



CYBERSAFE
KIDS

ACADEMIC YEAR IN REVIEW
— 2021 - 2022 —



OUR VISION

A world in which children are safe using technology in a positive and effective way.

OUR MISSION

To make online safer for children and children safer online. We do this through education, giving voice to children's online experience and by being a fierce advocate for children's online safety.

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TEACHER TESTIMONIAL

“Brilliant Session, the kids loved it!”

JOAN REEHILL, ST. TERESA'S NS

FOREWORD | Professor Brian O'Neill

I am once again very pleased to express my support for the work of CyberSafeKids in the Foreword to its Year in Review 2021-2022. Following the very challenging period for children and families with the huge disruption brought about by 2020's COVID-19 restrictions and lockdown, the past year has seen something of a return to normal. CyberSafeKids resumed its in-person school workshops and managed to speak directly to over 9,500 children and over 2,000 parents about their use of digital technologies.

CyberSafeKids' growing data repository gives unique insights into the experiences and perspectives of 8- to 12-year-old children about their digital lives. Since it was established, CyberSafeKids has ensured that children's own accounts of what they do online and what they experience are at the heart of its approach to online safety and the development of its training programmes. Thus, we can see that children at this age are fully embedded in the online world. Over 95% own their own smart device (though 50% do not have a smartphone); 87% use social media and messaging apps where typically the minimum age is 13; and nearly a third upload videos to short form video platforms. For all these reasons, children need expert educational support and training to ensure that they acquire the digital skills and literacy needed to keep safe online and to benefit from the important opportunities that the digital environment can provide.

As described in this year's review, children continue to access and use a range of services that were not necessarily designed for their age group. There is a clear disjuncture here. Children have a right to participate in the digital world and should be supported in doing so. There are, however, few age appropriate or purposely designed services for them. Many of the services they use often lack the safeguards one would want to be in place for under-12s. And, of course, depending on how children have registered for such accounts, service providers may not know they are not their actual age as they may have used a higher date of birth to get onto the service. All of this suggests that much more needs to be done if children are to be appropriately facilitated and provided for in learning to use and enjoy digital services.

The review notes that there are several key legislative and regulatory developments in train to address this important area which for far too long has been neglected. The Irish Data Protection Commissioner's Office has issued guidance to digital service providers in the form of Children Front and Centre: Fundamentals for a Child-Oriented Approach to Data Processing (2021). Under GDPR, the protection of children's data merits special attention as children may

not have the maturity to understand the ways in which data is collected and processed. Children may not appreciate how their digital use gives rise to data traces or how they may be targeted for advertising or certain types of information in their social media feeds. The DPC's guidance sets an important benchmark for protections that should be in place for all users of digital services and requires companies to apply child-specific data protection measures based on robust age verification measures. The second significant development is the progression of Ireland's Online Safety and Media Regulation Bill which is currently making its way through the houses of the Oireachtas. This will bring about a new regulatory environment with the establishment of a Media Commission, a new role of Online Safety Commissioner and the application of binding online safety codes on designated digital services.

Both developments alongside other initiatives taking place at European Union level will place new obligations on the providers of digital services to do more and be more transparent about their systems with particular reference to the needs of children as users of digital services. However, the need for education and online safety training remains as important as ever, not least since the digital world continues to evolve and present new challenges. The many testimonials from parents, teachers and other professionals about the value and quality of the work of CyberSafeKids also highlight the importance for us all to be informed and more aware of what it means to grow up in a digital world. For this reason, CyberSafeKids' work in nurturing children's digital literacy through expert and professional guidance is vital and deserves all our support.



A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read 'Brian O'Neill'.

Professor Brian O'Neill

Brian O'Neill, Emeritus Professor, Technological University Dublin, Researcher on young people's use of digital technologies, online safety and policy for the digital environment as well as Board Advisor to CyberSafeKids.

