safety issues, identify emerging issues where government intervention might be needed, help in the creation of clear and easy to understand online safety guidance materials for all internet users and examine national and international research and communicate key findings to Government, stakeholders and the wider public.

NACOS is chaired by the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, Catherine Martin, T.D., and the Deputy Chair of the Council is Professor Brian O'Neill, an

1 www.eukidsonline.net

2 O'Neill, B., Grehan, S., & Ólafsson, K. (2011). *Risks and safety for children on the internet: The Ireland report*. Technological University Dublin: EU Kids Online. <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/cserrep/22/>

3 O'Neill, B., & Dinh, T. (2015). *Net Children Go Mobile: Full findings from Ireland*. Technological University Dublin. <http://arrow.dit.ie/cserrep/55>

online safety expert, and former Director of Research, Enterprise and Innovation Services at Technological University Dublin. The Secretariat of NACOS is provided by the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media.

This research and report was commissioned on behalf of NACOS by the Department.

Purpose of the research and report

Fostering and providing for up-to-date, reliable and robust evidence regarding risks and harm online, for children and for adults alike, is a key priority of NACOS. However, NACOS considered that there was a lack of sufficiently robust and recent evidence regarding the experiences of Irish residents when they go online and that this required new primary research.

In particular, given the rapid pace of change and increased digitalisation, the Council considered it vital that up-to-date and robust data is available to inform policy debate around online safety, to identify trends and assist in prioritising issues for attention both now and in the future.

In light of this, a proposal for new research was adopted by the Council and in 2019 three national surveys were commissioned to provide robust baseline information regarding the state of online safety in Ireland in respect of children, their parents and adults.

Findings

Themes

While the research and this report provides a wealth of nuanced data regarding the state of online safety in Ireland, there are a number of standout themes running through the data some of which are highlighted here.

One of these themes is that the online environment is pervasive and that interaction with many aspects of this environment is a daily occurrence across almost all age groups. In particular, the frequency and complexity of these interactions increases with age as children mature and transition into adulthood and then begins to decline in older adults.

In relation to children, another theme is that there are often significant differences across different age categories of children (9-10, 11-12, 13-14 and 15-17) in terms of the nature of their engagement with the online environment, the online risks they encounter, the prevalence of those risks and their resilience in face of those risks. An example of these differences in terms of online risks by age is that children aged 13-14 report experiencing being bullied offline and online to a greater degree than those aged 9-12 or 15-17 **[figure 15]**.

There are also several differences regarding the nature of engagement with the online environment and of the prevalence of certain risks depending on the gender of the children. For example, girls report greater involvement from their parents/carers in terms of conversations about online safety, use of the internet and support in building resilience **[table 21]**.

In relation to children and their parents, another theme is that there is a gap in perception between children and their parents regarding how children interact with the online environment, the nature of their experiences, both positive and negative, and the nature and prevalence of parental mediation of children's interaction with the online environment. For example, parents/carers believe that the children they care for tell them about things on the internet that bother children to a far greater degree than children believe they do **[figure 58]**.

In relation to adults and online safety, a particular theme is that in most instances most adults feel that they have the tools and skills to deal with the challenges and problems that they may encounter online. Encountering problems online has the effect of raising adults' awareness of issues online risks and safety more generally while also enabling them to use the internet in a more balanced way.

Children and online safety

Findings in relation to children's online safety are organized according to a framework that examines their *Access & Use, Practices and Activities, Digital Skills, Risks, and Social Environment*. The relationship between each of these factors influence how children may experience and deal with problems that they may encounter online.

Digital technology use is pervasive for young people: **smartphones are the devices most used for online access daily by 9–17-year-olds** with 70% of boys and girls reporting at least daily online access. Children spend an average of 2.1 hours online weekdays and 3.4 hours online per day during weekends.

- Having **one's own digital device extends to all age groups**: 41% of 9–10-year-olds report owning their own smartphone, 47% a games console and 44% a tablet device. Over 90% of 15–17 years have their own smartphone.
- Most children are positive about the digital environment and say **there are good things online for children their age**. 44% say this is very true and 39% say it is fairly true.
- **62% of children and young people, aged 9–17 year, use social media**. This rises from a quarter of 9–10-year-olds to nearly 90% of 15–17-year-olds.
- **Children and young people report high levels of digital skills** and score an average of 7.3 out of 10 on the Internet Skills Scale.⁴ This ranges from an average of 5.1 for 9–10-year-olds to 8.7 for 15–17-year-olds.

While generally positive about what the digital environment offers them and confident in their skills to navigate it, children also report a range of negative online experiences. 13% of children overall, and one in five (21%) of 15–17-year-olds **has experienced something that bothered or upset them** in some way, making them feel uncomfortable, scared or that they shouldn't have seen it.

- **People being nasty to each other** (24%) and **bullying** (22%) stand out as the most mentioned things that upset young people. A quarter of all girls in the survey (26%) listed people being nasty to each other as the issue that most frequently upsets them.
- **Inappropriate or disturbing videos and photos** is the next most significant issue reported by one in five children (19%), followed by cruelty to animals online.
- **Contacting others online not previously known in-person** is common among young people and is not necessarily risky, depending on the circumstances. One third of 9–17-year-olds say they have looked for new friends or contacts online. 28% say they have had contact with someone online that they have not met before face-to-face. 12% of children state they have gone on to meet in-person contacts they had first made online.

Children's online safety is mediated and supported by parents, teachers, and peers.

4 van Deursen, A. J. A. M., Helsper, E. J., & Eynon, R. (2016). Development and validation of the Internet Skills Scale (ISS). *Information, Communication & Society*, 19(6), 804–823. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2015.1078834>

- 53% of children also say that **teachers often or very often suggest ways to use the internet safely** though 14% say that teachers never or hardly ever do this. Children also receive **support from friends and peers**. Almost one in two children say their friends provide support by talking about what the child should do if something on the internet has bothered them or have helped them in the past when something has bothered them online.

Parents and online safety

For each child participating in the survey, one of their parents was also interviewed about their mediation or digital parenting practices, their own internet use and their needs for online safety information and support.

Most parents describe themselves as **experienced internet users**. 84% stated that they had been internet users for many years. 11% stated that they had been internet users for a few years.

Most parents report **high levels of digital skills, scoring an average of 7.9 out of 10 on the Internet Skills Scale**.

Concerns about their child's online safety feature in the top five of parental concerns. 59% have concerns about a stranger contacting their child online. 58% are concerned about their child seeing inappropriate content online.

12% of parents were aware of **incidents occurring online that had upset their child** in the past year, confirming reports from children about something upsetting that they had experienced.

However, parents tend to underestimate specific categories of online risks that children in the survey report. For example:

- 12% of children **report meeting face to face somebody they first got to know online** but just one quarter of this number of parents (3%) say they are aware of this.
- 20% of children report coming across **hate messages online** but just 6% of parents say they are aware of this.
- 13% of children have seen online sites where **physical harm or self-harm is depicted**. Only 4% of parents say they know that about this.

Finally, parents gave their views on how they would like to receive online safety information.

- 82% say they would **most prefer to receive information from the child's school**. Just 60% currently report receiving information this way.
- 71% say they would like to receive information and advice from **media sources such as radio television and newspapers**. 58% currently receive online safety guidance via the media.
- 41% report having got information from government or local authority sources but 73% would like to receive further information from these sources.
- **Industry support for online safety** guidance and advice such as through Help Centres and social media websites is also sought: 59% say they would like to receive information in this way but just 34% say they currently receive online safety guidance from such sources.

Adults and online safety

A new short survey of adults' experiences of risks and safety online was also undertaken. The

questionnaire – adapted with permission from an equivalent survey undertaken by the Australian eSafety Commissioner’s Office – was administered to a representative sample of 387 adults, aged 18+ years.

- 72% of the sample describe themselves as **experienced digital users** having used online technologies for many years. The 25-34 years age group is the most experienced with 89% stating that they have used the Internet for many years. Half of those over 65 years also say they have used the internet for many years. Nearly, **one third (29%) of over 65s say they almost never go online.**
- Reported overall **average Internet skills are 7.5 out of 10 for all adult respondents.** Users aged 18-24 category report the highest levels of digital skills with an average of 9.3 out of 10.

Levels of trust in news media are reported as generally strong with somewhat lower levels of trust in social media.

- 61% of adults say they **trust most of the news they choose to read**, and that news media do a good job in helping to distinguish fact from fiction. The highest levels of trust are expressed by participants in the 35-to-44-year age group, with 79% of respondents saying that they can trust most of the news they choose to read or watch.
- Just 25% say that **social media does a good job in helping the users distinguish fact from fiction.** Low levels are reported across each of the age categories with the lowest levels being reported by 55- to 64-year-olds.

Online safety is a concern but not predominantly so for respondents.

- Relatively few say they **communicate / make friends with others online not previously known to them.** 15% overall (17% men and 14% women) say that they have talked to or chatted with others not previously known to them online in the past year. 11% overall say they have made friends with others online. This increases for users aged 18-24: 38% say they have chatted with others online while one third (33%) say they made friends online.

A range of problems that users reported encountering online was reported.

- **Being contacted by strangers or someone they didn't know** is the most reported problem encountered online. This is reported by 13% of adults overall. 8% say this happens at least every month and 3% at least every week.
- **Having personal information posted without agreeing to it** is reported by 3%, 2% of whom say this happens at least every month. 2% also reported having others say mean things about them online.
- Half of those who had experienced a problem online say they had become **more aware of online risks and safety.**

Conclusion

While further analysis of the data and further research will be necessary to draw specific conclusions regarding the wide range of online safety related issues that this research touches upon, it is safe to say that the main purpose of this research has been met. This purpose was to provide robust baseline information regarding how children, their parents/carers and adults resident in Ireland use and experience the internet, with a particular focus on online risks and online safety.

In particular, this research has allowed for the identification of a number of themes, which, while requiring further analysis, will be of great value to the National Advisory Council for Online Safety in carrying out its role of providing advice to Government on online safety issues. For example, in terms of online safety for children, the significant differences across different age categories of children (9-10, 11-12, 13-14 and 15-17) in terms of the nature of their engagement with the online environment, the online risks they encounter, the prevalence of those risks and their resilience in face of those risks, is certainly of interest in this regard.

Further to this, this research has a great deal of value as a benchmark for potential future research of this kind and as a starting point for further research into specific issues such as, for example, different perceptions between children and their parents/carers regarding. This would allow for further analysis of trends, which will help to inform public policy and online safety initiatives. This research also allows for a certain degree of comparison across the EU regarding the state of online safety given its roots in the EU Kids Online initiative and further and deeper research of this kind would compound the value of identifying trends from a public policy perspective.

Introduction

Introduction

About this report

This report was commissioned on behalf of the National Advisory Council for Online Safety (NACOS) by the then Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment.

Under the Action Plan for Online Safety 2018-2019, NACOS was established in October 2018 as a forum for non-governmental, industry, and academic stakeholders to discuss online safety issues. The role of NACOS is to provide advice to Government on online safety issues, identify emerging issues where government intervention might be needed, help in the creation of clear and easy to understand online safety guidance materials for all internet users and examine national and international research and communicate key findings to Government, stakeholders and the wider public.

Recognising the need for further research on the state of online safety in Ireland, the Research Subgroup of NACOS developed a research proposal for the Council as a whole. This proposal was adopted by NACOS and in 2019 a national survey was commissioned to provide baseline information regarding:

- Children, youth and risks/safety in use of the internet,
- Parents and online safety, and,
- Adults and online safety.

The objectives of the research as set out in the tender process were as follows:

- To determine how adults and children in Ireland use and access the internet and the level of their digital skills
- To estimate the prevalence of online risks and abuse experienced by internet users
- To identify opportunities and benefits obtained using the internet
- To identify safety practices of adults and children when using the internet
- To identify how parents mediate in the use of internet by their children

This report presents the findings of all three surveys: children (aged 9-17), their parents and adults' experiences of risks and safety when using online digital technologies. The report is presented in separate sections to present findings on children's experiences of online safety, parents' responses regarding many of the same issues raised in the children's questionnaire, and adults' experiences of digital technology use, online safety practices and negative experiences online.

Fieldwork for the research was carried by Ipsos MRBI between December 2019 and October 2020. The survey was conducted using face-to-face interview methods undertaken in-home with respondents. A nationally representative sample of 765 children, aged between 9 and 17 years, and one of their parents, was surveyed for the research. In addition, a further representative sample of the adult population (387 adults) was interviewed regarding online safety matters.

Covid-19 unfortunately caused significant disruption to the original timeline for the research.

Much of the interviewing was conducted prior to the implementation of the Covid-19 restrictions. However, fieldwork was paused between 16 March and 20 July 2020 because of restrictions. Following the introduction of additional restrictions in October 2020, it was decided at this point to cease fieldwork entirely, even though not all interviewing was completed at that point. This was done due to the uncertainty regarding the period of time that the new restrictions would be in place and the need to proceed to the data analysis stage. Weighting was applied to ensure an accurate representative sample and to correct any discrepancies arising from the incomplete fieldwork.

Background and theoretical framework

Use of the internet and digital technologies is an inextricable part of daily life for citizens in Ireland as elsewhere. While digital technologies provide immeasurable benefits and opportunities, they can also give rise to certain risks, particularly for vulnerable groups such as children who may lack the skills or knowledge about online safety. This report draws on and contributes to international research to better understand the risks and benefits of the digital environment as experienced by various categories of users and provides a baseline for mapping access and usage of digital tools and technologies, skills and digital competence, experiences of online risks and harm, and the role of the wider environment in mediating online safety.

This research on children and parents builds on the work of EU Kids Online, the multinational research initiative to enhance knowledge of European children's online opportunities, risks, and safety. Originally funded by the European Commission, the EU Kids Online network has developed a comprehensive research toolkit that uses multiple methods to map children's and parents' experience of the internet, in dialogue with national and European policy stakeholders.⁵

Using survey instruments developed by EU Kids Online, the current research uses updated versions of the child and parent questionnaires to reflect changes in technologies, practices, and risks. With the inclusion of items from other surveys, the research also adapts the questionnaire for use with adults to provide one of the first sources of data in Ireland of adult experiences of online risks and safety. A new short survey of adults' experiences of risks and safety online was also undertaken adapting with permission an equivalent survey undertaken by the eSafety Commissioner in Australia. All surveys were conducted using face-to-face interview methods undertaken in-home with respondents.

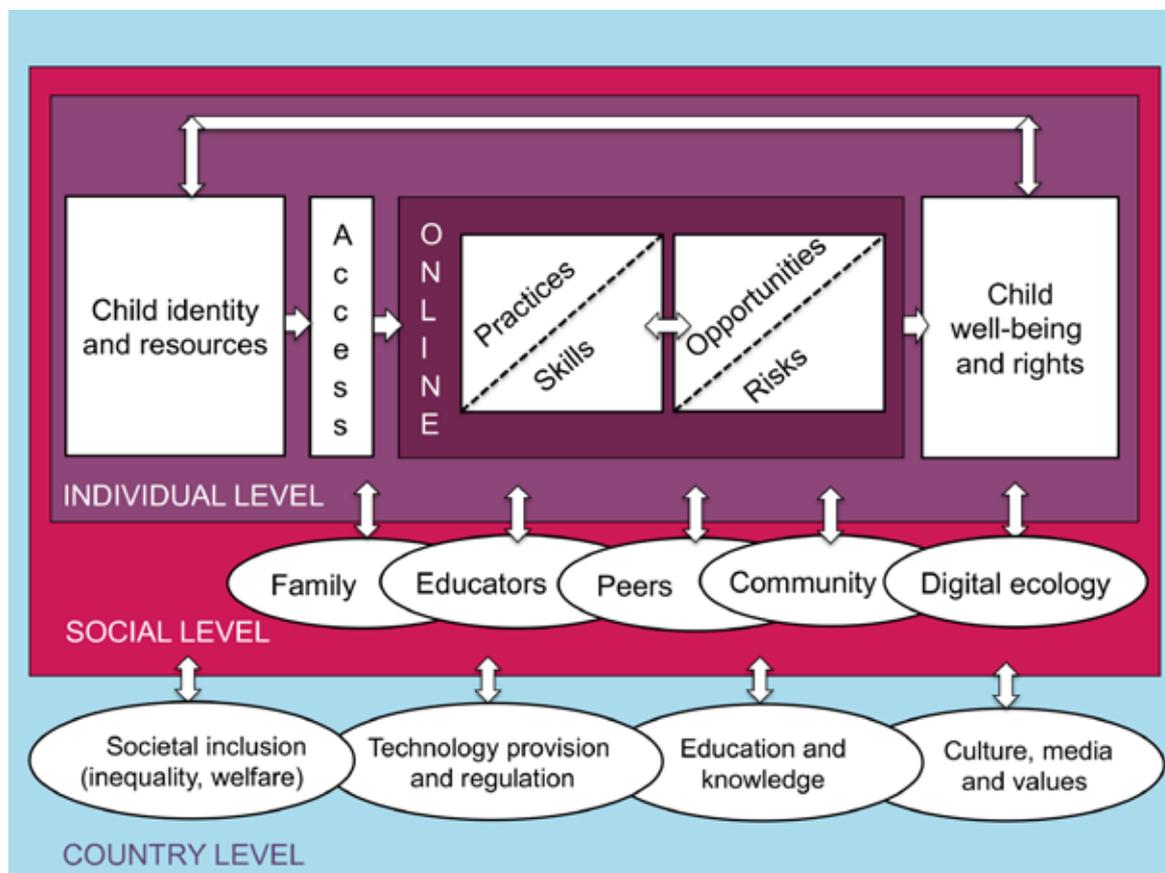
The theoretical framework used in the research is illustrated in Figure 1.⁶ The research aims to develop a deeper understanding of how users' engagement with the digital environment is dependent on individual factors, such as age and gender and how factors including their socioeconomic and cultural background, personality traits, abilities and skills impact on their online opportunities and exposure to risk. This includes how general psychological well-being, such as feelings of safety and belonging, is linked to (digital) well-being. On a social level, the research seeks to understand how in the context of children's experiences, parents, extended family as well as peers and educators and the larger community to which children belong can play a role in young people's experiences leading to harm or resilience. The wider eco-system can also be included as part of a comparative analysis at the country level, something the EU

5 All materials are available on the project website: <http://www.eukidsonline.net/>. A follow-on project, Global Kids Online, supported by the WeProtect Global Alliance, hosts updated versions of the research model and framework. See: <http://globalkidsonline.net/>

6 From Livingstone, S., Mascheroni, G., & Staksrud, E. (2018). European research on children's internet use: Assessing the past and anticipating the future. *New Media & Society*, 20(3), 1103–22. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444816685930>

Kids Online network has specialised in since its first survey in 2010.⁷ The most recent European report from EU Kids Online of 2020 thereby provides an important point of comparison for the children’s survey in the current report.⁸

Figure 1: The EU Kids Online Theoretical Model



Source: Livingstone, Mascheroni and Staksrud (2018)

Further information regarding the methodology of this report can be found at **Appendix 3**.

7 Livingstone, S., Haddon, L., Görzig, A., & Ólafsson, K. (2011). Risks and safety on the internet: The perspective of European children. Full Findings. EU Kids Online.

8 Smahel, D., Machackova, H., Mascheroni, G., Dedkova, L., Staksrud, E., Ólafsson, K., Livingstone, S., & Hasebrink, U. (2020). *EU Kids Online 2020: Survey results from 19 countries* (Issue February, pp. 156–156). <https://doi.org/10.21953/lse.47fdeqj01ofo>

Outline of the report

Part 1 of the report presents findings from the survey of children's experiences of risks and safety online. Findings are presented in respect of children's access to digital technologies, their frequency of use of different digital devices as well as ownership and access to one's own device.

Children's activities in the digital environment are then outlined looking at the range, extent and popularity of communication, entertainment, and education activities online. Particular attention is given to the use of social media platforms as a popular online activity for children aged 9-17 years with an account of the services most used by children, practices in relation to social media communication such as friend requests and perceptions of safety online.

Children's digital skills are outlined based an analysis of self-reports of digital skills as derived from the Internet Skills Scale (van Deursen et al. 2016).⁹ This encompasses five areas of digital competence: *operational skills*, including safety skills; *information navigation skills*; *social skills* including managing relationships with others online; *creative skills*; and *mobile skills*, related to the use of mobile devices.

Findings are presented on children's reported experiences of a selection of online risks derived from the classification of content, contact, and conduct risks.¹⁰

Children's accounts of negative experiences are outlined as is the response to having such an experience. Three further dimensions of children's online experiences that give rise to concern are further outlined: perceptions and responses to the misuse of personal data; feelings and behaviour associated with excessive internet use; and information shared online by others such as parents, friends and teachers.

Finally, children's experiences of the role played by parents, teachers and friends are presented in terms of online safety. Particular attention is given to active and restrictive modes of parental mediation looking at what parents do to support their children's development of safety awareness and online resilience.

Part 2 presents findings from a survey of parents administered in conjunction with the child survey. Parents' accounts of their experience as internet users are outlined as is their access and use of digital technologies. This includes an overview of parents' digital skills derived from the same Internet Skills Scale (ISS) administered to children. Parental attitudes and practices regarding the sharing of information about their children online ('sharenting') are also outlined.

The focus of this section of the report is on parental mediation and the different strategies employed by parents to oversee and support their children's online use. The two main types of parental activity are outlined: active mediation and restrictive mediation. Active mediation encompasses a range of activities in which parents are directly involved in supporting children's online use. Restrictive mediation includes activities undertaken by parents to reduce online risks, limit certain forms of content and contact and the use of tools and technologies to monitor and/or restrict access.

9 van Deursen, A. J. A. M., Helsper, E. J., & Eynon, R. (2016). Development and validation of the Internet Skills Scale (ISS). *Information, Communication & Society*, 19(6), 804–823. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2015.1078834>

10 Staksrud, E., & Livingstone, S. (2009). Children and online risk: Powerless victims or resourceful participants? *Information, Communication & Society*, 12(3), 364–387. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691180802635455>

Parents and children's accounts of actions undertaken as well as the awareness of risk activities reported by the child are compared.

Finally, parents report how they are currently supported in terms of receiving online safety advice as well as how they would like to receive guidance in online safety in the future.

Part 3 presents findings from the adult survey of online risks and safety which was administered separately.

Patterns of access and use among adult internet users is outlined along with an account of daily use of digital devices and technologies. Following a similar approach to that included in the report's representation children and parents' digital skills, adults self-reported digital skills, based on the Internet Skills Scale, are presented. Several additional aspects relating to digital citizenship and trust in news media are also outlined.

Experiences of making contacts with others not previously known and sharing information with others online are two examples of areas of risks and safety included in the study. This section also reports on examples of problems encountered online by respondents to the survey alongside reports of this impacted on individual and any actions taken in response.

Part 1

Children and online safety



Access and use

The starting point for this survey of children's experiences of online risks and opportunities begins with understanding the basic conditions of access and use of digital technologies. How and where children go online, which devices they use and how much time they spend online are all factors of access and usage which shape children's online experiences.

Devices

The online world may be accessed through a host of digital tools and devices, the use of which can shape the conditions under which children avail of digital opportunities or are exposed to online risks. The proliferation of different types of devices, particularly personal and portable devices such as smartphones and tablets, represents one of the main ways in which children's experience of the online world has changed.

To investigate the different modes of online access, children were asked the following question: *How often do you go online or use the internet using the following devices?* Table 1 provides a summary broken down by gender and age group.

Table 1: Daily use of different devices, by gender and age

%	Boys	Girls	9-10 years	11-12 years	13-14 years	15-17 years	All
A mobile/smartphone	69	72	37	60	85	91	70
A desktop computer laptop or notebook computer	20	20	15	16	16	29	20
A tablet	27	32	32	29	27	30	30
A game console	40	9	21	26	25	25	24
A TV	29	27	20	30	27	32	28
A toy which is connected to the internet	1	0	1	1	1	0	1
A wearable device	7	9	5	9	11	7	8
Something else	1	1	1	1	2	0	1

Q.B3 How often do you go online or use the internet using the following devices?

Base: All children who use the internet

- Mobiles and smartphones are the devices most used for internet access daily by 9–17-year-olds. 70% of boys and girls in this age group report at least daily online access using a mobile or smartphone.
- Other devices used include tablets (30%), connected TVs (28%) and games consoles (24%) as the next most mentioned devices to go online.
- Age is clearly a factor in the use of smartphones. Where 37% of 9–10-year-olds report daily use with a smartphone, this rises to 60% of 11–12-year-olds, 85% of 13–14-year-olds and 91% of 15–17-year-olds.
- Gender differences are less in evidence. 72% girls and 69% of boys say they go online

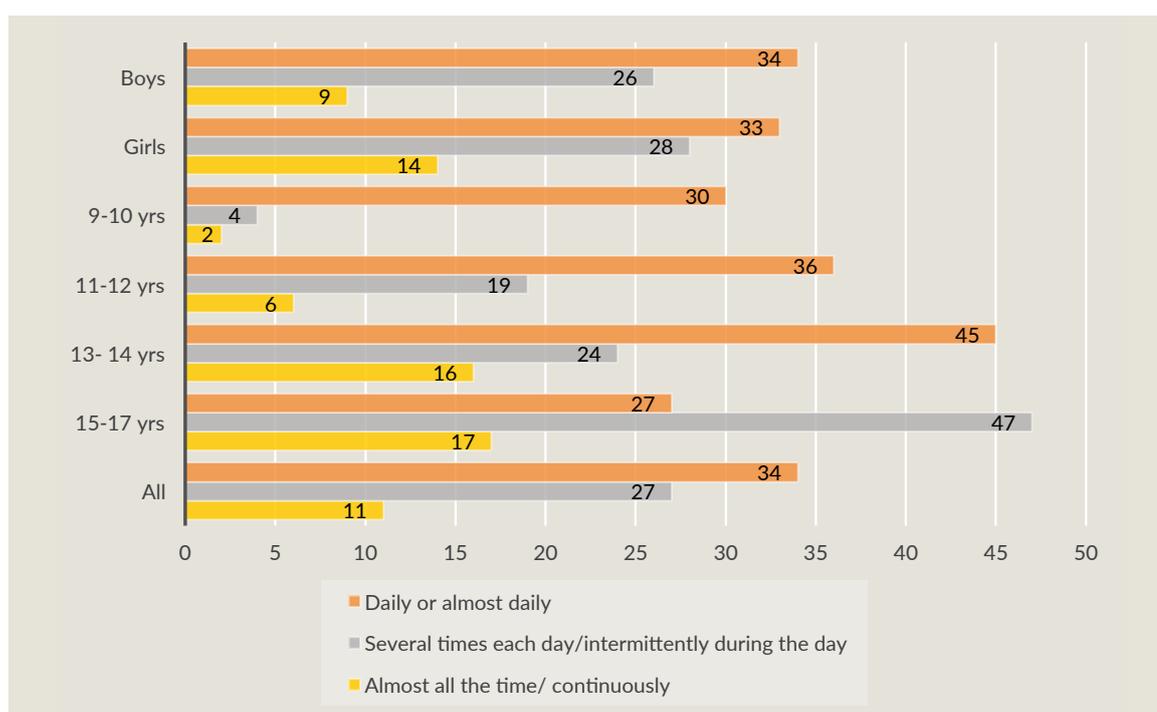
daily using a smartphone. Games consoles, on the other hand, are much more gendered in terms of use. 40% of boys say they go online daily using a games console compared to just 9% of girls. Girls, by contrast, report slightly higher use of tablets. 32% of girls compared to 27% of boys say they use tablets daily.

- Reported daily use of mobiles and smartphones has risen sharply from the figure of 35% in 2014 reported by the Net Children Go Mobile project¹¹ to 70% in 2020.
- At the same time, the reported daily average use of mobile phones/smartphones for internet access in the EU Kids Online (2020) study of 19 European countries is 80%, positioning Irish children at the lower end of the European spectrum.¹²

Frequency of smartphone use

As the most popular device for going online, use of smartphones is, not surprisingly, a daily occurrence for most children. Overall, 72% of children say they use their smartphone to go online at least daily with varying levels of frequent use reported across the age range:

Figure 2: Frequency of using a smartphone to go online



QB3. How often do you go online or use the internet using the following devices? A mobile phone/smartphone.

Base: All children who use the internet

- 27% say they go online several times each day/intermittently during the day, and
- 11% report they are online using their smartphone almost all the time or continuously
- Frequent use of smartphones increases strongly as children grow older. There is a steep

11 O'Neill, B., & Dinh, T. (2015). Net Children Go Mobile: Full findings from Ireland. Technological University Dublin. <http://arrow.dit.ie/cserrep/55> p.11

12 Smahel, D., Machackova, H., Mascheroni, G., Dedkova, L., Staksrud, E., Ólafsson, K., Livingstone, S., & Hasebrink, U. (2020). EU Kids Online 2020: Survey results from 19 countries (Issue February, pp. 156–156). <https://doi.org/10.21953/lse.47fdeqj01ofo> p.19

rise from age 13- 14 to age 15-17 where use of smartphone several times each day almost doubles (24% versus 47% respectively).

- Gender differences are relatively small though more girls than boys report frequent use of smartphones, i.e., several times each day or almost all the time.

Ownership of devices

Children were also asked which digital devices were for their own personal use to go online.

Table 2: Devices for own use, by gender and age

% Own devices	Boys	Girls	9- 10	11-12	13-14	15-17	All
A mobile phone/ smartphone	73	83	41	67	93	96	78
A desktop computer laptop or notebook computer	29	38	21	25	30	49	34
A tablet	39	51	44	44	47	45	45
A games console	68	33	47	50	51	55	52
A TV	39	38	23	38	37	47	38

Q.B4 Do you have any of these devices just for your own use that you can go online with?

Base: All children who use the internet

Again, ownership of smartphone devices stands out as the primary means for going online, thereby providing personalised and relatively privatised online experiences. Some of the key highlights also show:

- Having one's own device, whether a smartphone or other digital device for going online, rises sharply with age. Smartphone ownership rises from 41% of 9–10-year-olds to 67% of 11–12-year-olds. From age 13 onwards, over 90% report having their own smartphone device.
- Younger children, aged 9-10, report high levels of ownership overall: 41% report owning their own smartphone, 47% a games console and 44% a tablet device, all of which points to high levels of ownership of digital devices.
- Gender differences also show some interesting patterns. Girls overall report owning their own smartphone, computer or laptop or tablet. Games consoles are the only devices more frequently being owned by boys. Equal numbers of boys and girls reported being able to access their own TV.
- Smartphone ownership has nearly doubled since 2014 when the Net Children Go Mobile study report smartphone ownership as 40%.¹³

Time spent online

Estimating the amount of time that children spend online is not an easy task. With the “always

13 Net Children Go Mobile (2015), p. 13

on” connectivity of smartphones, children can seamlessly integrate online access into everyday activities making it more difficult to estimate how much time they spend using different devices. The fact that information and learning activities as well as communication, gaming and entertainment all integrate online dimensions makes it even more challenging to distinguish between online and offline.

Acknowledging these challenges and limitations, children were asked to estimate the average time, to the nearest hour, they spent online for a regular weekday or school day, and during the weekend.

Figure 3: Estimate of time spent online (weekdays and weekends)



Q.B5 About how long do you spend on the internet?

Children’s reports of the amount of time spent online range between 1 hour or less daily (reported by 13%) to about 3 hours per day, reported by 15%. The average across all age groups is 2.1 hours per day (weekdays) and 3.4 hours per day at the weekend.

- There are no noticeable gender differences in the amount of time spent online: boys and girls both estimate a similar average. Boys spend slightly more time online than girls at the weekend (3.5 hours versus 3.3 hours).
- There are noteworthy age differences. 9–10-year-olds report spending twice as much time online daily than 11–12-year-olds. In general, use rises with age with 15–17-year-olds reporting on average 3.2 hours online daily.
- Average time spent online shows a marked increase since the last EU Kids Online survey in Ireland in 2010 where boys and girls reported equally spending approximately 1 hour daily online.¹⁴ Even allowing difference in the age range surveyed, there is a significant increase in time spent online, consistent with increases in other European countries included in the EU Kids Online 2020 survey.¹⁵

14 O’Neill, B., Grehan, S., & Ólafsson, K. (2011). *Risks and safety for children on the internet: The Ireland report*. Technological University Dublin: EU Kids Online. <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/cserrep/22/> p.17

15 Smahel et al (2020), p.22

Practices and activities

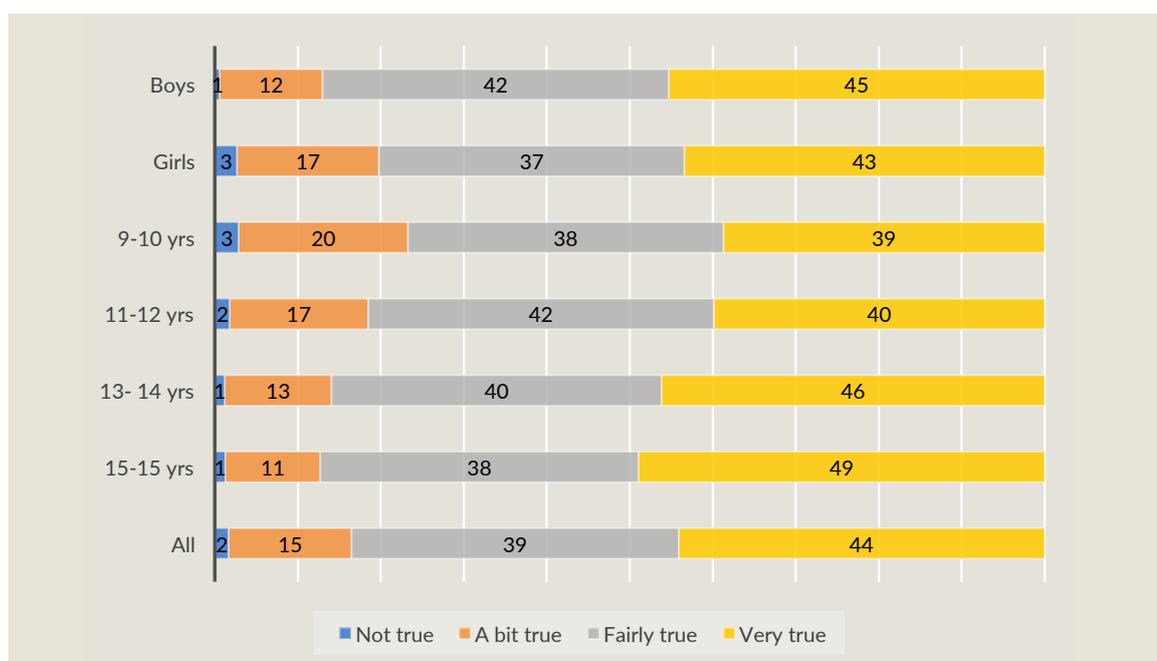
The second aspect considered within the overall theoretical model of children’s use of digital technologies concerns the activities that young people engage in online, and the levels of digital skills and competence exhibited. Following on from the consideration of the different types of online access available to young people, the focus here turns to how their application, in order to better understand patterns of use and children’s ability to manage online activities, privacy and e-presence.

Online activities

Children engage in a wide range of activities in the digital environment. Just as it is challenging for children to estimate how long they spend online or the amount of time using digital technologies, so too determining which activities children undertake in an online setting is not always easy to specify given the lack of any clear boundary from their perspective between online and offline worlds. To make this clearer, the question was posed in terms of the activities children engaged in on any device in any place, i.e., when using “*your mobile phone, tablet, gaming device or computer to send or receive messages, emails, browse or to communicate with friends and family, uploading or downloading, or anything else that you usually do online*”.

To set the context for this exploration and to gain an insight into children’s overall attitude towards online activities, children were first asked to respond to the statement “*There are lots of things on the internet that are good for children and youth of my age*”.

Figure 4: “There are lots of things that are good for children my age”



Q.C1: *There are lots of things on the internet that are good for children of my age.*

Response options: *very true, fairly true, a bit true, not true.*

Base: *All children who use the internet.*

Most children are positive about there being good things online for children their age.

- 44% of all 9–17-year-olds say this is “very true” while a further 39% say this is “fairly true”. Only 2% reported that this was not true while 15% stated with less certainty that this was “a bit true”.
- There are some gender differences in the views expressed with slightly more boys than girls reporting positively about the quality of online content. Age differences are also slight with older teens being the most positive about online content for their age group.

To understand the online opportunities that they take up, children were then asked how often within the past month they had undertaken any of a series of online activities, grouped around communication activities with family and friends, entertainment activities, gaming, schoolwork, information-seeking, or content creation.

Table 3 presents a summary of the most popular activities reported by children and undertaken at least daily.

Table 3: Daily online activities, by age and gender

At least daily (%)	9-12 yrs		13-17 yrs		All
		Girls	Boys	Girls	
I watched video clips	41	43	73	61	56
I listened to music online	29	38	70	73	55
I communicated with family or friends	28	32	66	70	51
I played online games	38	30	56	34	40
I visited a social networking site	10	18	51	62	38
I used the internet for schoolwork	21	24	35	51	34
I browsed for things to buy or see what things cost	9	17	21	31	20
I looked for information about work or study opportunities	10	13	20	26	18
I looked for news online	3	4	22	22	14
I participated in an online group where people share my interests or hobbies	6	2	22	15	12
I used the Internet to talk to people from other countries	6	0	7	6	5
I looked for health information for myself or someone I know	1	1	6	5	4
I created my own video or music and uploaded it to share	4	2	4	2	3
I got involved online in a campaign protest or I signed a petition online	1	0	1	4	2
I discussed political or social problems with other people online	1	0	2	2	1

Q.C3. How often have you done these things ONLINE in the past month?

Base: All children who use the internet.

The three most popular online as reported by children 9-17 years of age are *watching video clips, listening to music online and communicating with family or friends.*

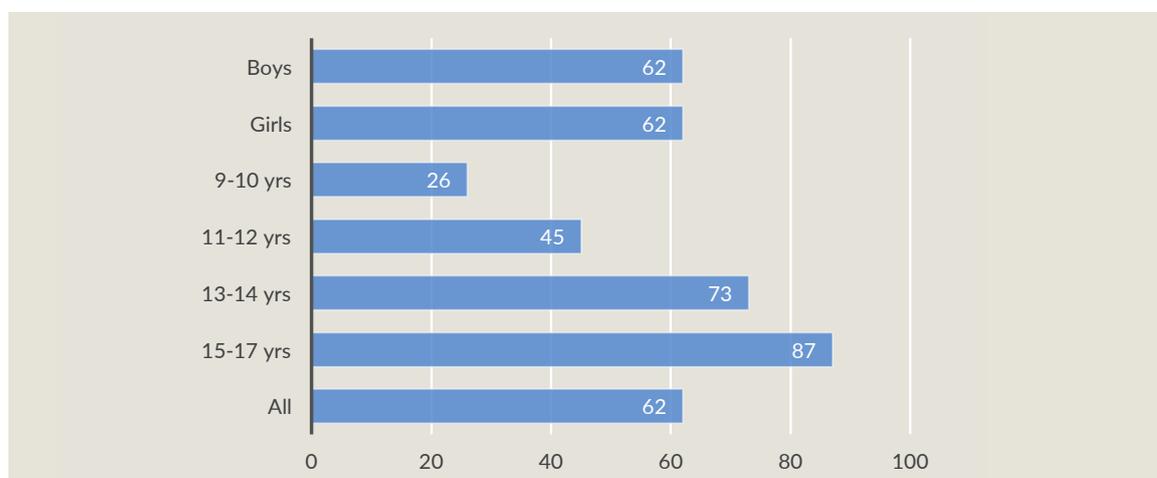
- Entertainment uses, e.g., watching video clips (56%) and listening to music (55%) are the most popular online activities for all age groups.
- Communicating with family or friends (50%) is especially popular with 13–17-year-olds with 66% of boys and 70% of girls reporting this as a daily activity.
- Visiting a social networking site also stands out as a popular daily activity especially for girls aged 13-17 years. 62% say they do this daily.
- 34% of children report using the internet for schoolwork. This is particularly the case for girls aged 13-17 years of whom 51% report doing this daily. Note, however, this does not take into account the impact of digital learning during the Covid-19 lockdown.
- Overall, gender differences in daily online activities are noteworthy: girls 13–17-years-old typically do more than boys in all categories except for watching video clips. Playing games online is the activity that is most highly gendered.
- Activities associated with creativity and digital citizenship are much less in evidence. While 22% of teens report looking for news online daily, very few report being actively involved in civic, public, or political activities online. The exception here is the somewhat greater numbers who report participating in an online group where people share their hobbies or interests (22% of boys aged 13-17 years and 15% of girls aged 13-17 years).
- Findings for entertainment activities are in line with the 2014 Net Children Go Mobile survey which found that 50% of children reported listening to music daily and 48% watching video clips on daily basis¹⁶

Use of social media platforms

The use of social media or social networking sites has long been a popular activity among children and young people. However, patterns of use have changed consistently as young migrate to instant messaging services and other platforms for purposes of socialising with friends and peers. To examine these trends a little further, children were asked about which sites they visited, if they maintained their own social media profile and how they responded to friend requests. Given that children use a wide range of services, some of which they may not recognise as social media, the following explanation was offered: *“By this we mean sites like Facebook or Instagram where you can have a profile (i.e., a page or place where you put things about yourself that others see) and where you can keep in touch with people and share things with them.”*

16 Net Children Go Mobile (2015), p. 18.

Figure 5: Profile on a social networking or social media or gaming site, by gender and age



Q.E3. Do you have your own profile on a social networking or social media or gaming site that you currently use?
Base: All children who use the internet

As reported by children, use of social media platforms is evident even from an early age with increasing levels of use as children get older:

- 62% of children, aged 9-17 years report having at least one profile on a social networking or social media or gaming site.
- Social media is strongly associated with age: while a quarter (26%) of 9–10-year-olds report having a social media profile, this rises to just under half, or 45% of 11–12-year-olds, three quarters or 73% of 13–14-year-olds and 87% of 15–17-year-olds.
- There are no gender differences in social media activity.
- Comparing these findings with earlier studies, there has been a steady increase in overall social media use, and especially so in the case of younger users. Findings for 9–10-year-olds having their own social media profile have risen from 14% in 2014 to 26% in 2020.¹⁷ In the case of 11–12-year-olds, having a social media profile has risen from 39% in 2014 to 45% in 2020.

Children were also asked to identify which websites, apps or social media services they used mostly. This was answered using a free text option to list the services most used.

¹⁷ See *Net Children Go Mobile* (2015) p. 23

Table 4: Top 10 services most used by children aged 9-17 years

	Boys	Girls	9-10 yrs	11-12 yrs	13-14 yrs	15-17 yrs	All
You Tube	59	43	51	59	50	47	51
Snapchat	40	46	15	30	55	62	43
Instagram	24	28	3	12	34	46	26
TikTok	15	31	15	28	27	20	22
Facebook	11	11	3	6	11	20	11
Netflix	11	11	9	12	10	11	11
Whats App	8	13	5	8	13	14	10
Other	10	10	14	8	6	10	10
Other Games/PS4	9	8	13	15	8	2	9
Google	8	8	8	7	8	8	8

Q.E1. Which websites or apps do you mostly use these days?

Base: All children who use the internet

The top ten apps and services, as reported by children aged 9-17 years, include a range of popular social media, video sharing and instant messaging services.

- Reflecting the popularity of watching video clips as a daily online activity, YouTube is the most mentioned platform or app used by children.
- Social media services such as Snapchat, Instagram, TikTok and Facebook are among the social media platforms most mentioned by children.
- Girls more frequently list social media platforms as the services that are most used. For example, more girls than boys mention Snapchat, Instagram, and WhatsApp. Twice as many girls as boys list using TikTok as the most used service.
- There are of course age differences in the most popular services listed. While video sharing platforms such as YouTube are popular among all age groups, gaming applications such as Roblox and Minecraft are popular among 9–11-year-olds. Twitter and Facebook are mentioned much more by 16–17-year-olds.
- Underage age use of social media platforms, i.e., defined as being below the age of 13 as the minimum for registering an account, is evident for those services listed by younger children.
- For example, 18% of 9–11-year-olds reported using TikTok; 17% report using Snapchat, and 6% say they use WhatsApp. This rises to 28% of 11–12-year-olds who report using TikTok, 12% who use Instagram and 30% who report using Snapchat.

Children were also asked about how they responded to requests from people to become “friends” online.