POINTS OF INTEREST

CHILDREN

- **95% of 8–12 year olds owned their own smart device** (an increase of 2% on last year's figure).
- **87% of 8–12 year olds had their own social media and/or instant messaging account** (an increase of 3% on last year).
- **YouTube was the most popular app (78%) followed by TikTok (47%), Snapchat (41%) and WhatsApp (40%).** If children were posting videos of themselves online however, they were more likely to do so on TikTok (74%) or Snapchat (41%) than YouTube (20%).
- **Just over a quarter (26%) of children with social media or instant messaging accounts had friends or followers they didn't know offline.**
- **19% of children reported playing over-18s games** with boys (31%) much more likely to do so than girls (8%).
- **A third (33%) of children game online with people they don't know offline** (40% of boys vs. 28% of girls). Almost two-thirds (**64%**) **said they had been contacted by a stranger in an online game** either 'lots of times' (20%) or 'A few times' (44%) - an overall increase of 3%.
- **Over a quarter of kids (26%) have seen or experienced something online in the last year that bothered them.** 29% of those children kept it to themselves rather than report it to their parents or someone else.
- **28% of children have experienced bullying online.** A third (33%) of those children did not tell anyone about it but kept it to themselves.
- **Most children (74%) are speaking to parents or carers about what they are seeing and doing online with some regularity** but 11% never do and 2% only once a year.
- In terms of rules around device use and access, most children reported having some rules in place but **15% reported that there were 'no rules' and more than a third (34%) said they could go online 'whenever I want'.**

TEACHERS

- The **majority of teachers (63%) told us that online safety was a significant issue in their school.**
- The good news is that **most teachers (65%) feel they have sufficient knowledge/skills** to effectively deliver educational messages relating to online safety and **most teachers teach online safety in the classroom at least once a year, if not more** (26% teach it once a year, 57% teach it 2-4 times a year and 15% teach it 5 times or more in a year). These are positive trends that we are seeing year on year. However, we would stress the need for greater teacher training on this subject (with over one third of teachers reporting that they don't have sufficient knowledge or skills), as well as greater classroom time on a topic that is increasingly becoming an integral part of pupils' lives.

INTRODUCTION | Avril Ronan Naughton, Chairperson

Thank you to Alex Cooney, CEO and to her passionate team at CyberSafeKids who have once again produced invaluable year on year research on children's digital use in Ireland.

It is critical in the assessment of educational impact to date and in identifying the areas where the need for education still remains.

Looking at the comparative data, year on year; it comes as no surprise that there is an increase in the number of children between 8-12 years owning their own smart device. Technology is fully integrated into society, into our lives for all ages and will continue to do so. The key for us is finding a healthy balance for our kids from a young age with the skills, tools and parenting to guide them.

Along with a device comes access to every app and game you could imagine. Children want them (especially if their friends have them) and we know that 87% of 8-12 year olds have their own social media or IM account. I urge parents and guardians everywhere to download and use any app first before deciding to allow your child to use it. The majority of social networks have a minimum age of 13 years and, for very good reason. Take a look yourself, check out the app reviews, age ratings and talk to other parents too.

Knowing that the majority of children 8-12 years of age own their own devices and have their own social account, it is clear that a paradigm shift is needed; moving away from the conversation about 'screen time', and focusing our attention more on quality time online and what that looks like. Are kids learning something new online? Are they being creative online? Are they having fun and spending time with friends and family? Let's talk about it more with our kids. Find what they love online and offline, then work on getting the balance right together with them. The younger they are when we start the better!

It is encouraging to see that 74% of children regularly talk to their parents or guardians about their online activity, though we need to see this percentage increase next year. Safeguarding children online can feel daunting for many parents, guardians and educators.

Yes, those safety and privacy settings and tools are very important but they will never replace the role of a parent/guardian in a child's life as they embark on their digital journey. An open and trusting relationship is the key to nurturing that digital journey not to mention the development of a child's social, emotional and physical wellbeing.

Take comfort in knowing that CyberSafeKids will not rest until Child Online Safety is a recognised part of Child Safeguarding Obligations and all who work and care for children are upskilled. CyberSafeKids have exciting plans for the future to fulfil their vision of children across Ireland using technology in safe, positive and successful ways. The 'Cyber-Safe Tools for Schools' initiative is in its infancy yet already showing signs of becoming an important guide for schools; bolstering confidence in a schools' ability, knowledge and approach to digital citizenship for all students.



As Chair, financing is the critical element to a charity's success; the greater the social investment the greater the social impact. Particular thanks to our supporters over the last year: the Life's2Good Foundation, Trend Micro, Accenture, the Community Foundation of Ireland, Rethink Ireland, CommSec and Sara Emanuel for your financial support and commitment to date. Your encouragement and confidence in CyberSafeKids' strategic plans for community educational impact and reach are truly appreciated.

With this in mind, I call on all potential investors and supporters to talk to our CEO, Alex or myself or any of the board of directors. We will clearly outline how you can make a real impact on children's digital safety and wellbeing in Ireland.

On a final note, I would like to thank my fellow board members for their focus and commitment to CyberSafe's work and mission over the past year. Your time and energy is really appreciated.

Mise le Meas,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Avril Ronan Naughton".

Avril Ronan Naughton | Chairperson

CYBERSAFEKIDS' ACADEMIC YEAR IN REVIEW 2021 – 2022

Overview

In this part of the report, we provide an overview of the data we have collected over the past academic year (September 2021 up to June 2022) and also a more in-depth focus on some of the key findings. The data is gathered from children via an anonymous online survey before we visit a school or deliver our services via live webinar. This allows us to get a picture of **trends and usage within the 8-12 year old age bracket** and also to tailor our sessions more specifically to their needs. Where appropriate and of interest, we have also provided a comparative analysis of the data against last year's data. Finally, there are both data and testimonials collected from parents and teachers following our sessions with them.

Key Numbers

- **Since January 2016**, we have spoken to **38,614 children** aged between 8 and 13.
- **In this academic year**, we spoke directly to **9,525 children** (+41% on 2020/21 - 6,742) and to 2,014 parents (+14% on 2020/21 - 1,762).
- **We have gathered data from 4,714 children¹** over the 2021/22 academic year. As the responses from 13-year olds were few in number and because we reported on only 8-12 year olds last year, we discounted their data from our overall results and the findings outlined in this report are based on responses from **4,408 children aged between 8 and 12** with the breakdown provided in Table 1.

Number of Kids

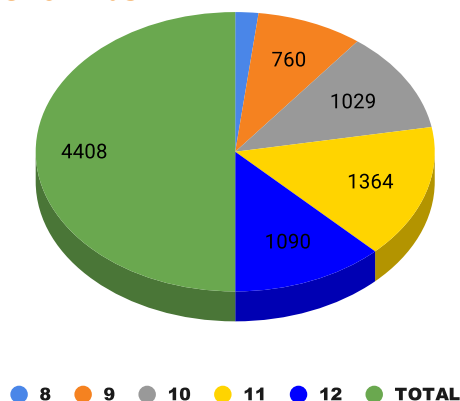


TABLE 1

¹ Not all children to whom we deliver sessions completed the survey and like 2019/20, this academic year was more challenging than most because of COVID-19 and the difficulty of using shared devices within the classroom due to hygiene restrictions.

- The gender breakdown is provided in Table 2 below.

GENDER	#KIDS	%
Male	1,996	45
Female	2,412	55
TOTAL	4,408	100

TABLE 2

- We delivered educational services in 188 different settings including schools, libraries and youth services over the last academic year. Most schools opted for in-person delivery, when restrictions allowed, but many parent and teacher workshops were delivered virtually. The county breakdown is as follows (Table 3):

County Breakdown from Sept 2021 – June 2022

Wicklow	8.6%	Laois	1.4%
Galway	0.7%	Kilkenny	1.4%
Westmeath	1.4%	Kildare	3.6%
Tipperary	3.6%	Kerry	1.4%
Roscommon	3.6%	Carlow	1.4%
Offaly	1.4%	Cavan	3.6%
Meath	3.6%	Clare	2.9%
Mayo	3.6%	Cork	10.0%
Louth	7.9%	Donegal	2.1%
Longford	1.4%	Dublin	29.3%
Limerick	4.3%	Wexford	0.7%
Leitrim	1.4%		

TABLE 3

Children who own a smart device

By smart devices we mean touch-screen devices, games consoles and PCs. We asked children the following question: "Which smart devices do you own yourself? Please tick any that you own yourself (don't tick if it is a device that your parents own and just let you use sometimes)" and a list of devices is provided with boxes that they can tick. There was also the option to tick a box that says "I don't own any smart device". The figures outlined below indicate that ownership of smart devices for the 8–12 age group remained extremely high. Our data shows that **overall 95% of the children surveyed stated that they own a smart device** and this represents a **2% increase** on the 2020/21 figures. A breakdown by age is provided in Table 4 below. This shows that device ownership was consistently high across all age groups with 89% of 8-year olds and 99% of 12-year olds owning their own device.