Table 5: Friend requests on social media

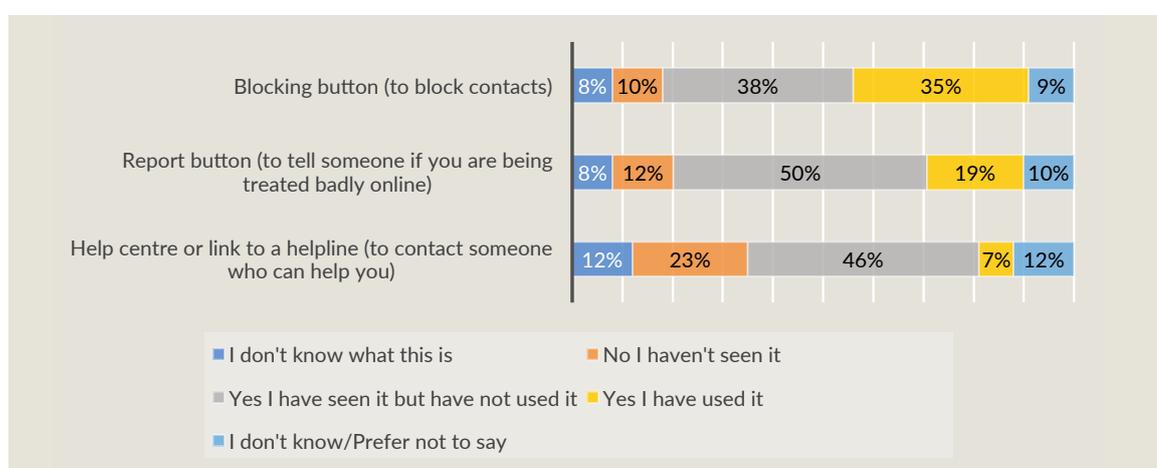
	Boys	Girls	9-10 yrs	11-12 yrs	13-14 yrs	15-17 yrs	All
I usually accept all requests	5	3	2	3	2	6	4
I accept only if we have friends in common	20	22	8	9	19	38	21
I accept only if I know them	34	31	15	30	41	39	33
I accept only if I know them very well	14	18	12	14	19	18	16
I only accept them if my parents/carer says it is ok	17	17	29	23	15	8	17
I don't know	17	16	37	23	9	5	16

Q.E4 How do you usually respond to requests from people to become your 'friends' online?

Base: All children who use the internet

- In general, only a very small number of children, just 4%, would accept all requests from people to become their “friends” online.
- Just under half of 9–17-year-olds, or 49% in total, accept online “friends” request only when they know or know very well the people who send the requests.
- One in five children, or 21%, say they accept friend requests from someone if they have friends in common.

Children were also asked if they were aware of the availability of certain online safety features on the social media and gaming sites used. These features include the availability of Blocking buttons to block contacts, a Report button to tell someone if they were being treated badly online and a Help Centre or link to a helpline to contact someone when needed.

Figure 6: Awareness of online safety features of social media apps and gaming sites


Q.E5 Thinking about your use of social networking or social media or gaming sites, have you seen any of these online?

Base: All children who use the internet

- Blocking buttons have been seen and used by 35% of 9–17-year-olds and are the most used safety feature. A further 38% are aware of the availability of a blocking button but have not used it. 10% say they have not seen it and a further 8% stated that they did not know what this was.
- Report buttons have the highest level of awareness with half of all children say they have seen such a button but have not used it. 19% say they have used a reporting feature because of being treated badly online. 12% say that they have not seen such a feature and 8% again state that they do know what this is.
- Regarding links to help centres and helplines, just under half of children, or 46%, say they have seen this feature while 7% have used these links. A quarter, however, or 23%, have not seen any such links and 12% do not recognise what this is.

Finally, children were also asked about their general perceptions about feeling safe online, their approach to communication online and if they knew what to do if someone acted in a way they didn't like.

Table 6: Feeling safe online, by age and gender

% Often or always	9-12 yrs		13-17 yrs		All
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
I feel safe on the internet	87	83	91	79	85
I find other people are kind and helpful on the internet	64	64	70	64	66
I know what to do if someone acts online in a way I don't like	76	75	83	86	81
I find it easier to be myself online than when I am with people face-to-face	20	24	31	30	27
I talk about different things online than I do when speaking to people face-to-face	16	14	23	16	18
I talk about personal things online which I do not talk about with people face-to-face	7	6	13	8	9

Q.E2 How often does the following apply to you? Response items: Never, Sometimes, Often, Always, I don't know, Prefer not to say

Base: All children who use the internet

- 85% of children aged 9-17 years say they feel safe online. Boys more so than girls say they feel safe online.
- 81% of children aged 9-17 years say they know what to do if someone acts in the way they don't like online. In this case, it is age rather than gender that has an impact with older teens reporting most that they know what to do in such instances.
- 66% of children overall, and 70% of teenage boys, say that they find people kind and helpful on the internet.
- Regarding general approaches to communication online, 27% of children say they find it

easier to be themselves online compared to face-to face interaction, more so for older children rising from one quarter of 9–12-year-olds to one third of 13–17-year-olds.

- There is little evidence of a distinction or gap between online and offline communication styles given that fewer than one in five, or 18% say they talk about different things online compared to when speaking to people face-to-face. The exception is for teenage boys, for whom the internet provides an opportunity for one quarter (23%) to talk about different things online or personal things (13%) that they would not talk about with people face-to face.
- Overall, however, less than one in ten children (9%) say they talk about personal things online which they do not talk about with people face-to-face.

Digital skills

Digital skills are essential to effective participation in the digital environment. Research shows that children with more skills are better able to avail of online opportunities and benefits, and can explore the online world with greater confidence.¹⁸ While more activities online can also give rise to greater exposure to potential risks, it is also the case that higher levels of digital skills can better prepare children to deal with problematic situations they may encounter online, giving them greater resilience to any potential harmful consequences.¹⁹ In the theoretical model employed in this survey, practices and skills are brought together and provide a crucial element in the child's ability to navigate a world mediated by digital technologies.²⁰

The revised version of the EU Kids Online questionnaire includes an expanded range of digital skills. This includes the adoption of the Internet Skills Scale, as developed and validated by van Deursen et al.²¹ This identifies skills measures in five areas of competence: *operational skills*, including safety skills; *information navigation skills*, which enable critical engagement with online information; *social skills*, i.e., the ability to manage online relationships with others; *creative skills*, namely the capacity to produce online content; and *mobile skills*, related to the use of mobile devices.

In the survey, children were asked to report on their level of ability when carrying a range of common tasks associated with digital technologies. The question was framed as follows:

Please indicate how true the following things are of you when thinking about how you use technologies such as mobile phones and the internet. If you have never done this then think of how much this would apply to you if you had to do this now. On a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 is 'Not at all true of me' and 5 is 'Very true of me', how true are these of you?

Operational skills

Operational skills are defined as the skills to operate digital media. In this survey, skills associated with operating online safety features are included. Two items were used to measure operational skills: “*whether you know how to store an image you find online*” and “*whether you know how to change your privacy settings, for example on a social network*”.

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- 18 Livingstone, S., Ólafsson, K., Helsper, E. J., Lupiáñez-Villanueva, F., Veltri, G. A., & Folkvord, F. (2017). Maximizing Opportunities and Minimizing Risks for Children Online: The Role of Digital Skills in Emerging Strategies of Parental Mediation. *Journal of Communication*, 67(1), 82–105. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcom.12277>
- 19 Vandoninck, S., & D'Haenens, L. (2015). Children's online coping strategies: Rethinking coping typologies in a risk-specific approach. *Journal of Adolescence*, 45, 225–236. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2015.10.007>
- 20 Livingstone, S., Mascheroni, G., & Staksrud, E. (2018). European research on children's internet use: Assessing the past and anticipating the future. *New Media & Society*, 20(3), 1103–1122. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444816685930>
- 21 van Deursen, A. J. A. M., Helsper, E. J., & Eynon, R. (2016). Development and validation of the Internet Skills Scale (ISS). *Information, Communication & Society*, 19(6), 804–823. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2015.1078834>

Table 7: Overview of digital skills, by age and gender

% Who say somewhat true or very true	9-12 years		13-17 years		All
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
I know how to save a photo that I find online	60	55	88	94	76
I know how to change my privacy settings (e.g., on a social networking site)	44	45	90	92	70
Average score of operational skills (0-10)	6.1	5.9	8.8	9.0	7.6

Q.F1 On a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 is 'Not at all true of me' and 5 is 'Very true of me', how true are these of you?
Response items: Not true of me; Somewhat not true of me; Neither true nor not true of me; Somewhat true of me; Very true of me; Prefer not to say

Base: All children who use the internet.

Regarding operational skills associated with saving digital content found online, three quarters of children (76%) reported that this was somewhat true or very true of them. 70% overall reported operational skills associated with privacy settings.

- Age is the main factor in reporting levels of digital skills. While just over half of 9–12-year-olds report knowing how to manipulate or save online photos, this rises to 90% for 13–17-year-olds. Less than half (45%) of 9–12-year-olds say they know how to change their privacy settings whereas over 90% of 13–17-year-olds say they can do this.
- Girls aged 13-17 report slightly higher levels of operational skill than boys (94% and 92% versus 88% and 90% respectively). Girls in this age category have the highest average score for operational skills overall. Girls aged 9-12 lag somewhat behind boys in reported levels of operational skills.

Information navigation skills

Information navigation skills are defined as “the skills to search, select and evaluate information in digital media”²² and are represented here by the two items: “I find it easy to check if the information I find online is true” and “I find it easy to choose the best keywords for online searches”.

Table 8: Information navigation skills, by age and gender

% Who say somewhat true or very true	9-12 years		13-17 years		All
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
I find it easy to check if the information I find online is true	35	32	77	75	57
I find it easy to choose the best keywords for online searches	48	48	80	82	66
Average score (0-10)	5.6	5.4	8.2	8.2	7.0

Q.F1 On a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 is 'Not at all true of me' and 5 is 'Very true of me', how true are these of you?
Response items: Not true of me; Somewhat not true of me; Neither true nor not true of me; Somewhat true of me; Very true of me; Prefer not to say

Base: All children who use the internet.

22 van Deursen, A. J. A. M., Helsper, E. J., & Eynon, R. (2016).

Children report an average score of 7.0 out of 10 for the two items related to information navigation skills

- 57% of children overall say they find it easy to check if information online is true. 66% of children say they find it easy to choose between the best keywords for online searches.
- Levels of information skills unsurprisingly rise with age. While just a third of 9–12-year-olds say they find it easy to check if the information they find online is true, this rises to three quarters of 13–17-year-olds. Just under a half of 9–12-year-olds, however, report greater levels of confidence regarding their online search skills.
- Gender differences in information skills are slight though boys claim slightly greater levels of skill compared to girls when checking information online.

Social skills

The specific skills required for the use of social media have been highlighted as a further key dimension of internet skills. Defined as “the social ability to pool knowledge and exchange meaning with others in peer-to-peer networking”, these are the social and communicative digital skills for many of the activities that take place on digital platforms.²³

In the survey, children were asked about two items related to sharing content and communication on social media platforms, namely “I know which information I should and shouldn't share online” and “I know how to remove people from my contact lists”.

Table 9: Social skills, by age and gender

% Who say somewhat true or very true	9-12 years		13-17 years		All
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
I know which information I should and shouldn't share online	69	70	94	96	83
I know how to remove people from my contact lists	61	56	93	95	78
Average score (0-10)	7.1	7.0	9.2	9.2	8.3

Q.F1 On a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 is 'Not at all true of me' and 5 is 'Very true of me', how true are these of you?
 Response items: Not true of me; Somewhat not true of me; Neither true nor not true of me; Somewhat true of me; Very true of me; Prefer not to say
 Base: All children who use the internet.

High levels of social and communicative skills are reported by children in both items asked about.

- 83% of 9-17 year olds say they know which information they should and shouldn't share online. This is especially the case for 13-17 year olds, 95% of whom say this is true or very true of them.
- A similar proportion of 13-17 year olds say they know how to remove people from their contact lists. For the 9-12 year old group, 61% of boys and 56% of girls say this is either true or very true of them.
- The average score given for social and communicative skills is high with 8.3 out of 10 given to both items. As with other categories of digital skills, social skills increase with age.

- In terms of gender, girls, aged 13-17 years, report slightly higher skills while boys, aged 9-12, report being better skilled at managing contacts.

Creative skills

Creative skills are included as a further category of overall digital skills and are particularly significant given the prominence of multimodal content in digital settings. Creative skills are important for effective use of a variety of digital services and refer to skills beyond the purely technical or operational.²⁴ Creative skills are also an important indicator of higher levels of digital engagement and participation.²⁵

Children were asked about two items relating to creative and digital content production: “I know how to create and post online video or music” and “I know how to edit or make basic changes to online content that others have created”.

Table 10: Creative skills, by age and gender

% Who say somewhat true or very true	9-12 years		13-17 years		All
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
I know how to create and post online video or music	50	43	84	86	68
I know how to edit or make basic changes to online content that others have created [just check as they are identical]	33	26	63	63	48
Average score (0-10)	5.3	4.9	7.8	7.9	6.4

Q.F1 On a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 is ‘Not at all true of me’ and 5 is ‘Very true of me’, how true are these of you?
Response items: Not true of me; Somewhat not true of me; Neither true nor not true of me; Somewhat true of me; Very true of me; Prefer not to say
Base: All children who use the internet.

In the general area of creative digital skills, 58% report being able to practice the skills referred to.

- 68% say they know how to create and post online video or music. For 13-17 year olds, this rises to 85%.
- Younger children report much lower levels of creative skills. Just one third of boys aged 9-12 (33%) and one quarter of girls (26%) say that it is true or very true of them that they know how to create, post or edit online digital content. The average score for creative skills for 9-12 years is 5.1 out of 10. This compares to 7.8 out of 10 for 13-17 year olds.
- Gender differences are apparent only among the younger age group of 9-12 years where more boys than girls report creative skills. There are no gender differences among 13-17-year-olds.

24 Helsper, E. J., & Eynon, R. (2013). Distinct skill pathways to digital engagement. *European Journal of Communication*, 28(6), 696–713. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323113499113>

25 Helsper, E.J., Van Deursen, A.J.A.M., & Eynon, R. (2015). Tangible Outcomes of Internet Use. From Digital Skills to Tangible Outcomes project report. Available at: www.oii.ox.ac.uk/research/projects/?id=112

Mobile skills

A separate scale for mobile skills has been identified in the literature as an important means of understanding the importance and distribution of skills using mobile devices.²⁶ Three items are included within the category of mobile skills: “I know how to install apps on a mobile device (e.g. phone or tablet)”, “I know how to keep track of the costs of mobile app use” and “I know how to make an in-app purchase”.

Table 11: Mobile Skills

% Who say somewhat true or very true	9-12 years		13-17 years		All
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
I know how to install apps on a mobile device (e.g., phone or tablet)	72	73	98	95	86
I know how to keep track of the costs of mobile app use	27	26	73	68	51
I know how to make an in-app purchase	44	26	85	75	60
Average score (0-10)	6.0	5.5	8.6	8.3	7.3

Q.F1 On a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 is 'Not at all true of me' and 5 is 'Very true of me', how true are these of you?
Response items: Not true of me; Somewhat not true of me; Neither true nor not true of me; Somewhat true of me; Very true of me; Prefer not to say
Base: All children who use the internet.

The overall average score for mobile skills as reported by children aged 9-17 years is 7.3 out of 10.

- The highest reports of mobile skills are in relation to installing apps on mobile devices. Three quarters of 9-12 year olds and nearly all 13-17 years report that they can do this.
- 60% of all children say they know how to make an in-app purchase and just over half (51%) report knowing how to keep track of the costs of mobile app use. Not surprisingly, this is much less the case for 9-12 year olds.
- In terms of gender differences, boys overall report better mobile skills than girls, particular so in regards to making in-app purchases. Boys, aged 13-17 years, report the highest overall average score for mobile skills.

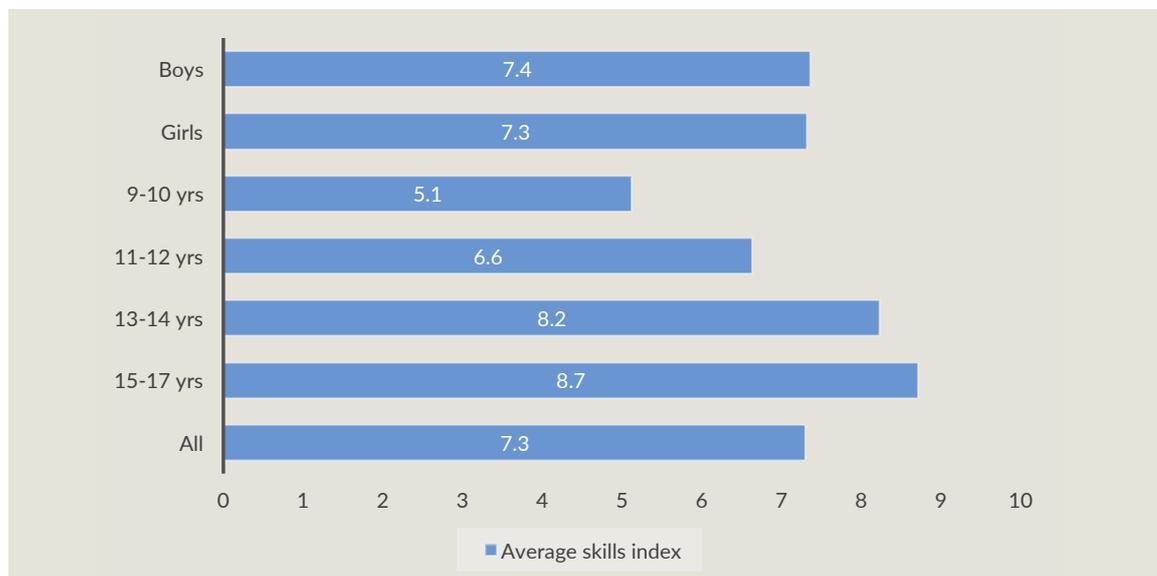
Overall digital skills

The importance of age in the attainment of digital skills is highlighted below with a comparison of the average score (0-10) for the various items listed in the questionnaire. As shown in Figure 7 below, the average scope for overall digital skills ranges from 5.1 out of 10 as reported by 9-10-year-olds, rising to a score of 8.7 out of 10 for 15-17-year-olds.

On the other hand, digital skills are balanced across both genders with an average of 7.4 and 7.3 respectively for boys and girls.

26 van Deursen, A. J. A. M., Helsper, E. J., & Eynon, R. (2016), p. 14.

Figure 7: Overall digital skills, by age and gender

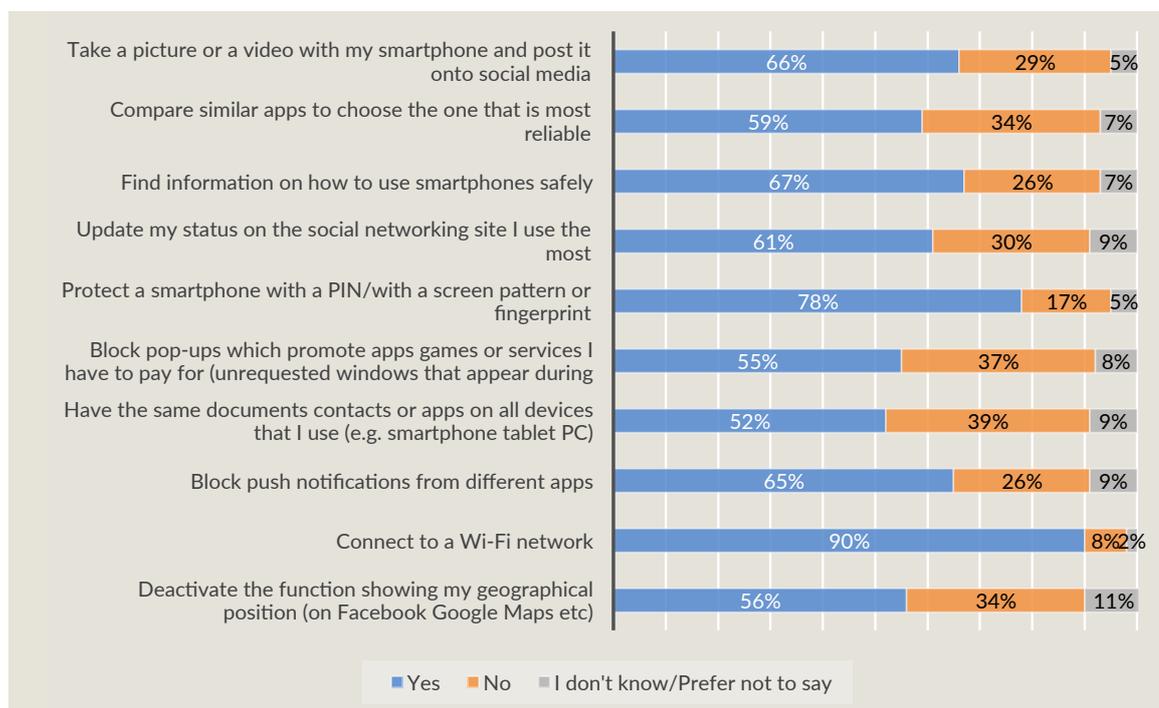


Derived from Q.F1 On a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 is 'Not at all true of me' and 5 is 'Very true of me', how true are these of you? Response items: Not true of me; Somewhat not true of me; Neither true nor not true of me; Somewhat true of me; Very true of me; Prefer not to say.
 Base: All children who use the internet.

In addition to questions regarding digital skills derived from the Internet Skills Scale (ISS), children were also asked about several operational and functional aspects related specifically to mobile devices, smartphones, and tablets. The aim of this question was to gain some further understanding into the availability of children's skills in managing and controlling features specific to these devices.

Figure 8 provides a summary of responses from children, aged 9-17 years, to the diverse functions associated with mobile devices.

Figure 8: Mobile device skills



Q.F2 Which of these things do you know how to do on a smartphone or tablet?

Base: All children who use the internet.

Key findings in relation to mobile device skills are as follows:

- 90% of all children report knowing how to connect to a Wi-Fi network. This is the feature with the highest number of positive responses.
- Conversely, just over half (52%) say they do not know how to synchronise content across multiple devices. This is the item with the lowest number of positive responses.
- In terms of online safety features, while two thirds (67%) say they know where to find information on how to use smartphones safely, over a quarter (26%) do not know where to find this information.
- Just over half say they know how to deactivate location services to protect their privacy (56%). 34% state they do not know how to do this and 10% report that they do know what this is.
- Similarly, 55% say they know to block pop-ups while using a browser. 37% do not know how to do this and 7% do not know what this is.
- A much higher proportion, 78% of all children 9-17 years, say they know how to protect a smartphone with a PIN or other locking feature.

Risks and online activities

This section of the report looks at online activities and experiences that may expose to children to risks, around which online safety efforts have concentrated. Following on the previous sections dealing with access, practices and skills, the survey looks at those specific “risky opportunities”²⁷ that children engage in, and which in some situations, may cause harm to the child. Note that under this theoretical model, risks and opportunities are closely linked and often go hand in hand in the sense that the more online opportunities children avail of, the more likely they are to encounter risks.²⁸ In many cases, online activities cannot be definitively categorised as either positive or negative. Rather, it is a matter for research to determine which activities in which circumstances are more likely to lead to negative outcomes and to target preventative measures accordingly.

Risks in the digital environment continue to evolve and for both practical and ethical reasons it is not possible to include all areas of risk in any one survey. Risks have traditionally been classified as either *content*, *contact* or *conduct* related risks depending on the nature of the activity and its potential outcome. This classification of the three Cs of risks was introduced in the context of the first EU Kids Online pan-European survey²⁹ and has been recently revised to include a fourth C of *contract risks*, reflecting the range of commercial and consumer risks faced by children in the context of a thoroughly commercialised digital environment.³⁰

The risks and online activities covered in this section are as follows: *overall negative experiences encountered online, meeting new people online, online aggression and cyberbullying, exposure to sexual content, receiving and sending sexual messages, exposure to potentially harmful content, the misuse of personal data, excessive online use, and having one’s information shared by others*. We also include a section about children’s preferences for online communication, which may represent either a risk or opportunity.

Overall negative online experiences

Before asking about specific online activities which may expose them to risks, children were first asked if they had ever had a negative experience of any kind online. This question builds on items from previous surveys which have asked children about things online that would bother or upset them or make them wish they had not seen it. The question was framed as follows: *In the PAST YEAR, has anything EVER happened online that bothered or upset you in some way (e.g., made you feel upset, uncomfortable, scared or that you shouldn’t have seen it)?*

Findings for negative online experiences are given in Figure 9 below and show that overall, 13% of children, aged 9-17 years have experienced something in the last year that bothered or upset them. Age and gender stand out in reporting of negative online experiences.

27 Livingstone, S. (2014). Developing social media literacy: How children learn to interpret risky opportunities on social network sites. *Communications*, 39(3), 283–303. <https://doi.org/10.1515/commun-2014-0113>

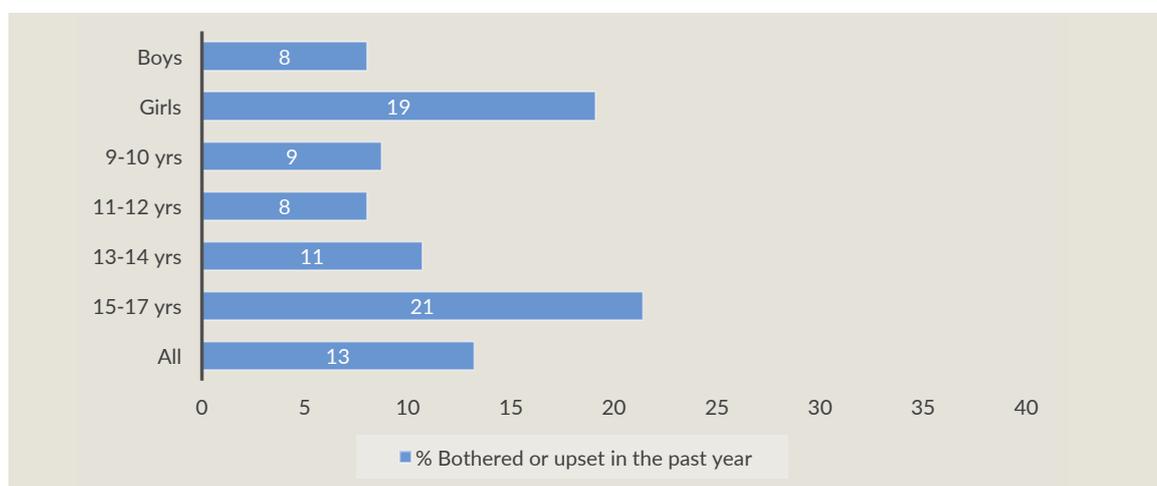
28 Stoilova, M., Livingstone, S., & Khazbak, R. (2021). Investigating Risks and Opportunities for Children in a Digital World: (p. 82). UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.

29 Staksrud, E., & Livingstone, S. (2009). Children and online risk: Powerless victims or resourceful participants? *Information, Communication & Society*, 12(3), 364–387. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691180802635455>

30 Livingstone, S., & Stoilova, M. (2021). The 4Cs: Classifying online risk to children. *CO:RE Short Report Series on Key Topics*. <https://doi.org/10.21241/SSOAR.71817>

- More than twice as many girls as boys report being upset by something they experienced online. One in five girls (19%) report being bothered in this way compared to less than one in ten boys (8%).
- Older users, aged 15-17 years, report more frequently that they have been upset in this way with 21% reporting having had a negative online experience in the last year. At the same time, approximately one in ten of younger age groups also report being upset by something they have encountered online.
- Reports of overall negative online experiences have declined somewhat when compared to previous national surveys. Net Children Go Mobile in 2014 found that 20% of children had been bothered by something on the internet in the past year.³¹ The previous EU Kids Online survey in Ireland found that 14% of children had been bothered by something online.³²

Figure 9: Negative online experiences, by age and gender



Q.D1. In the PAST YEAR, has anything EVER happened online that bothered or upset you in some way (e.g., made you feel upset, uncomfortable, scared or that you shouldn't have seen it)?

Base: All children who use the internet

Children were then asked, using a free text option, to give examples of the kinds of things that upset children their age. A range of examples were offered, the most frequent of which are summarised in Table 12.

Here, *people being nasty to each other* (24%) and *bullying* (22%) stand out as the most mentioned items that upset young people. Notably, 26% of girls listed *people being nasty to each other* as the most frequent issue that upsets them.

Inappropriate or disturbing videos and photos is the next most significant category of content listed by children as upsetting, followed by the related issue of *animal cruelty* online.

31 Net Children Go Mobile (2015), p.39

32 Risks and safety for children on the internet: The Ireland report (2015), p.28

Table 12: Things that upset young people, by gender.

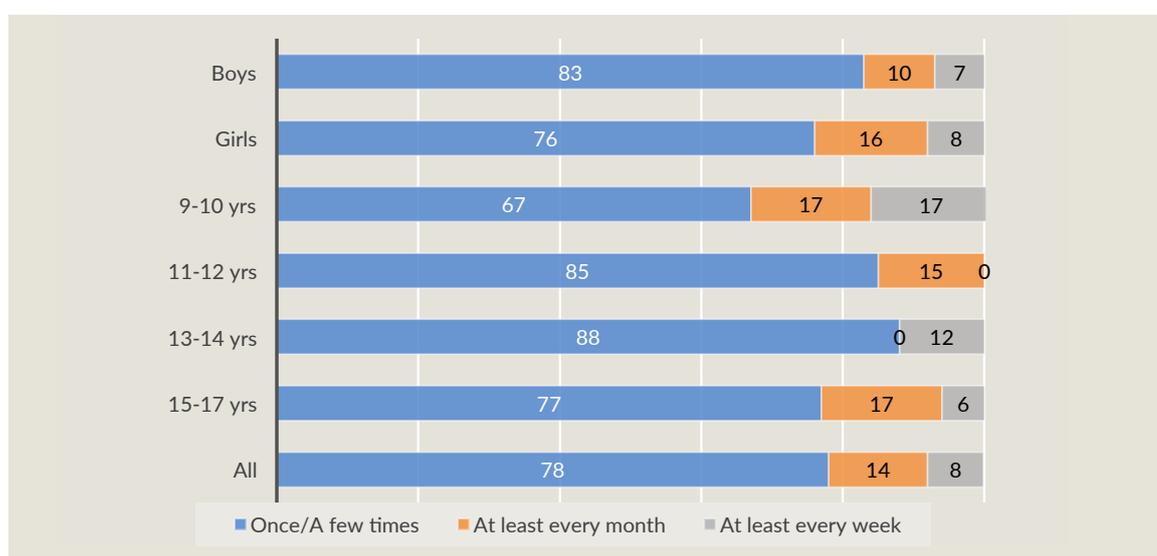
	Boys	Girls	9-10 yrs	11-12 yrs	13-14 yrs	15-17 yrs	All
Bullying	20	23	8	7	28	29	22
Slagging	7	2	0	7	6	2	3
Judging	3	2	0	0	6	2	2
People being nasty to each other	20	25	8	29	39	21	24
Material relating to body image/ extreme dieting	0	5	0	0	0	6	3
Inappropriate/disturbing videos/ photos	23	17	17	21	28	15	19
Animal cruelty	3	12	17	0	11	10	9
Other	7	26	33	14	6	23	20

Q.D6 What things on the internet bother or upset people about your age?

Base: All who EVER had anything happen online that bothered or upset them

Children who had been upset by a negative online experience in the past year were then asked several follow up questions about the frequency of such occurrences and any action they took in response. Figure 10 presents an overview of how often such negative experiences occurred.

Figure 10: Frequency of negative online experiences, by age and gender



Q.D2. In the PAST YEAR, how often did this happen?

Base - All who EVER had anything happen online that bothered or upset them

- For those who had this experience, in three quarters of cases, this happened once or a few times. In 14% of cases, this happened monthly and in a further 8%, this happened at least once a week.

- For younger children, 9-10 years, this was a more frequent occurrence though the small numbers involved do not allow drawing any conclusion from this.
- Among 15–17-year-olds, 23% say this is something they encounter at least every month or more frequently.

Children were also asked about whether they had spoken to anyone (parents, peers, teachers, other trusted adults etc.) when something happened online that bothered or upset them. Findings are summarised in Table 13.

Table 13: Telling someone about negative online experience, by age and gender

% which say...	9-12 yrs		13-17 yrs		All
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
My mother or father (or step/foster mother or father)	67	90	48	51	62
A friend around my age	13	21	24	63	43
My brother or sister (or step/foster/half sibling)	38	5	10	16	15
I didn't talk to anyone	0	5	30	0	7
A Teacher	0	5	5	0	2
Someone else	13	0	5	5	5
Someone whose job it is to help children	0	0	0	0	0
Another adult I trust	0	5	5	5	4

Q.D3 The last time something happened online that bothered or upset you, did you talk to any of these people about it?
Base - All who EVER had anything happen online that bothered or upset them

- The majority of children report turning to one of their parents (62%), friends (43%) or siblings (15%) as sources of social support.
- Younger children report more often talking to their parents than anyone else, with girls more frequently turning to mothers and older boys seeking support from parents or carers.
- Relatively few say they would talk to teachers (2%) when they have a negative online experience. There were no reports of talking to someone whose job is to help children.
- Interestingly, younger boys (9-12 years) report more often speaking to their brothers or sisters about negative experience online (38%) more so than with other groups

Children were then asked about any proactive action they had taken in response to the upsetting experience. A range of possible actions were included such as *proactive responses* (blocking the person, reporting the problem, changing privacy settings) as well as more *fatalistic responses* such as stopping internet use, closing the app or ignoring the problem, hoping it would go away by itself.

Table 14: Actions following a negative online experience, by age and gender

% which say...	9-12 yrs		13-17 yrs		All
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
I blocked the person from contacting me	13	42	24	30	29
I ignored the problem or hoped the problem would go away by itself	22	15	29	16	19
I closed the window or app	13	30	10	30	24
I deleted any messages from the other person	13	10	15	19	15
I felt a bit guilty about what went wrong	13	5	0	14	9
I tried to get the other person to leave me alone	0	10	10	7	8
I tried to get back at the other person	13	11	0	0	3
I stopped using the internet for a while	0	11	5	9	8
I changed my privacy/contact settings	0	10	15	2	7
I reported the problem online (e.g. clicked on a 'report abuse' button or contacted an internet advisor or Internet Service Provider (ISP))	0	11	10	16	12
Something else	38	11	14	13	15

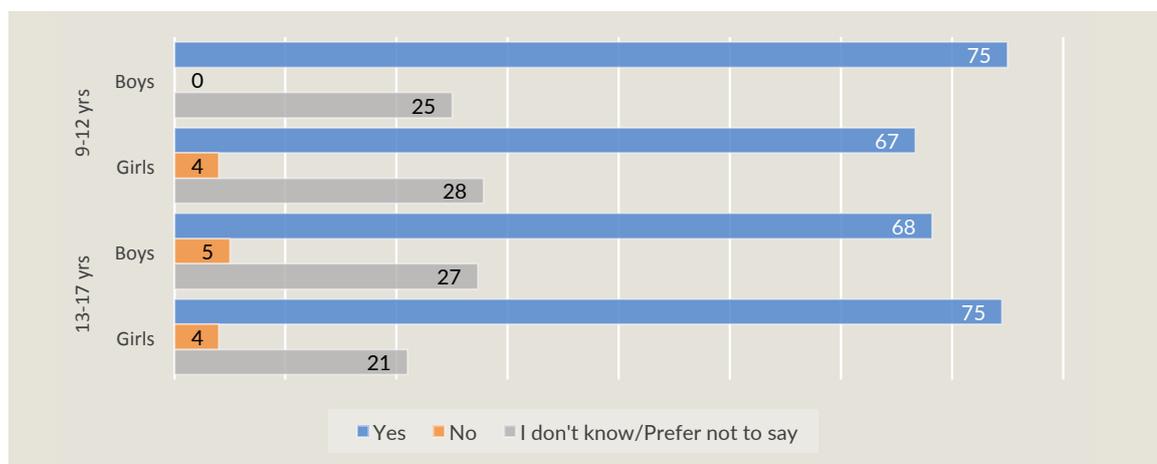
QD4 The last time you had problems with something or someone online that bothered or upset you in some way did you do any of these things afterwards?

Base - All who EVER had anything happen online that bothered or upset them

Findings in relation to actions taken following a negative online experience show a mixed range of responses:

- The most common response to a negative online experience is blocking the person who has caused the problem. This is the action reported by 29% of those who had such a negative online experience. Girls more frequently report blocking contacts in this way, as reported by 42% of 9–12-year-olds and 30% of 13–17-year-olds.
- The next most common response reported is to close the window or the app to shut out the upsetting experience. This is reported by 24% overall, again something that features more strongly with girls, one third of whom say they do this.
- Other reactive responses include “ignoring the problem and hoping it would go away by itself”. This was reported by 19% of 9–17-year-olds and by 29% of 13–17-year-old boys.
- 12% overall say they reported the problem online (e.g., clicked on a ‘report abuse’ button or contacted an internet advisor or Internet Service Provider (ISP)). More girls report doing this compared to boys (16% vs. 10%).

Finally, in this section, children were asked if the actions they had taken helped to solve the problem.

Figure 11: Effectiveness of actions taken, by age and gender

QD5 And did doing this help you?

Base - All who EVER had anything happen online that bothered or upset them

In most cases, children reported positively that this had helped.

- 72% of children aged 9-17 years say this did help. Just 4% report that the action taken had not helped. Nearly a quarter, however, said that they did not know or preferred not to say whether the action had helped them.
- Among 9–12-year-olds, boys more so than girls were happy that the outcome had helped them (75% vs. 67%).
- Among 13–17-year-olds, this is reversed with three quarters of girls (75%) compared to 68% of boys reporting that the actions taken had helped.
- While the numbers of those reporting that this did not help are small, approximately a quarter in both age categories are not sure if the actions had helped.

Meeting new people online

Meeting new people online who are not known to the child offline is one of those activities that may be a risk or an opportunity. On the one hand, children – as with many adults – use the digital environment to make new friends and to socialise and interact with their peers. On the other hand, media representations of the risks of contacting people you don't know in real life, or worse – online predatory behaviour by strangers, suggests this to be very unsafe, even if research shows that such risks are rare.³³ At the same time, children themselves frequently highlight unwanted contacts from strangers as something they find very problematic during their online use.³⁴

To examine this area of contact risk further, children were asked several general questions about looking for new contacts or friends online, including if they had ever shared personal information

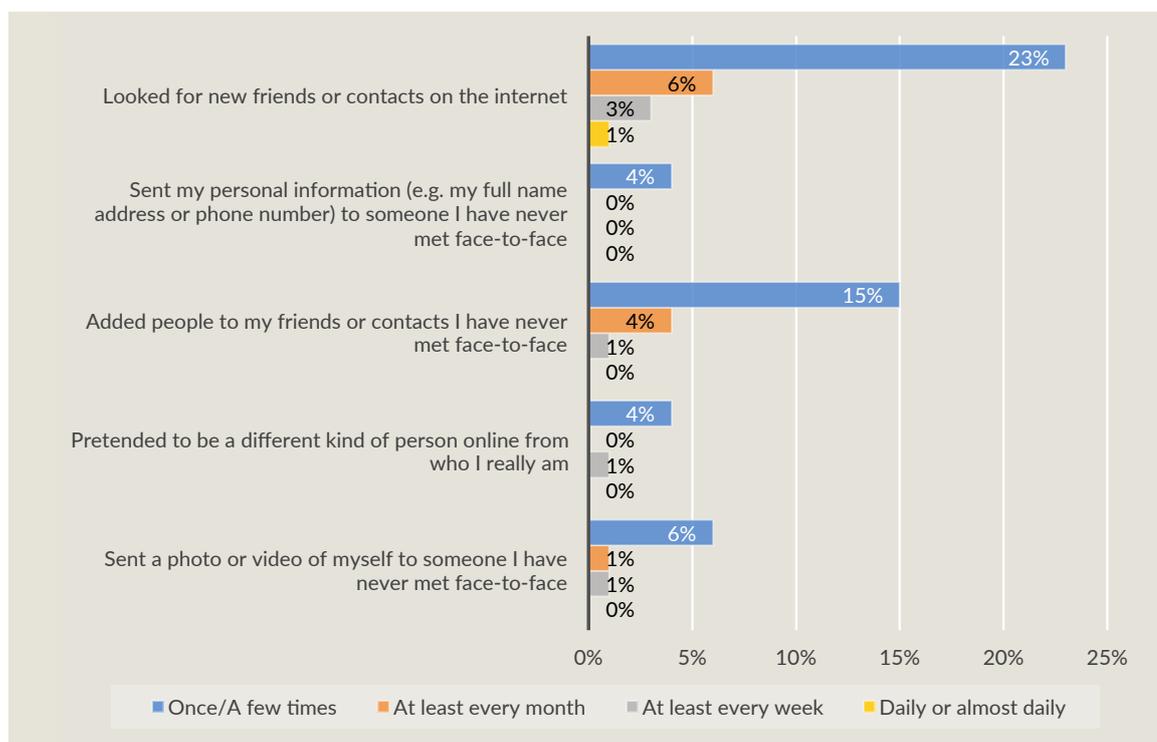
33 Dedkova, L., Cerna, A., Janasova, K., & Daneback, K. (2014). Meeting online strangers offline: The nature of upsetting experiences of adolescent girls. *Communications*, 39(3), 327–346. <https://doi.org/10.1515/commun-2014-0115>

34 Smahel, D., & Wright, M. F. (2014). The meaning of online problematic situations for children. Results of qualitative cross-cultural investigation in nine European countries. *EU Kids Online*. http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/56972/1/EU_Kids_Online_Report_Online_Problematic_Situations_for_Children_June2014.pdf

such as their name, address, or phone number with someone they had not met face-to-face or added people as friends or contacts that they had not met previously. Care was taken not to use leading terms such as “strangers” or to portray meeting new people online as either good or bad.

A summary of responses is given in Figure 12.

Figure 12: Meeting new people and sharing information



Q.G1 In the PAST YEAR, how often have you done these things online?

Base: All children who use the internet

Practices regarding meeting new people and sharing information with people they have never met face-to-face show a mix of different responses.

- Approximately one third of children 9-17 years report that they have looked for new friends or contacts on the internet. 23% say this has happened once or a few times. 6% report that this happened at least every month with less 4% saying that this happened more frequently.
- One in five or 20% of all children, aged 9-17 years say they have added people to their friends or contacts that they have never met face-to-face. Just 5% say they do this on a regular basis, i.e., at least once per month.
- When it comes to sharing personal information with people they have not met face-to-face, children are much more cautious. Just 4% say they have done this a few times. However, 8% of children say they have sent a photo or a video of themselves to someone they have not met previously.
- In terms of sharing personal information with others not previously known to the child, 6% they have sent a photo or video of themselves once or a few times. 4% say they shared other personal information such as their name, address, or phone number occasionally.

- 4% also report that they have once, or a few times pretended to be a different kind of person online.

“Looked for new friends or contacts on the internet” is the most reported form of meeting new contacts and sharing information with others online. Data in Table 15 looks at this item in more detail.

Table 15: Looked for new friends or contacts on the internet

% who say ...	Boys	Girls	9-10 yrs	11-12 yrs	13-14 yrs	15-17 yrs	All
Never	66%	65%	85%	79%	60%	48%	65%
Once/A few times	21%	25%	11%	15%	30%	30%	23%
At least every month	7%	5%	1%	4%	5%	12%	6%
At least every week	4%	1%	1%	1%	2%	6%	3%
Daily or almost daily	1%	1%	0%	0%	1%	2%	1%
I don't know/Prefer not to say	1%	3%	2%	1%	1%	2%	2%
Any time	33%	32%	13%	20%	39%	49%	33%

Q.G1 In the PAST YEAR, how often have you done these things online?

Base: All children who use the internet

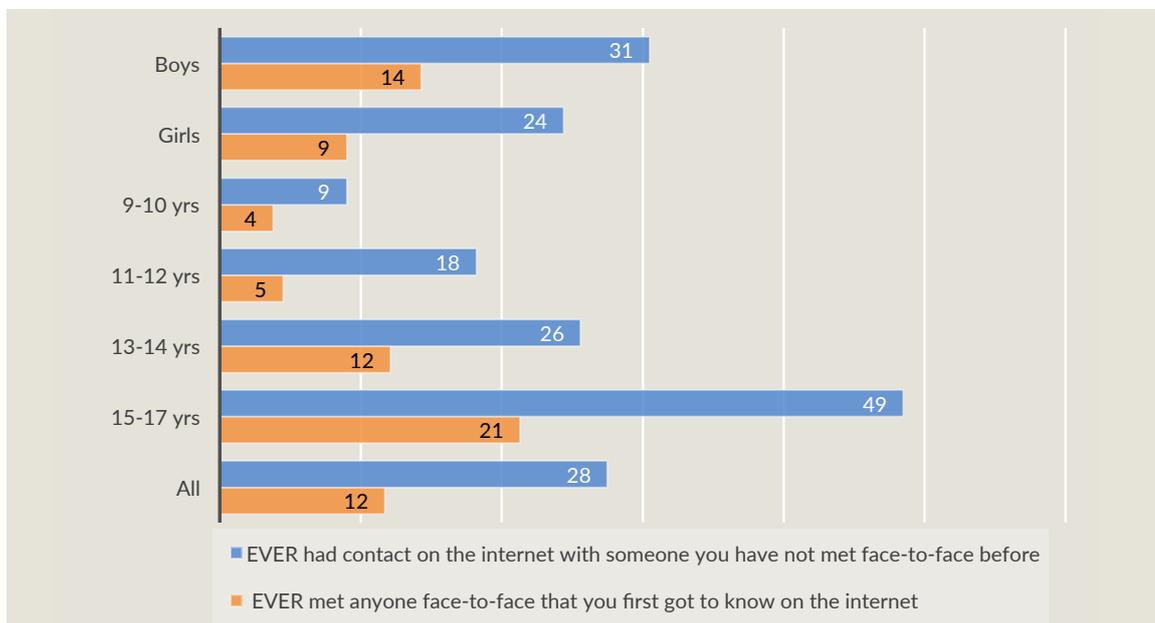
As reported by children, meeting new people online is a relatively infrequent occurrence.