Smart device ownership by age

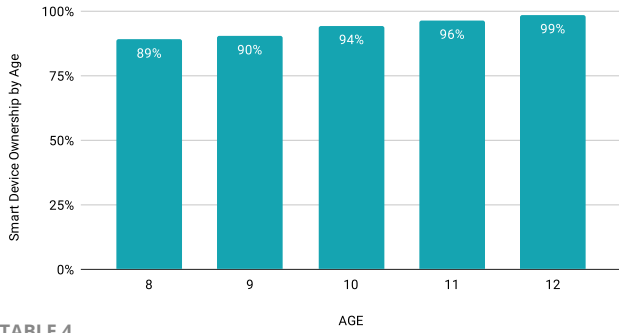


TABLE 4

In line with last year’s findings, the most popular devices were tablets (56%) and games consoles (53% - a 5% increase on last year) with smartphones being the third most popular (50% - 2% increase on last year). There was a considerable gender difference in relation to the ownership of games consoles with 77% of boys owning one vs. 33% of girls (Table 5).

What smart devices do you own?

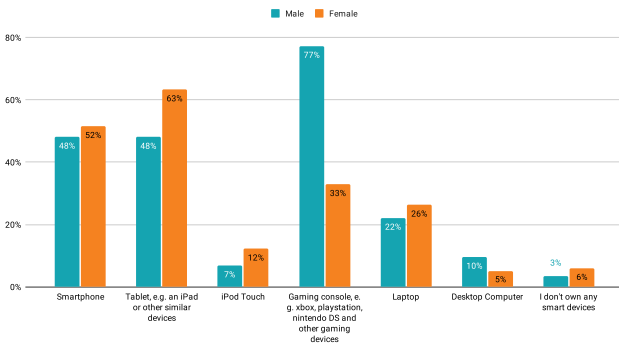


TABLE 5

The ownership of tablets remained fairly consistent across all ages with 55% of 8-year olds and 57% of 11-year olds stating that they owned one (see Table 6). The ownership of smartphones and games consoles however, rose with age. This was more notable with smartphones with 30% of both 8 and 9-year olds owning one as compared to 54% of 11-year olds and 77% of 12-year olds.

As we have noted in our reporting over the last number of years, this suggests that many parents are holding off on buying their child their first smartphone until 11 or 12. Many parents ask us what the right age is to give a child a smartphone. The reality is that the age at which you give a child any smart device should depend on the maturity levels of the child in question and the readiness of the parent to assume the ongoing responsibility that comes with their child’s use of the device and being active online.

What smart devices do you own?

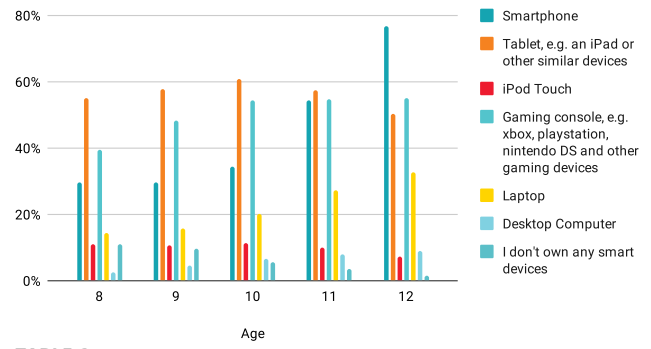


TABLE 6

Use of Social Media & Messaging Apps

We asked children the following question: “If you are using any of the following social media and messaging apps WITH YOUR OWN ACCOUNT, please tick the box beside it (please choose only the apps that you use yourself and have your own account for!)”. We provided a list of social media and messaging apps as well as the option to include one that is not listed under ‘other’. We also provided the option to say ‘I’m not using any social media or messaging accounts’. Our data shows that **87% of the 8 - 12-year olds we surveyed were using social media and messaging apps** and 13% were not. This represents a 3% increase on last year’s figure of 84%.

As we have noted in previous reports, **all of the popular apps have a minimum age restriction of at least 13**. Table 7 below provides an age breakdown and they show that 76% of the 8-year olds surveyed and 79% of the 9-year olds reported that they had a social media and/or instant messaging account in their name rising to 95% of 12-year olds.

Using Social Media & Messaging Apps (by Age)