- One third (33%) report ever looking for new friends or contacts on the internet. One quarter say that this happened once or a few times and 4% reported that it happened more frequently.
- Looking for new contacts on the internet is associated with age. While 13% of 9–10-year-olds say they have done this, one in five or 20% of 11–12-year-olds report having done this rising to 39% of 13–14-year-olds and just under half of 15–17-year-olds.
- There are few gender differences with equal numbers of girls and boys reporting that they have looked for new friends or contacts on the internet.

The survey then focused on two specific aspects of interaction with people children had not previously met face-to-face. Children were asked (1) if they had contact online with someone previously not known to them, and (2) whether they subsequently met this person face-to-face (Figure 13).

- Overall, 28% of children, aged 9-17 years, say they have had contact with someone online that they have not met before face-to-face. 12% of children state they have gone on to meet in the physical world contacts they had first made online.
- This primarily relates to older teenagers. More than one in five young people from 15-17 years have gone to a meeting face to face with someone they met online when only 4% of children 9-10 year have done this.
- Gender is also a factor with more boys than girls reporting that they have made new contacts online and gone on to meet contacts face-to-face.

Figure 13: Child has communicated online with, or gone to an offline meeting with, someone not met face-to-face before

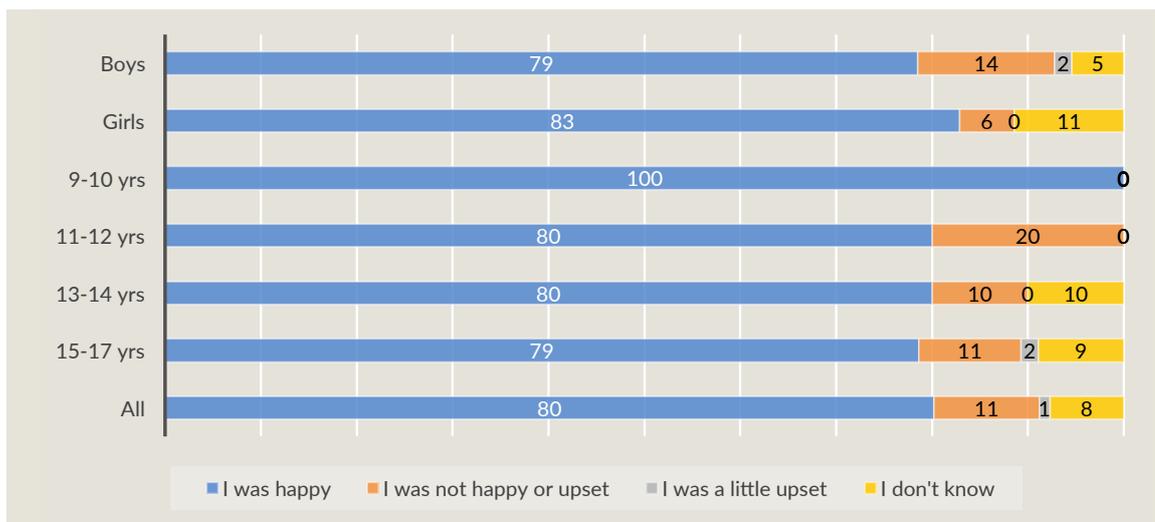


Q.G2 Have you EVER had contact on the internet with someone you have not met face-to-face before?

Q.G3 In the PAST YEAR have you EVER met anyone face-to-face that you first got to know on the internet?

To further understand from the child's perspective meeting contacts face-to-face that they first got to know online, children were asked about how they felt about the last time this had happened.

Figure 14: How children felt after meeting offline contacts in person (only those who had done so)



Q.G4 Thinking of the LAST TIME you met anyone face-to-face that you first got to know on the internet how did you feel about it?

As shown in Figure 14, most children report meeting offline contacts in person as a positive experience.

- 80% of children 9-17 years say they were happy with meeting contacts in person this as a positive experience and only 2% report that they were a little upset by the experience.
- Noting that meeting contacts face-to-face that they had first met online is primarily associated with young people 15-17 years, the majority in this age group are positive about the experience they had. 11% said they were neither happy nor upset.

Online aggression and cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is one of the most widely discussed forms of online harm that children may encounter in the digital environment. Research shows that bullying and aggression is a complex, multifaceted problem with both offline and online dimensions.³⁵ While the focus here is on bullying that takes place online, it is important also to contextualise this within the wider environment within which bullying takes place and to consider not just children who may be victims of bullying but also those who may be involved as aggressors themselves.

Given the complexity of the topic and the diversity of terms that are used to characterise this form of conduct risk, the term “bullying” itself was not used in the questionnaire. Instead, a broader description of aggressive behaviour was used as follows:

Sometimes children or teenagers say or do hurtful or nasty things to someone and this can often be quite a few times on different days over a period of time, for example. This can include:

- *teasing someone in a way this person does not like*
- *hitting, kicking or pushing someone around*
- *leaving someone out of things*

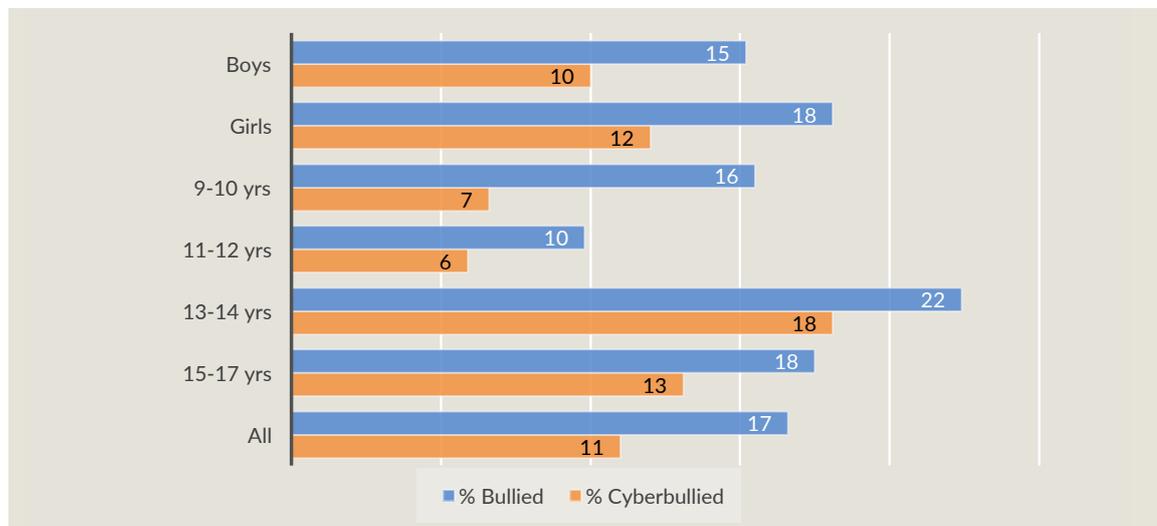
When people are hurtful or nasty to someone in this way, it can happen:

- *face to face (in person)*
- *by mobile phones (texts, calls, video clips)*
- *on the internet (e-mail, instant messaging, social networking, chatrooms)*

In the survey, children were first asked if anyone in the past year had ever treated them in such a hurtful or nasty way. Children were then asked whether this had taken place either face-to-face or online. Responses are summarised below.

³⁵ Richardson, J., Milovidov, Elizabeth., & Blamire, Roger. (2017). *Bullying: Perspectives, practice and insights*. Council of Europe.

Figure 15: Experiences of being bullied (online and offline), by age and gender



Q.G6 In the PAST YEAR has anyone EVER treated you in such a hurtful or nasty way?

Q.G7 In the PAST YEAR, how often did this happen in the following ways? Via a mobile phone or internet computer tablet

Base: All children who use the internet

Responses show that bullying is something that is experienced at all ages and by both boys and girls.

- 17% of children 9-17 years reported that they had some form of bullying, either online or offline, in the past year. The highest number of reports comes from 13-14-year-olds, 22% of whom report having been bullied in the past year.
- More girls report experiencing bullying of any kind, either online or offline, than boys (18% for girls compared to 15% of boys).
- 11% of all children say they have experienced cyberbullying in the past 12 months. This compares to the 17% of children who have been bullied either online or offline in the past year. 13-14-year-olds again report the highest levels of being cyberbullied. 18% say they have been bullied online in the past year. Girls report being the victims of bullying online somewhat more than boys (12% vs. 10%).
- Findings in respect of overall incidence of bullying have declined when compared to the Net Children Go Mobile study of 2014 which reported 22% of children had experienced bullying.³⁶ Previously, EU Kids Online had found 23% of children in Ireland had reported being bullied.³⁷
- Comparison with recent European EU Kids Online findings positions Ireland somewhat below the reported average of 23% of children overall reporting being bullied. However, the prevalence of victimisation ranges between 7% (Slovakia) and 40% (Poland). In most countries as reported in the 2020 study, more than 20% children experienced victimisation.³⁸

36 Net Children Go Mobile (2015), p.43.

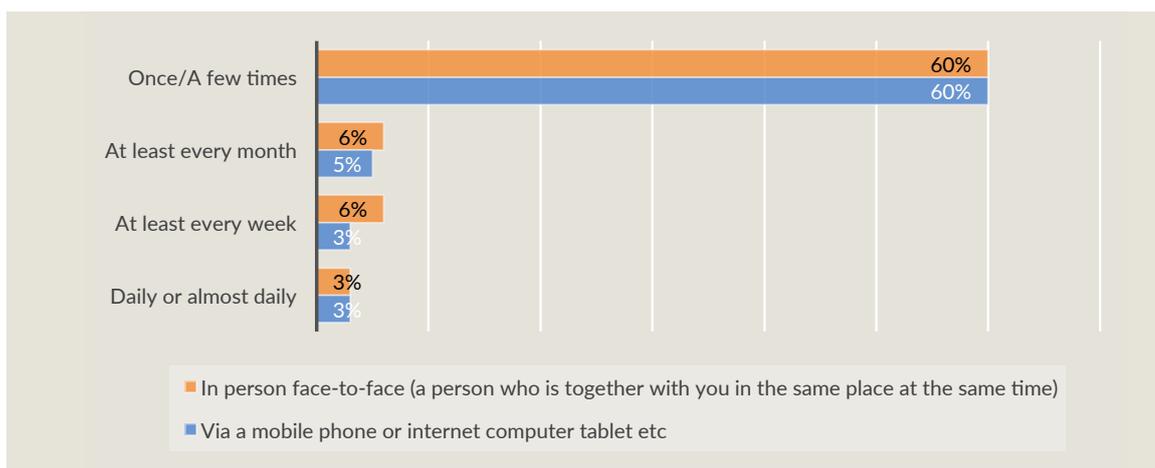
37 Risks and safety for children on the internet: The Ireland report (2015), p.33

38 EU Kids Online 2020: Survey results from 19 countries (2020), p.53.

Children were then asked how often this happened to them, both with regard to bullying in person face-to-face and bullying that occurred via a mobile phone, computer, or tablet.

As shown in Figure 16, reports of the frequency of being bullied either offline or online are broadly equivalent with equal numbers reporting bullying taking place occasionally (once or a few times), monthly or more frequently. Not all children chose to report how often they had experienced this.

Figure 16: Frequency of being bullied, offline and online

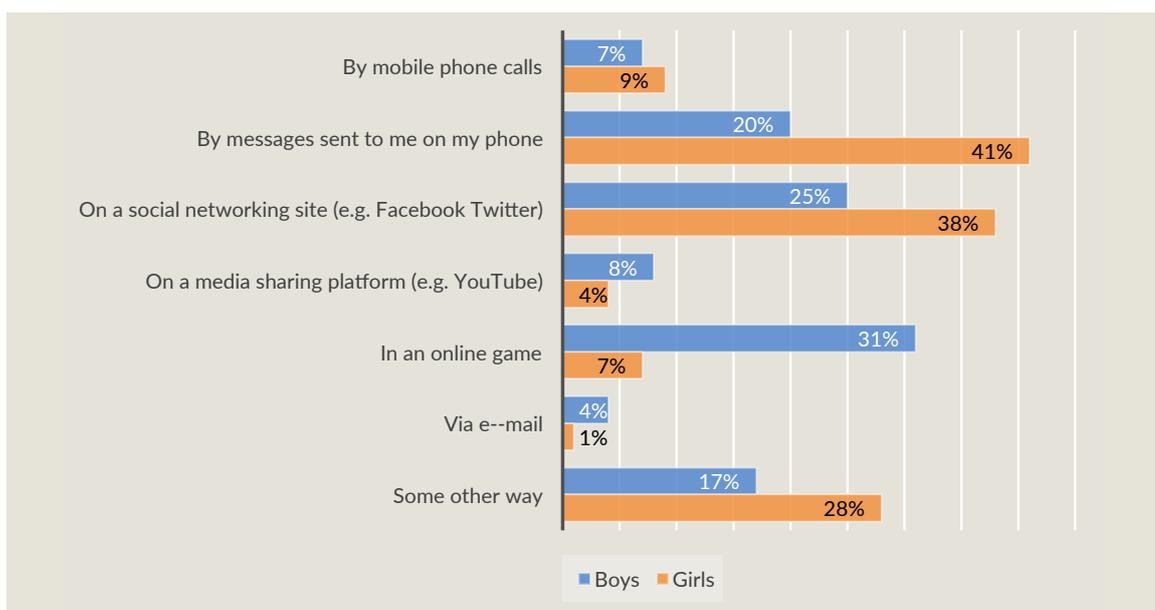


Q.G7 In the PAST YEAR, how often did this happen in the following ways?

Base: All those who have been bullied (QG6)

For those who had been cyberbullied, several follow up questions were asked to determine where and how the cyberbullying occurred.

Figure 17: How cyberbullying occurred, by gender



Q.G8 When you were treated in this way online or via a mobile device has it happened through any of the following?

Base: All those who had experienced cyberbullying (QG7)

For those who have experienced cyberbullying, several different forms of online bullying are reported.

- The most common way for this to happen is on a social networking site such as Facebook or Twitter. This is reported by 32% of those who been victimised, with 38% of girls and 25% of boys reporting that this happened to them.
- The next most common way in which cyberbullying is experienced is via messages sent by mobile phone. This is reported by 30% of those who had experienced cyberbullying. This is again much more the case for girls, 40% of whom said that this happened to them and 20% of boys.
- Online games platforms are the next most reported setting in which cyberbullying took place with 31% of boys and 7% of girls reporting that they had experienced this.

Children were also asked which of the most common forms of cyberbullying happened to them. Again, this question was only asked of those who had experienced cyberbullying.

Table 16: Cyberbullying, by age and gender

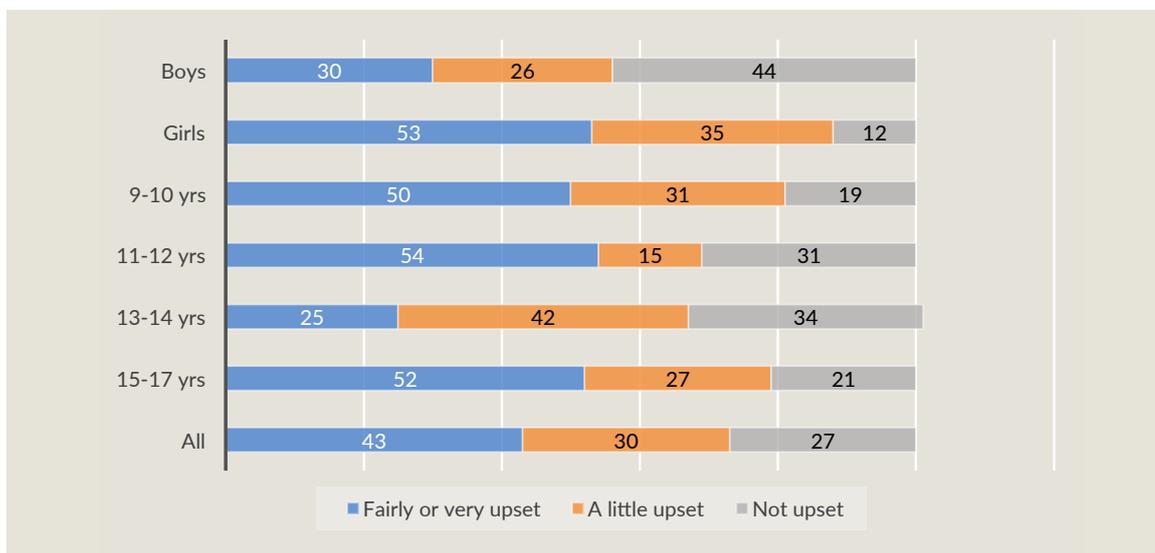
% this happened to	Boys	Girls	9-10 yrs	11-12 yrs	13-14 yrs	15-17 yrs	All
Nasty or hurtful messages were sent to me	56	62	30	42	72	71	59
Nasty or hurtful messages were passed around or posted where others could see	17	31	9	16	36	26	24
I was left out or excluded from a group or activity on the internet	24	31	17	21	31	36	28
I was forced to do something I did not want to do	15	9	0	5	8	0	3
Other nasty or hurtful things happened to me on the internet	13	14	4	21	19	12	14

Q.G9 Have any of these things happened to you in the last year
 Base: All those who had experienced cyberbullying (Q.G7)

- Having nasty or hurtful messages sent to the young person is the common form of cyberbullying reported. Of those who had reported being cyberbullied, 59% said this happened to them. More girls report this happening than boys (62% vs. 56%).
- Receiving nasty messages is very much influenced by age. Of those who had been cyberbullied, nearly three quarters of 13–17-year-olds said this happened to them.
- Being left out or excluded from a group or activity on the internet is the next most common form of bullying behaviour online. 28% of those who reported being bullied online said this happened to them. Again, more girls and older age groups report this.
- 24% of those that had been bullied online reported that nasty or hurtful messages were passed around or posted where others could see. Twice as many girls as boys said this happened to them.

Gauging children’s response to the experience of being bullied online and assessing its impact is a further important question for research. Referring to the last time they had experienced being bullied online, children were then asked how the experience made them feel.

Figure 18: Impact of cyberbullying, by age and gender



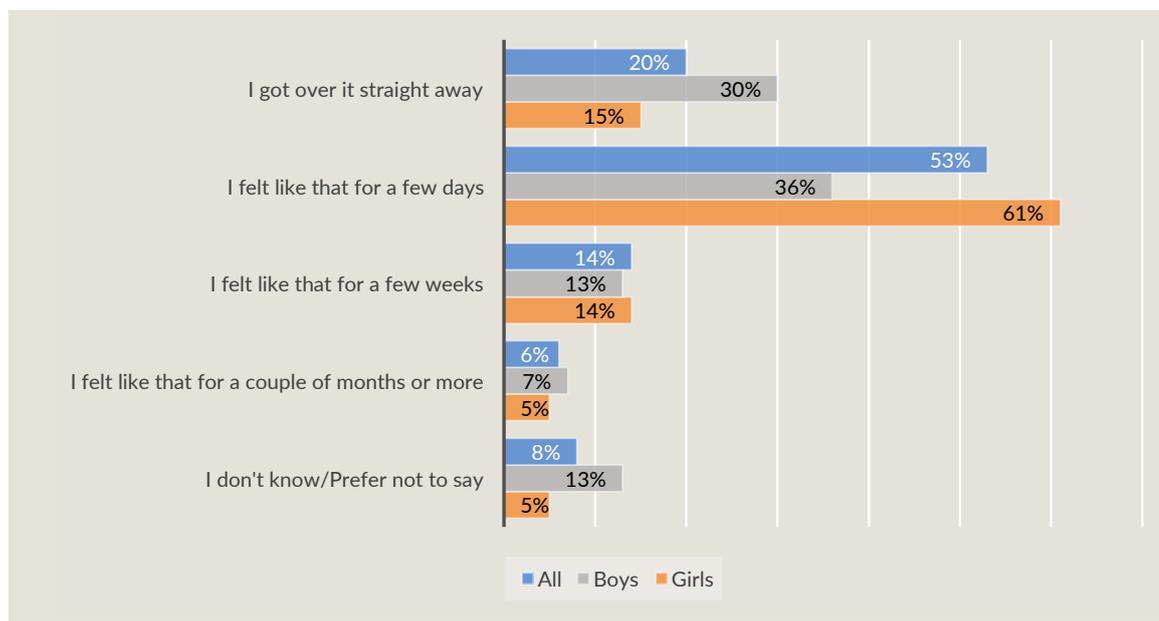
Q.G10 Thinking of the LAST TIME someone treated you in a hurtful or nasty way ONLINE how did you feel?
 Base: All those who had experienced cyberbullying (QG7)

Reinforcing previous findings in the literature that cyberbullying is one of the areas of risk that has the highest level of impact, findings in this survey confirm the level of upset caused to children who have experienced this.

- Of those who had been bullied, 43% of children say they were fairly or very upset by what happened. 31% were a little bit upset and 27% not upset at all.
- More girls report being affected by what happened: 51% of girls compared to 30% of boys say they were fairly or very upset by what happened.
- The influence of age is interesting: most of the younger age groups of 9-10 years and 11-12-year-olds say they were fairly or very upset (50% and 54% respectively). 13-14-year-olds report less serious impact though this increases again to over half of 52% of 15-17-year-olds.

Children were then asked for how long after the incident did they feel like this?

Figure 19: Duration of impact, by gender

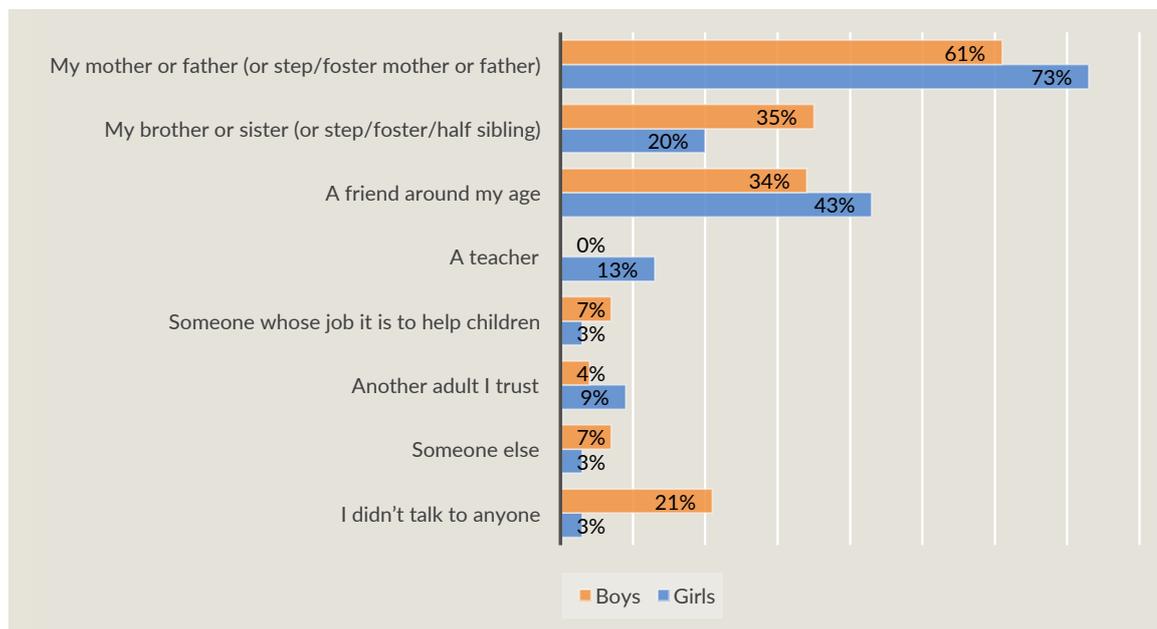


Q.G11 How long did you feel like that for?
 Base: All those who had experienced cyberbullying (QG7)

Responses to the duration of the impact of cyberbullying range from the child saying that he/she got it over it straight away to a more enduring impact from a few days to weeks, months or more.

- In one fifth of cases, children reported that they got over the experience straight away. Twice as many boys as girls reported this (30% vs. 15%)
- In just over half of cases (53%), children reported feeling like this for a couple of days. This was reported by twice as many girls as boys (61% vs. 36%)
- For a further 20%, children said that the effect was long lasting, i.e., that they felt like that for a couple of weeks or even a couple of months or more. Equal numbers of boys and girls reported this kind of long-lasting impact.

Children were also asked who they may have turned to for support following the experience of cyberbullying.

Figure 20: Sources of social support, by gender

Q.G12 When this happened to you whom if any did you talk to?
 Base: All those who had experienced cyberbullying (QG7)

The most important sources of social support in the context of cyberbullying are as follows:

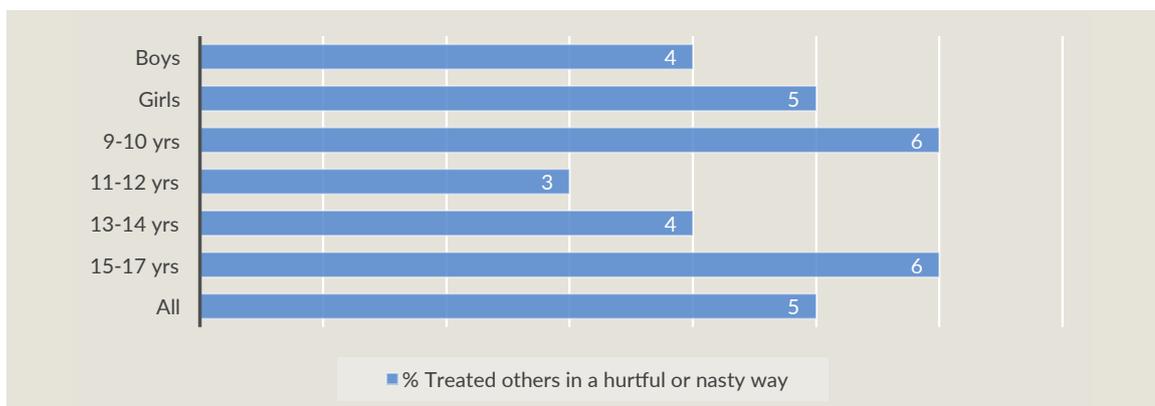
- 67% of those who experienced cyberbullying turned to parents as a source of social support. 61% of boys and 73% of girls said they did this.
- Peers or friends around their own age are the next most important sources of social support. 41% overall said they sought friends' support, including 34% of boys and 43% of girls.
- Siblings are the next group who children turn to following an experience of being cyberbullied. 25% overall reported doing this, including 35% of the boys who had experienced cyberbullying and 43% of girls.
- 13% of girls who had been cyberbullied turned to teachers. 9% of girls said they also spoke with another adult they trust.

The last set of questions in this section examined the extent to which children also act as aggressors or perpetrators of bullying. The literature frequently points out that being bullied and bullying are intertwined, making the phenomenon of bullying and cyberbullying highly complex and interconnected.³⁹

Children were asked firstly if they had ever treated someone else in a hurtful or nasty way.

39 Ybarra, M. L., & Mitchell, K. J. (2004). Online aggressor/targets, aggressors, and targets: A comparison of associated youth characteristics. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 45(7), 1308–1316. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-7610.2004.00328.x>

Figure 21: Abusive behaviour towards others, by age and gender



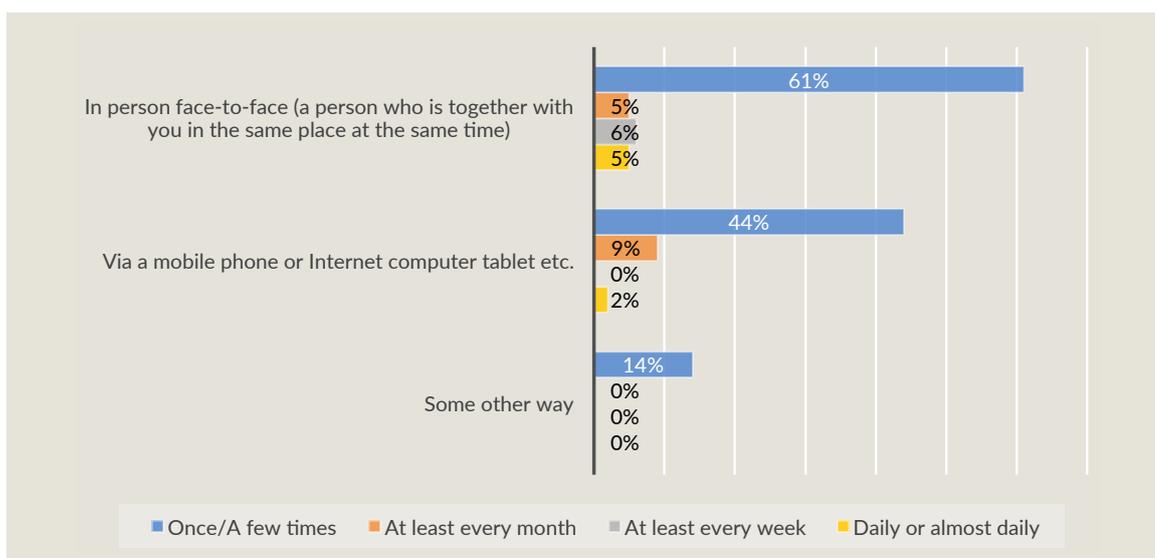
QG13 In the PAST YEAR have you EVER TREATED someone else in a hurtful or nasty way?

Base: All children who said they have EVER TREATED someone else in a hurtful or nasty way.

- 5% of children, aged 9-17 years, report treating someone else in a hurtful or nasty way.
- This compares to 17% of children reported being bullied in some way, online or offline, i.e., approximately one third of that figure. This is consistent with previous EU Kids Online findings.
- Bullying others is more common among young 9-10 year olds and older 15-17-year-olds (6%).
- Slightly more girls than boys (5% versus 4%) report behaving in this way.

Noting the relatively small numbers, those children were also asked how often and in what way they had behaved like this towards someone else.

Figure 22: Mode and frequency of abusive behaviour towards others



QG14 In the PAST YEAR, how often have you TREATED someone else in any of the following ways?

Base: All who have treated someone else in a hurtful or nasty way (QG13)

- Of those who said they bullied others, more children said that this had happened face to face than online. 61% of these children said that they had bullied others once/a few times in person with 16% saying this had happened more frequently.
- In terms of cyberbullying, 44% said that they had occasionally, i.e., once or a few times, bullied someone via a mobile phone or other digital device.
- In a small number of cases, such behaviour happened via a mobile phone or Internet computer tablet on a more regular basis, either monthly (9%) or almost daily (2%).

Seeing sexual content

A frequently expressed concern by parents, carers and educators is children's exposure to sexual content while using the internet and the potential harm and negative effects this may have, particularly for younger children. The apparent easy online access to graphic sexual content has given rise to much policy debate and the need for interventions to restrict access to age-inappropriate content.

The availability of robust evidence regarding children's exposure to sexual context is uneven.⁴⁰ This is a topic that is methodologically and ethically challenging to research⁴¹; yet it is vital to have information from children themselves to understand better how to target support to those who are most at risk of harm from such exposure.

In this survey, the topic was introduced using the following description:

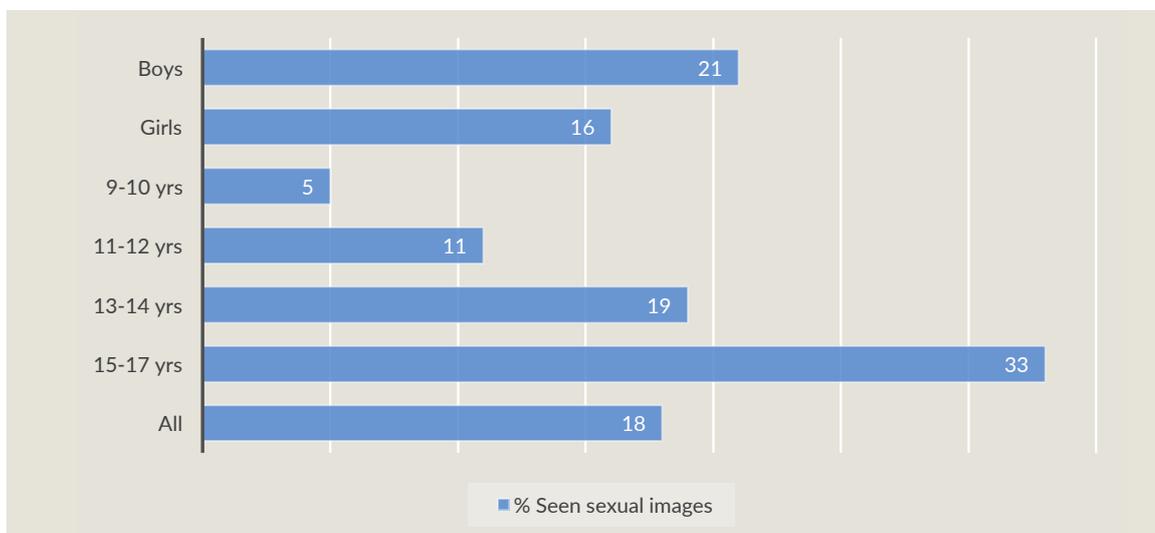
In the PAST YEAR, you have seen lots of different images – pictures, photos, videos. Sometimes, these images might be obviously sexual, e.g., they may show people naked or people having sex. You might never have seen anything like this, or you may have seen something like this on a mobile phone, in a magazine, on the TV, on a DVD or on the internet. The next few questions ask you about things like this.

In this description, terms such as “pornography” or “porn” were intentionally avoided, and reference is made to a variety of different platforms, online and offline, where young people are likely to come across sexual images.

The first question concerned children's exposure to sexual content in general.

40 Mitchell, K., Jones, L., Finkelhor, D., & Wolak, J. (2014). *Trends in Unwanted Exposure to Sexual Material: Findings from the Youth Internet Safety Studies* (pp. 1–9). Crimes Against Children Research Centre. [http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/pdf/Unwanted Exposure 3 of 4 YISS Bulletins Feb 2014.pdf](http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/pdf/Unwanted%20Exposure%203%20of%204%20YISS%20Bulletins%20Feb%202014.pdf)

41 Peter, J., & Valkenburg, P. M. (2016). Adolescents and Pornography: A Review of 20 Years of Research. *Journal of Sex Research*, 53(4–5). <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2016.1143441>

Figure 23: Seeing sexual images, by age and gender

Q.G15: In the PAST YEAR, have you EVER SEEN any sexual images?

Base: All children who use the internet

Most children report that they have not come across sexual images of this kind with just one in five responding yes to this question.

- 18% of children aged 9 to 17 years in Ireland say that they have seen sexual messages on the internet in the past 12 months.
- Reports of seeing sexual images increases with age: 5% of children aged 9-10 say they seen images of this kind. This increases to 11% for 11-12-year-olds, 19% of 13-14-year-olds and one third (33%) of 15-17-year-olds report having received such images.
- Gender differences are notable with more boys than girls (21% vs. 16%) reporting exposure to sexual content.
- For the purposes of comparison, the EU Kids Online 2020 study of 19 European countries reported an average of 33% of 9-16-year-olds seeing images in the past year. This ranges from the lowest finding of 21% (France) to 43% (Czech Republic).⁴²
- The finding of 18% of Irish children in this age range is similar to the finding of 17% in the first EU Kids Online survey in Ireland in 2010.⁴³ The follow up Net Children Go Mobile study in 2014 reported the slightly higher figure of 21%.⁴⁴

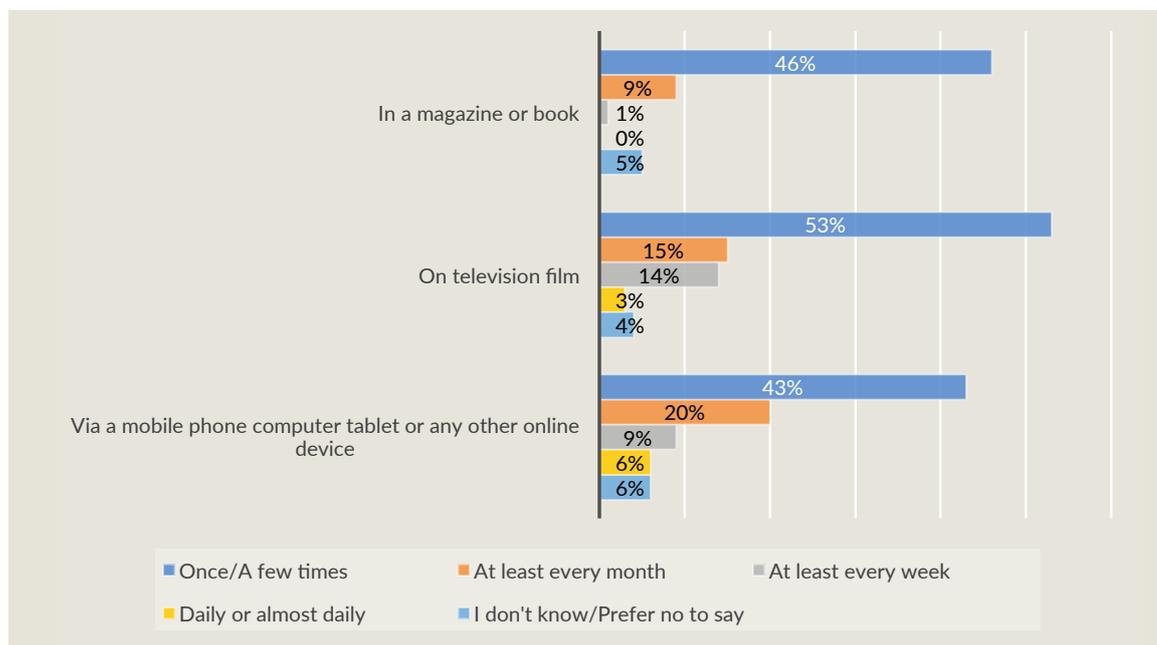
Children who had seen images of this kind were then asked about how often and on which platform they had seen such images.

42 Smahel et al (2020), p.89.

43 O'Neill, B., Grehan, S., & Ólafsson, K. (2011), p.29.

44 O'Neill, B., & Dinh, T. (2015), p. 48.

Figure 24: Frequency of seeing sexual images on different platforms

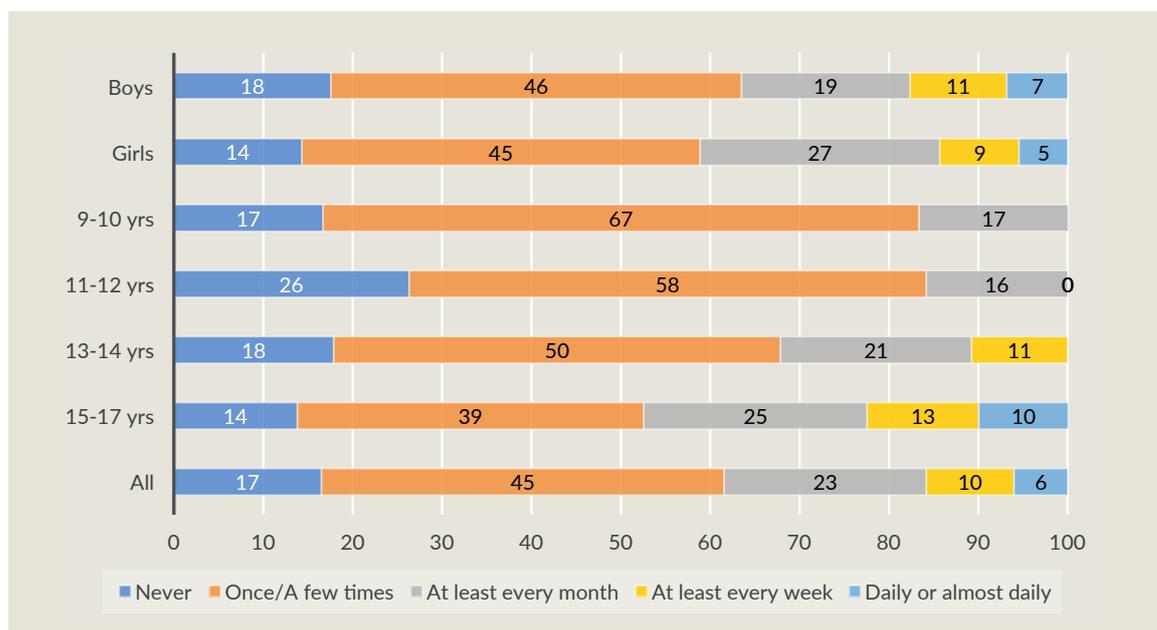


Q.G16 In the PAST YEAR, how often have you seen images of this kind in any of the following ways?
 Base: All who have seen sexual images (QG15)

- Children are exposed to sexual images across all media, from magazines and books, on television or film and online
- The most prevalent form of exposure is via a mobile phone, computer, tablet or any other online device. 35% of young people report seeing sexual images online at least monthly. This is followed by television and film (32%) and magazines or books (10%).
- 6% report seeing sexual images online daily or almost daily.
- In terms of age and gender, boys and older teens report higher levels of exposure to sexual images.

Looking more closely at those who reported seeing sexual images online, Figure 25 presents findings by gender and age for sexual content via a mobile phone, computer, tablet or any other online device.

Figure 25: Seeing sexual images (online only), by age and gender



QG16 In the PAST YEAR, how often have you seen images of this kind in any of the following ways*Via a mobile phone computer tablet or any other online device

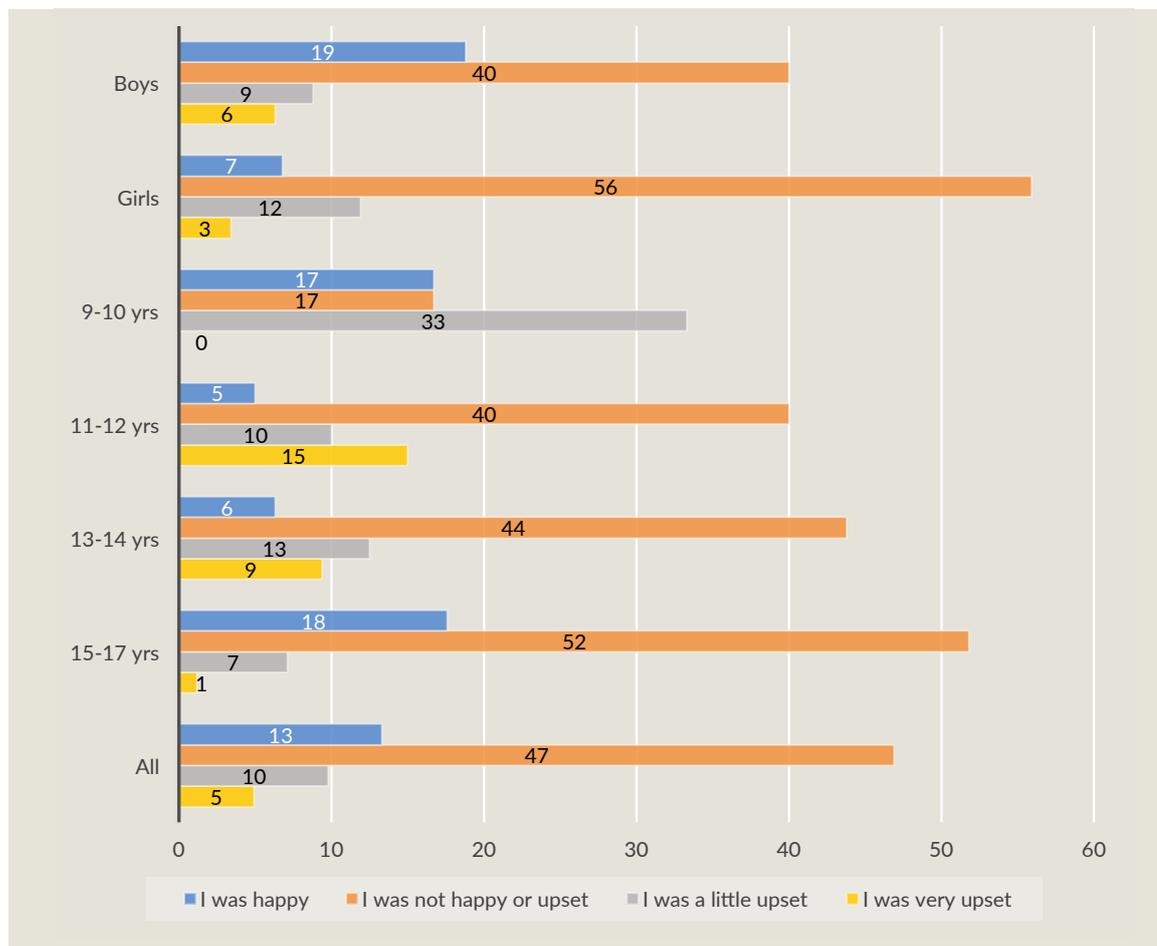
Base: All who have seen sexual images (QG15)

For the majority of those who reported seeing sexual images online, this was a once off or irregular occurrence.

- 45% (46% boys, 45% girls) say they have seen such images just once or few times.
- One quarter or 23%, say they have come across such images at least every month. This is by 19% of boys and 27% of girls.
- More frequent exposure (weekly or more frequently) is reported by 16% overall (18% of boys vs. 14% of girls).
- Age is the main factor with no frequent exposure, i.e., weekly or more often, reported by under-12s.

Finally, in this section, children were asked about impact of seeing such sexual images. Noting that such exposure may be intentional and may not necessarily be a negative experience, depending on the context and the individual child, children were asked the following question: *Thinking of the LAST TIME you have seen images of this kind, how did you feel about it?* The options provided were: options: *I was happy, I was not happy or upset, I was a little upset, I was fairly upset and I was very upset as well as I don't know and Prefer not to say.*

Figure 26: Impact of seeing sexual images, by age and gender



QG17 Thinking of the LAST TIME you have seen images of this kind how did you feel about it?

Base: All who have seen sexual images (QG15)

Excluding don't knows and those who prefer not to say, responses to the impact of seeing sexual images is as shown in Figure 26 is for most children neither positive nor negative.

- 47% of young people state (40% of boys and 56% of girls) state that they were neither happy nor upset on seeing sexual images across any platform.
- For 13% of young people, exposure to such images was rated as positive. This includes 19% of boys vs. 7% of girls.
- 15% however say that were either a little upset or very upset on being exposed to sexual images. Equal numbers of boys and girls say this.
- One third of 9–10-year-olds who had seen this content reported that they were little upset on being exposed to sexual images while only 7% of older children (15-17 years) say the same.
- 15% of the pre-teen group of 11–12-year-olds state that they were “very upset” on seeing sexual images, while this was only 1% among 15–17-year-olds.

Receiving and sending sexual messages

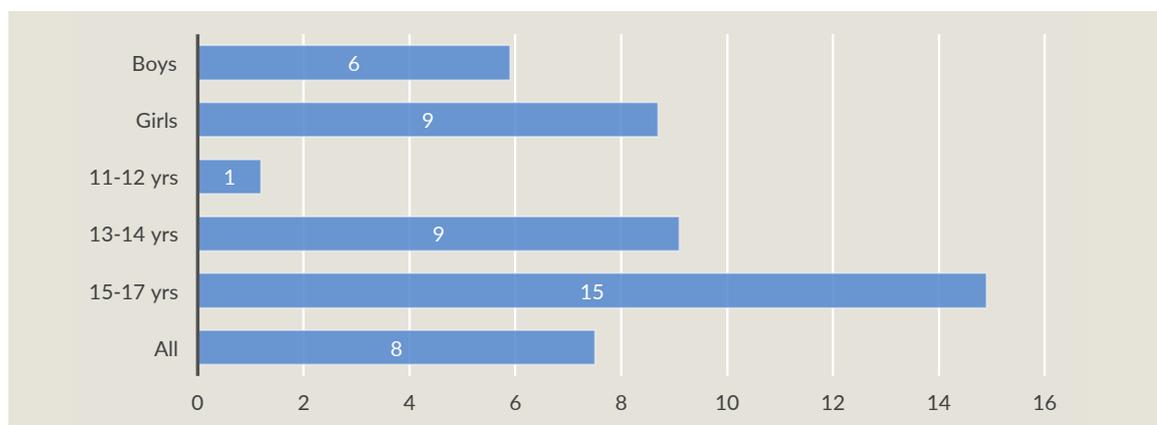
The topic of receiving and sending sexual messages via digital devices, so called “sexting”, is a further area of online conduct risk that gives rise to much public debate. As with other aspects of online youth “risky opportunities”, the issue of sending and receiving sexual messages electronically is a complex one. On the one hand, while the exchanging of sexual messages is sometimes identified as an emerging norm or a likely behaviour in the context of adolescent romantic relationships,⁴⁵ there are also concerns about increased risks of unwanted distribution, misuse within the context of an abusive relationship as well as the growing threat of sextortion or coercion arising from sexual images being acquired without consent.⁴⁶

Against this background, the survey included questions on experiences with the receiving and sending of sexual messages. Young people were asked if they had experienced this and if so, how it had taken place. A question was also included about unwanted requests for such content. The context for the series of questions in this section was framed as follows:

People do all kinds of things on the internet. Sometimes they may send sexual messages or images. By this we mean talk about having sex or images of people naked or images of people having sex. The next few questions ask you about things like this.

Participants were first asked if they had received any sexual messages, whether in the form of words, pictures, or videos.

Figure 27: Receiving sexual messages, by age and gender



Q.G18 In the PAST YEAR have you EVER RECEIVED any sexual messages? This could be words pictures or videos?

Base: All children from 11-17 years-old who use the internet.

In terms of the incidence of having received sexual messages at all, only a small minority reported receiving such messages.

- Just 8% overall, which includes 6% of boys and 9% of girls reported receiving such messages

45 Symons, K., Ponnet, K., Walrave, M., & Heirman, W. (2018). Sexting scripts in adolescent relationships: Is sexting becoming the norm? *New Media & Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444818761869>

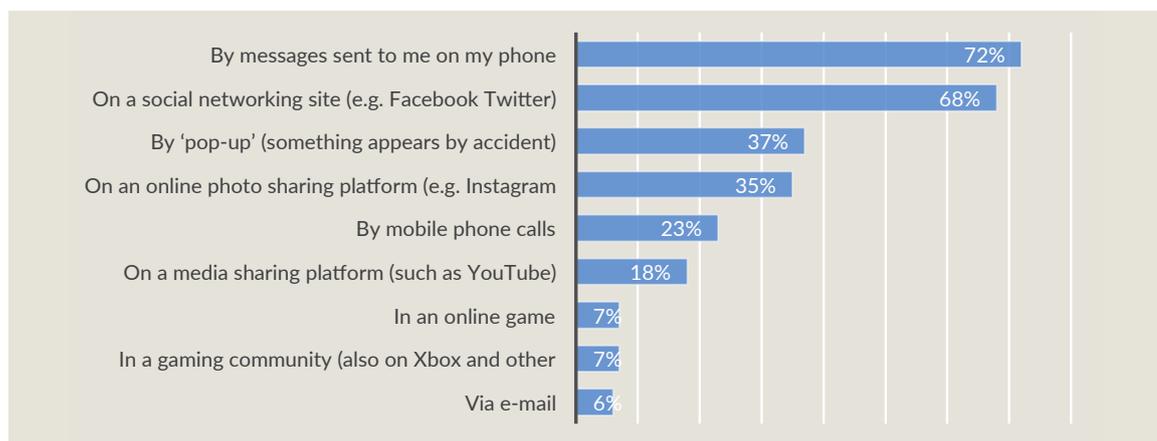
46 Wolak, J., Finkelhor, D., Walsh, W., & Treitman, L. (2018). Sextortion of Minors: Characteristics and Dynamics. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 62(1), 72–79. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2017.08.014>

Europol & EC3. (2017). Online sexual coercion and extortion as a form of crime affecting children.

- Age is the biggest factor here: just 1% of 11–12-year-olds report receiving sexual messages. This rises to 9% for 13–14-year-olds and 15% for 16–17-year-olds.

Those who responded that they had received sexual messages were then asked how this had happened.

Figure 28: Receiving sexual messages, by platform



QG19 If you have RECEIVED any sexual messages in the PAST YEAR, how did it happen?

Base: All who have received sexual messages (QG18)

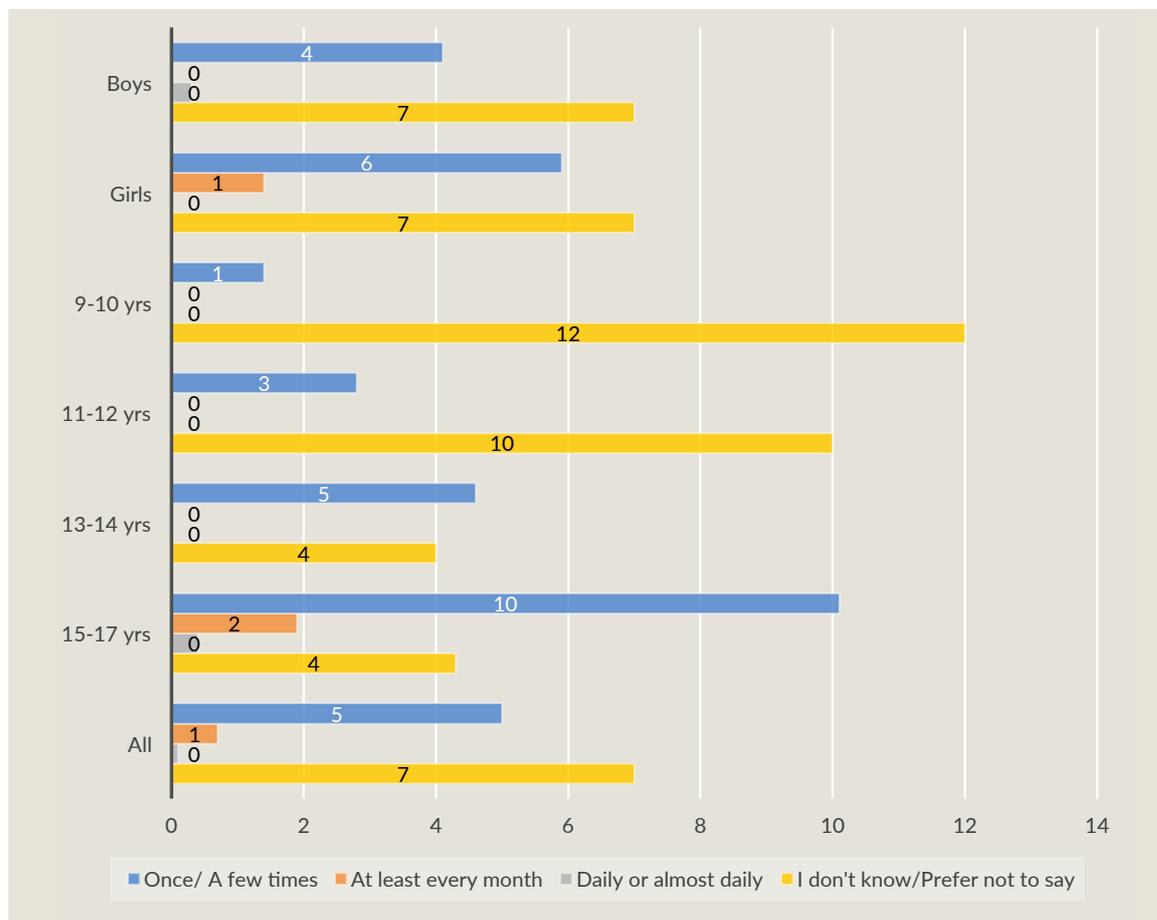
Noting that numbers involved are small, i.e., just 6% of the total, sexual messages are primarily received in the following manner:

- 72% of those who had received sexual messages report receiving them on their mobile phone. This is the most reported method of receiving sexual messages.
- 68% report that this happened on a social networking platform such as Facebook or Twitter.
- 37% also report receiving sexual messages in the form of a “pop up”, something which appeared by accident while browsing online.
- 35% report receiving such sexual messages via an online photo sharing platform such as Instagram or Flickr.

In the same manner, participants were then asked if they had ever sent or posted any sexual messages. In response to this item, just 1% of the total reported having sent or posted sexual messages. Respondents were in the older teenage bracket, but the numbers involved were too small for statistical analysis.

Finally, participants were asked if they had ever received any unwanted requests for sexual information. The question was framed so as to include a wide range of such possible requests: *In the PAST YEAR how often if ever have you been asked by someone on the internet for sexual information (words pictures or videos) about yourself (like what your body looks like without clothes on or sexual things you have done).*

Figure 29: Receiving unwanted requests for sexual information, by age and gender



Q.G22 In the PAST YEAR how often if ever have you been asked by someone on the internet for sexual information (words pictures or videos) about yourself (like what your body looks like without clothes on or sexual things you have done).

Base: all children who use the internet.

The numbers reporting receiving unwanted requests for sexual information are similar to those reporting receiving sexual messages.

- 5% overall report receiving an unwanted request for sexual information
- 4% of boys and 6% of girls report receiving such requests either once or a few times
- 1% of girls report receiving such requests more frequently, at least every month
- Most of those receiving unwanted requests are in the upper age range. However, 1% of 9–10-year-olds and 3% of 11–12-year-olds report receiving unwanted requests for sexual information.

Harmful online content

Children’s exposure to various types of harmful online content has been the focus of considerable debate amidst concerns for children’s welfare when accessing, intentionally or

otherwise, online content that may be dangerous, harmful, misleading, or distressing.⁴⁷ Children regularly report that coming across harmful content such as gory or violent images, scary content or hate messages as highly distressing and amongst the most problematic forms of content they encounter.⁴⁸ Efforts to restrict access to such content are to the fore in many interventions designed to protect children online and form an important part of legislative efforts to support a better digital environment for children.⁴⁹

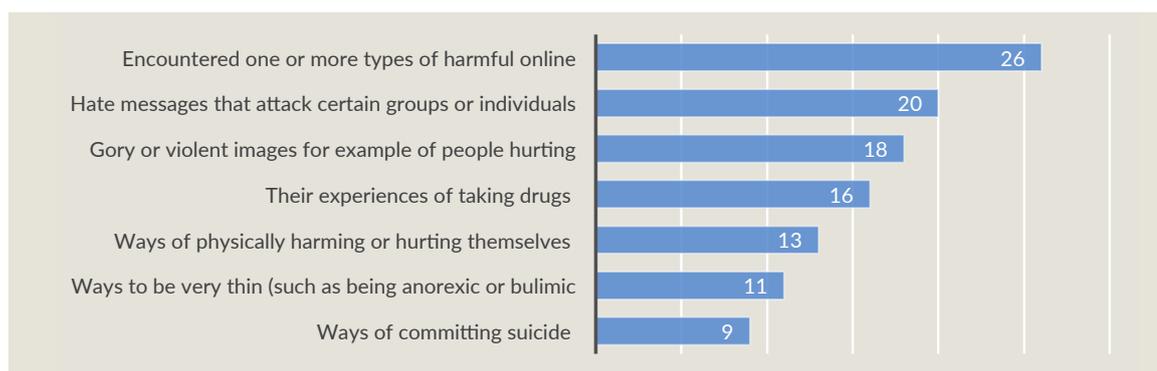
In the survey, children were asked about six different types of harmful content ranging from violent images, ways of physically harming and hate messages. No distinction was made between so-called user-generated content which may be created and posted by young people themselves on various platforms and other professionally produced content which may appear on sites accessed by children, intentionally or otherwise.

The question relating to harmful online content was introduced as follows:

On the internet, people discuss things that may not be good for you. Here are some questions about these kinds of things. In the PAST YEAR, have you seen online content or online discussions where people talk about or show any of these things?

A summary of responses is given below:

Figure 30: Exposure to harmful online content



Q.G23 *In the PAST YEAR, have you seen online content or online discussions where people talk about or show any of these things?*

Base: All children who use the internet

Overall, more than one in four children (26%) report seeing potentially harmful online content in the last year making this is the most reported type of online risk that children encounter. There has also been an increase in reports of exposure to most categories of harmful online content

47 Mars, B., Heron, J., Biddle, L., Donovan, J. L., Holley, R., Piper, M., Potokar, J., Wyllie, C., & Gunnell, D. (2015). Exposure to, and searching for, information about suicide and self-harm on the Internet: Prevalence and predictors in a population based cohort of young adults. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 185, 239–245. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2015.06.001>

48 Smahel, D., & Wright, M. F. (2014). The meaning of online problematic situations for children. Results of qualitative cross-cultural investigation in nine European countries. http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/56972/1/EU_Kids_Online_Report_Online_Problematic_Situations_for_Children_June2014.pdf

49 Flew, T., Martin, F., & Suzor, N. (2019). Internet regulation as media policy: Rethinking the question of digital communication platform governance. *Journal of Digital Media & Policy*, 10(1), 33–50. https://doi.org/10.1386/jdmp.10.1.33_1

Kuklis, L. (2020). Video-Sharing Platforms In AVMSD – A New Kind Of Content Regulation. SSRN Electronic Journal. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3527512>

since the Net Children Go Mobile study in 2014 which reported that 21% of 11-16 year olds had seen potentially harmful online content.⁵⁰

The top five forms harmful online content seen by children are hate messages (20% compared to 15% in 2014), gory or violent images (18%), experiences of taking drugs (16% vs. 7% in 2014), self-harm sites (13% compared to 9% in 2014) and sites promoting ways to be thin (11%). 9% say they have also seen sites that depict ways of committing suicide.

An analysis of reports of exposure to harmful online content by age and gender is given in Table 17.

Table 17: Exposure to harmful online content, by age and gender

% exposed to..	9-12 yrs		13-17 yrs		All
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
Ways of physically harming or hurting themselves	9	4	17	19	13
Ways of committing suicide	9	3	11	12	9
Ways to be very thin (such as being anorexic or bulimic or "thinspiration")	4	4	12	23	11
Hate messages that attack certain groups or individuals (e.g. people of different colour religion nationality or sexuality)	9	6	31	30	20
Their experiences of taking drugs	6	3	27	22	16
Gory or violent images for example of people hurting other people or animals?	9	5	28	26	18
Encountered one or more types of harmful online content	14	8	39	39	26

Q.G23 In the PAST YEAR, have you seen online content or online discussions where people talk about or show any of these things?

Base: All children who use the internet

- The most common type of harmful content which children report encountering is that of speech or hate messages that attack certain groups of people. 20% of children aged 9-17 years report encountering hate speech. This ranges from approximately one in ten 9-12-year-olds rising to one third of 13-17-year-olds. Roughly equal numbers of boys and girls report encountering this type of content.
- The next most common type of harmful online content is that of gory or violent images, including people hurting each other or subjecting animals to cruelty. This is reported by 18% of children overall, and more than one quarter of 13-17-year-olds. Boys report seeing this content somewhat more frequently than girls (9% boys vs. 5% of girls aged 9-12, and 28% boys vs. 26% girls aged 13-17 years).
- Other forms of harmful content which young people encounter include:

50 Net Children Go Mobile (2015), p.51.

- self-harm sites (13%), viewed by 17% of boys and 19% of girls aged 13-17 years;
 - sites where people discuss their experience of taking drugs viewed by 16% overall, including 27% of boys and 22% of girls aged 13-17 years;
 - sites promoting ways to be thin (so-called pro-anorexic sites) encountered by 11% overall, and 12% of boys and 23% of girls aged 13-17 years;
 - sites where people share ways of committing suicide which have been seen by 9% overall, and 11% of boys and 12% of girls aged 13-17 years.
- Seeing negative or harmful online content increases with age: 11% of children aged 9-12 years have encountered one or more of the types of content listed compared with 39% of 13-17-year-olds.
 - In terms of gender differences, younger boys aged 9-12 years report encountering harmful content more than girls of the same age group. There are fewer gender differences among 13-17-year-olds with the exception of online content “promoting ways to be thin”. This more frequently encountered by girls. Additionally, sites where people share experiences of drugs are more frequently encountered by boys.

Misuse of personal data

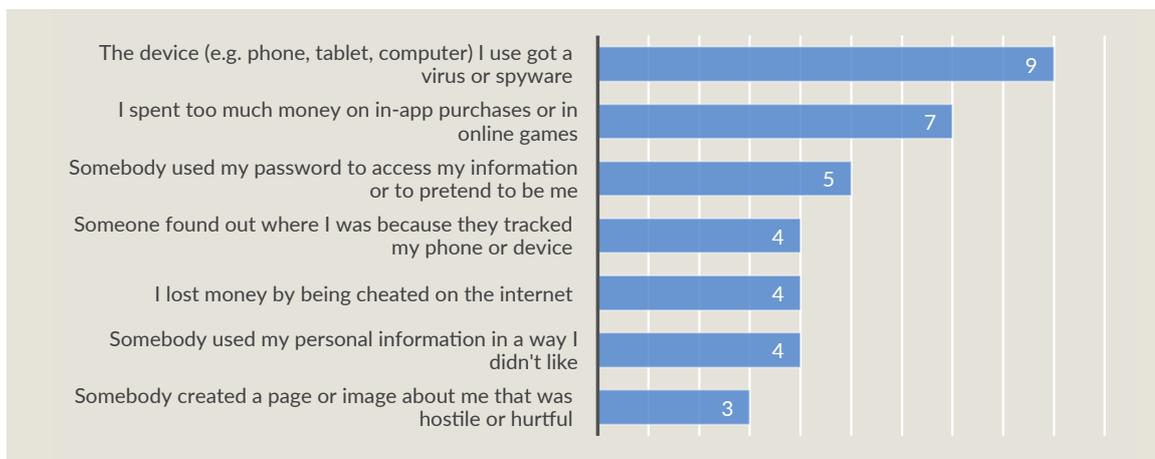
As children go online and use digital technologies, they increasingly leave data traces and are more likely to experience some form of data misuse or privacy-related risks arising from the use of digital services. These diverse risks of data misuse derive from the many data-driven services likely to be used by children and which require specific skills to manage privacy, personal data and risks of its being misused.⁵¹ This is particularly a concern for younger children who may lack the skills to recognise privacy risks in highly datafied environments or know how to protect themselves against them.⁵² Such risks also come under the category of contract or consumer risks, i.e., whereby children may be subject to unfair commercial exploitation in the transactional environment of online interactions.⁵³

In the survey, children were asked about seven types of data misuse (see below) which ranged from getting a virus on a digital device, to having one's password stolen or their personal data used in a way they did not like. Children were asked which, if any, of these things happened to them in the past year.

51 Livingstone, S., Stoilova, M., & Nandagiri, R. (2018). *Children's data and privacy online: Growing up in a digital age*. London School of Economics and Political Science. <https://www.lse.ac.uk/media-and-communications/assets/documents/research/projects/childrens-privacy-online/Evidence-review-final.pdf>

52 Lupton, D., & Williamson, B. (2017). The datafied child: The dataveillance of children and implications for their rights. *New Media & Society*, 19(5), 780-794. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444816686328>

53 Hof, S. van der, Lievens, E., Milkaite, I., Verdoodt, V., Hannema, T., & Liefwaard, T. (2020). The Child's Right to Protection against Economic Exploitation in the Digital World. *The International Journal of Children's Rights*, 28(4), 833-859. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718182-28040003>

Figure 31: Experiences of misuse of personal data


Q.G24 In the PAST YEAR, has any of the following happened to you on the internet?

Base: All children who use the internet

Misuse of personal data has been experienced by approximately 1 in 10 of 9–17-year-olds. The most common forms of personal data misuse include acquiring a virus on a digital device experienced by 9% of 9–17-year-olds; experiences of spending too much money on in-app purchases or online games (7%); and somebody using the child's password to access their information or pretend to be them (5%).

Looking at experiences of personal data misuse by age and gender shows this to be something that affects all age groups and both boys and girls.

Table 18: Misuse of personal data, by age and gender

% this has happened to	9-12 yrs		13-17 yrs		All
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
The device (e.g. phone tablet computer) I use got a virus or spyware	8	7	8	13	9
I spent too much money on in-app purchases or in online games	8	7	10	5	7
Somebody used my password to access my information or to pretend to be me	6	5	5	5	5
Somebody used my personal information in a way I didn't like	5	3	3	5	4
I lost money by being cheated on the internet	4	4	4	3	4
Someone found out where I was because they tracked my phone or device	3	3	4	5	4
Somebody created a page or image about me that was hostile or hurtful	3	5	2	3	3
Experienced at least ONE of these	13	11	18	19	16

Q.G24 In the PAST YEAR, has any of the following happened to you on the internet?

Base: All children who use the internet

- The most common problem that children have experienced in the past year is that of getting a virus or spyware on a digital device such as phone, tablet, or computer. This happened to 9% of children overall. Among 9–12-year-olds, equal numbers of boys and girls (8% and 7% respectively) had this problem. For teenagers, more girls than boys experience this (13% of girls aged 13-17 years vs. 8% of boys).
- The next most common risk reported is that of spending too much money on in-app purchases or in online games. This is experienced by 7% of children overall, with similar numbers again of boys and girls aged 9-12 years (8% of boys and 7% of girls in this age group). Among teenagers, twice as many boys as girls have experienced this (10% of boys aged 13-17 years vs. 5% of girls).
- Less prevalent but no less serious in terms of potential risks are other forms of data misuse. Having one's personal information misused by others is experienced by 4% of children, as is being cheated out of money online or having one's location tracked.
- Finally, a small proportion report that somebody created a page or image about them that was hostile or hurtful. This has happened to 3% of children and young people overall, but 5% of girls aged 9-12 years.

Excessive internet use

Much attention has been to the subject of time spent online and using digital technologies. While debates about screen time have focussed on what levels of use of screen use are developmentally appropriate for children of different ages, the lack of sufficient evidence and confusion over time or exposure-based guidelines makes this a complex debate.⁵⁴ The term “excessive internet use”, however, refers not so much to the amount of screen time but rather a pattern of online or technology use that may be problematic and have a negative impact on children's development and well-being.

The questionnaire draws on criteria for excessive internet use as outlined by Griffiths (2000).⁵⁵ This sets out a range of criteria whereby the extent of online use is such it becomes the dominant activity in a child's life, influencing moods, creating conflicts with others, requiring increased amounts of online activity to sustain the effects and causing unpleasant feelings because of withdrawal.⁵⁶

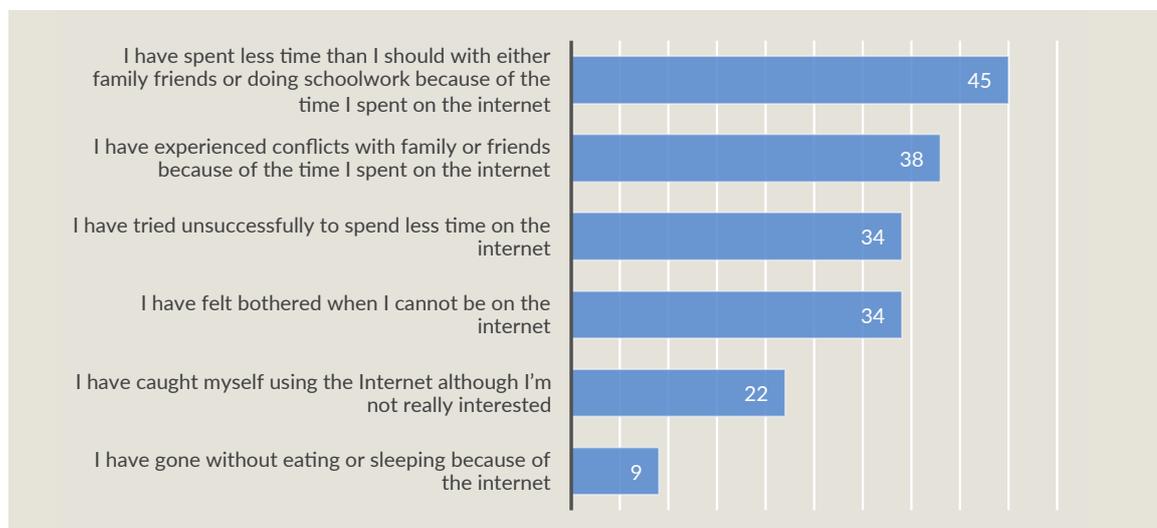
In the survey, children were asked how often any of a series of six associated features of excessive internet use had happened to them in the past year. Figure 32 presents findings in respect of any category of excessive internet experienced at least once or a few times in the past year.

54 Blum-Ross, A., & Livingstone, S. (n.d.). The Trouble with 'Screen Time' Rules. In *Digital Parenting: The Challenges for Families in the Digital Age*, Yearbook 2018 (pp. 179–187). NORDICOM. International Clearinghouse on Children, Youth and Media. http://www.nordicom.gu.se/sites/default/files/kapitel-pdf/16_blum-ross_livingstone.pdf

55 Griffiths, M. (2000). Does Internet and Computer 'Addiction' Exist? Some Case Study Evidence. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, 3(2), 211–218. <https://doi.org/10.1089/109493100316067>

56 See also Griffiths, M. D., Kuss, D. J., Billieux, J., & Pontes, H. M. (2016). The evolution of Internet addiction: A global perspective. *Addictive Behaviors*, 53, 193–195. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.addbeh.2015.11.001>

Figure 32: Experiences of excessive internet use (once/ few times in the past year)



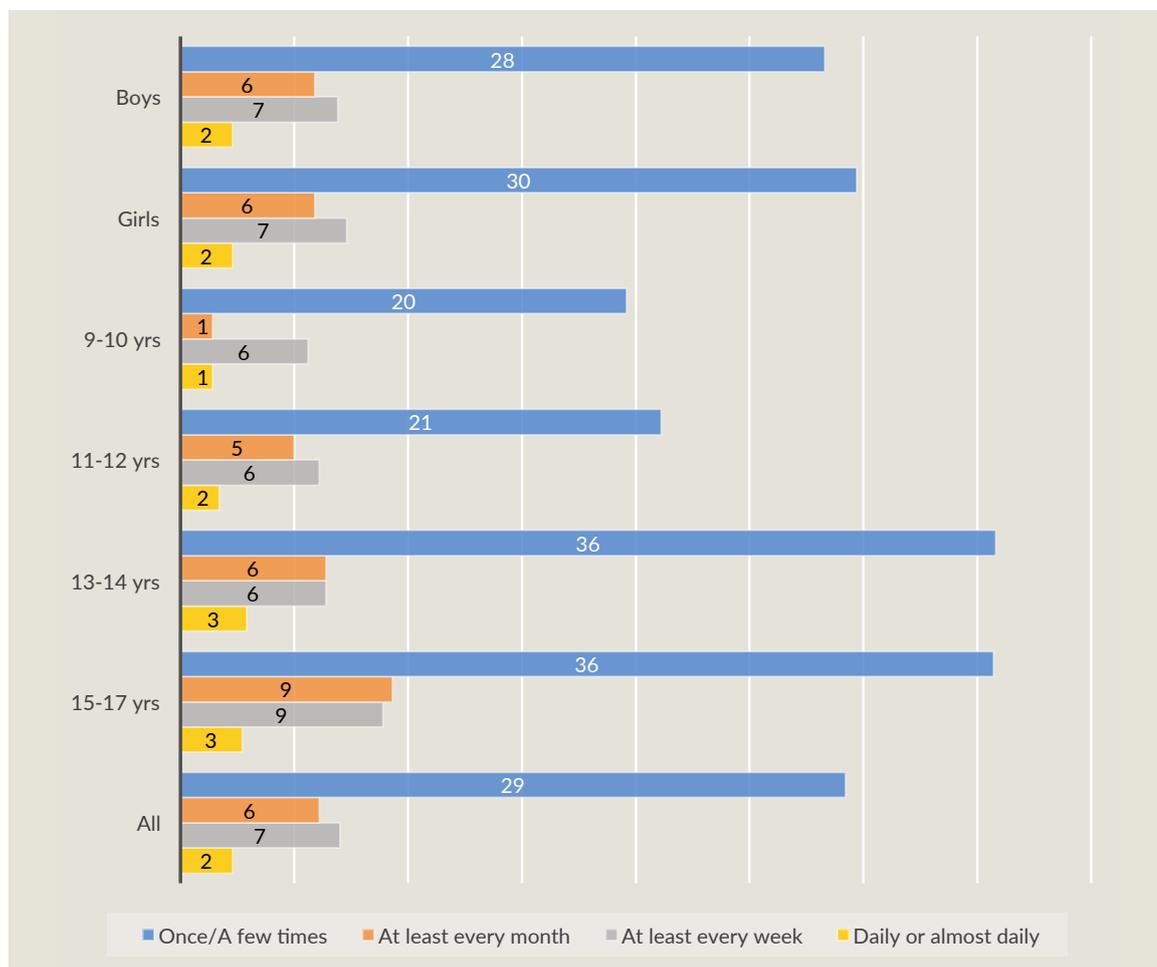
Q.G25 In the PAST YEAR, how often have these things happened to you?

Base: All children who use the internet

- The most reported form of excessive internet use is spending less time with either family or friends or doing schoolwork because of the amount of time spent online. This is reported by 45% of all children, aged 9-17 years.
- 38% of children also say that they have experienced conflicts with family or friends because of the amount of time spent online.
- 34% of 9–17-year-olds say that they have unsuccessfully tried to spend less time online and have felt bothered when they can't be online.
- One in five (22%) admit that they aimlessly gone online when not really interested.
- One in ten (9%) of all 9–17-year-olds say they have gone without eating or sleeping because of the internet.

Looking more closely at the most reported aspect of excessive internet use – “Spending less time than I should with either family friends or doing schoolwork because of the time I spent on the internet” – Figure 33 presents a breakdown by gender and age.

Figure 33: Spending less time with either family friends or doing schoolwork because of time spent on the internet, by gender and age



Q.G25 In the PAST YEAR, how often have these things happened to you?

Base: All children who use the internet

- 28% of children aged 9-17 years old say they have experienced this at least once or a few times.
- 6% say this is a more frequent occurrence which is experienced by them on a weekly basis. Age is a key factor in this regard with approximately one in five of 9-10-year-olds and 11-12-year-olds saying this. This rises to 36% of 13-14-year-olds and 15-17-year-olds. Equal numbers of boys and girls report this as something they have experienced at least once or a few times.
- More frequent experiences of spending less time with other activities because of the amount of time spent online are similarly associated with age. 21% of 15-17-year-olds say they experience this feature at least every month or more frequently. 8% of 9-10-year-olds say this is true of them, with 13% and 15% being reported by 11-12-year-olds and 13-14-year-olds respectively.

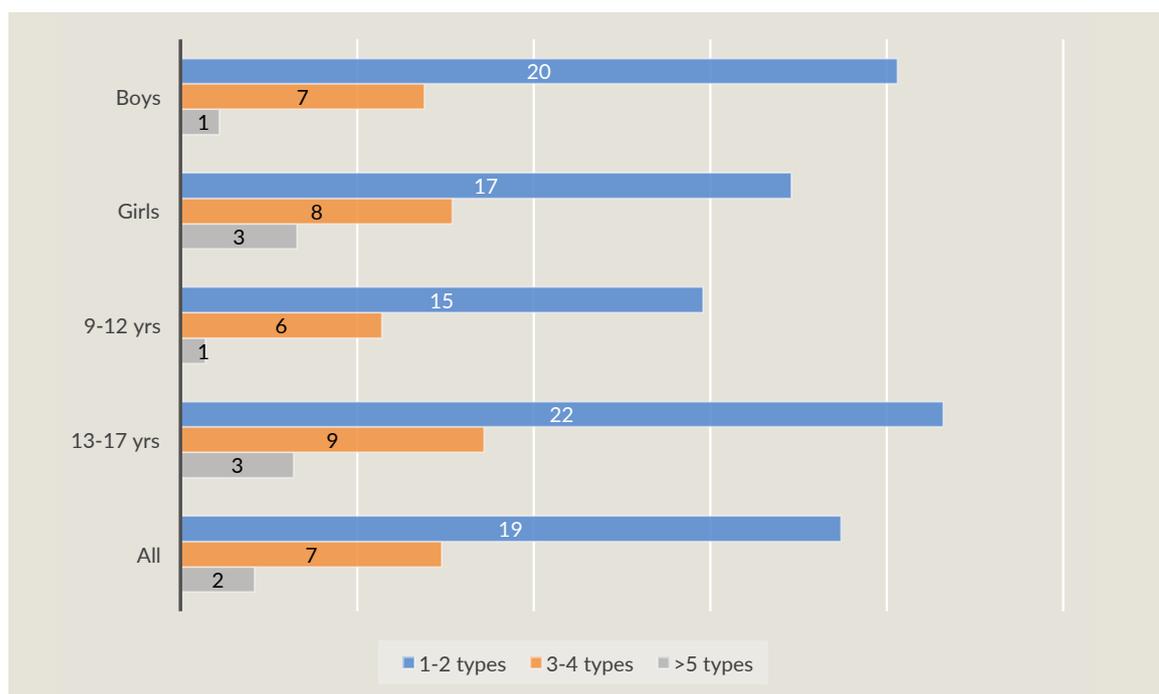
In terms of experiencing one or more of the criteria for excessive internet use:

- 19% of 9-17-year-olds have experienced 1-2 types. This compares with 23% of children

in the 2014 Net Children Go Mobile who reported experiencing at least two types of excessive internet use⁵⁷

- 7% of 9–17-year-olds have experienced 3-4 types, and
- 2% of 9–17-year-olds have experience 5 types or more of excessive internet use
- Girls more than boys and older rather than younger children report experiencing multiple features of excessive internet use. Notably, however, 15% of 9–10-year-olds say they have experience 1-2 types of excessive internet use.

Figure 34: Experienced one or more criteria for excessive internet use, by age and gender



Q.G25 In the PAST YEAR, how often have these things happened to you?

Base: All children who use the internet

Information shared by others (parents, friends, teachers)

The final area of risk asked about in the survey concerns information shared about children without their permission by parents or carers and the potential consequences of this from the child’s perspective. While not always included within the category of risks and online safety, the phenomenon more popularly known as “sharenting” – a combination of sharing and parenting – is a something that has featured in awareness campaigns regarding the potential risks to sharing personal data of children without their permission.

The sharing of content online by parents about their children is identified as a common practice of parenting behaviour, often in the context of documenting family life, celebrating newborn

57 Net Children Go Mobile (2015), p. 59.

children and following children through their infant years and early stage of development.^{58 59} Potential tensions arise however when parents begin to shape their children's digital identity before the child has sufficient agency to assent to having such information shared, thereby contravening the child's right to privacy.⁶⁰

In the survey, a series of questions were put to children regarding the sharing of information by parents and carers to understand how prevalent an issue "sharenting" is and to assess children's perceptions of the practice. Children were asked how often each of six individual items related to sharing of information about them by others had happened in the past year.

Table 19: Information shared by others, by age and gender

% Who say this has happened at any time	9-12 years		13-17 years		All
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
My parent/carer published information (such as text pictures or movies) about me on the internet without asking first if I was OK with it	9	11	17	13	13
My friend(s) published information about me on the internet without asking first if I was OK with it	3	2	12	13	8
I asked my parent/carer to remove things they had published on the internet	2	5	8	6	5
I was upset because of information my parents published online	1	1	3	4	2
My teacher(s) published information about me on the internet without asking first if I was OK with it	1	0	2	2	1
I received negative or hurtful comments from someone because of something my parent/carer published online	1	1	2	2	1

Q.G26 In the PAST YEAR, how often has this happened to you?

Base: All children who use the internet

- 13% of children overall report that their parent/carer has shared information about them online (such as text, photos or video) without their permission. This has happened to approximately one in ten 9–12-year-olds and 15% of 13–17-year-olds.
- Among younger children, more girls than boys report this to be the case (11% of girls compared to 9% of boys, aged 9–12 years). Among older teens, more boys – 17% of 13–17-year-olds compared to 13% of girls – report this to be the case.
- 8% of children report that their friends had published information about them without their permission. This is much more a case for teenagers where 12% of boys and 13% of girls report that this has happened to them.

58 Brosch, A. (2016). When the child is born into the internet: Sharenting as a growing trend among parents on facebook. *The New Educational Review*, 43(1), 225–235. <https://doi.org/10.15804/tner.2016.43.1.19>

59 Blum-Ross, A., & Livingstone, S. (2017). 'Sharenting' parent blogging, and the boundaries of the digital self. *Popular Communication*, 15(2), 110–125. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15405702.2016.1223300>

60 Steinberg, S. B. (2016). Sharenting: Children's Privacy in the Age of Social Media. *Association of American Law Schools*, 839(16), 1–44.

- In terms of responses to such sharing of information without permission, 5% of children say they have asked their parents to remove content that they had published online. 8% of boys, aged 13-17 years say they have done this.
- Fewer numbers report being upset because of having information shared about them. Just 3% of boys aged 13-17 and 4% of girls of that age say they were upset because of this.

Social environment

Completing this section of the report on children's experiences of online risks and safety is the wider context within which digital activities take place. Having considered the individual topics of children's online access, their digital activities and practices, digital skills and exposure to various online risks, this section looks at the child's social environment and examines from the child's perspective how family context, as well as the role of teachers and peers, play a role in mediating their use of digital technologies.

The theoretical model adopted in this survey posits the social environment as an important factor in shaping the context for children's experiences. This encompasses the all-important role of parents who from the earliest age are the primary mediating influence on children's access to digital devices, their main source of support in acquiring digital skills and guide for various digital activities. Digital parenting styles vary considerably, as the literature shows⁶¹, and this can be an important factor in shaping the conditions within which children begin to explore the digital environment.⁶² As children get older, parental mediation is likely to evolve,⁶³ joined also by increasing influence of peers⁶⁴, the school environment and teachers as sources of support and influence in their digital practices.⁶⁵ Against this background must also be considered the influence of societal discourses, norms and political context especially as it impacts on the digital environment. Noting that research on factors that shape the digital environment are multi-layered, the focus in this section of the survey on children's experiences of sources of support for online safety, whilst also considering children's own perceptions of safety, security, and confidence to manage their own safety online.

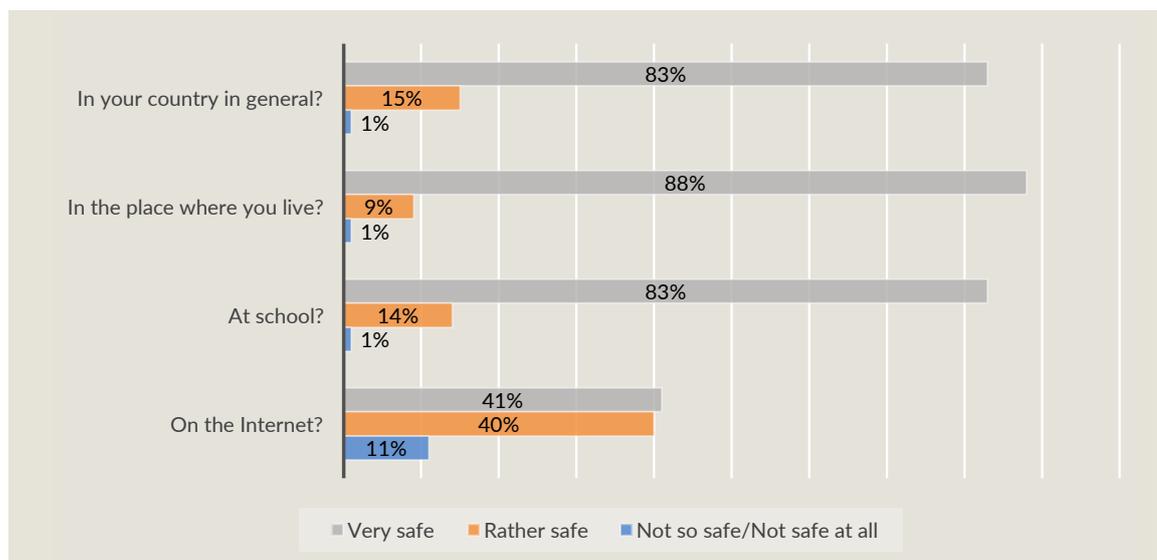
Feelings of safety and security

Children's general perceptions of safety and security have an important bearing on their own behaviour towards others, both online and offline, and shapes their confidence regarding participation in online activities.

As a general measure of their sense of feeling secure in their surroundings, children were asked about how safe they feel overall on a scale ranging from not safe at all to very safe. A summary of responses is given below:

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- 61 Quinn, S. (2016). Parenting the Online Child. In A. Attrill & C. Fullwood (Eds.), *Applied Cyberpsychology* (pp. 24–38). Palgrave Macmillan UK. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137517036_2
- 62 Mascheroni, G., Ponte, C., & Jorge, A. (2018). *Digital Parenting: The Challenges for Families in the Digital Age*. Nordicom, UNESCO International Clearinghouse for Children, Youth and Media.
- 63 Erickson, L. B., Wisniewski, P., Xu, H., Carroll, J. M., Rosson, M. B., & Perkins, D. F. (2016). The boundaries between: Parental involvement in a teen's online world. *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology*, 67(6), 1384–1403. <https://doi.org/10.1002/asi.23450>
- 64 Mascheroni, G., Vincent, J., & Jimenez, E. (2015). "Girls are addicted to likes so they post semi-naked selfies": Peer mediation, normativity and the construction of identity online. *Cyberpsychology: Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace*, 9(1). <https://doi.org/10.5817/CP2015-1-5>
- 65 Pasquier, D., Simões, J. A., & Kredens, E. (2012). Agents of mediation and sources of safety awareness: A comparative overview. In *Children, risk and safety on the internet. Research and policy challenges in comparative perspective* (pp. 219–230). Policy Press.

Figure 35: Feelings of safety and security



Q.H2 How safe do you feel overall...? Response items: Not safe at all; Not so safe; Rather safe; Very safe; I don't know; Prefer not to say
 Base: All children who use the internet.

Children expressed a range of responses regarding their feeling of safety and security in their living environment.

- Most children feel safest in the place where they live. 88% of children aged 9-17 years say they feel very safe in the place where they live. A further 9% say they feel rather safe. Just 1% report that they feel “not so safe”.
- This compares with similar findings for feeling safe in their country in general. Here, 83% say they feel very safe with 15% reporting that they feel ‘rather safe’. Again, just 1% report that they feel “not so safe” .
- Similarly, most children report that they feel very safe in school. 83% of children aged 9-17 years say that they feel very safe in school. 14% say they feel rather safe and 1% again report feeling “not so safe” .
- When it comes to the digital environment, a different pattern is evident. 41% of children aged 9-17 years say they feel very safe with a further 40% saying they feel ‘rather safe’ on the internet. 11%, however, say they feel “not so safe” or “not safe at all”, making the online world the environment children feel least safe in.
- Somewhat more girls than boys say they feel not so safe online (10% of girls vs. 8% of boys). Age is also a factor with younger children feeling less safe online. For example, 11% of 12-13-year-olds say they feel not so safe, compared to 9% of 14-15-year-olds and 6% of 16-17-year-olds.

Examining feelings of safety, security and being listened to at home, children were asked how true the following statements were for them regarding their home and family:

Table 20: Family environment, by age and gender

% Who say very true	9-12 years		13-17 years		All
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
When I speak someone listens to what I say	69	70	62	62	66
My family really tries to help me	88	85	79	80	83
I feel safe at home	92	91	90	92	91

Q.J1 How true are the following things about your family and home? Response items: Not true; A bit true; Fairly true; Very true; I don't know; Prefer not to say.

Base: All children who use the internet

As reported above, most children report that they feel safe in the home and family environment.

- 91% say they feel “very safe” at home with the remainder saying it is fairly true that they feel safe at home. Just 1% say it is a bit true and no cases reported it was not true.
- Most children also report their family really tries to help them: 83% overall say this is “very true” of them and their family.
- 66% say they are listened to when they have something to say. This is truer of younger children aged 9-12 years (70%) declining somewhat to 62% of 13-17-year-olds.
- There are no gender differences in terms of boys and girls reporting that they are listened to when they have something to say.

Parental mediation

Children’s access to digital technologies and use of various digital services is for the most part mediated by other adult influences in their lives, particularly so for younger children. Parents and carers are the most notable influence in this regard and how they approach the task of “digital parenting” can have a major determining effect on children’s experiences of the digital environment.⁶⁶

Two main types of parental mediation have been identified.⁶⁷ *Active mediation* involves the parent taking an active role in supporting the child’s positive use of the internet and digital technologies. This includes, for example, encouraging the child to explore and learn things online, supporting the development of skills and demonstrating ways to use online technologies safely. Active and enabling parenting practices are considered valuable as the support children’s digital literacy and resilience in negotiating online risks.⁶⁸ *Restrictive mediation*, by contrast, involves limiting children’s use of the internet and digital technologies, through the application

66 Livingstone, S. (2021, March 3). “I recognise how important technology is, now more than ever: The dilemmas of digital parenting” [Online resource]. *Parenting for a Digital Future*; London School of Economics and Political Science. <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/parenting4digitalfuture/>

67 Livingstone, S., Ólafsson, K., Helsper, E. J., Lupiáñez-Villanueva, F., Veltri, G. A., & Folkvord, F. (2017). Maximizing Opportunities and Minimizing Risks for Children Online: The Role of Digital Skills in Emerging Strategies of Parental Mediation: Maximizing Opportunities and Minimizing Risks. *Journal of Communication*, 67(1), 82–105. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcom.12277>

68 Dedkova, L., & Smahel, D. (2020). Online Parental Mediation: Associations of Family Members’ Characteristics to Individual Engagement in Active Mediation and Monitoring. *Journal of Family Issues*, 41(8), 1112–1136. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X19888255>

of rules and / or technical monitoring and restriction of what children can and cannot do online. While restrictive mediation limits exposure to online risks, for instance by blocking access to certain forms of content or contact, it also has the effect of restricting opportunities as well as limiting the child's ability to develop resilience in the face of problems that may arise online.^{69 70}

This section of the questionnaire was introduced to children with the following reminder:

Remember that when we say "the internet" or "online", please think how you use any device in any place. This could include your cell phone, tablet, or computer to send or receive messages, emails, browse, or to communicate with friends and family, uploading or downloading, or anything else that you usually do online.

Active mediation

Children were first asked the extent to which their parents/carers practiced several enabling online support activities.

Table 21: Active mediation as experienced by children, by age and gender

% Who say often or very often	9-12 years		13-17 years		All
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
Encourages me to explore and learn things on the internet	32	28	25	25	27
Suggests ways to use the internet safely	64	67	47	61	59
Talks to me about what I do on the internet	62	70	37	51	44
Helps me when something bothers me on the internet	61	62	44	57	55

Q.J3. When you use the internet, how often does your parent/carer do any of these things? Response items: Never; Hardly ever; Sometimes; Often; Very often; I don't know; Prefer not to say.

Base: All children who use the internet

Findings in relation to active mediation include some of the follow key highlights:

- 59% of children report that their parents suggest ways to use the internet safely, making this the most popular way to actively mediate children's internet use. This is particularly the case for girls. 61% of 13–17-year-old girls say this is the case, compared to 47% of boys in this age group. There are fewer gender differences for younger children aged 9 to 12 (67% of girls vs. 64% of boys in this age group).
- 55% of children say their parents help them when something bothers them online. This is the second most common form of active mediation. Again, gender differences are apparent among teenagers. 57% of girls aged 13–17 years say this is the case compared 44% of 13–17-year-old boys. There are no gender differences in the 9–12-year-old age group, with 62% of girls and 61% of boys saying their parents often help them when something bothers them online.

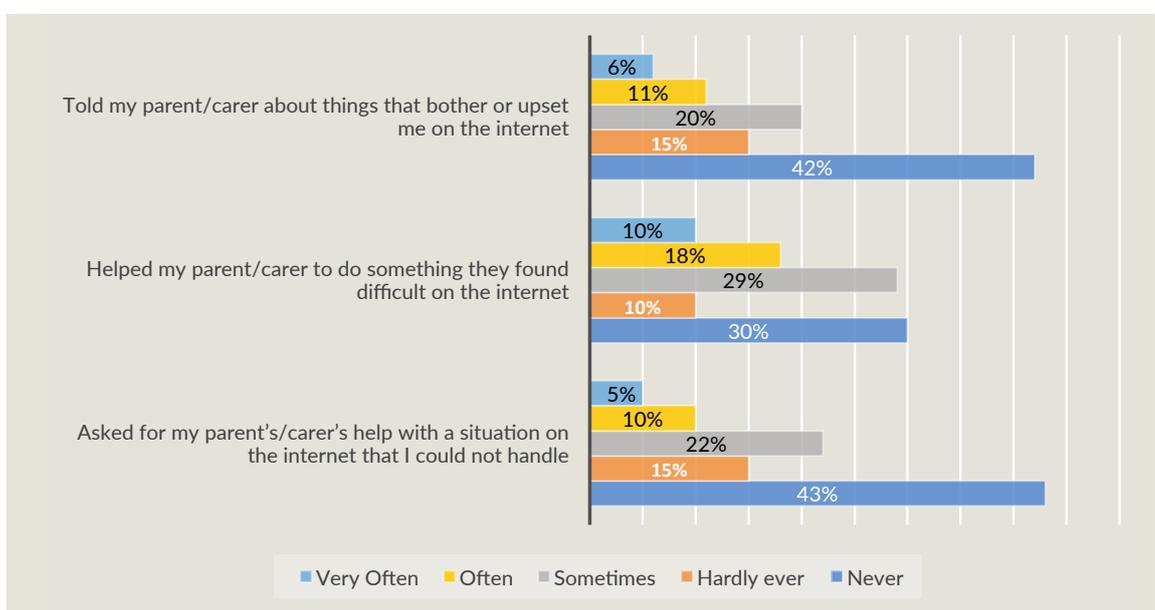
69 Lee, S.-J. (2013). Parental restrictive mediation of children's internet use: Effective for what and for whom? *New Media & Society*, 15, 466–481. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444812452412>

70 Chen, V. H. H., & Chng, G. S. (2016). Active and restrictive parental mediation over time: Effects on youths' self-regulatory competencies and impulsivity. *Computers & Education*, 98, 206–212. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2016.03.012>

- A gendered pattern of involvement in children’s reports of their parents talking to them about what they do on the internet. 70% of 9–12-year-old girls and 51% of 13–17-year-old girls say this is the case compared to 62% of 9–12-year-old boys and just 37% of 13–17-year-old boys.
- The lowest finding in relation to active mediation is in respect of children being encouraged to explore and learn things on the internet. Just 27% of children overall say their parents do this often or very often. While close to one third of 9–12-year-old boys (32% say this is the case, this declines to one quarter or 25% of 13–17-year-olds.

Children were also asked the extent to which they took the initiative in telling their parents or carers about things that bother them online or if they were proactive in asking for help or, conversely, acted to help their parents with something difficult online.

Figure 36: Seeking or giving parental help, by age and gender



Q.J4 When you use the internet, how often does your parent/carer do any of these things
 Base: All children who use the internet.

When it comes to the child taking proactive steps to ask for guidance or support:

- Just 17% say they often or very often tell their parents about things that bother or upset them on the internet. 20% say they sometimes do this but 42% say they never do this.
- Similar findings are evident in relation to asking for a parent’s or carer’s help with a situation on the internet that the child could not handle. While 15% of children say they often or very often do this, 43% say they never do this.
- Somewhat greater numbers report helping their parents when they come across something difficult online. 28% of children say they do this often or very often, with 29% saying they sometimes do this.

Restrictive mediation and technical monitoring

In terms of restrictive mediation, the general focus of questions posed was on parents' use of different technical means of overseeing their children's digital activities to monitor, limit or restrict the kinds of activities or the time spent online using digital devices.

Children were also asked about the rules that were in place regarding their activities online and which of the following activities they were allowed to do:

Table 22: Parental rules regarding online activities

children who say (%)	I am allowed to do this anytime without permission or supervision	I am allowed to do this only with permission or supervision	I am not allowed to do this	I do not know if I am allowed to do this
Use a web or phone camera (e.g. for Skype or video chat)	32	34	24	5
Download music or films	45	34	15	3
Use a social networking site (e.g. Facebook Snapchat Instagram Twitter)	44	26	25	1
Watch video clips (e.g. on YouTube)	58	34	4	1
Play games with other people online	45	30	17	3
Read/watch news online	51	20	12	6
Use the internet for school work	60	30	5	1
Spend time in a virtual world (e.g. Minecraft)	45	21	20	5
Share photos videos or music online with others	36	24	32	4

Q.J5 Does your parent/carer allow you to do the following things on the internet and if so, do you need their permission to do them?

Base: All children who use the internet

As outlined above, children are allowed to undertake a wide range of popular online activities. As reported by children:

- Popular online activities such as watching video clips online, using the internet for schoolwork, reading and watching news online are allowed for most children 9-17 years. In most cases, children say they are allowed to do this without permission or supervision.

- 45% say that playing video games online and 44% say social media use are activities that they are allowed to do without permission or supervision.
- Sharing photos, video on music content with others online is the activity that most parents forbid. 32% of children aged 9-17 years old say they are not allowed to do this. One quarter or 24% say they can only do this with permission.
- One third, or 34%, say that they need a parent's permission to use a camera phone or webcam

Children were asked if their parents made use of any of the items included in a list of popular technical mediation tools including parental control for tracking or restricting online access, limiting in-app purchases, ad-blockers or other technologies to manage access to digital devices.

Table 23: Restrictive mediation according to children, by age and gender

% Who say their parent make use of these	9-12 years		13-17 years		All
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
Rules about how long or when I am allowed to go online	88	83	60	54	70
Parental controls or other means of keeping track of the Internet content I look at or apps I use	73	75	39	43	55
Parental controls or other means of blocking or filtering some types of content	71	74	38	43	54
Parental controls that alert my parent/carer when I want to buy content (in-app purchase)	64	60	41	30	46
Parental controls that filter the apps I can download	65	62	34	26	44
A service or contract that limits the time I spend on the internet	55	40	19	20	31
Programs that block advertising (ad blocking)	45	51	21	21	31
Software that limits the people I can be in touch with through voice calls and messages	52	41	20	19	30
Technology to track where I am (such as GPS)	41	36	19	21	28

Q.J6 Does your parent/carer make use of any of the following...?

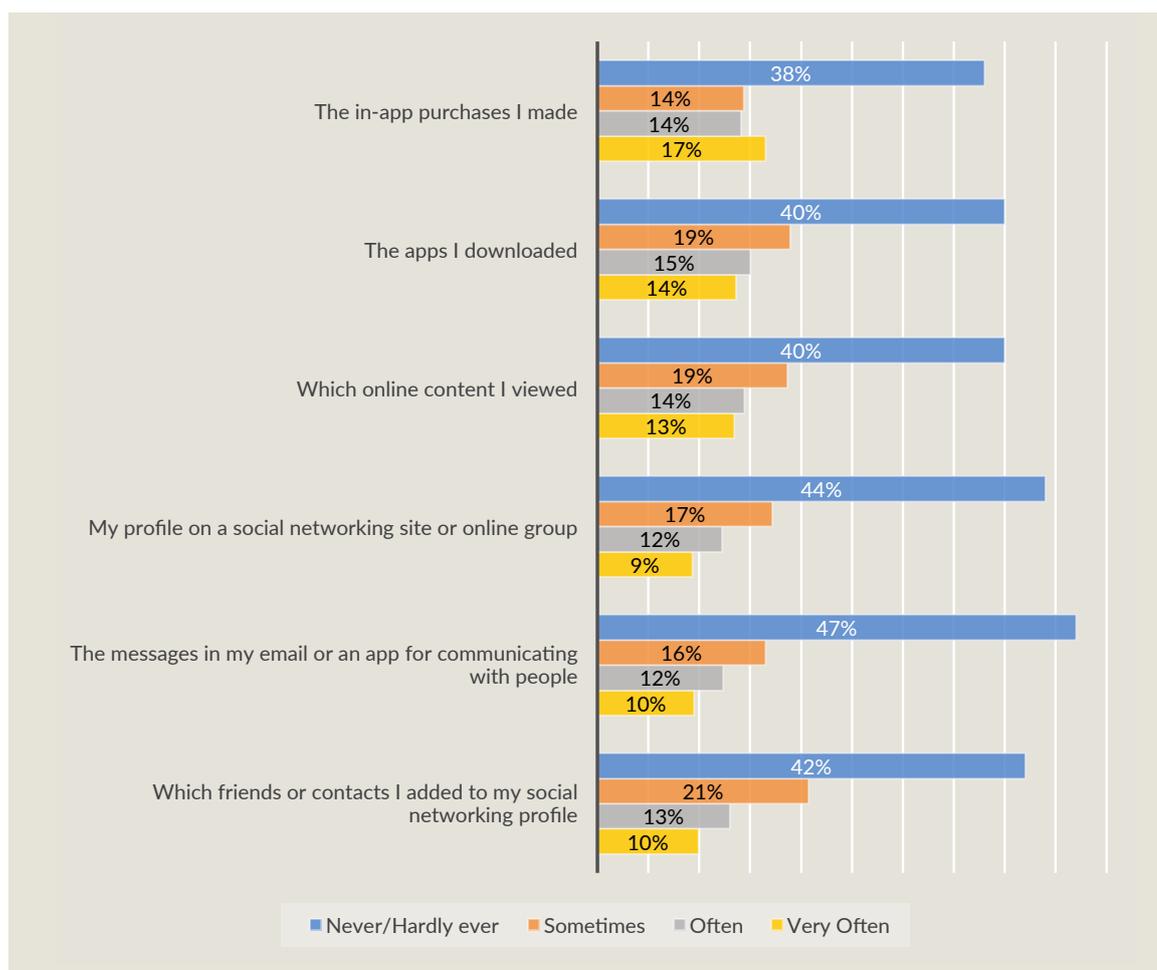
Base: All children who use the internet

- The most reported restrictive strategy adopted by parents, according to children, is the setting of rules about how long or when the child is allowed to go online. This is the case for 70% of all children. As to be expected, this applies more so to younger children with 88% of boys and 83% of girls aged 9-12 years say this applies to them. For older teens, it is the case for 60% of boys, 13-17 years and 54% of girls in this age group.
- Parental control tools are also widely used by many parents, again according to the child. Three quarters of 9-12-year-olds say their parents use such controls to keep track of the internet content they look at and to filter certain kinds of content. A little over 60% of 9-12-year-olds also say their parents use controls to limit in-app purchases or filter the apps that they can download.

- The use of technical means of monitoring or restricting access is, unsurprisingly, much less in evidence for older teenagers. At the same time approximately 40% of 13–17-year-olds report that their parents use control tools to keep track of content viewed online or to block access to certain types of content.

Children were also asked how often their parent or carer checked or monitored their activities, using the following main examples:

Figure 37: Frequency of parental checking of online activities



QJ7 When you use the internet, how often does your parent/carers check the following things afterwards?
 Base: All children who use the internet.

In terms of children's reports of their parents following up and checking their online activities:

- The in-app purchases which children make and the apps which children download are the online activities most frequently checked afterwards according to children aged 9-17 years. 31% say their parents often or very often check their in-app purchases and 29% check which apps the child has downloaded.
- Parents also regularly check which content the child views. 27% of children aged 9-17 years say their parents often or very often do this.

- Approximately one in five also say that their parents often or very often check which friends or contacts the child adds to their social media profile (23%); the messages in their email or messenger account (23%); or their profile on a social networking site or online group (21%).
- 40% on average say their parents do not check on any of the activities listed.

Finally, in this section, children were asked about their perceptions of the overall effectiveness of measures taken by their parents to supervise their online access and use.

Table 24: Perceived effectiveness of parents' mediation efforts

Children who say (%)	Yes a little	Yes a lot	No	I don't know
Do the things that their parent/carer does relating to how you use the internet help to make their internet experience better	32	27	19	21
Do the things that their parent/carer does relating to how they use the internet limit what they can do on the internet	21	26	40	12

QJ11 Do the things that your parent/carer does relating to how you use the internet limit what you can do on the internet?

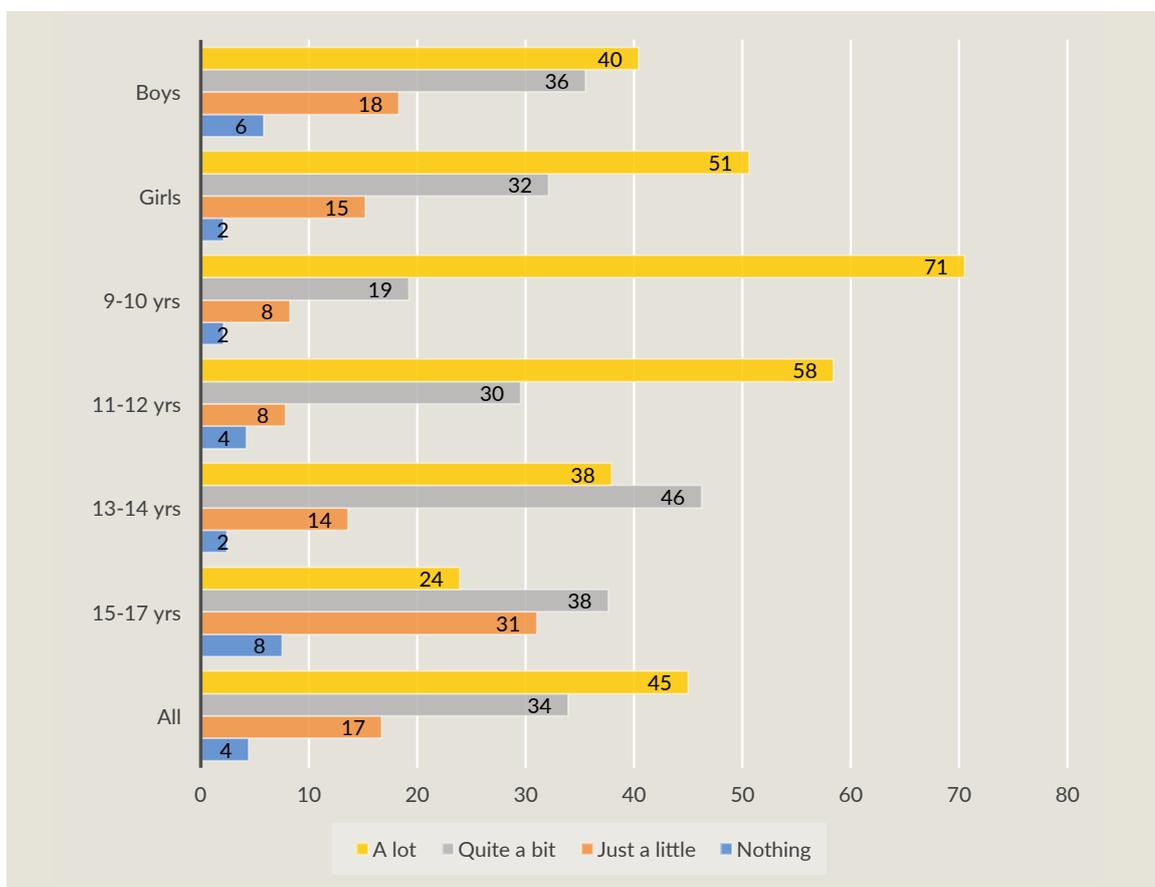
QJ12 Do you ever ignore what your parent/carer tells you about how and when you can use the internet?

Base: All children who use the internet

- When it comes to the things that their parents or carers do, 59% of children believe this does help to make their online experience better. 27% of children say this helps a little while close to a third (32%) say this helps a lot. 19% say this does not help them.
- When asked if the things that their parents or carers did restrict how they use the internet, children were more divided. 47% of children aged 9-17 years said their parents' mediation had a limiting effect on what they can do online. 21% said their parents' involvement affected this a little, while over a quarter or 26% this affected them a lot. 40% of children this does not restrict what they do online.
- Most children (59%) said they follow the rules that their parents lay down though a quarter (23%) state they sometimes ignore what their parents say. A further 10% say they often ignore their parents in this regard.

Children were also asked how much they thought their parent/carer knew about what they did online.

Figure 38: How much parents know of child's internet use, by age and gender



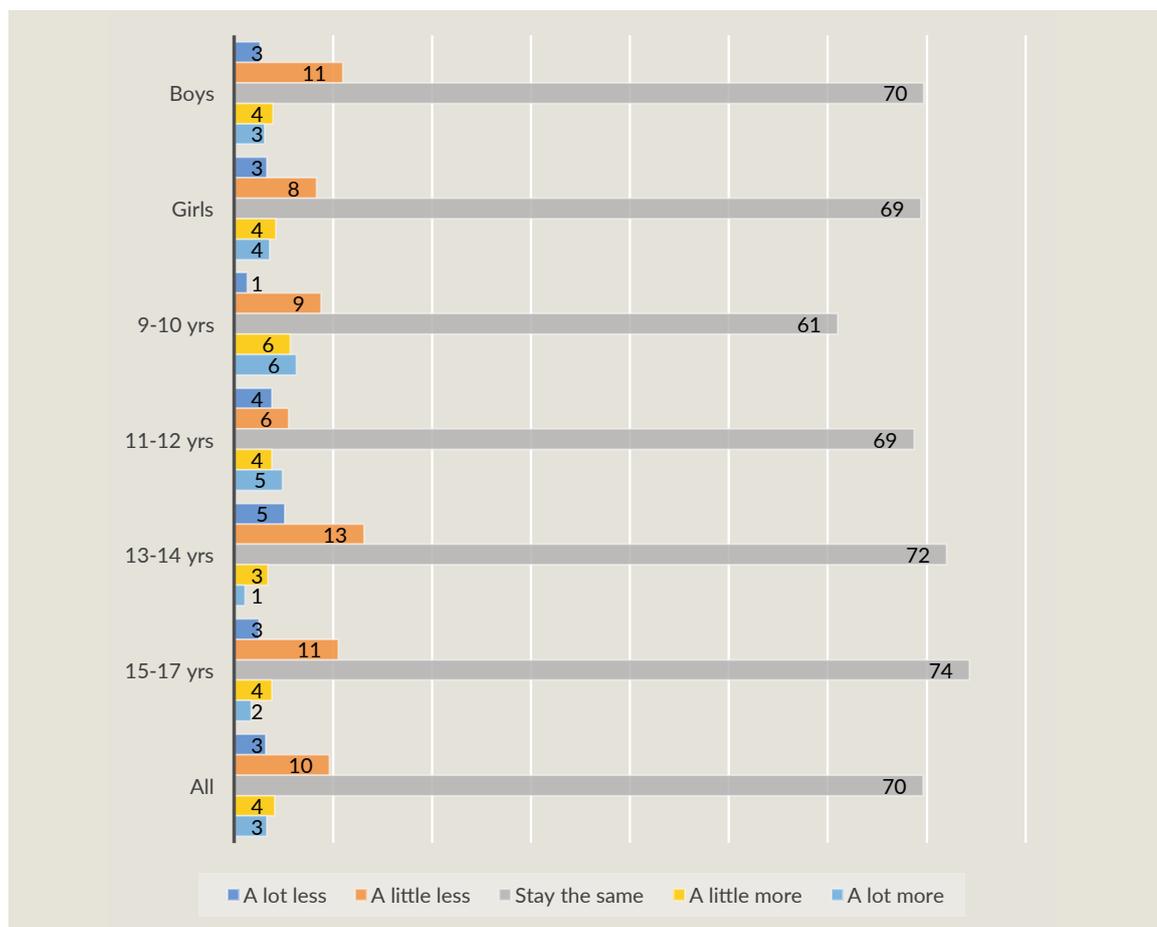
QJ8 How much do you think your parent/carer knows about what you do on the internet?
 Base: All children who use the internet.

- 45% of children report that their parents know a lot about what they did on the internet.
- 51% of girls and 40% of boys say that their parents know a lot about what they do online.
- 17% state that their reports know just a little while 4% (6% of boys and 2% of girls) say their parents know nothing of what they do online.
- Knowing less about what the child does online rises with age. While 8% of 9–10-year-olds say their parents know just a little of what they do online, this rises to 31% of 15–17-year-olds.

When asked if they would like their parent or carer to take more or less interest in what they do on the internet, most children stated that they were satisfied with the level of their parents' interest or involvement.

- 70% of children said they would like this to stay the same.
- 13% stated that they would like less involvement from their parents regarding their online activities.
- 7% overall reported that they would like to have a little more (4%) or a lot more involvement (3%) from their parents. 12% of younger children, 9–10 years, would like more involvement of their parents in their online activities.

Figure 39: Desired level of parental involvement according to the child



QJ9 Overall would you like your parent/carer to take more or less interest in what you do on the internet or to stay about the same?

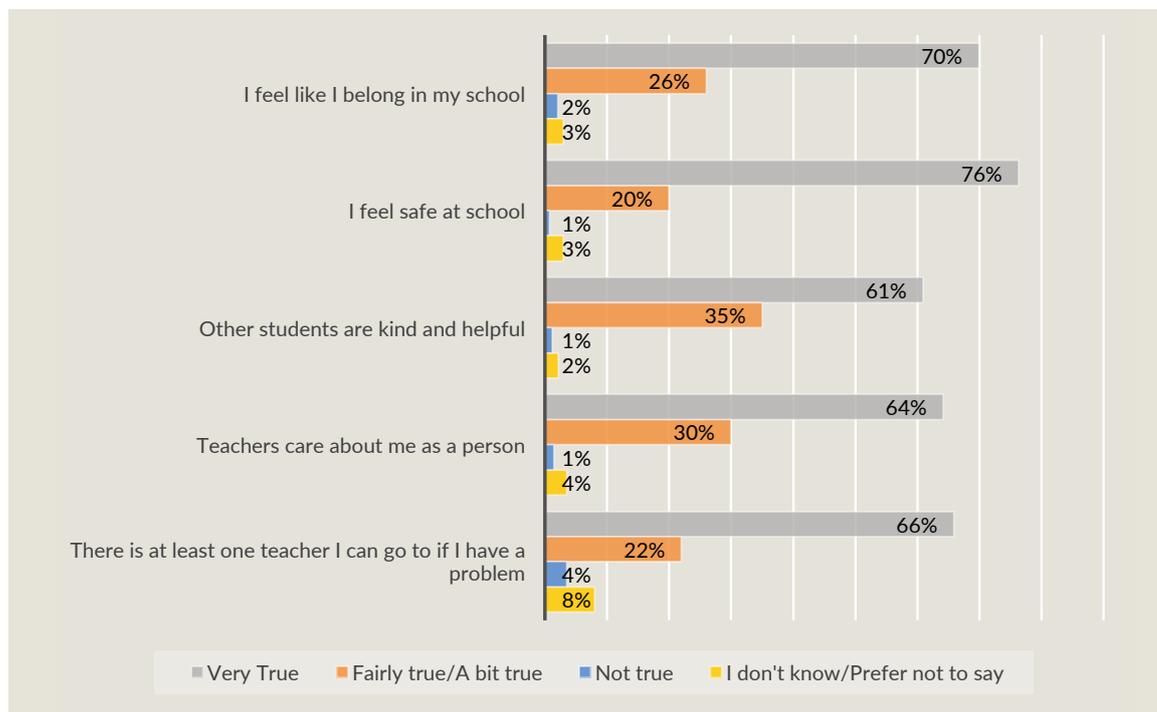
Base: All children who use the internet.

Mediation by teachers and peers

Mediation by peers, teachers and others also plays an important role in shaping children's online experiences.

To explore this further, children were asked about their experience in schools and as with the home environment their feelings of safety, security, and support within the school environment. Children were shown several statements about the school environment and were asked to signal their agreement on a scale from Not true to Very true.

Figure 40: School environment



Q.K1 Here are some statements about your school and the students and teachers in your school. Please say how much you agree or disagree with each one.

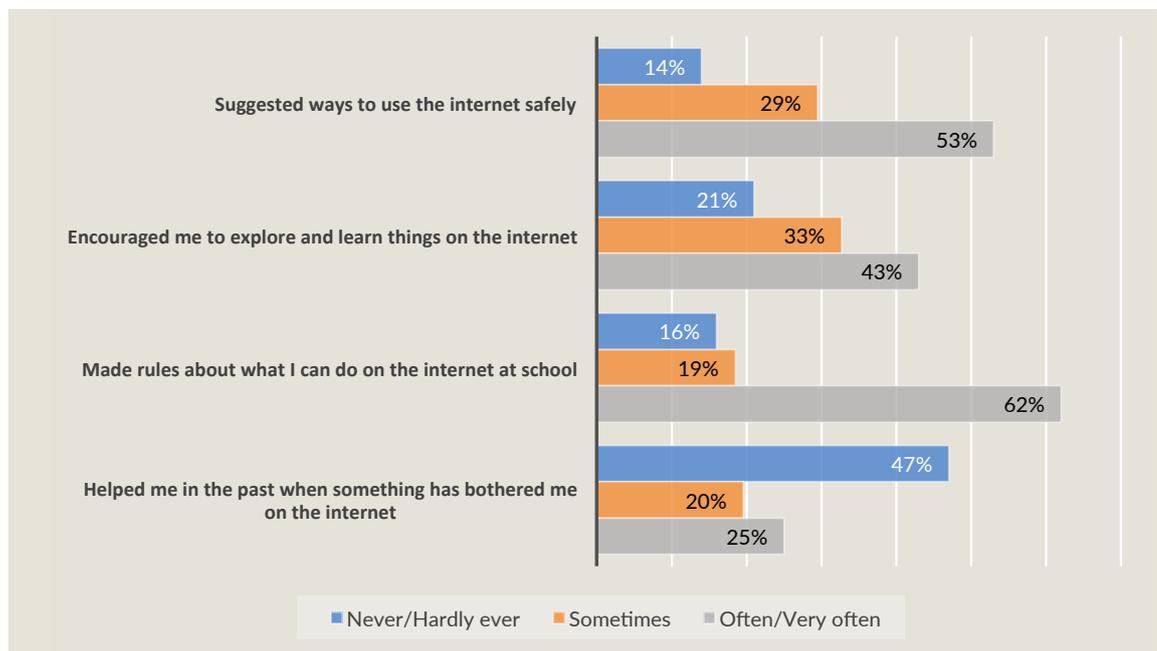
Base: All children who use the internet

Responding to the various items about the school environment, most children are very positive about their experience of school:

- 96% of all children, aged 9-17 years, say they feel like they belong in their school and that they feel safe. Three quarters (76%) say it is very true of them that they feel safe at school. 70% of children say they feel like they belong in school.
- Children are very positive about their experience of teachers. 94% of children aged 9-17 years say that their teachers care about them as persons. 88% of children say there is at least one teacher they can go to if they have a problem. 66% of children saying this is very true of them.
- 96% of children also say that other students are kind and helpful with 61% this to be very true.

Children were also asked about various activities teachers may have undertaken to support their online safety.

Figure 41: Teachers' mediation of online safety



Q.K2 Have any teachers at your school done these things?

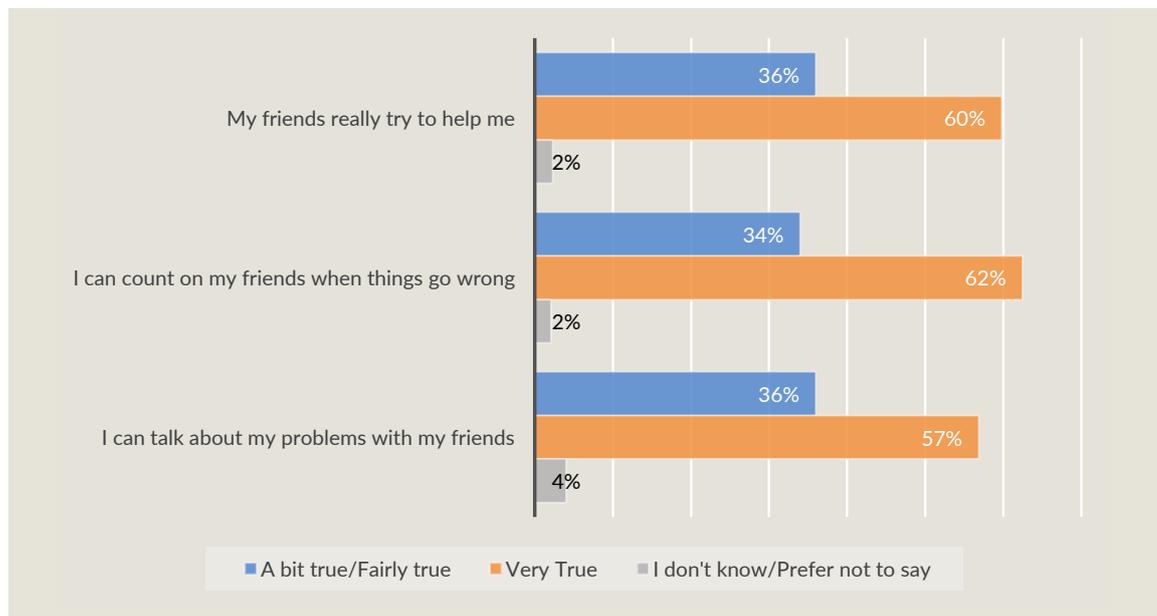
Base: All children who use the internet

- The most common form of mediation practiced by teachers is by the setting of rules about what children can do on the internet at school. 81% of children overall say this is sometimes or often the case. One third of children (31%) say this is very often the case.
- 53% of children also say that teachers often or very often suggest ways to use the internet safely. 14% say that teachers never or hardly ever do this.
- Teachers also support children by encouraging them to explore and learning things online. 76% of children overall say that teachers sometimes or often do this. According to one in five children (21%), however, teachers never or hardly ever do this.
- 45% of children also say that teachers have sometimes or often helped them when something has bothered them on the internet. One quarter of children (25%) say this is often or very often the case.

Similar questions were also put to children about the role played by their friends and peers in supporting them with what they do online.

Firstly, children were asked about their general perception of friendship.

Figure 42: Approach to friendship



Q.L1 How true are the following things for you?

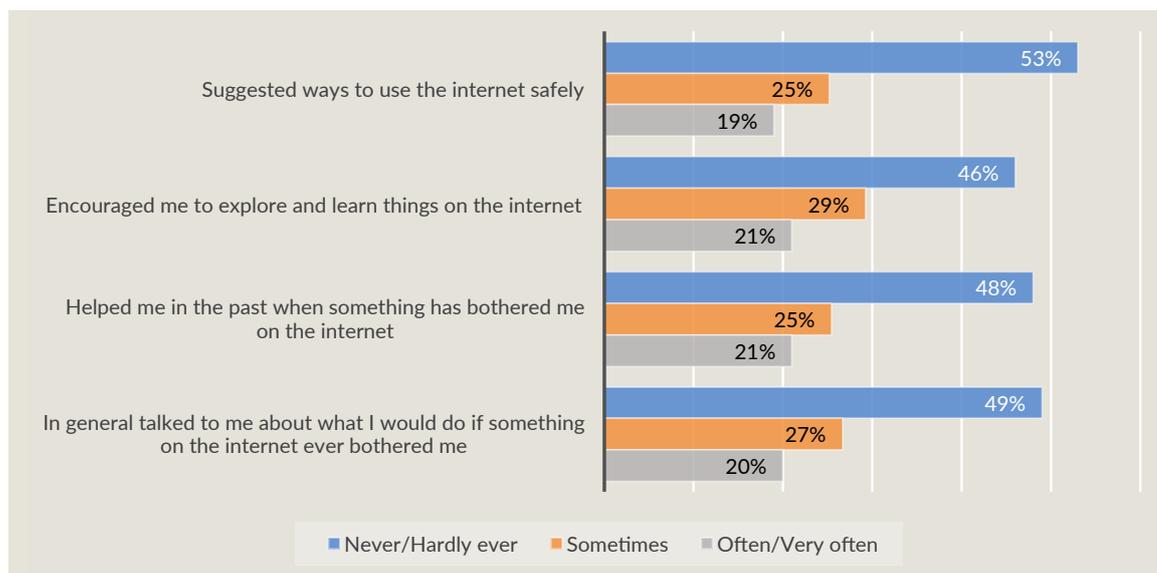
Base: All children who use the internet.

Children are similarly very positive about the role played by their friends and peers in their lives.

- 96% of children say their friends really try to help them. 60% of 9–17-year-olds say this is very true.
- A similar number (96%) of children say they can count on their friends when things go wrong. 62% of children say this is very true of them.
- 93% of children say they can talk about their problems with their friends. This is very true according to 57% of children and a bit true or fairly true for a further quarter (36%).

Regarding online safety, children were asked if their friends had done any of the following things to help in response to problems encountered online:

Figure 43: Peer mediation of online safety



Q.L2 Have any of your friends done these things?

Base: All children who use the internet

- The most reported form of mediation by peers is encouraging the child to explore and learn things on the internet. 50% of children aged 9-17 years say this is the case at least sometimes. 21% of children this is often or very often so.
- 47% of children say their friends provide support by talking about what the child should do if something on the internet bothered them. 20% of children say this is often or very often the case.
- 46% of children say their friends have helped them in the past when something has bothered them online. For 21% of children, this is often or very often the case.
- 44% of children say their friends have suggested ways to use the internet safely. 19% say this is often or very often the case.

Summary: Children and online safety

Access and use:

- Research has shown that children's online activities vary by age – with children progressing up 'the ladder of opportunities' over time, from basic uses to creative and participatory uses of the internet. Using the **digital environment for entertainment** accounts for the most reported activities by children 9-17 years. These include watching video clips (56%), listening to music online (55%) and communicating with family or friends (51%).
- Mobiles/smartphones are the most used device for internet access on a daily basis by 9–17-year-olds in both boys and girls.
- Smartphones (70%) followed by tablets (30%) and TVs (28%) are the devices most used to go online.
- **YouTube, Snapchat, Instagram, TikTok** and **Facebook** are among the social media platforms most used by children. Roblox and Minecraft are popular among 9–11-year-olds.
- **Underage age use of social media platforms**, i.e., below the minimum age of 13, is evident for services listed by younger children.
- 18% of 9–11-year-olds report using TikTok; 17% report using Snapchat, and 6% say they use WhatsApp. 28% of 11–12-year-olds report using TikTok; 12% use Instagram and 30% report using Snapchat.

Risk and negative user experiences

- Most children **turn to one of their parents (62%), friends (43%) or siblings (15%)** as sources of social support. The most common response to a negative online experience is to block the person who has caused the problem. More girls report blocking contacts in this way, as reported by 42% of 9–12-year-olds and 30% of 13–17-year-olds.
- 41% of children aged 9-17 years say they feel very safe online with a further 40% saying they feel "rather safe" on the internet. 11%, however, say they feel "not so safe" or "not safe at all".
- 17% of children 9-17 years have experienced some form **of bullying, either online or offline**, in the past year. 11% of all children say they have experienced **cyberbullying** in the past 12 months. This mostly involved nasty or hurtful messages on social media or messages sent to their phone. 24% of those that had been bullied online reported that nasty or hurtful messages were passed around or posted where others could see. Of those who had been bullied, 43% of children say they were fairly or very upset by what happened. 5% of children, aged 9-17 years, report treating someone else in a hurtful or nasty way.
- 18% of children aged 9 to 17 years in Ireland say that they have **seen sexual images online** in the past year. This includes 5% of 9–10-year-olds, 11% for 11–12-year-olds, 19% of 13–14-year-olds and one third (33%) of 15–17-year-olds. 47% of young people state (40% of boys and 56% of girls) that they were neither happy nor upset arising from this. 15% say that they were either a little upset or very upset on being exposed to sexual images.

- 9% for 13–14-year-olds and 15% for 16–17-year-olds reported **receiving sexual messages** (“sexts”) in the past year. 72% of those who had received sexual messages report receiving them on their mobile phone. 68% report that this happened on a social networking platform such as Facebook or Twitter. 12% of 15–17-year-olds report receiving an **unwanted request for sexual information**.
- A quarter of children (26%) report seeing potentially **harmful online content** in the last year. 20% have seen **hate messages online**; 18% have encountered **gory or violent images**; 16% have seen experiences of **taking drugs online**; 13% have visited **self-harm sites**; and 11% sites promoting **ways to be thin**. 9% say they have also seen sites that depict ways of **committing suicide**.
- **Misuse of personal data** has been experienced by approximately 10% of young people. 9% got a virus on a digital device; 7% found themselves tricked into spending too much money on in-app purchases or online games. 5% said somebody used their password to access their information or pretend to be them.
- 45% say they have experienced some aspect of **excessive internet use** in the past year. This includes spending less time with either family or friends or doing schoolwork because of the amount of time spent online. 38% of children also say that they have experienced conflicts with family or friends because of the amount of time spent online. 34% of 9–17-year-olds say that they have unsuccessfully tried to spend less time online and have felt bothered when they can’t be online.
- 13% of children overall also report that their parent/carer has **shared information about them online (such as text, photos or video) without their permission**.

Mediation

- 59% of children report that their parents **suggest ways to use the internet safely**. 55% of children say their parents help them when something bothers them online. At the same time, just 17% of children say they often or very often tell their parents about things that bother or upset them on the internet. 20% say they sometimes do this but 42% say they never do this.
- Parents less frequently report **encouraging children to explore things online for themselves**. Just 27% of children overall say their parents do this often or very often.
- **Playing video games online** (82%) or **using a social networking site** (70%) are activities that most children say *they do not need or hardly ever need* to have permission to do. 70% of children also say their parents set rules about how long or when they are allowed to go online.
- **Parental control tools are also widely used by many parents**, according to the child. Three quarters of 9–12-year-olds say their parents use such controls to keep track of the internet content they look at and to filter certain kinds of content.
- Parents also regularly **check which content the child views**. 27% of children aged 9-17 years say their parents do this often or very often. Approximately one in five also say that their parents often or very often check which friends or contacts the child adds to their social media profile (23%); the messages in their email or messenger account (23%); or their profile on a social networking site or online group (21%).

- 42% of children report that their parents **know a lot about what they do online**. This is especially so for girls: 47% of girls compared to 38% of boys say that their parents know a lot about what they do online.
- Teachers also support children by encouraging them to explore and learning things online with 76% of children overall say that teachers sometimes or often do this. 45% of children also say that teachers have sometimes or often helped them when something has bothered them on the internet.
- 47% of children say their friends provide support by talking about what the child should do if something on the internet has bothered them. 46% of children say their friends have helped them in the past when something has bothered them online. For 21% of children, this is often or very often the case.

Part 2

Parents and online safety



Introduction

Part 2 of the report presents findings from the survey of parents which was administered in conjunction with the child survey.

The focus of this section of the report is on parental mediation and the different strategies employed by parents to oversee and support their children's online use. The two main types of parental activity are outlined: active mediation and restrictive mediation. Active mediation encompasses a range of activities in which parents are directly involved in supporting children's online use. Restrictive mediation includes activities undertaken by parents to reduce online risks, limit certain forms of content and contact and the use of tools and technologies to monitor and/or restrict access. Comparison between child and parent findings is also facilitated by the pairing of interviews in this survey, allowing an examination of the differences in reports regarding actions undertaken and overall awareness of risk activities. Finally, parents report how they are currently supported in terms of receiving online safety advice as well as how they would like to receive guidance in online safety in the future.

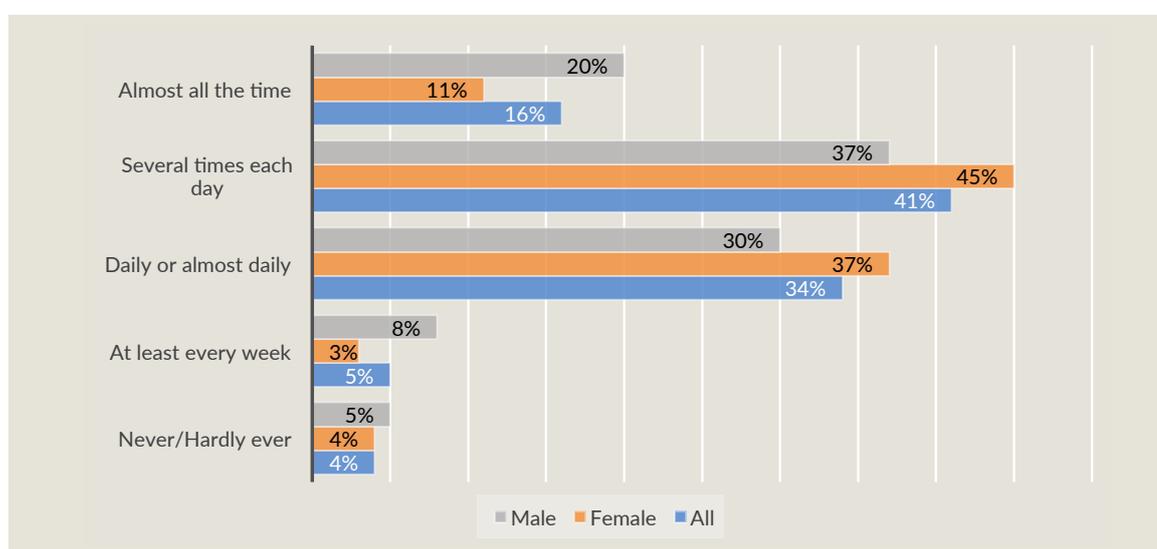
Access and use

In line with the model applied to researching children's experiences of risk and safety online, the first section presents findings on parent's access and use of digital and their levels of digital skills and competence.

By way of general background, parents were asked about their own history of internet use. Most parents (84%) say that they are experienced internet users having been online for many years with a further 11% reporting that they had been internet users for a few years. 3% of parents interviewed declared that they were not internet users.

Parents were then asked how often they used the internet.

Figure 44: Parents internet use



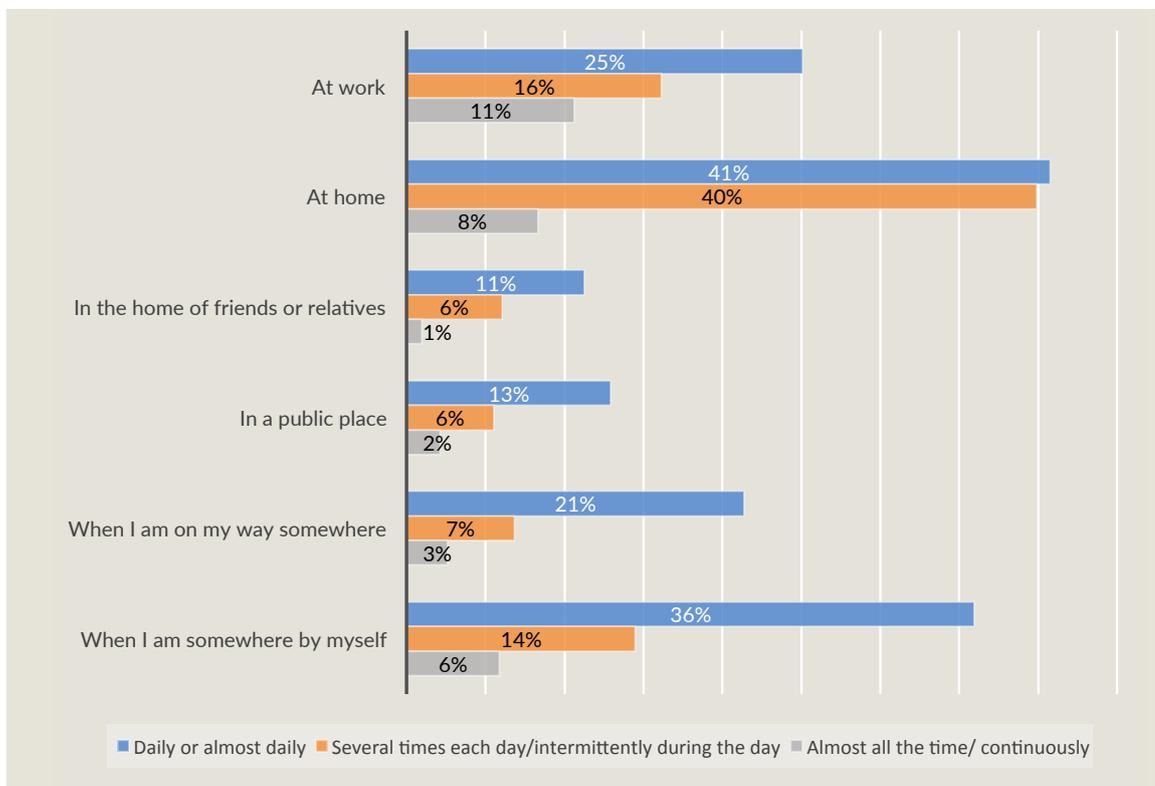
QA2 How often do you use the internet? Response items: Never; Hardly Ever; At least every month; At least every week; Daily or almost daily; Several times a time; Almost all the time; Don't know; Prefer not to say
Base: All parents who use the internet

In line with their level of experience, parent respondents to the survey report frequent or very frequent use of the internet.

- 91% of respondents go online at least daily. 41% say they do this several times a day and 16% say they are online almost all the time.
- There are some gender differences in this regard with twice as many fathers as mothers reporting intensive use, i.e., being online almost all the time. 20% of fathers compared to 11% of mothers say this.
- There are fewer gender differences in daily use with somewhat more mothers than fathers describing themselves as going online daily or almost daily (37% vs. 30%) or several times a day (45% vs. 37%)
- A small proportion of respondents (4%) report hardly ever going online, i.e., less than once a month.

Exploring daily online use a little further, Figure 45 presents findings where respondents report frequent online use, i.e., at least daily or more often during the day.

Figure 45: Daily internet use in various locations



Qa5 How often do you go online or use the internet at the following places? Response items: Never; Hardly Ever; At least every month; At least every week; Daily or almost daily; Several times a time; Almost all the time; Don't know; Prefer not to say

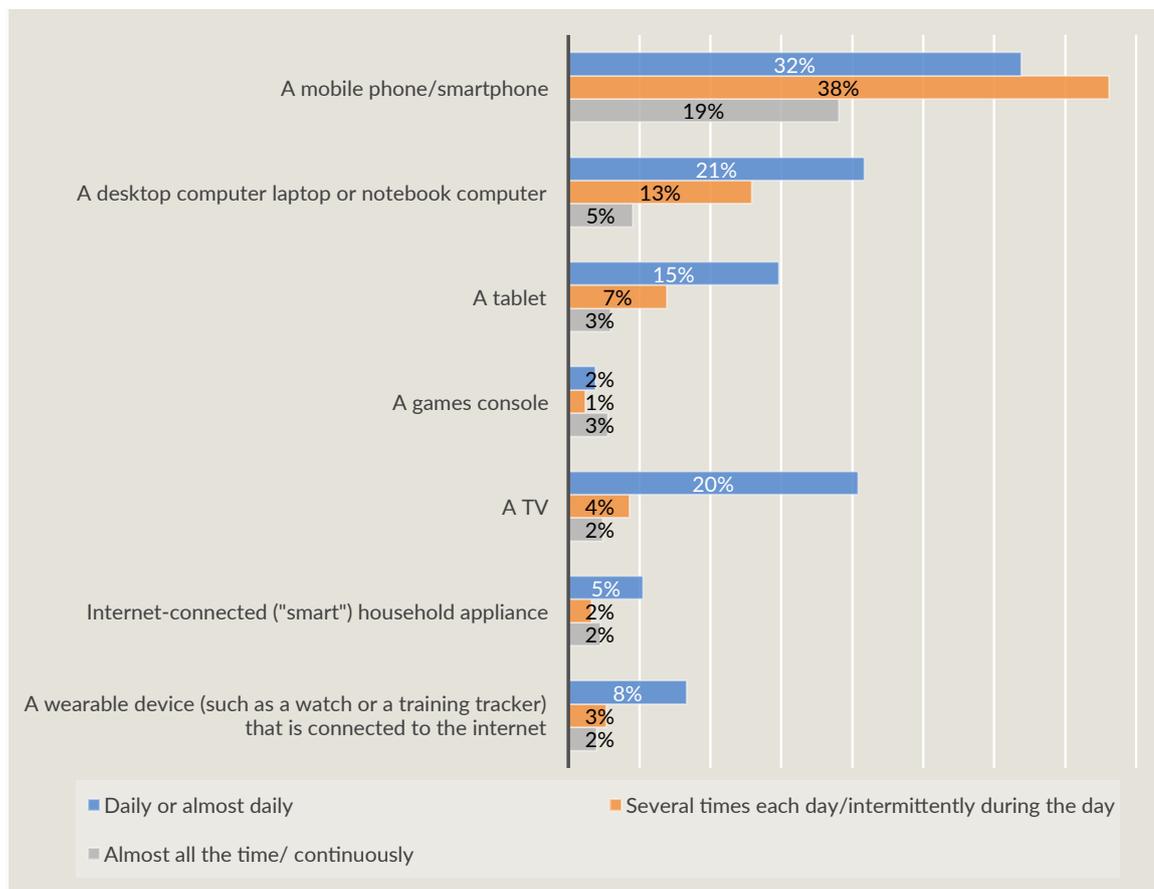
Base: All parents who use the internet

Internet use at home is the most frequently reported context for internet use according to parents in the survey.

- 89% of all respondents say they go online daily or more often during the day; 40% say they use the internet several times each day or intermittently during the day at home. 8% say they use the internet almost all the time or continuously at home.
- Respondents also report going online when they are somewhere by themselves. This is reported by 56% of all respondents.
- 52% say they are online daily in the context of work. 16% say this is several times or intermittently during the day and 11% say it is almost all the time or continuously.

In the same way, parents were asked about which devices they used to go online. Figure 46 presents findings on the devices used daily.

Figure 46: Daily use of digital devices



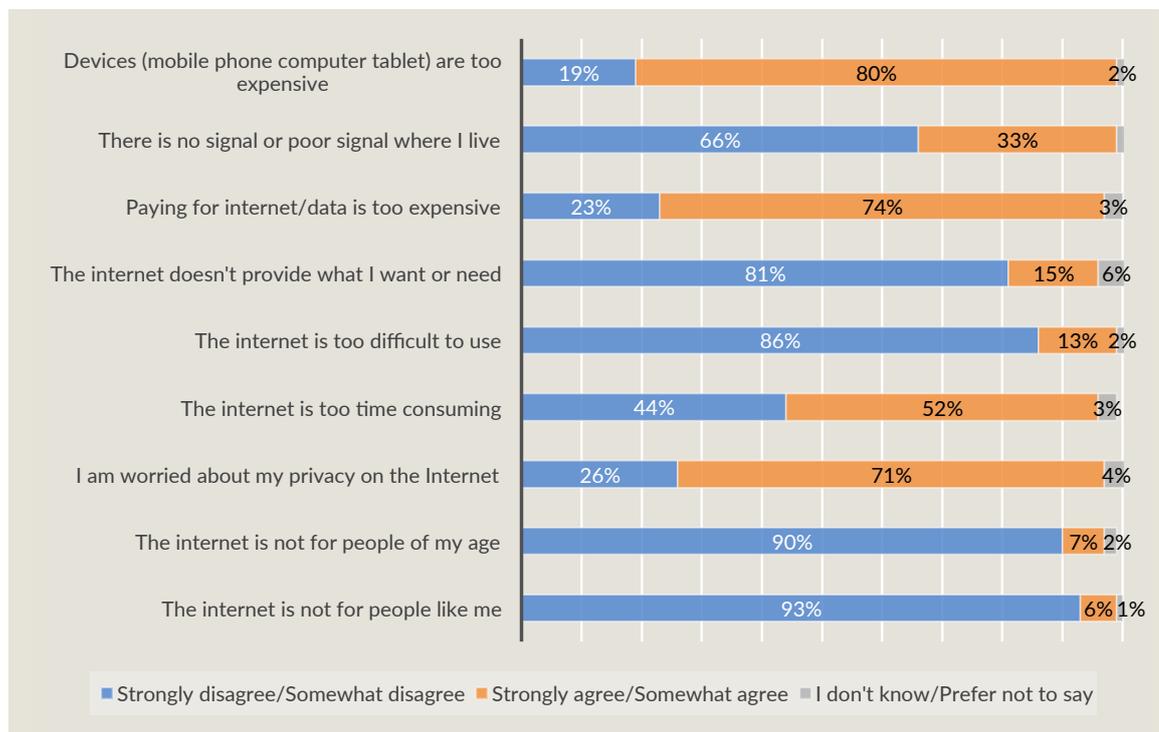
Qa6 How often do you go online or use the internet using the following devices? Response items: Never; Hardly Ever; At least every month; At least every week; Daily or almost daily; Several times a time; Almost all the time; Don't know; Prefer not to say
 Base: All parents who use the internet

As with children, a mobile phone or smartphone is the device that is most reported by parents for going online.

- 89% of respondents report using a mobile phone or smartphone to go online daily. 38% say they do this several times each day or intermittently during the day. 19% say they go online almost all the time or continuously using their smartphone.
- 39% also report using a desktop computer, laptop, or notebook for daily online use. 13% use such a device several times a day and 5% say they are online almost all the time using desktop or laptop.
- Tablets and connected TVs are also regularly used for daily online use. A quarter of respondents (25%) say they use tablets to go online daily. 26% note that their TV is also used for going online daily.

Parents were also asked about their general attitudes towards internet use and whether they felt positively or negatively towards its accessibility, suitability, and concerns that it may raise for them. Parents were asked to respond using a scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Aggregated scores are presented in Figure 47.

Figure 47: Attitudes towards internet use



QA4 How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Base: All parents who use the internet

Responses from parents to the survey show a largely positive disposition towards online use and the digital environment.

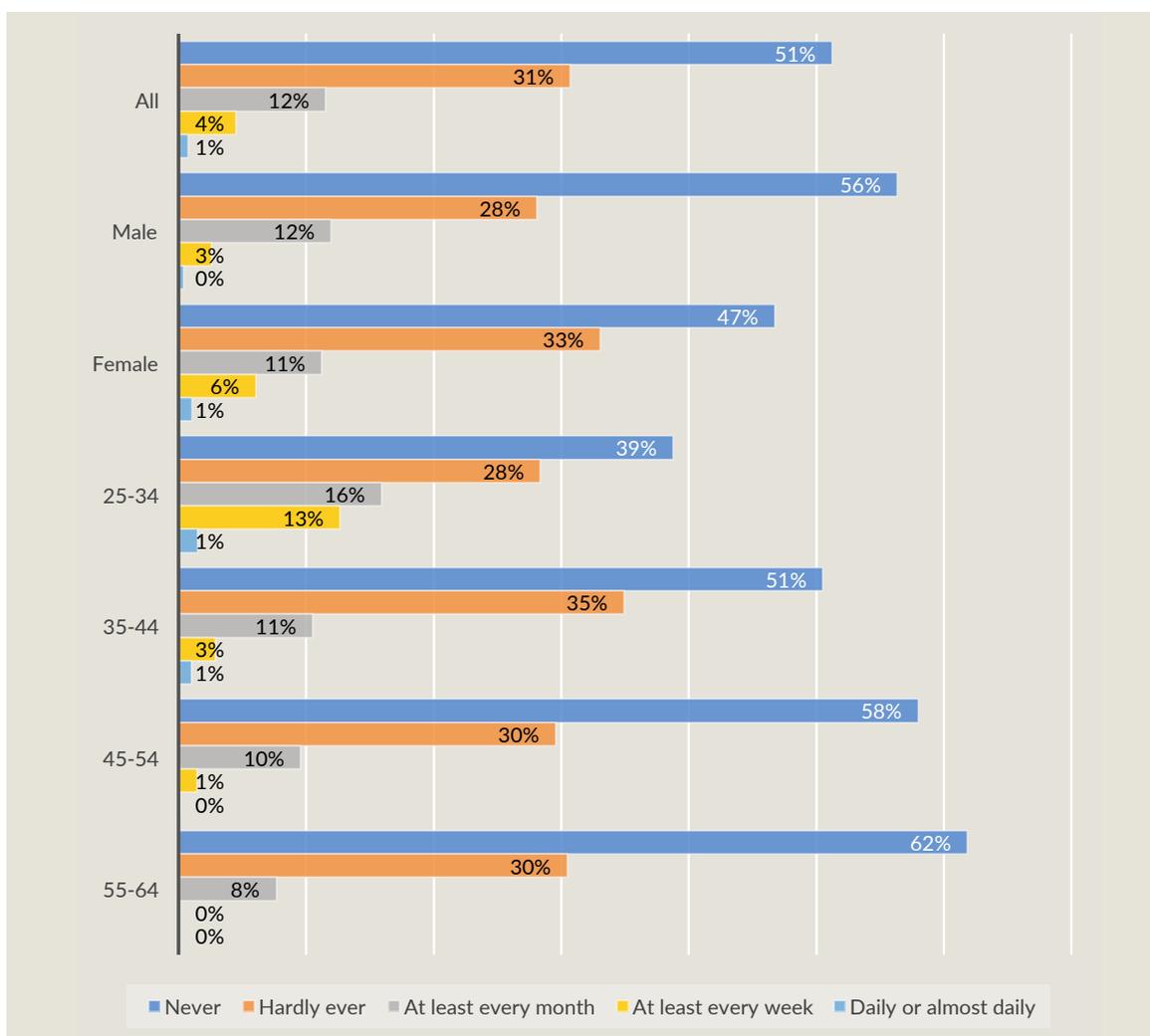
- Regarding accessibility, most agree that the costs of paying for internet or data as well as the cost of devices is too expensive. One third (33%) also report difficulties with the connectivity where they live.
- Most are very satisfied that the internet provides what they need (81%) and strongly disagree (86%) that it is too difficult to use.
- They also reject the statements “The internet is not for people of my age” (90%) or “The internet is not for people like me” (93%)
- However, 71% are worried about their privacy on the internet. 52% also agree that the internet is too time consuming.

Sharenting

In parallel with the topic explored in the child questionnaire, parents were also asked about their overall practices regarding sharing of videos and photos of their child online. Three questions were included in the survey regarding how much they shared, the frequency of sharing and general reasons or responses to sharing this content with others.

Parents were first asked how often they shared either posts, blogs, photos or videos of their child online.

Figure 48: Sharing child’s photos/videos online



QA10 How often do you share/post/blog photos/videos of your child online? Response items: Never; Hardly Ever; At least every month; At least every week; Daily or almost daily; Several times a time; Almost all the time; Don't know; Prefer not to say

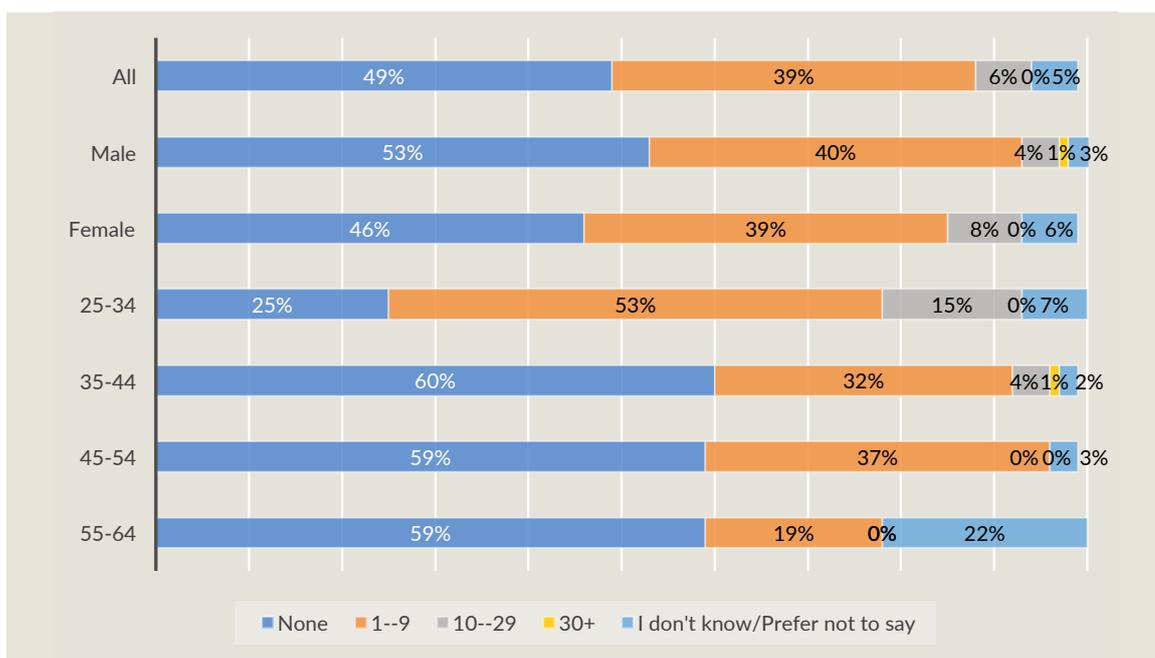
Base: All parents who use the internet

The sharing of photos, videos or other content about their child online is not a frequent practice among parents, according to the responses to this item. Recalling that 13% of children 9-17 years reported that their parents shared photos of them online without permission:

- 12% report that may share images or other content monthly and 5% overall report more frequent sharing.
- 51% of parents say they never do this and a further 31% say they hardly ever share photos or other content related to their children online.
- More frequent sharing of content is associated with age. 16% of parents aged 25-24 say they share content of their children at least every month and 13% reporting sharing content related to their children every week. By contrast, just 10% of parents over 45 report sharing content monthly.
- Slightly more mothers than fathers report frequent sharing of content: 6% of mothers compared 3% of fathers report sharing content of their children at least every week.

Parents were also asked about the number of items they may have shared online in the past month.

Figure 49: No. of photos/videos posted in the past month



QA11 In the past month how many photos or videos of your child have you shared online?

Base: All parents who use the internet

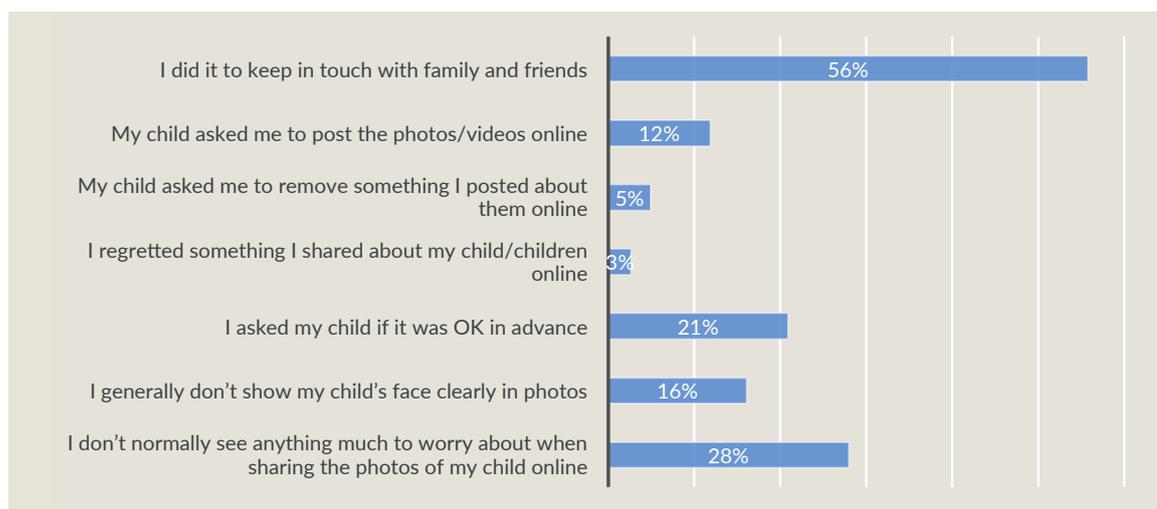
- Half of the parent respondents (49%) reported that they had not shared any photos or videos in the past month.
- 39% said they had shared between 1-9 items and 6% 10 items or more.
- Greater levels of sharing content online by parents in the past month is again associated with age: 53% of parents 25-34 say they have shared between 1 and 9 items and 15% 10 or more.

- However, a third of parents in the age categories 35-44 and 45-54 say they have shared 1-9 items about their children in the past month.

Finally, parents were asked to give some of the reasons for sharing photos or videos of their children online.

- The most common reason given for sharing children’s content online was to keep in touch with family and friends. This was reported by 56%.
- 28% reported that they did not see anything much to worry about when sharing photos of their children online.
- 21% stated that they had asked their child in advance if it was okay to share their content online.
- 5% reported that their child had asked them to remove something which they had posted online.
- Just 3% stated that they regretted something they had shared about their child online.

Figure 50: Reasons for sharing child’s photo/video online



Qa12 When you have shared photos or videos of your child and/or children online has any of the following happened?
 Base: All parents who use the internet

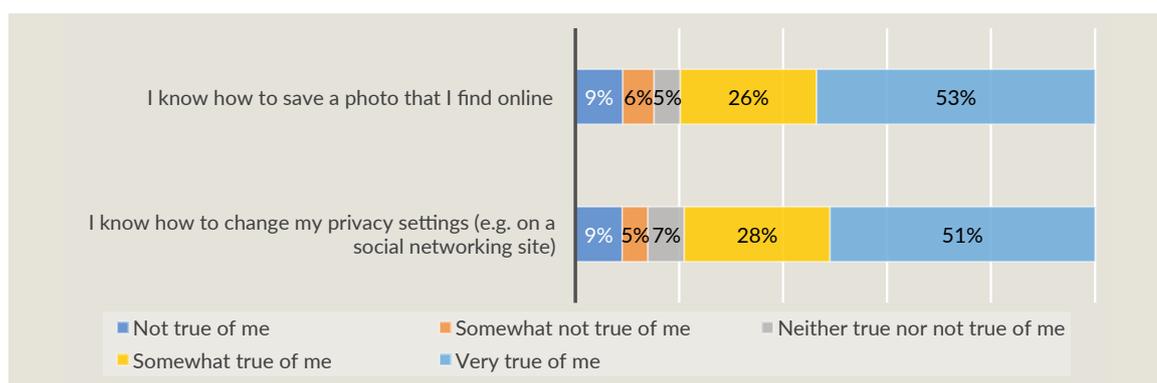
Digital Skills

This section of the questionnaire also includes questions about digital skills derived from the Internet Skills Scale (van Deursen et al 2016).⁷¹ As in the child questionnaire, parents were similarly asked about the following five areas of competence: *operational skills*, including safety skills; *information navigation skills*, including critical engagement with online information; *social skills*, or the ability to manage online relationships with others; *creative skills*, related to content production; and *mobile skills*, related to the use of mobile devices. Parents were also asked about their self-efficacy in digital competence and whether they felt they knew more about the internet than their child.

Operational skills

Parents were asked about their skills in operating digital media including operating online safety features such as privacy settings. The two items to measure operational skills were: “*whether you know how to save an image you find online*” and “*whether you know how to change your privacy settings, for example on a social network*”.

Figure 51: Parents’ operational skills



QA7 On a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 is 'Not at all true of me' and 5 is 'Very true of me', how true are these of you?

Base: All parents who use the internet

Most parents report high levels of operational skills related to their internet use.

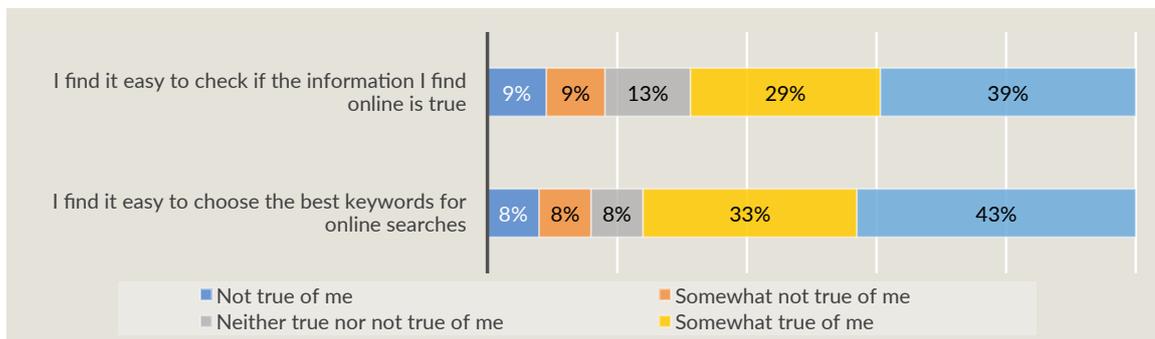
- 79% say they know how to save a photo that they find online. 53% say this is very true of them while 26% say this is somewhat true of them. Just 15% report that this is not true of them or somewhat not true of them.
- 79% say they know how to change privacy settings e.g., on a social networking site. 50% say this is very true of them and 28% report that it is somewhat true of them. Again, just 14% report but this is not true of them or somewhat not true.

Information navigation skills

Parents were asked about their skills in searching, selecting and evaluating information in digital media through the following two items: *I find it easy to check if the information I find online is true*; and *I find it easy to choose the best keywords for online searches*.

71 van Deursen, A. J. A. M., Helsper, E. J., & Eynon, R. (2016). Development and validation of the Internet Skills Scale (ISS). *Information, Communication & Society*, 19(6), 804–823. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2015.1078834>

Figure 52: Parents' information navigation skills



QA7 On a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 is 'Not at all true of me' and 5 is 'Very true of me', how true are these of you?
 Base: All parents who use the internet

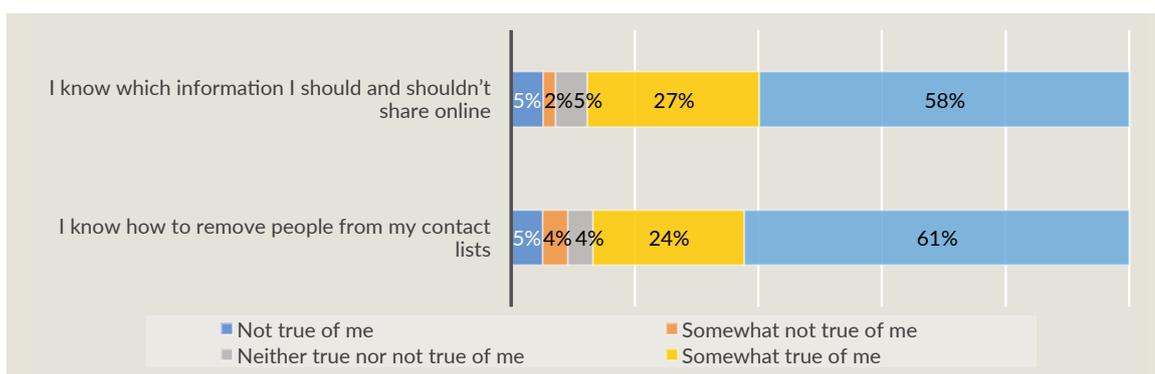
Most parents say they possess the skills associated with navigating information online.

- 68% say they find it easy to check if the information they find online is true. 39% say this is very true of them. 29% say this is somewhat true. 18% say that this is not true of them or somewhat not true.
- Over three quarters of parents, or 76%, say they find it easy to choose the best keywords for online searches. 43% say this is very true of them while one (33%) say this is somewhat true of them. 16% say this is not true of them or somewhat not true.

Social skills

Parents were similarly asked about their level of skills in the use of social media, specifically related to sharing content and communication on social media platforms: "I know which information I should and shouldn't share online" and "I know how to remove people from my contact lists".

Figure 53: Parents' social media skills



QA7 On a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 is 'Not at all true of me' and 5 is 'Very true of me', how true are these of you?
 Base: All parents who use the internet

High levels of social skills are reported on both items related to the use of social media.

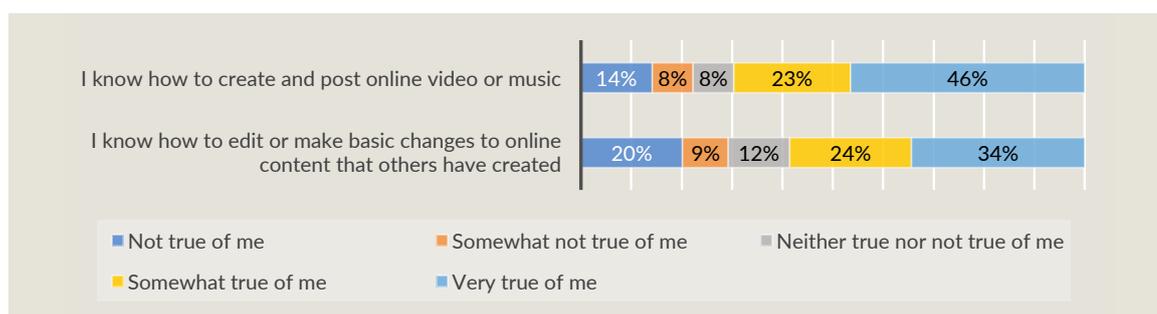
- 85% of parents reported that they know which information they should and shouldn't share online. 58% said this was very true of them while 27% said this was somewhat true. Just 7% reported that this was not true of them.

- Similarly, 85% of parents reported that they know how to remove people from their contact lists. 61% say this is very true of them. 24% said this is somewhat true of them. 8% say this is not true of them or somewhat not true.

Creative skills

Parents were also asked about creative skills related to the creation or manipulation of digital content production: “I know how to create and post online video or music” and “I know how to edit or make basic changes to online content that others have created”.

Figure 54: Parents’ creative skills



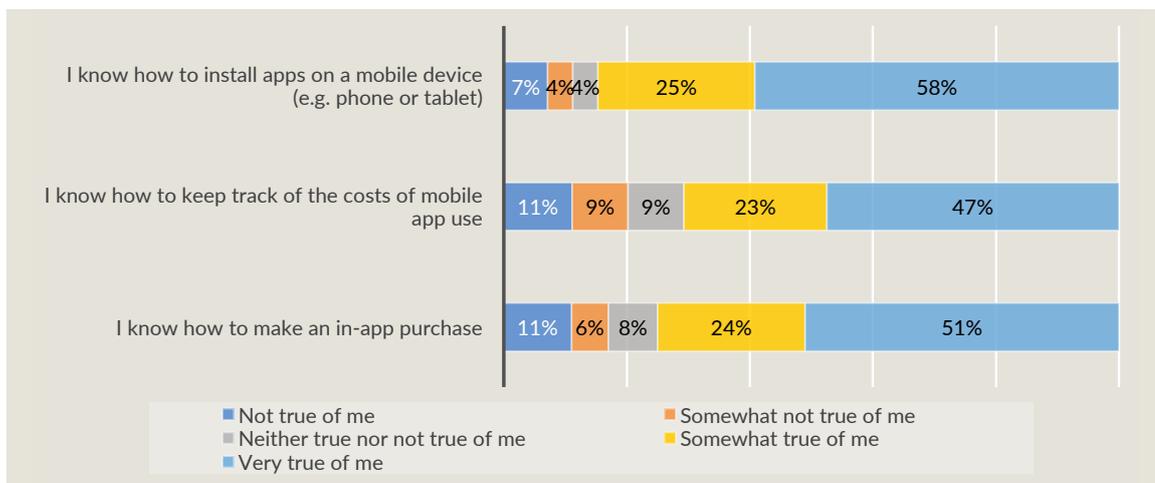
QA7 On a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 is ‘Not at all true of me’ and 5 is ‘Very true of me’, how true are these of you? Base: All parents who use the internet

A more mixed pattern of creative digital skills is reported by parents in this section of the survey.

- 69% say they know how to create and post online video or music. 46% say this is very true of them and a quarter or 23% say this is somewhat true. 22% say this is not true of them or somewhat not true.
- 58% say they know how to edit or make basic changes to online content that others have created. 34% say this is very true of them while one quarter or 24% say this is somewhat true. 29% say this is not true of them or somewhat not true.

Mobile skills

Mobile skills refer to the specific skills associated with mobile or personal digital devices. Parents were asked about the same three items that had been posed to children: “I know how to install apps on a mobile device (e.g. phone or tablet)”; “I know how to keep track of the costs of mobile app use”; and “I know how to make an in-app purchase”:

Figure 55: Parents' mobile skills


QA7 On a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 is 'Not at all true of me' and 5 is 'Very true of me', how true are these of you?

Base: All parents who use the internet

On average, half of all parents report having high levels of mobile skills with a further quarter saying this is somewhat true of them:

- 83% say they know how to install apps on a mobile device such as a phone or a tablet. 58% say this is very true of them while 25% said this is somewhat true.
- 70% say they know how to keep track of the costs of mobile app use with 47% saying this is very true of them and 23% saying this is somewhat true. 20% say this is not true of them or some much not true.
- 75% say they know how to make an in in app purchase. 51% say this is very true of them while 24% say this is somewhat true. 16% say this is not true or somewhat not true of them.

Table 25 presents a summary of parents' overall digital skills, broken down by gender and age.

Table 25: Parents' overall digital skills, by gender and age

Score (0-10)	Operational skills	Information and navigation skills	Social skills	Creative skills	Mobile skills	Digital skills overall score
All	8.1	7.7	8.7	7.0	8.0	7.9
Male	8.1	7.8	8.6	7.1	7.9	7.9
Female	8.1	7.7	8.8	7.0	8.0	7.9
25-34 yrs	8.6	8.1	8.9	8.1	8.8	8.5
35-44 yrs	8.5	8.0	8.8	7.5	8.3	8.2
45- 54 yrs	7.9	7.6	8.7	6.6	7.7	7.7
55+ yrs	6.1	6.1	7.3	5.3	6.1	6.2

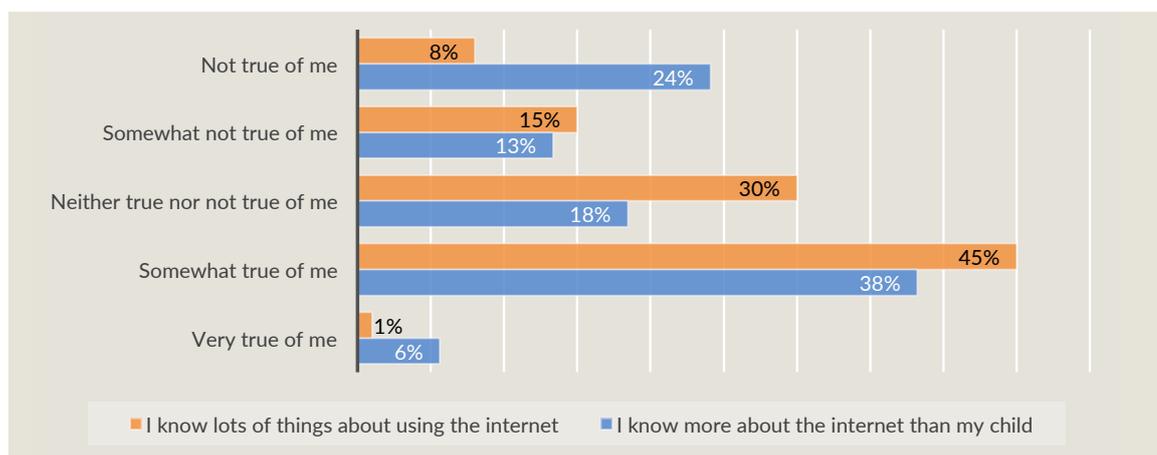
Derived from Qa7 On a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 is 'Not at all true of me' and 5 is 'Very true of me', how true are these of you?

- Parents’ highest reported level of skills are in social media use with an average score 8.7 for the items listed.
- Operational skills and mobile skills are the next highest average scores reported at 8.1 and 8.0 respectively.
- Parents in the age range 25-34 report the highest levels of skills overall with an average of 8.5 across the 6 areas of internet skills. The highest averages for any area are reported by this group, as for example in skills in social media use (8.9) mobile skills (8.8).
- The lowest level of digital skills is reported by those in the 55+ age group.

General digital skills

Parents were asked to report on their overall levels of self-efficacy both in terms of their overall self-reported knowledge (“I know lots of things about the internet”) and in terms of comparison with their perception of their children’s digital skills.

Figure 56: “I know lots of things about using the internet”



Qa8 On a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 is ‘Not at all true of me’ and 5 is ‘Very true of me’, how true are these of you? ‘I know lots of things about using the internet’. ‘I know more about using the internet than my child completing the survey’.

As shown in Figure 56, parents’ self-reported levels of confidence regarding the internet and digital competence are somewhat lower than their reports of individual skills.

- Just under half or 46% say it is true of them that they know lots of things about using the internet. Only 1% state that this is very true of them while 45% say this is somewhat true of them.
- One third, or 30%, say this is neither true nor untrue of them. 23% report that they do not know lots of things about using the internet.
- When it comes to knowing more about the internet than their children, 38% say this is somewhat true of them. 37%, however, say this is either not true or somewhat not true of them.

Parental Mediation

Parents engage in a range of mediation activities to support their children's use of the internet and are often the most important influence on the child's access to digital technologies and in relation to children's overall experiences of the digital environment.

As outlined in Part 1 dealing children's online safety, the survey focuses on two main types of parental mediation: *active mediation* which involves the parent taking an active role in supporting the child's positive use of the internet and digital technologies; and *restrictive mediation* which involves limiting the child's digital use through setting rules on what is permitted and / or technical monitoring and restriction of what children can and cannot do online.

In this section, we examine the most reported forms of mediation practiced by parents while also comparing accounts of children and parents in relation to both forms of parental mediation.

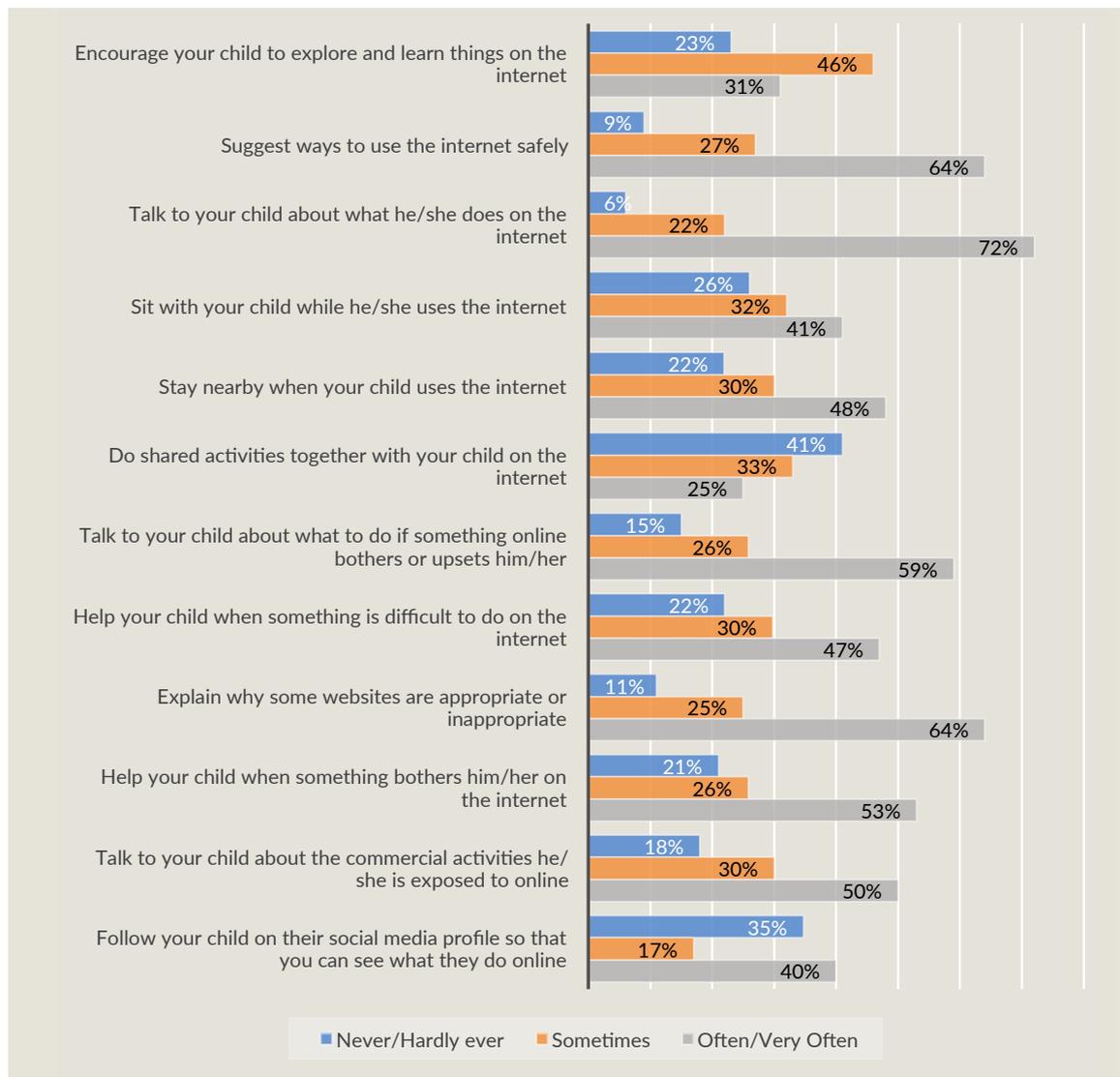
Active mediation

Firstly, parents were asked to identify how often they practiced a range of typical parenting activities involving active and enabling mediation. A summary is presented in Figure 57.

High levels of active mediation are reported across a wide range of active mediation practices.

- Most parents, for instance, report that they talk to their child about what he or she does on the internet. 72% of parents say they do this often or very often. This is the most reported form of active parental mediation.
- 64% of parents say they suggest ways to their children about how to use the internet safely. A further 25% of parents say they sometimes do this.
- 64% of parents say that they explain why some websites are appropriate or inappropriate. 25% also say they sometimes do this.
- 59% of parents talk to their children about what to do if something online bothers or upsets him or her again with 26% saying they sometimes do this.

Figure 57: Parental active mediation practices

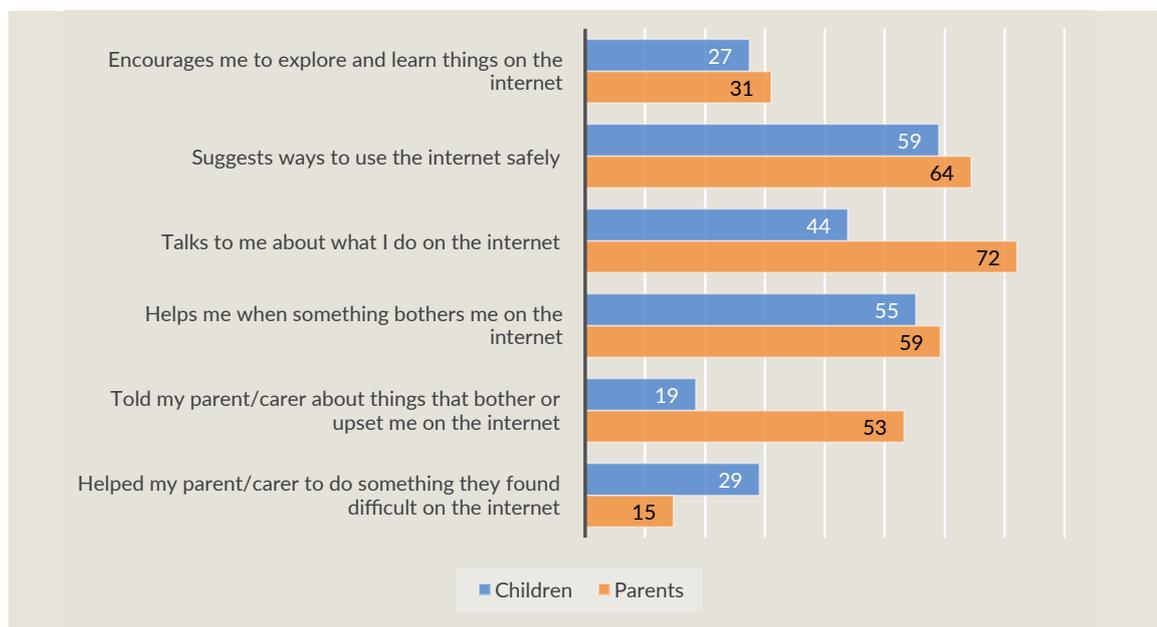


QA9 In relation to the child completing the questionnaire, how often do you do these things?
 Base: All parents who use the internet.

When comparing children’s and parents’ accounts of active mediation (Figure 58), there is broad agreement in most categories with two exceptions:

- 72% of parents say that they talk to their children about what they do on the internet. However, only 44% children say that this is the case.
- Similarly, 53% of parents report they help their child when something bothers them on the internet. However, just 19% say they have told their parents or carer about things that have upset them online.

**Figure 58: Active mediation, parents and children compared
(% who say they often or very often do this)**



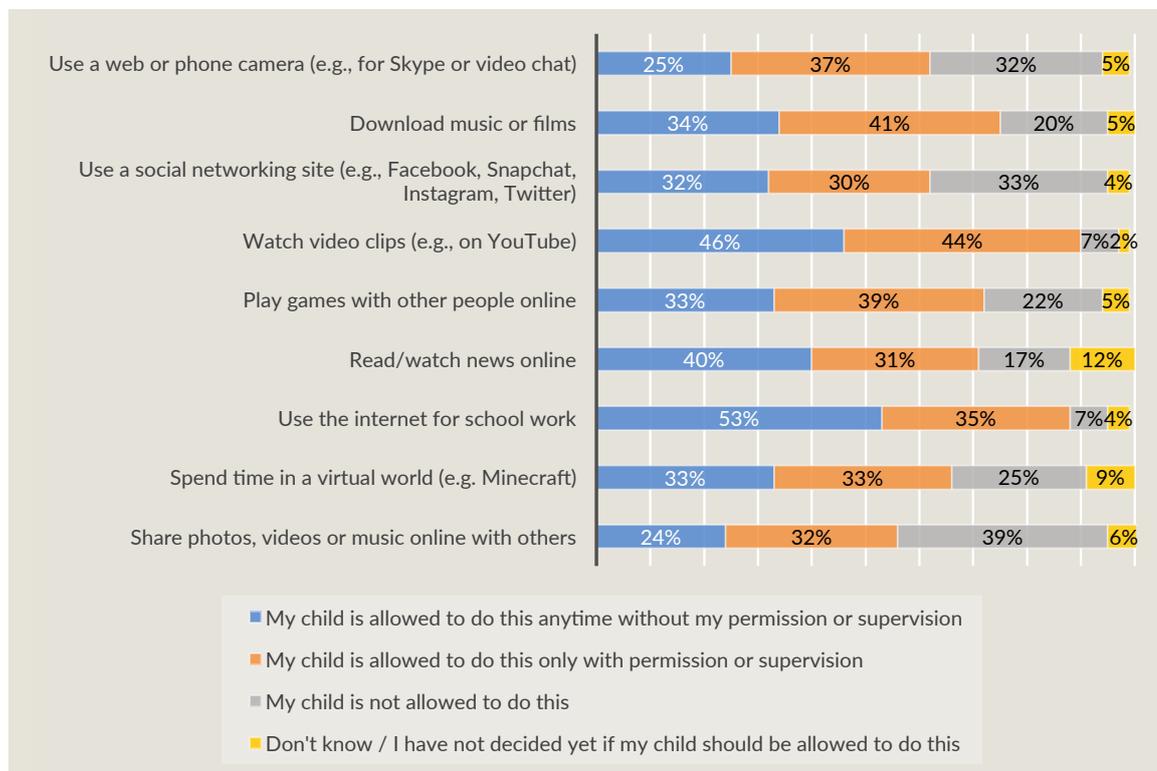
QJ3 When you use the internet, how often does your parent/carer do any of these things
 QA9 In relation to the child completing the questionnaire, how often do you do these things?
 Base: all children and parents who use the internet

Restrictive mediation and technical monitoring

Parents deploy a range of strategies designed to minimise potential exposure to risks either through the setting of rules of what the child is permitted to do or not online and using various technical means of monitoring and/or restricting the child’s online activities. Both aspects are relevant in the implementation of an overall online safety approach and form part of many parents’ approaches to supporting their children online.

Parents were asked about the rules that they set regarding their child’s activities online and were asked to identify which of the following activities they allowed to do, with or without supervision.

Figure 59: Parental rules regarding child's online activities



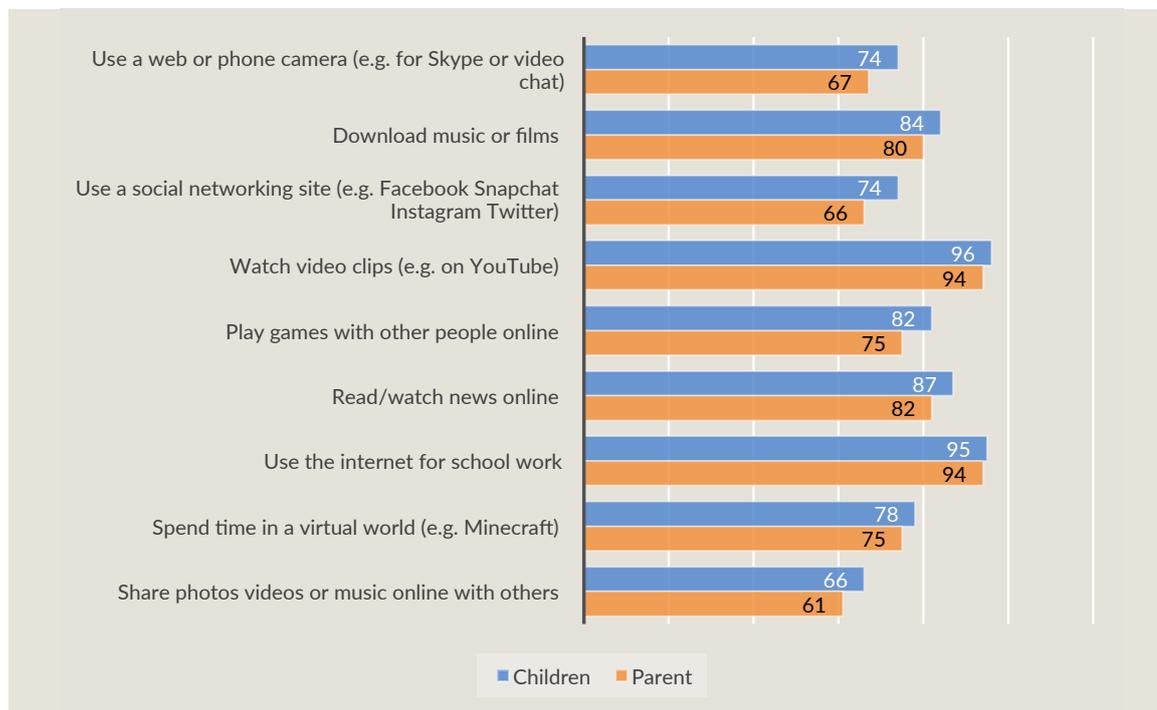
Qa14 Do you allow your child to do the following things on the internet and if so, do they need their permission to do them?

Base: All parent who use the internet.

- Popular online activities such as watching video clips online are evenly split in terms of the numbers of parents who allow their children to this between those who allow this without supervision (46%) and those who only allow their child to do this with permission (44%).
- Entertainment activities such as using a social networking site or play games with others online similarly have equal numbers who only allow this with permission and those who say their children can do this anytime without permission.
- Communication activities or sharing content online are the most reported activities that have rules not allowing the child to do this, e.g., sharing photos, videos, or music online with others (39%); using a social networking site (33%); and using a web camera or phone camera (32%).

Comparing children's and parents' accounts of rules that apply to online activities (Figure 60) shows that children slightly overestimate the extent to which they are allowed to undertake certain activities without parental permission.

Figure 60: Rules for online activities, children and parent accounts compared



QJ5 Does your parent/carer allow you to do the following things on the internet and if so, do you need their permission for them?

Qa14 Do you allow your child to do the following things on the internet and if so, do they need their permission to do them?

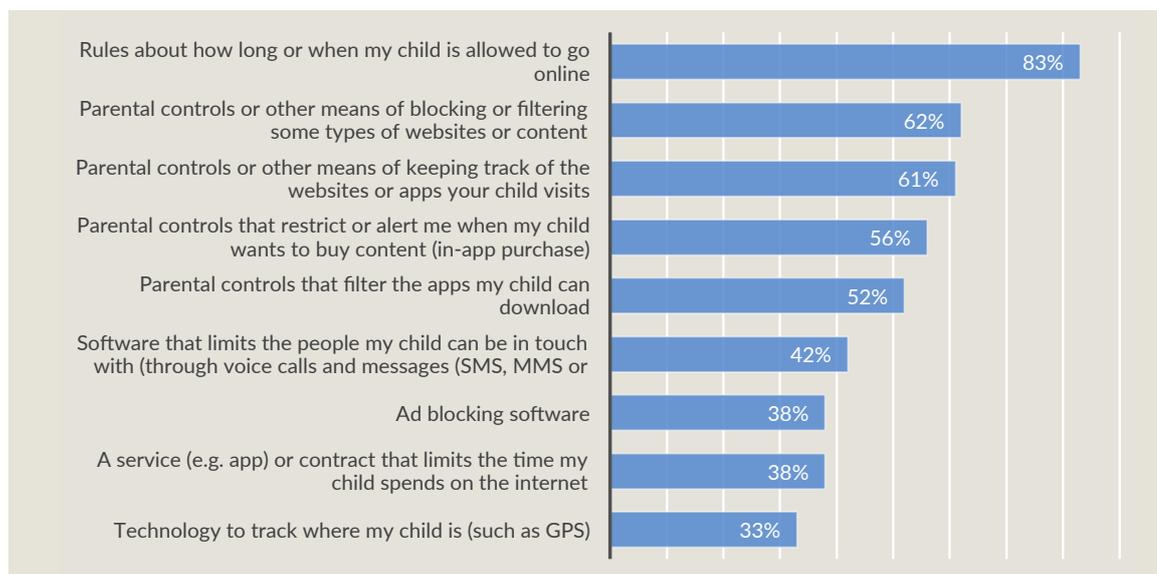
Base: all children and parents who use the internet

Considering online activities that children are allowed to undertake either on their own or with permission/supervision, there is general agreement between children's and parents' accounts of what they are allowed to do. Areas where some disagreement is apparent include certain communication and entertainment activities:

- Using a social networking site. 74% of children say they are allowed to do this but only 66% of parents say their children are allowed.
- Playing games with other people online: 82% of children compared to 75% of parents say this is allowed.
- Using a web or phone camera: 74% of children say they are allowed to do this but just 67% of parents say this is the case.
- Sharing photos online: 66% of children say they are allowed to do this but just 61% of parents say this is so.

The second aspect of a more restrictive approach to parental mediation refers to various technical tools to monitor the child's use of the internet, to restrict access to certain categories of content or functions on a digital device, and to limit the amount of time spent online.

Parents were asked which of the following range of technical tools or parental control features they used in the context of mediation their child's internet use.

Figure 61: Use of parental controls or other technical tools

Qa18 Do you (or other parent/carer with responsibility for your child) make use of any of the following?

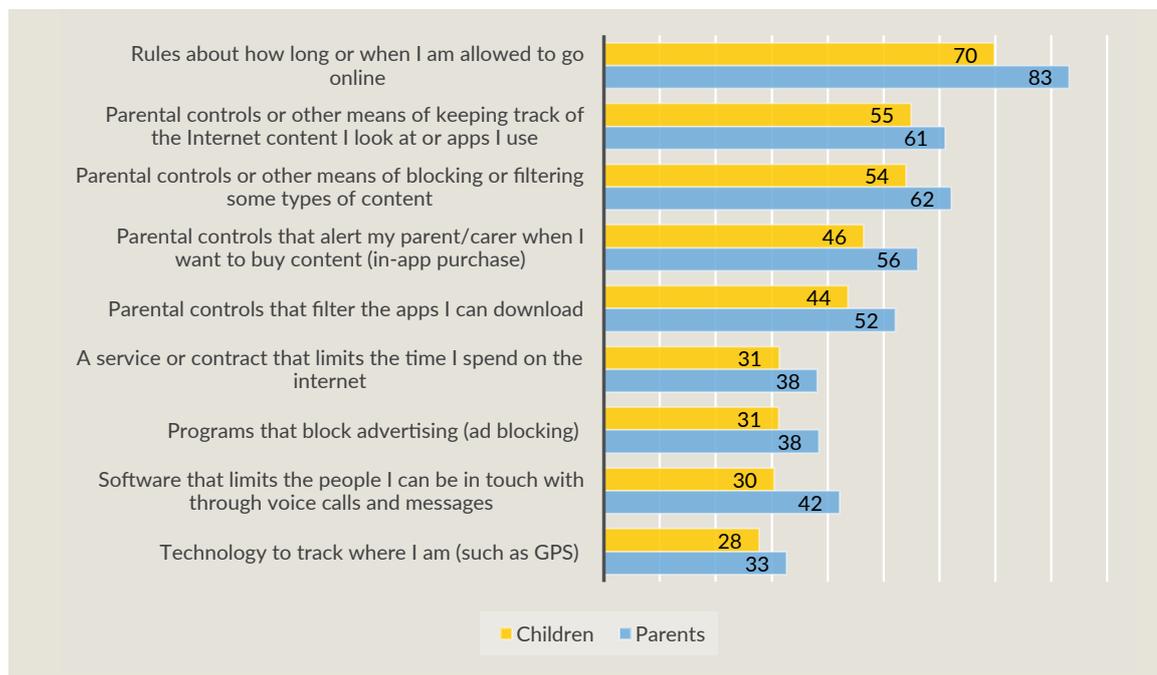
Base: All parents who use the internet.

In this context, the majority of parents (83%) say they set rules about how long a child is allowed to go online. This makes this the most common form of restrictive mediation. Technical forms of mediation are reported as follows:

- 62% of parents say they use some form of parental controls both for the purposes of blocking or filtering some types of online content and for keeping track of the websites or apps a child visits or uses.
- 56% of parents also say they use parental controls to restrict or alert them when their child wants to use in-app purchases or buy content online.
- 52% use parental controls that filter the apps their children can download and 42% use software to control or limit who their child may contact online.
- Approximately one third of parents also say they use software tools to limit children's contacts (38%); to block ads (38%); and to track where their child is, e.g. GPS (33%).

When comparing responses of both children and parents on the use of parental controls, again some differences are apparent between the respective accounts.

Figure 62: Technical mediation, children and parents compared



Qa18 Do you (or other parent/carer with responsibility for your child) make use of any of the following?
 QJ6 Does your parent/carer make use of any of the following ...?

In general, children underestimate the use of parental controls or technical tool for mediation which their parents have stated they use.

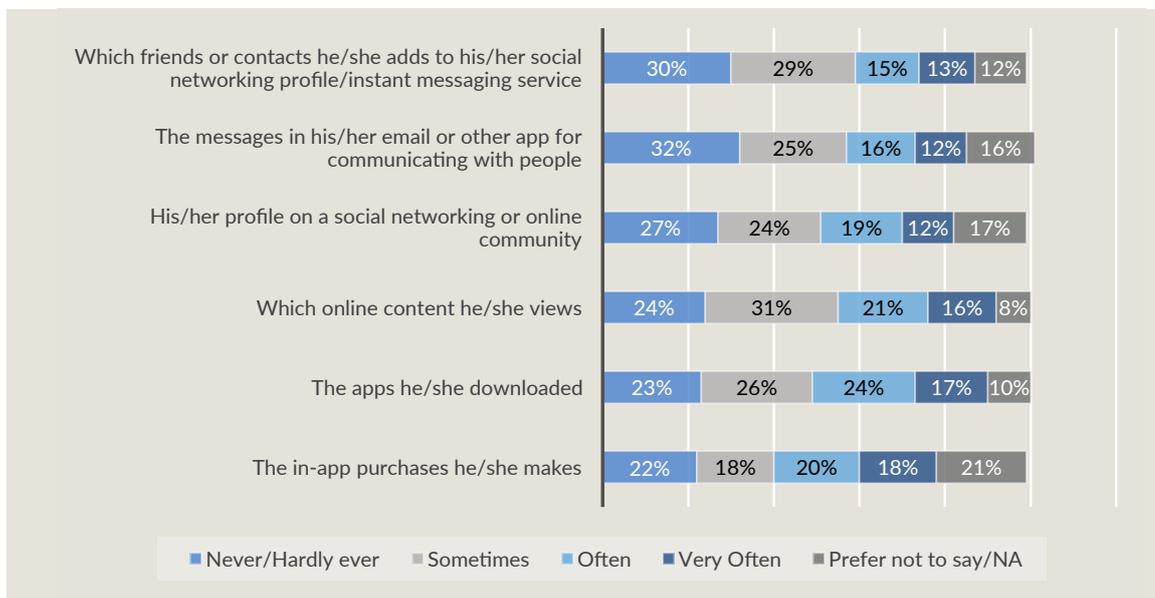
- The largest area of disagreement is in relation to the presence of rules about how long or when the child is allowed to go online. Where 83% of parents say there are such rules in place, just 70% of child believe this to be the case.
- Similarly in the use of certain parental control tools, there are difference between children’s and parent’s accounts of software to limit purchases (Parents – 42% vs. Children 30%); filtering tools for online content (Parents – 61% vs. Children – 54%); tools to alert regarding in-app purchased (Parents – 56% vs. Children – 46%).

Risks and online safety

In the context of keeping children safe online, parents may undertake various follow up actions as part of their overall approach to digital parenting. This may include actions such as checking the child’s social media profile, the friends or contacts their child may add, the types of content the child accesses or the purchases the child may make in the context of online gaming.

Parents were asked which if any of these typical supervisions activities they undertook and how often.

Figure 63: Supervision of child's online activity



Qa19 When your child uses the internet, how often do you (or other parent/carer) check the following things afterwards?

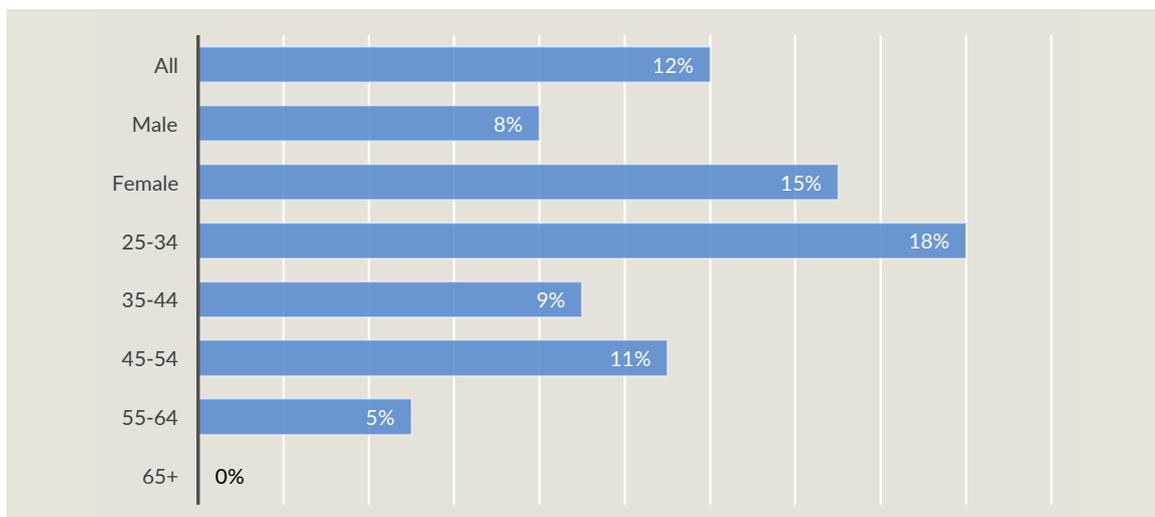
Base: All parents who use the internet.

Parents report a range of supervision activities in checking or following up on what the child may have done online.

- The apps a child has downloaded and in-app purchases are the two aspects that parents follow up most frequently. 41% of parents say they check often or very often which apps a child may have downloaded. 38% say they often or very often follow up with regards to in app purchases. Approximately one in 10 say they never or hardly ever check on this.
- 37% of parents say they check which online content the child has viewed. One third of parents say they sometimes do this. However, one quarter say they never or hardly ever do this.
- 28% of parents say they follow up on the friends or contacts their child may have added to their social media profile as well as messages to others on email or another communications platform. One third (30%) say they never or hardly ever do this.

Intervention by parents in relation to children's online activity or concerns about online safety often follows on something that may have happened which has bothered or upset the child. Parents were asked therefore if they were aware if anything had happened in the past year that may have bothered or upset the child in some way, for example, made them feel uncomfortable, scared or that they shouldn't have seen something online.

Figure 64: Has something happened online that bothered or upset your child?



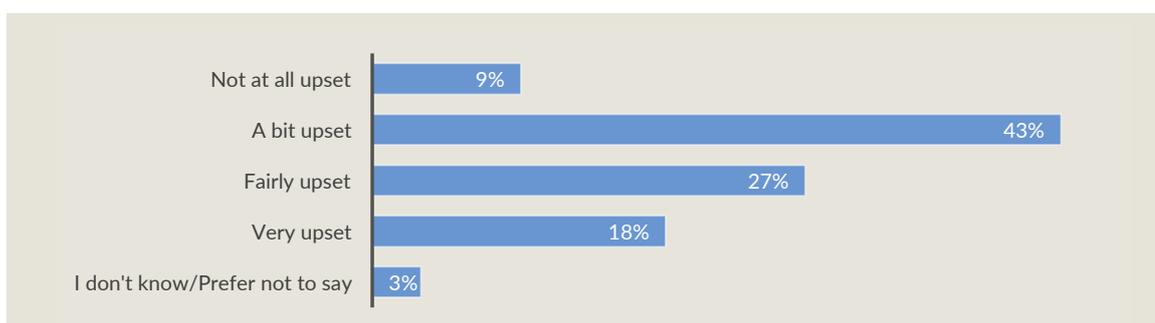
QA20 As far as you are aware in the past year has anything happened online that bothered or upset your child in some way (e.g., made them feel uncomfortable scared or feel that they shouldn't have seen it)?

Base: All parent who use the internet.

Remembering that 13% of children reported that they had encountered something that had bothered them in the past year, so also 12% of parents similarly report that they were aware of an issue or incident that had occurred to upset the child. Reports of being aware of an issue that has occurred are associated more so with mothers (15%) and with younger parents, aged 25 to 34 (18%).

Parents were also asked to gauge how upset the child was the last time something happened online that bothered or upset them (Figure 65). In just under half of cases, 43%, parents reported that their child was a bit upset. In 27% of cases the child was reported to be fairly upset and in 18% cases the child was reported to be very upset.

Figure 65: How upset was the child?

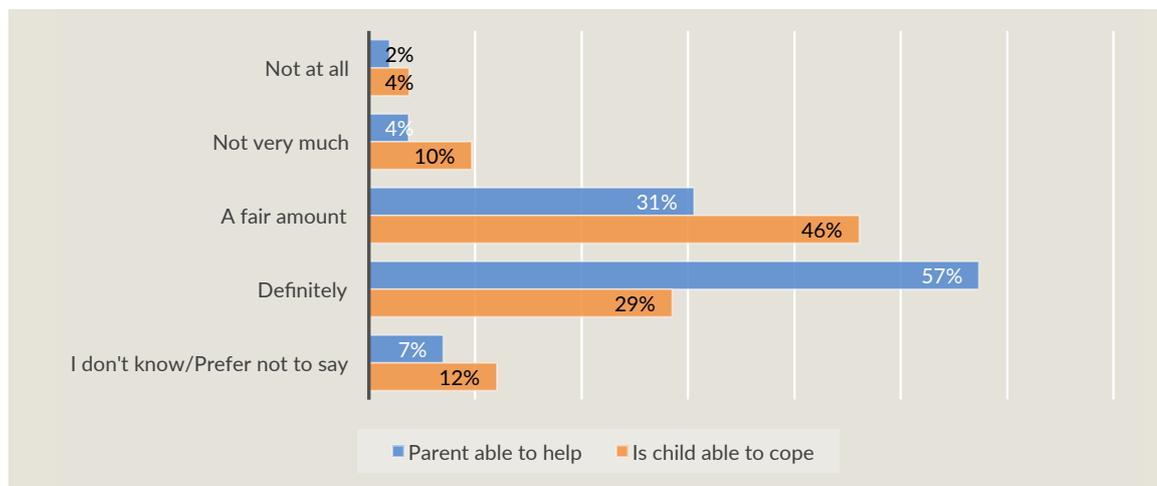


QA22 The last time something happened online that bothered or upset your child how upset was she/he about what happened (if at all)?

Base: all parents who said their child was bothered or upset online.

Parents were also asked to report on their children's ability to cope with things that may bother or upset them online and if they, as parents, felt equipped to help their child to cope.

Figure 66: Parents' accounts of child's ability to cope



QA23 Do you feel you can help your child to cope with things online that bother or upset them?

QA24 Do you think your child can cope with things online that bother or upset them?

Base: All parents who use the internet.

As outlined in Figure 66, most parents feel they are able to help their child cope with things online that bother or upset them.

- 57% of parents say they are definitely able to help the child in such circumstances and one third (31%) say they are able to help “a fair amount”.
- 46% of parents also say that their child is able to cope “a fair amount” with things online that may bother them. 29% say their child is definitely able to cope.

Finally, in this section, parents were asked about some of the specific areas of risks their child may have encountered. Matching this with the various content, contact and conduct risks which children were also asked about, the following compares accounts of parents and children in terms of exposure to online risks.

Table 26: Parent vs. child accounts of exposure to online risks

% who say yes	Parent	Child
Contact/Conduct Risks		
Had contact on the internet with someone that your child had not met face-to-face before	11%	28%
Been treated in a hurtful or nasty way on the internet by someone	8%	16%
Met anyone face-to-face that your child first got to know on the internet	3%	12%
Treated someone else in a hurtful or nasty way on the internet	2%	5%
Harmful Online Content		
Ways of physically harming or hurting themselves	4%	13%
Ways of committing suicide	4%	9%
Ways to be very thin (such as anorexic or bulimic)	4%	11%
Hate messages that attack certain groups or individuals (e.g., people of different colour or religion or nationality)	6%	20%
Their experiences of taking drugs	5%	16%
Gory or violent images	9%	18%
Sexual content online		
S/he has seen images on the internet that are obviously sexual	10%	18%
S/he has received a sexual message (this could be words, pictures or videos)	3%	8%
S/he has seen or received a sexual message, image or video about someone else that s/he did not want	1%	6%
Personal data misuse		
Somebody used his or her personal information in a way he or she didn't like	2%	4%
The devices (e.g., phone, tablet, computer) s/he uses got a virus or spyware	5%	9%
S/he lost money by being cheated on the internet	2%	4%
Somebody used your child's password to access his or her information or to pretend to be him or her	2%	5%
Somebody created a page or image about him or her that was hostile or hurtful	2%	3%
S/he spent too much money on online games or in-app purchases	4%	7%
Someone found out where your child was because they tracked his/her phone or device	1%	4%

QA25, 26, 27 As far as you are aware, in the past year, have any of these things happened to your child on the internet?

QG2 Have you EVER had contact on the internet with someone you have not met face-to-face before?

QG7 In the PAST YEAR, how often did this happen in the following ways?

QG24 In the PAST YEAR, has any of the following happened to you on the internet?

Base: All parents and children who use the internet.

Comparing parent and child accounts of exposure to online risks, there is a consistent underestimation on the part of parents of risks to which their child has been exposed in the past year.

Contact and conduct risks are underestimated by parents by a factor of more than 2.

- Where 28% of children report having had online contact with people they had not previously known, just 11% of parents are aware of this.
- 16% of children report being treated in a hurtful or nasty way online but just 8% of parents say that they are aware of this.
- 12% of children report meeting face to face somebody they first got to know online but just one quarter of parents (3%) say they are aware of this.

Similarly, in relation to exposure to harmful online content there are significant gaps between accounts of children and parents.

- 20% of children report coming across hate messages online but just 6% of parents say they are aware of this.
- 13% of children have seen online sites where physical harm or self-harm is depicted. Only 4% of parents say they know that about this.
- Similar findings in relation to exposure to suicide sites or pro-anorexic online content which 9% and 11% of children say they have seen respectively is recognised by just 4% of parents.

This is the case also for exposure to sexual content online.

- Where 18% of children report seeing obviously sexual images online, only 10% of parents are aware of this.
- 6% of children report receiving an unwanted sexual message, but just 1% of parents say they knew about this.

Likewise, findings in relation to personal data misuse are underestimated by parents in similar numbers. While the overall numbers are lower, parents are reportedly less aware of incidents happening to their children involving misuse of their data, being cheated online or having their password stolen.

Parental concerns and online safety support

The final part of this section on Parents and Online Safety deals with parents' top concerns for their children's welfare and their concerns for their children's safety online.

A series of questions were asked of parents about the things they worry about most in relation to their children. Firstly, a range of general concerns for children's health, welfare and well-being were listed.

Table 27: Parents' concerns for child's welfare, by age and gender of child

% of parents who worry about ...	9-12 yrs		13-17 yrs		All
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
Your child's health	64	67	64	67	65
Having enough money to care for your child	60	61	60	62	61
How your child is doing at school	78	80	82	81	80
Other children treating your child in a hurtful or nasty way	74	79	65	72	72
Your child drinking too much alcohol/taking drugs	31	25	36	43	34
Your child seeing inappropriate material on the internet	59	53	57	61	58
A stranger contacting your child on the internet	64	57	55	61	59
Your child's sexual activities	35	28	36	39	35
Your child becoming a victim of crime	50	41	51	55	50
Your child getting into trouble with the police	40	32	35	35	35
Your child receiving an injury on the roads	70	60	58	60	62

Q.A29 Thinking about your child, which of these things, if any, do you worry about a lot?

Base: All parents who use the internet

The top concerns for their child's welfare as reported by parents include:

- How the child is doing at school is the most reported concern. This is put forward by 80% of all parents.
- Concerns regarding the child being bullied is the next most reported area as identified by 72% of all parents.
- Other concerns include the child's health (65%), and having enough money to care for the child (61%)
- Worries about online safety feature 5th in the list of top parental concerns. This includes potential contact from a stranger online (59%) or the child seeing inappropriate material on the internet (58%).
- Interestingly, parents express greater concerns in relation to boys aged 9-12 years, as for example, seeing inappropriate material on the internet (59% for boys vs. 53% for girls) or being contacted by a stranger online (64% for boys vs. 57% for girls).
- There are fewer gender differences for the older age group though parents express greater concerns for girls being bullied (72% for girls vs. 65% for boys).

Parents were then asked about their top concerns in relation to the child's online safety. Table 28 presents a summary by age and gender of the child.

Table 28: Parents' concerns for child's online safety, by age and gender of the child

% of parents who worry about ...	9-12 yrs		13-17 yrs		All
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
Your child revealing personal information online	47	47	45	51	48
Exposed to hateful or racist messages or activities	54	54	54	63	56
Exposed to pornography	60	54	61	61	59
Become socially isolated because of their technology use	46	44	46	50	47
Contacted by a stranger for sexual purposes	57	51	48	57	54
Recruited by extremist or fundamentalist groups	38	33	30	37	35
Asked to send sexual images of themselves to someone	51	48	45	56	50
Damaging their reputation either now or in the future	52	45	49	54	50
Seeing content which encourages them to hurt or harm themselves	49	45	42	51	47
Learning to hack/drawn into cybercrime	38	32	32	37	35
Experiencing something that makes my child' feel bad about themselves	60	54	54	61	57

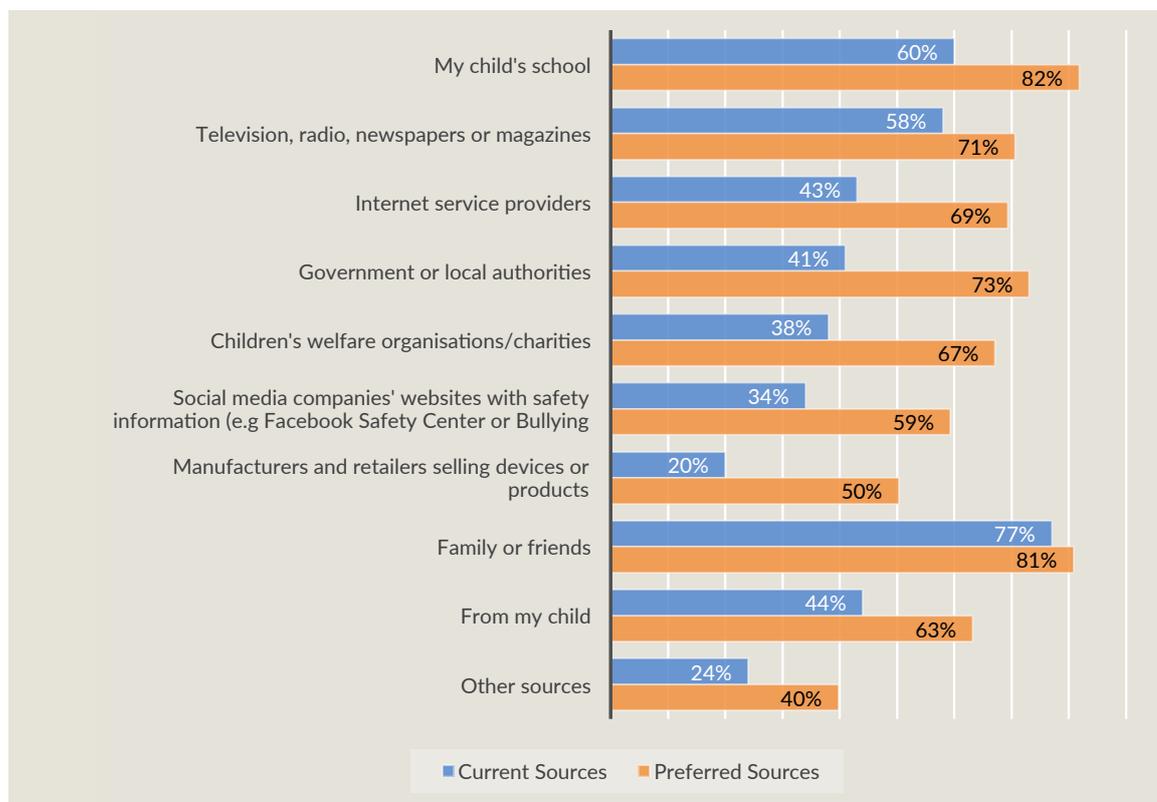
Q.A30 Still thinking about 'your child's internet use do you worry a lot that they may be...?

Base: All parent who use the internet.

- Exposure to pornography is the most reported concern by parents for their child's online safety. 59% of parents say they worry about this.
- That the child might experience something online that makes them feel bad about themselves is noted by 57% of parents as an online safety concern.
- Exposure to hateful or racist messages or activities is expressed by 56% of parents as a worry for their child's online safety followed by being contacted by a stranger for sexual purposes (54% of parents).
- In terms of gender differences, parents express somewhat more concerns in relation to boys aged 9-12 years and girls aged 13-17 years. For example, being contacted by a stranger for sexual purposes is a concern of 57% of parents of boys aged 9-12 years compared to 51% of girls aged 9-12 years. This is reversed in the case of 13-17 year olds. Here, 57% express concerns in relation to girls and 45% express the same concerns in relation to boys.

Finally, parents were asked about their sources for online safety information, both in terms of where they currently receive guidance or advice about online safety matters and from where they would prefer to receive such information. A comparison of responses to both items is presented in Figure 67.

Figure 67: Current vs. preferred sources of online safety information



Q.A32. In general, where do you get information and advice on how to help and support your child on the internet and keep him/her safe?

Q.A33. In general, where would you like to get information and advice on how to help and support your child on the internet and keep him or her safe in the future?

Base: All parent who use the internet.

- The top three sources of information on online safety which parents report that they currently use are: Family or friends (77%); the child's school (60%) and Television, radio, newspapers or magazines (58%).
- These also happened to be the preferred sources of information identified by parents in roughly the same order.

However, there are differences between the levels of current provision of online safety information and the numbers who would prefer to receive it in this way.

- 82% say they would prefer to receive information from the child's school. Just 60% say they currently receive information from schools.
- 71% say they would like to receive information and advice from media sources such as radio television and newspapers. 58% say they currently receive it in this way
- Interestingly, 41% report currently receiving information from government or local authority sources but 73% would like to receive information in this way.
- A similar large gap is apparent in relation to information from manufacturers and retailers selling devices or products. Just 20% report currently receiving information from this source. 50% say this would be a preferred source
- In terms of industry provision of online safety, for example, directly from social media company websites or Help Centres, 59% say they would like to receive information in this way but just 34% say they currently receive online safety guidance from such sources.

Summary: Parents and online safety

- Regarding their access and use of digital technologies, 91% of parents go online at least daily. 41% say they do this several times a day and 16% say they are online almost all the time. 89% use their smartphone to go online daily with 38% saying they do this intermittently during the day. About 40% use a desktop computer, laptop or notebook for daily online use.
- Parents' highest level of skills are reported in social media use with an average score 8.7, followed by operational skills and mobile skills with average scores reported at 8.1 and 8.0 respectively.
- Overall skills are highest among parents aged 25-34, scoring an average of 8.5 out of 10. Levels of confidence in their knowledge of the digital world are somewhat lower with just 46% saying it is true of them that they know lots of things about using the internet. **Only 38% claim to know more about the internet than their child** with an equivalent number saying their knowledge was about the same as their child's.
- Most parents are positive about the digital environment though 71% are **worried about their privacy online**. Just over half (52%) also say that the internet is too time consuming.
- The practice of "**sharenting**" or posting images or photos of one's child online to share with others is not widespread. Half of the parents interviewed stated that they had not shared any photos or videos in the past month. **Just 17% overall say they do this on a regular basis**, i.e., at least every month, mostly for the purpose of keeping in touch with family and friends.

Parents undertake a range of actions to support their children's online use:

- 70% of parents often or very often **talk to their child about what he or she does online**. This is the most reported form of active parental mediation. 78% of parents also say they set rules about how long a child may spend online.
- 64% of parents suggest ways to their children about **how to use the internet safely** and 62% of parents say that they **explain why some websites are appropriate or inappropriate**. 58% of parents talk to their children about what to do if something online bothers or upsets him or her again.
- Parents are evenly divided regarding popular online activities such as watching video clips online and social media between those parents who allow their children to this and those who allow this without supervision (46%) and those who only allow their child to do this only with permission (44%).
- **58% of parents say they use some form of parental controls** both for the purposes of blocking or filtering some types of online content and for keeping track of the websites or apps a child visits or uses. Approximately one third of parents also say they use software tools to limit children's contacts (38%); to block ads (35%); and to track where their child is, e.g., GPS (32%).
- Parents most often check on **apps downloaded, or in-app purchases** a child may have made. About 40% of parents do this. 37% of parents check which content the child has

viewed online. One third of parents say they sometimes do this. However, one quarter say they never or hardly ever do this.

- Exposure to **suicide sites or pro-anorexic online content** is reported by 9% and 11% of children respectively. Just 4% of parents say they are aware of this.
- Where 18% of children report **seeing obviously sexual images online** but only 10% of parents are aware of this.
- 6% of children report receiving an **unwanted sexual message**, but just 1% of parents say they knew about this.

Part 3

Adults and online safety



Introduction

Research on the topic of online safety has been primarily focused on children's experiences of risks and safety online with accompanying research on parental mediation and related awareness, skills and needs analysis regarding online safety. The experiences of the adult population in relation to matters of online risks and safety has received somewhat less attention in research, even though it is a matter of increasing policy focus. For this final part of the report, findings are presented from an exploratory questionnaire investigating experiences reported by adults, aged 18 and over, on some the main issues pertaining to online safety matters.

The potential risks of harm from exposure to various content, contact and conduct risks apply to adults just as much as to minors. The key differences in this respect are expectations regarding adults' skills in navigating the digital environment, their ability to respond to risks they encounter and to cope with any problems that ensue. While most research and policy interest has been focussed on the protection of young people and other vulnerable citizens when they use online services, increasingly there is a recognition that safety features as well as online safety education is relevant to adults as well.

In this instance, some of the same question areas are incorporated into a shorter questionnaire which was similarly administered to adults in person. The questionnaire – adapted with permission from an equivalent survey undertaken by the Australian eSafety Commissioner's Office – was administered to a representative sample of 387 adults, aged 18+ years.⁷²

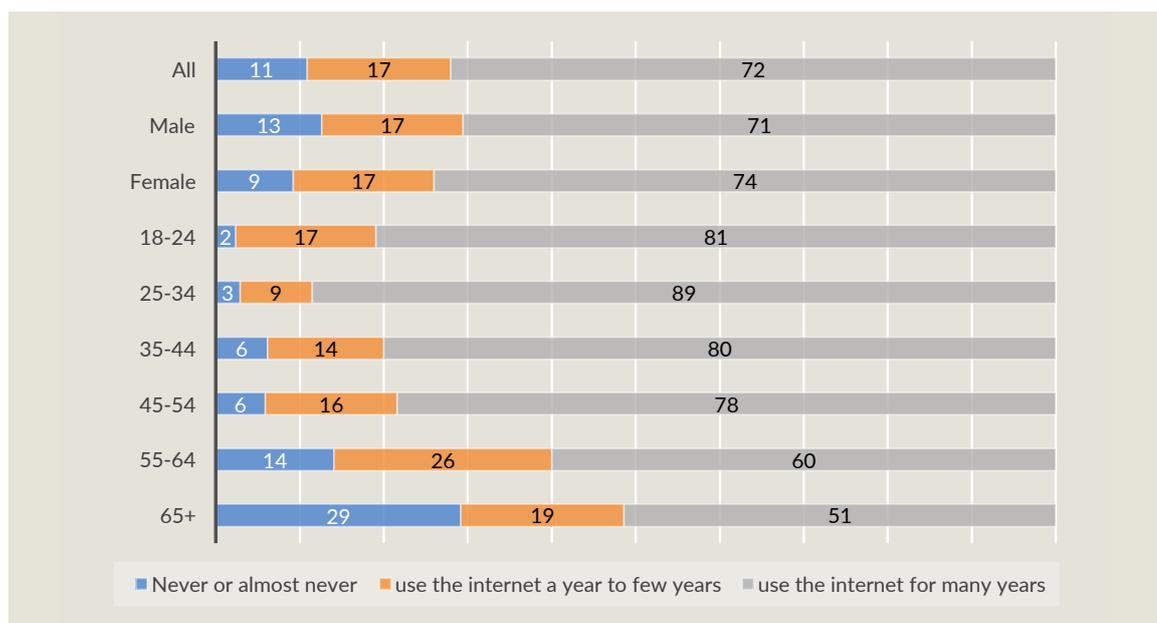
Three main areas are addressed in the questionnaire: access and use of digital technologies; digital skills and citizenship, including questions related to trust in media sources of information; and questions related to online risks and responses.

72 <https://www.esafety.gov.au/about-us/research/adults-negative-online-experiences#>

Access and use

Respondents to the adult questionnaire were first asked for long for how long they had been internet users.

Figure 68: Internet use reported by adults



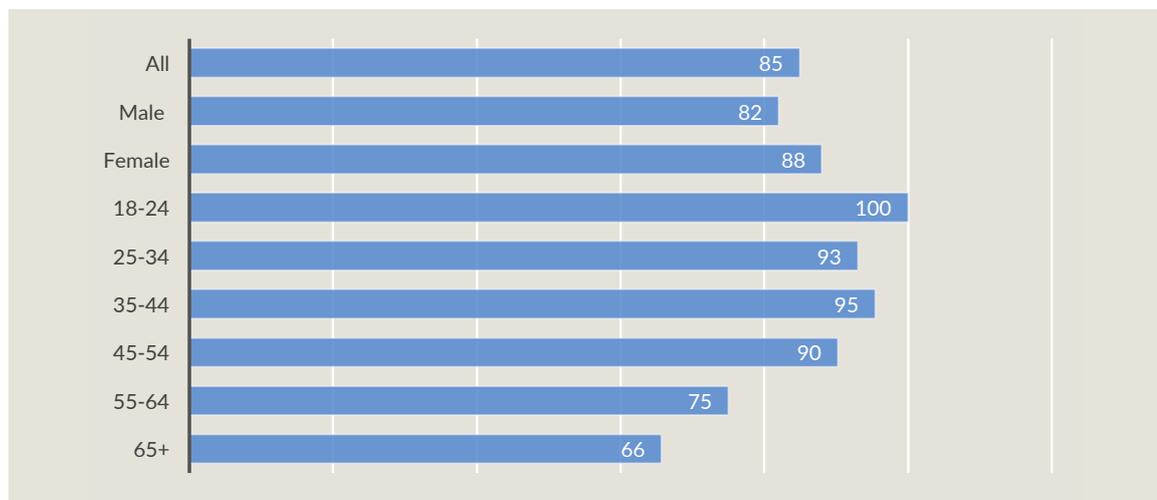
Q.A1 Do you use the internet yourself?

Base: All adults

As reported by respondents the vast majority describe themselves as experienced users.

- 89% of all respondents say they have used the internet for at least a few years. 72% say they have used it for many years.
- Respondents in the 25 to 34 age group are the most experienced in terms of internet use with 89% stating that they have used the internet for many years.
- Unsurprisingly, users in the 65+ age group are the least experienced in terms of internet use. While 51% describe themselves as having used the internet for many years, one third or 29% say that they almost never use the internet.
- There are relatively few gender differences with slightly more women reporting levels of experienced internet use (74% of women compared to 71% of men). At the same time 13% of men compared to 9% of women describe themselves as having never or almost never been online.

Respondents were also asked to report how often they used the internet on a scale ranging from hardly ever to daily or several times each daily.

Figure 69: Daily internet use


Q.A2 How often do you use the internet?

Base: All adults

As shown in Figure 69, most respondents report high levels of daily use of the internet.

- 100% of adults in the 18 to 24 age group say they go online daily.
- More than 90% in each of the categories 25 to 34, 35 to 44, and 45 to 54 also describe themselves as daily users.
- It is only in the 55+ age group that slightly less frequent online use is reported.
- Gender differences are small with slightly more women than men reporting daily internet use.

Respondents were also asked about the different kinds of devices that they used to go online. As shown in Table 29, a range of devices is used with smart phones, desktop computers and tablets being the most reported digital devices for daily internet access.

Table 29: Daily use of different devices, by gender and age

% daily use	A mobile/ smartphone	A desktop computer laptop or	A tablet	A game console	A TV	Internet-connected ('smart')	A wearable device	Something else
Male	79	50	24	4	18	11	7	5
Female	84	37	28	3	22	8	9	4
18-24	98	36	26	17	38	14	17	7
25-34	96	51	28	6	26	10	7	7
35-44	95	63	22	3	34	12	12	3
45-54	84	41	33	0	12	10	8	2
55-64	69	43	29	0	14	10	7	6
65+	56	26	21	0	4	3	1	1
All	81	43	26	3	20	9	8	5

Q.A6 How often do you go online or use the internet using the following devices?

Respondents report using an average of two devices per day to go online with younger respondents using slightly more and older respondents slightly fewer.

- 81% of respondents say they use a mobile phone or smartphone daily. More women than men report daily use of smart phones (84% of women compared to 79% of men). The age group from 18 to 44 reports the highest level of daily smartphone use, i.e., more than 95% in each age category.
- Desktop computers or laptops the next most used device for daily internet use with 43% overall reporting that they use these daily. The most intensive use of computers is reported by the 35 to 44 age group. More men than women report daily desktop computer or laptop use (50% of men compared to 37% of women).
- Tablets also feature as digital devices regularly used to go online. One quarter or 26% report using a tablet daily. Interestingly similar numbers across each category use tablets daily.

Finally, respondents were asked how often they go online in different places such as at home, at work, in public places or on public transport etc.?

Table 30: Daily access to the internet in different locations by gender and age

% Daily access	Male	Female	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	All
At work	52	41	45	70	69	51	35	9	46
At Home	81	86	98	96	92	86	72	63	83
In the home of friends or relatives	14	17	55	23	13	12	5	2	16
In a public place (for example, in libraries, cafes, computer shops)	18	19	61	23	19	20	8	0	19
When I am on my way somewhere (e.g., on the street, in a bus or car)	34	28	76	41	42	26	15	7	31
When I am somewhere by myself	45	47	83	59	60	45	29	18	46

Q.A5 How often do you go online or use the internet at the following places?

- Most daily use takes place at home with most respondents (83%) reporting this to be the case. This is particularly so for the 18 to 24 age group (98%) the 25 to 34 age group (96%) and the 35- 44 (92%). Again, more women than men report daily internet use at home.
- 46% of respondents report going online daily at work. This applies more to men (52%) rather than women (41%). It is also more the case with the 25 to 34 years age group.
- Similarly, 46% of respondents also report going online daily when they are somewhere by themselves. This applies to both genders and particularly so for the 18 to 24 age group of whom 83% say this is the case.

Digital skills and citizenship

Adult respondents were also asked about digital skills, using the Internet Skills Scale (van Deursen et al 2016).⁷³ As with the child and parent questionnaire, adult respondents were also asked five areas of digital competence: *operational skills*, including safety skills; information navigation skills, including critical engagement with online information; *social skills*, or the ability to manage online relationships with others; *creative skills*, related to content production; and *mobile skills*, related to the use of mobile devices. Parents were also asked about their self-efficacy in digital competence and whether they felt they knew more about the internet than their child.

These are summarised in one combined table (Table 31) including a comparison of the average skills score by age and gender.

73 van Deursen, A. J. A. M., Helsper, E. J., & Eynon, R. (2016). Development and validation of the Internet Skills Scale (ISS). *Information, Communication & Society*, 19(6), 804–823. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2015.1078834>

Table 31: Internet skills, by gender and age

% Who say somewhat true or very true	Male	Female	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	All
Operational skills									
I know how to save a photo that I find online	75	74	98	91	86	71	63	50	75
I know how to change my privacy settings (e.g. on a social networking site)	66	68	98	86	83	67	51	34	67
Average score for operational skills (0-10)	7.6	7.6	9.6	9	8.6	7.6	6.6	5.5	7.6
Information navigation skills									
I find it easy to check if the information I find online is true	58	59	83	67	77	53	51	29	58
I find it easy to choose the best keywords for online searches	72	69	98	82	84	71	57	44	70
Average score for information skills (0-10)	7.2	7.3	9.1	8.2	8.1	7.2	6.5	5.4	7.2
Social skills									
I know which information I should and shouldn't share online	80	88	95	90	91	86	80	69	84
I know how to remove people from my contact lists	79	83	100	93	91	78	72	60	81
Average score for social skills (0-10)	8.3	8.6	9.6	9.3	9	8.6	7.9	7	8.5
Creative skills									
I know how to create and post online video or music	61	64	93	87	76	61	44	30	62
I know how to edit or make basic changes to online content that others have created	55	49	78	77	63	45	37	24	52
Average score for creative skills (0-10)	6.7	6.8	8.8	8.6	7.7	6.4	5.4	4.3	6.7
Mobile skills									
I know how to install apps on a mobile device (e.g. phone or tablet)	75	77	100	91	88	78	69	42	76
I know how to keep track of the costs of mobile app use	62	57	85	84	70	59	48	23	59
I know how to make an in-app purchase	68	68	95	90	80	67	61	31	68
Average score for mobile skills (0-10)	7.5	7.5	9.4	9	8.2	7.5	7	4.9	7.5
Overall Internet Skills									
Average skills index	7.5	7.6	9.3	8.9	8.3	7.4	6.7	5.4	7.5

Q.A7 On a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is 'Not at all true' and 5 is "Very true to me", how true are these of you?

Base: All adults

Reported overall average internet skills are 7.5 out of 10 for all adult respondents.

- While gender differences are slight, it is age that primarily differentiates the different levels of reported skills. So, for example, 18 to 24-year-olds report an overall average of 9.3 out of 10 for internet skills compared to 5.4 out of 10 for 65+ years.
- The area of internet skills that scores the highest is in the use of social media. Respondents in the 18- to 24-year-old age category report 9.6 out of 10. Social skills also score highly across each age category.
- Users in the 18 to 24 age category also report high levels of skill in mobile devices with an average of 9.4 out of 10 across these items.
- It is interesting to note the declining levels of skills reported in categories such as operational skills information navigation skills and creative skills from younger to older age groups. For instance, where 98% of 18- to 24-year-olds say they know how to choose the best keywords for online searches just 57% in the 55- 64-year-old age group and 44% of the 65+ years age group say they know how to do this.
- Knowing how to change one's privacy settings is also clearly aligned with age. 98% of 18- to 24-year-olds say they know how to do this but just 51% of 55-to-64-year-olds and 34% of 65+ years know how to do this.

In addition to the items relating to information navigation skills, several questions concerning media literacy were included, examining attitudes towards news and online media and various online engagement and participation activities practiced by respondents.

Table 32 summarises responses to the question of trust in online news media.

Table 32: Trust in news and online media, by age and gender.

% Agreed or strongly agreed....	Male	Female	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	All
I think I can trust most news most of the time	50	55	59	50	44	51	49	61	52
I think I can trust most of the news I choose to read or watch most of the time	62	60	63	62	79	58	61	63	61
The news media (for example TV radio or newspapers) does a good job in helping me distinguish fact from fiction	62	60	64	57	50	65	63	67	61
Social media (for example Facebook Twitter Snapchat Instagram) does a good job in helping me distinguish fact from fiction	29	22	29	36	19	26	16	23	25

Q.A8 How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Q.A9 How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Base: All adults

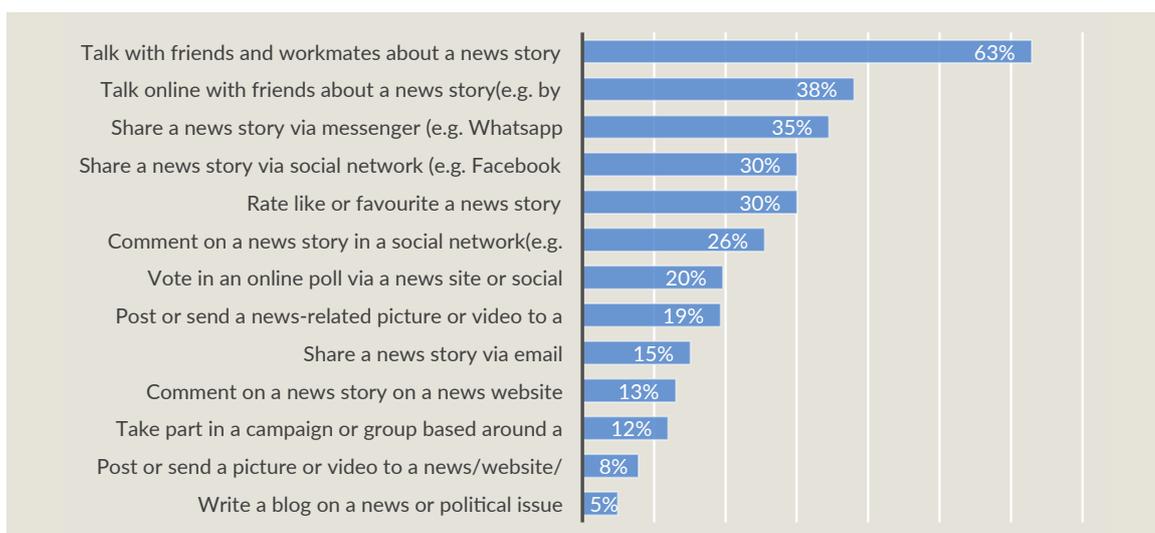
Levels of trust in news media are reported as generally strong with lower levels of trust in social media.

- 61% of respondents say that they trust most of the news they choose to read, and that news media do a good job in helping to distinguish fact from fiction. Levels of trust are similar between both genders and differ very little across age groups. The highest levels of trust are expressed by participants in the 35-to-44-year age group, with 79% of respondents saying that they can trust most of the news they choose to read or watch.
- Relatively few believe social media does a good job in helping the viewer distinguish fact from fiction. 25% overall say this is the case with more men than women expressing this view. Low levels are reported across each of the age categories with the lowest levels being reported by 55- to 64-year-olds.

Participants were also asked about their engagement with news related activities such as, for example, discussing the news with others sharing news stories online or actively participating in public or civic related issues. Respondents were asked how many of a range of typical activities they engaged in during an average week. Responses are summarised in Figure 70.

- As illustrated below, the most reported form of engagement with news is through talking with friends and work mates about a news story. This is reported by 63% of respondents.
- 38% of respondents also talk online with friends about a news story, e.g., on social media.
- 35% also say that they would share a news story via a messenger service such as WhatsApp or Facebook Messenger during an average week.
- One third also comment that they often rate or like a new story and share news stories via social media. 26% say that they comment on news stories in a social network setting during an average week.
- One in five or 20% say they have voted in an online poll on a news site or social network. 19% have also posted or sent a news related picture or video to a social network site over an average week.

Figure 70: Online news media engagement activities



Q.A10 During an average week, in which, if any, of the following ways do you share or participate in news coverage?
Base: All adults

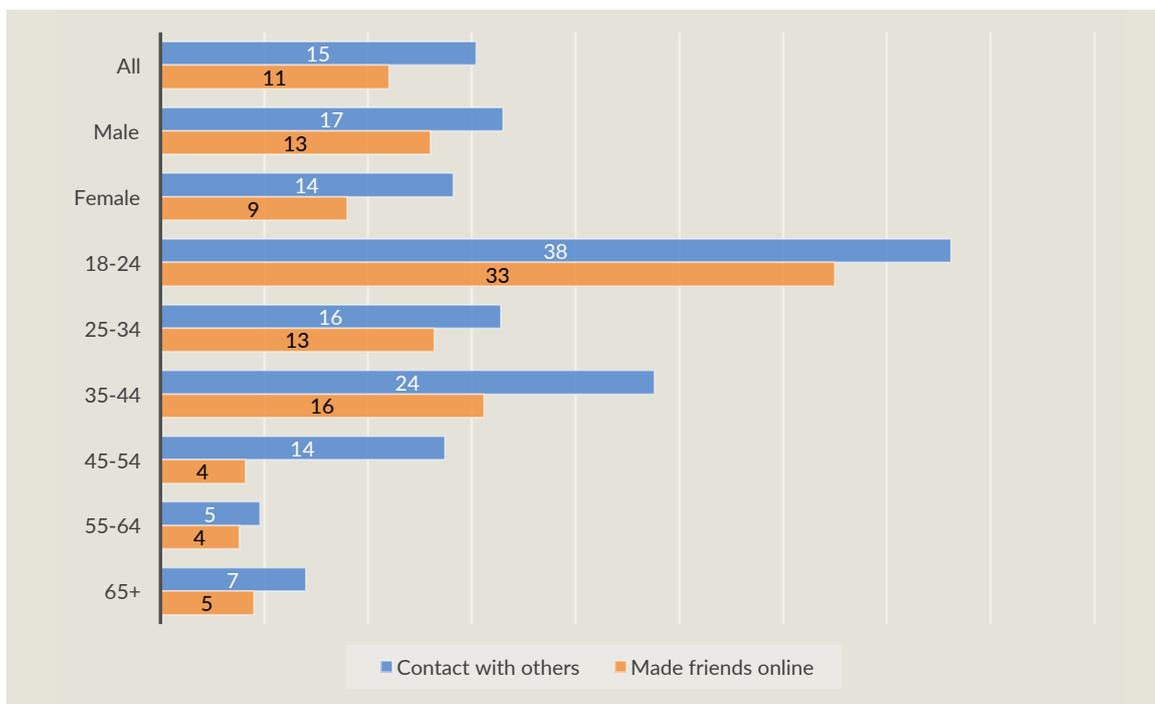
Online safety

For this part of the survey, adults were asked a range of questions relating to their experiences of risks, specifically sharing personal information and protection of privacy; contacting and meeting others online not previously known face-to-face; and the range of online safety strategies practiced.

Contact with others

Respondents were first asked if over the course of the last year they had used the internet to talk or chat to someone they didn't previously know. Examples suggested included using Facebook, a chat room, playing a game online. Communication was defined as including talk or sending written messages to someone not previously known face-to-face.

Figure 71: Contacts with others online not previously known



Q.B1 In the last year have you used the internet to talk or chat to someone you don't know?

Q.B3 In the last year have you made friends with someone you met on the internet?

Base: All adults.

Using the internet to communicate with and make friends with others not previously known is, as reported by participants, a relatively infrequent occurrence.

- 15% overall (17% men and 14% women) say that they have talked to or chatted with others not previously known to them online in the past year. 11% overall say they have made friends with others online.
- Chatting to others online and making friends is primarily a matter for users in the 18-24 category. 38% say they have chatted with others online while one third (33%) say they made friends online.

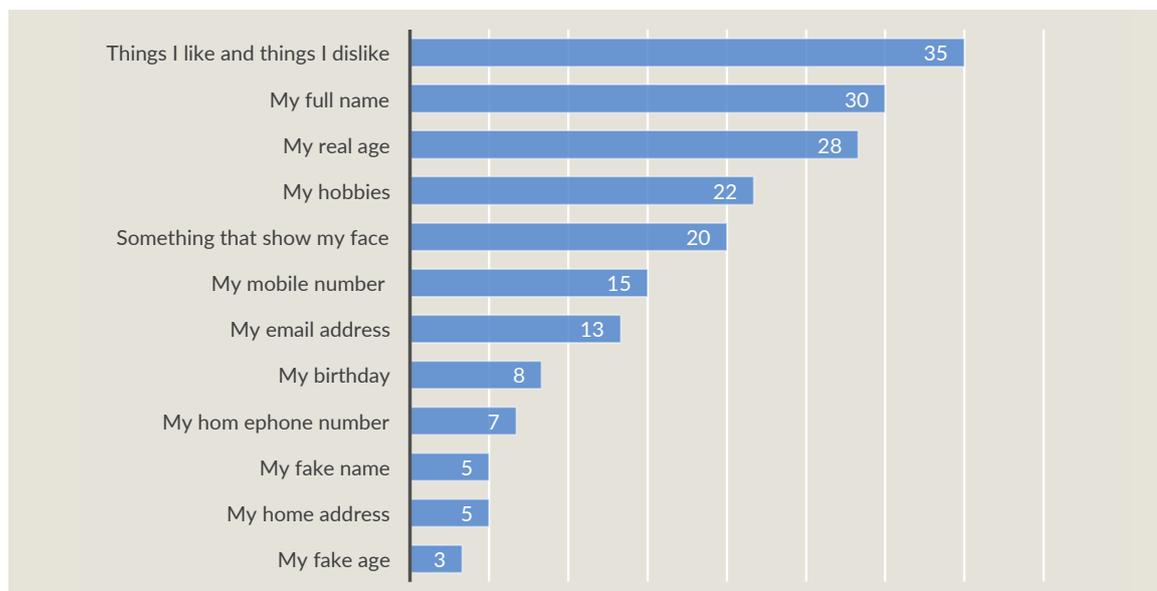
- Fewer numbers over age 25 say this is the case. However, one quarter, or 24%, of those aged 35-44 say they have chatted with others and 16% say they have made friends online.
- Less than 5% of those 55-64 years say they have communicated with others in this way and just 4% say they have made friends with others online. .

Sharing information online

Those that had reported communicating with others online were then asked what information they had shared in this context.

As shown below, information shared included personal information real name and age (30% and 28% respectively), hobbies (22%) as well as “things I like and dislike” (35%). Phone numbers, email addresses and something that shows the person’s face are other forms of information shared.

Figure 72: Information shared with others online

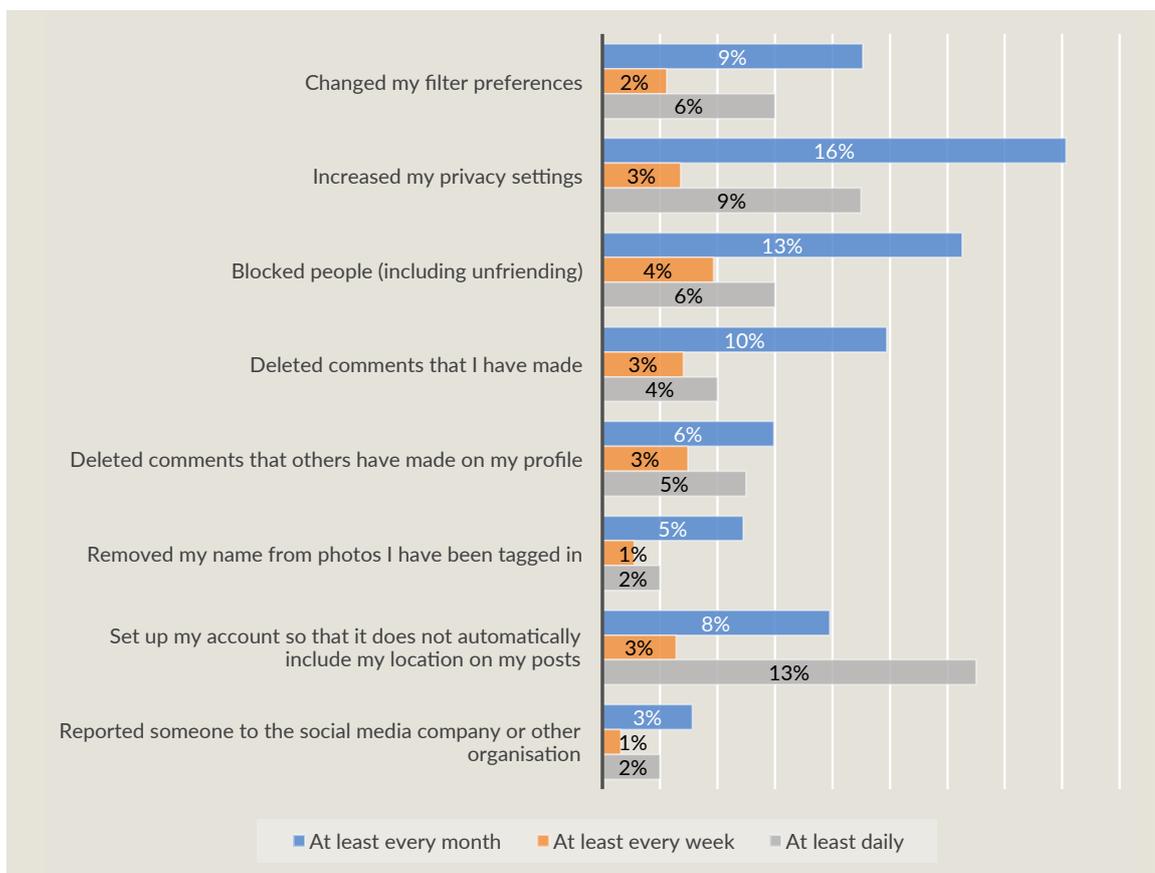


Q.B2 You said that you have used the internet to talk or chat to someone you don't know. What did you tell them?
 Base: Adults who used the internet to talk to someone they didn't know (QB1)

Participants were then asked about which actions they had taken and their frequency to keep themselves safe online when using social media.

A summary is given in Figure 73.

Figure 73: Frequency of online safety actions taken



Q.B4 In the last year, when using social media, have you done any of these things to help keep you safe online?
Base: All adults

- The most reported action to keep safe online when using social media is changing one's privacy settings. This is reported by 28% overall, with 16% reporting that they do this at least monthly and 9% at least daily.
- "Setting up my account so that it does not automatically include my location on my posts" is reported by 23% of respondents. 13% of all adults say they do this at least daily.
- Blocking people, including unfriending others on social media, is noted by 22% of all adults and by 13% who say they do this monthly, and 6% who say they do this daily.
- Deleting comments that others have made is reported by 17% as something they do at least monthly, as is changing filter preferences on a social media profile.

Problems encountered online

Respondents were then asked about which of a list of commonly reported problems they had encountered in the past year in the course of their online use. Participants were asked to choose any that apply.

Table 33: Problems encountered online

% this has happened to ...	Never / hardly ever	At least every month	At least every week	Daily or more
Had lies or rumours spread about me	93%	1%	0%	1%
Had personal information posted without me agreeing	93%	2%	0%	1%
Had inappropriate private photos of me posted without me agreeing	96%	1%	0%	1%
Had others say mean things about me/ Call me names etc	95%	2%	0%	0%
Was excluded or left out by others e.g., in a group chat	95%	1%	0%	1%
Had people threaten me or say they were going to hurt me	97%	0%	0%	0%
Had someone pretend to be me online	96%	0%	0%	1%
Had my accounts accessed by someone else without me agreeing	94%	1%	0%	1%
I was contacted by strangers/someone i don't know	85%	8%	3%	2%
Had someone steal my money through online fraud	97%	1%	0%	0%
Had my personal information used in a way I did not like	96%	1%	0%	1%
Clicked on a pop-up link and the device got a virus	95%	1%	0%	1%

Q.B5 In the last year, have any of these things happened to you online?

Base: All adults.

Experiences of problems encountered online are reported to be low, according to respondents to this survey.

- *Being contacted by strangers or someone they didn't know* is the most reported problem encountered online. This is reported by 13% of adults overall. 8% say this happens at least every month and 3% at least every week.
- Having personal information posted without agreeing to it is reported by 3%, 2% of whom say this happens at least every month. 2% also reported having others say mean things about them online.

For those who had encountered any of the above problems during their online use, a follow up question was asked to explore what had happened and how this made the respondent feel because of their experience online.

Table 34: “How did you feel because of the things that you experienced online”

% who have experienced this ...	Not true for me	A bit true for me	Fairly true for me	Very true for me	Don't know/ Prefer not to say
I felt anger sadness fear helpless without power	45%	19%	11%	8%	18%
I didn't feel good about myself	54%	21%	4%	3%	18%
I got a mental health problem (e.g. anxiety depression)	73%	5%	2%	3%	18%
I felt left out/I lost some of my friends	64%	12%	4%	1%	19%
My reputation was damaged - people were thinking bad things about me	70%	8%	2%	1%	20%
I started to go badly in my schoolwork	73%	2%	0%	2%	24%
I didn't feel close to my family and / or friends	72%	6%	2%	2%	19%
I became more aware of online risks	30%	14%	16%	21%	19%
I became more aware of who my real friends are	50%	12%	11%	9%	19%
I became more able to overcome problems that I experience online	41%	15%	11%	15%	18%
I learnt to use the internet in a more balanced way	36%	17%	11%	17%	21%
I developed a greater understanding of my own behaviour online	43%	13%	11%	13%	20%
Other	41%	0%	1%	1%	57%

Q.B6 What happened and how did you feel because of the things that you experienced online? (existing)?

Base: All adults who have encountered problems online (QB5)

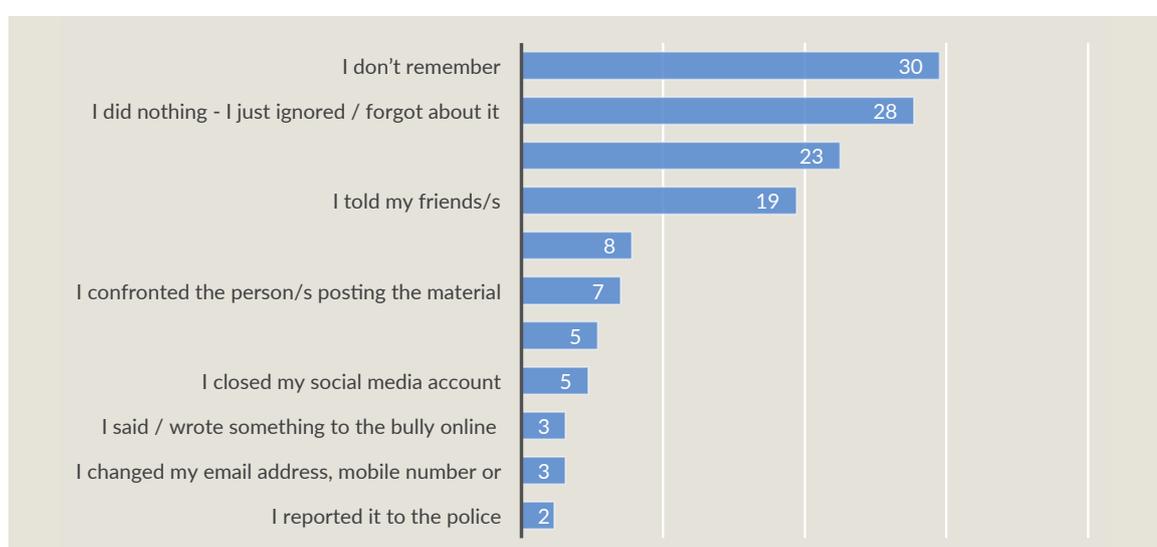
- The most reported response to an experience of a problem encountered online is that of *becoming more aware of online risks*. 51% of those who have experienced any such problems say that this is the case. 16% say this is fairly true of them and 21% say it is very true of them.
- *Learning to use the internet in a more balanced way* is the next most reported response as reported by those after having encountered problems online. 11% say this is fairly true of them and 17% say it is very true of them.
- 42% overall also said that they were better *able to overcome problems that they experience online*. 15% of respondents say this is very true of them.

- 37% overall said they experienced feelings of anger, sadness, fear, helplessness and being without power as a result of the experience. 8% said this was very true of them.
- A similar number (37%) said that they developed a greater understanding of their own behaviour online because of what they had experienced. 11% said this was fairly true of them and 13% said this was very true in their case.

Responses to problems encountered

Arising from problems encountered online, respondents were asked what action they had taken in response to the experience.

Figure 74: Response to negative online experience



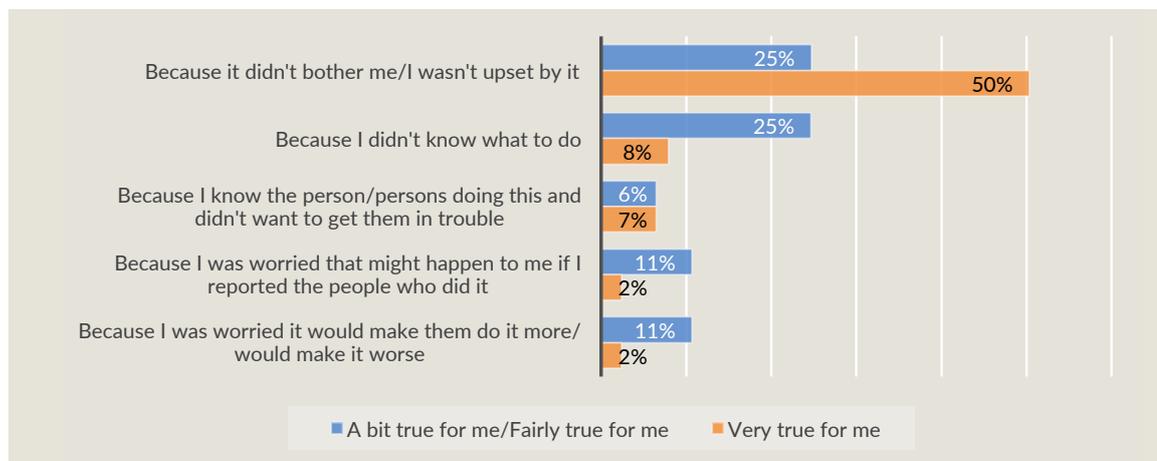
Q.B7 What did you do about the experience?

Base: All adults.

- Of the responses given, those affected stated that either they didn't remember (30%) or that they did nothing or ignored the issue (28%). This was the most reported action taken in response.
- The next most reported action taken was that of blocking the account of the person who had caused the upset. This is reported by 23% of those affected.
- 19% state that they told their friends about the issue though relatively few (8%) said they reported the matter to the website or service provider.
- A limited number (7%) said they confronted the person who posted the material that caused upset.

Finally, those who stated they did nothing in response to the problem they had encountered were asked about some of the reasons for not acting. As reported by respondents, the most frequently reported explanation is that the matter was not sufficiently concerning or that the respondent was not particularly upset by the experience. A smaller proportion said this was because they did not know what to do.

Figure 75: Reasons for not acting in response to negative online experience



Q.B8 You've told us that you did nothing/just ignored it/forgot about it when those things happened to you online. What are the reasons you did nothing?

Base: All adults

Summary: Adults and online safety

- The vast majority of respondents describe themselves as experienced users with 89% say they have used the internet for at least a few years and 72% say they have used it for many years. Experience in using the internet associated with age with age group (25 to 34 year-old) are the most experienced in terms of internet use with 89% stating that they have used the internet for many years. There is little gender difference in relation to experience in the internet use.
- High levels of daily use of the internet was reported across gender and age groups with 100% of adults in the 18 to 24 age group say they go online daily and 90% of adults (with exception of over 55 year old) describe themselves as daily users most daily use taking place at home.
- In general, users like to engage with news stories with 38% talk online with friends about news stories; 35% share news stories via a messenger service such as WhatsApp or Facebook Messenger during an average week. One third also rate or like a new story and share news stories via social networks. 26% comment on news stories online during an average week.
- The most reported action to keep safe online is **changing one's privacy settings**. 28% overall do this, with 16% reporting that they do this at least monthly and 9% at least daily.
- "Setting up my account so that it does not automatically **include my location on my posts**" is reported by 23% of respondents. 13% of all adults say they do this at least daily.
- **Blocking people**, including unfriending others on social media, is noted by 22% of all adults and by 13% who say they do this monthly, and 6% who say they do this daily.
- **Deleting comments that others have made** is reported by 17% as something they do at least monthly, as is changing filter preferences on a social media profile.
- 45% also said they had **learned to use the internet in a more balanced way** because of the experience.
- 42% overall also said that they were better **able to overcome problems that they experience online**. 15% of respondents say this is very true of them.
- For those who did make any response to a problem encountered online, the most frequently reported explanation given was that the **matter was not sufficiently concerning** or that the respondent was not particularly upset by the experience.

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Appendix 3

Methodology

This report presents findings from 3 separate surveys of children aged 9-17, parents, and adults. A total of 1917 respondents were surveyed between December 2019 and October 2020 using a modified version of the EU Kids Online questionnaire, broken down as follows:

Overview of the fieldwork, Dec 2019 – Oct 2020

Survey group	Completed interviews	Place of Interview	Method
Children aged 9-17	765	Household	PAPI
Parents of children	765	Household	PAPI
Other adults (non-parents)	387	Household	PAPI

The questionnaire

The questionnaire is based on the original survey instrument developed by the EU Kids Online network in 2010 and subsequently updated by the Global Kids Online initiative in 2016.⁷⁴ A revised version of the EU Kids Online network was further developed in 2018, to take account of new technological developments, changing patterns of use and emerging forms of risk. The full version of the research toolkit and accompanying methodological resources are available from the EU Kids Online website.⁷⁵

The final versions of the questionnaires used in the current research include all core questions from the original EU Kids Online questionnaire with a selection of optional questions that inquire into selected topics in more depth. The parent questionnaire similarly includes all core questions from the EU Kids Online questionnaire and is linked to the child questionnaire for purposes of comparison. The adult questionnaire is a new questionnaire and adapts some questions from EU Kids Online and adds new items principally derived from equivalent international examples such as the survey of Adults' Negative Online Experiences carried out by the Office of the eSafety Commissioner, Australia.⁷⁶

Survey mode

The survey was conducted using a Pen and Paper Interviewing (PAPI) approach with interviews conducted in-home with respondents. This approach was selected for a number of reasons.

Firstly, it made the process of interviewing children and their parents simultaneously much more straightforward. The parent questionnaire was administered on a self-completion basis, which meant that a paper mode was likely to be more acceptable for parents.

Secondly, while the interview content was quite long, there was minimal routing and much of

74 <http://globalkidsonline.net/>

75 <https://www.lse.ac.uk/media-and-communications/research/research-projects/eu-kids-online/toolkit>

76 <https://www.esafety.gov.au/about-us/research/adults-negative-online-experiences#>

this was quite straightforward. For these reasons PAPI was considered to be a suitable survey mode as interviewers could easily and accurately navigate the paper questionnaires.

Finally, the initial timescale set for the project required that fieldwork commenced soon after the questionnaire content agreed. Using a paper-based approach meant that it was not necessary to script the questionnaire into a format for Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) which meant that fieldwork could commence sooner.

Sampling procedure

A quota sampling approach using defined starting addresses was used to select households and participants. The selection of the sample involved a stratified random selection of addresses, or sampling points, to distribute the sample geographically throughout the Republic of Ireland, proportional to population.

The Republic of Ireland is divided geographically into 3,440 Electoral Divisions (EDs) ranged across Urban and Rural districts throughout the country. These EDs provided the basis of the sampling frame from which the selection of sampling points was chosen for this study – each sampling point represented an individual ED.

To ensure that the selected EDs were representative of the required population in terms of its distribution around Ireland, the population was initially stratified by province and degree of urbanisation. Within this stratification, all wards, towns and EDs were listed with their populations and the required sampling points were selected proportional to their population, utilising a random, systematic selection process. In this manner 125 EDs were selected by identifying every *n*th ED.

This framework ensured a spread of interviewing across all urban and rural dimensions. The systematic approach further ensured that all households had an equal opportunity for selection regardless of the size of the ED.

Within each sampling point the interviewer was provided with a randomly selected starting address from which they commenced their interviewing assignment of 20 interviews (8 children 8 parents and 4 other adults).

At each sampling point quota controls were applied to ensure that the sample was representative of the universe in terms of required demographic criteria. These were set by gender and age of the child (9-11, 12-13, 14-15, 16-17), and by age of the other adult (18-44, 45+). For parents, the interviewer was permitted to select either the female or male caregiver.

Fieldwork

Fieldwork took place between 16 December 2019 and 19 October 2020. However, fieldwork was paused between 16 March and 20 July 2020 due to Covid-19 restrictions. Most of the interviewing was conducted prior to the implementation of the Covid-19 restrictions.

All interviewers working on this project were sourced from the Ipsos MRBI interviewing fieldforce. All interviewers had previous experience working on surveys with children and many had over 10 years of this type of experience.

In advance of commencing work on this project, the interviewers received both written and a verbal briefing, delivered either by the Project Director or Field Manager.

In addition, field management staff were available throughout the fieldwork period to address queries and provide additional support to interviewers.

A total of 52 interviewers worked on this project. The median number of interviews completed by each interviewer was 20 interviews. The highest number of interviews completed by a single interviewer was 146 interviews (7.6% of all completed interviews).

Approaching households and securing consent

The initial step when approaching a household was to identify its eligibility to participate in the survey. Every household was eligible to participate and the survey that they were invited to participate in depended upon whether any children aged between 9 and 17 lived in the household.

If there were children in this age group present in the household, then they were invited to participate in the child and parent survey. If not, they were invited to participate in the “other adult” survey.

The second step was to identify whether or not the household qualified for any of the survey quotas that had not yet been filled. In the cases of households with multiple children that qualify for different quota groups (e.g., a girl aged 11 and a boy aged 14), the interviewer would typically choose the child within the least-full quota at that point. This least-full approach was also adopted for the “other adults” survey if multiple adults lived in the household.

The next step was to secure consent from the survey participant. For adults, this was done verbally by the interviewer. However, for children it was necessary for the parent to read and sign a parental information sheet. This was retained by the interviewer and returned to the Ipsos MRBI office. Any completed child interviews that did not have an accompanying signed information sheet were deleted.

No incentive was offered to any respondent.

Data analysis

The data used for analyses were weighted and cleaned by Ipsos MRBI. Data was then analysed by researchers at TU Dublin using IBM SPSS Statistics 27, working collaboratively with Ipsos MRBI during the analysis process to clarify errors and make sure that the dataset was clean and error-free.

Treatment of missing values: The results in this report were computed from valid data only. However, the exact number of percentages reported will be dependent on how missing values are treated and which of them are included or excluded from the base.

The base determines which respondents were included for reporting percentages of a particular variable. In this report, we decided to exclude all of the above from the base, that is, we defined the base as: “All respondents, who have given a valid answer to a question, such as “yes”, “no” or any response option that is not “don’t know” or “prefer not to say”.

One exception to this rule was made: when the response “don’t know” or “prefer not to say” was considered meaningful to report OR it was presented as separate independent option – e.g., due to the topic in question or because a large number of respondents had chosen them – then these responses were included in the base.

Age categories for children questionnaire: The age categories used in this report are similar with those used in EU Kids Online Ireland 2010 and Net Children Go Mobile 2014 which allow identification of trends and patterns of children internet's use in Ireland over the past ten year. In this report, the age categories were: 9-10, 11-12, 13-14 and 15-17 OR 9-12 and 13-17.

The grouping of data into segments proceeded as follows:

- Reducing data (mostly using aggregate data as a technique to compile and summarise data into broader records by dividing the entire data into multiple groups and drawing the number for each group), e.g.: age groups and gender in each age group.
- Rescaling data: as a part of data normalisation procedures that aim at improving the quality of a dataset by reducing dimensions and avoiding the situation when some of the values overweight others, e.g.: in a multiple options or measure scales which have more than 5 options.

Note that due to rounding the sum of numbers in certain graphs might add up to between 99% and 101%