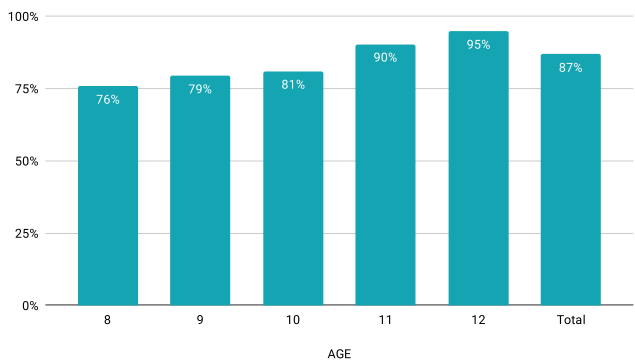


TABLE 7

Table 8 below shows the top 7 most popular apps overall. YouTube remained extremely popular with 78% of respondents stating that they had their own YouTube account (for which 13 is also the minimum age requirement). This was followed by TikTok with almost half (47%) of 8 - 12-year olds signed up to it. Both these data points were consistent with last year's findings. Snapchat has grown in popularity with children in this age group signed up - a 41% increase on last year. WhatsApp remains popular with 40% of children surveyed signed up. The Houseparty app featured on this list last year and saw a growth in popularity during the various lockdowns but has been shut down since October 2021. It has been replaced by a growth in the use of Twitch (14% of all children surveyed were using it), a live streaming app popular with gamers.

Top Seven Apps

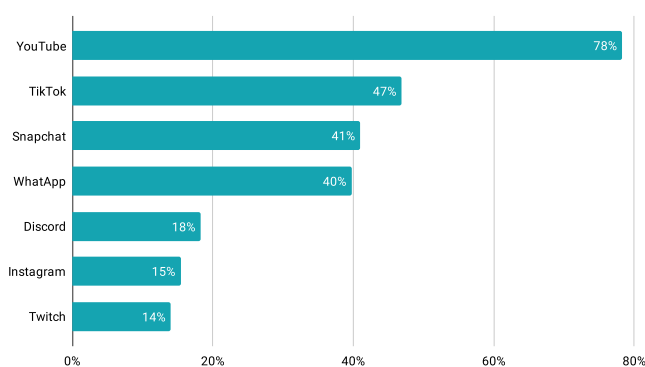


TABLE 8

There were some interesting gender differences in relation to children's use of social media and messaging apps as can be seen in Table 9 below. YouTube was popular with both boys and girls (but slightly more popular with boys) and TikTok was also popular with both but used by more girls (51%) than boys (42%), although the gap was less notable than last year. WhatsApp and Snapchat were also both slightly more popular with girls. The other notable differences were in relation to the use of both Discord and Twitch, with significantly more boys than girls signed up. This is likely down to the fact that both apps are used in conjunction with online gaming, an activity that is, in general, more popular with boys.

Top Seven Apps (by Gender)

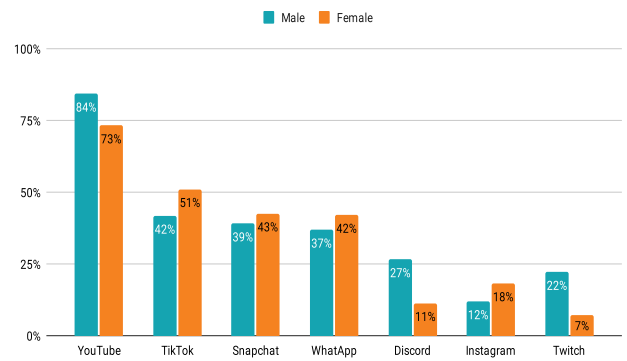


TABLE 9

There is no question that over the long periods of social distancing and restrictions around gatherings, the online world has offered many opportunities to children to interact with their friends, peers and family online. Social media, messaging apps and multiplayer gaming sites all offered that opportunity in abundance. The concern however, is over children accessing sites that are not appropriate for their age either because of the type of content that they host or because of the opportunities to interact with people that they don't know offline.

Clearly, **existing age restrictions are not working and are relatively easy to bypass for a determined child.**

Given what we know from the figures, many children are lying about their age in order to access these apps and whilst we don't have data on this, we have to assume that parents are, in many cases, letting them do so. It's hard to provide an ideal age for a child to start using social media and messaging apps but age-restrictions are certainly worth bearing in mind, as well as the fact that many of these environments were not designed with children in mind. If children are using social media and messaging apps under the minimum age requirement, then they need guidance and oversight when using these sites. Some safeguards are available on a number of platforms for those aged 13-16 but what remains unclear is what age a child is using to sign up for an account. It could even be that some are bypassing age-restrictions as well as any safeguards on offer altogether by inputting an age over 16.

PARENT TESTIMONIAL

"Thank you CyberSafeKids for educating our young people and parents today. The content and delivery was very good."

PARENT, SCOIL MUIRE MXD

What kids are doing online

We ask children what they most enjoy doing online both in the survey as well as in the classroom and gaming, watching videos online, chatting to friends via messaging apps and being on social media frequently come up as the most popular online activities (and generally in that order).

As noted above, the use of video-sharing platforms was very popular with 8 - 12-year olds. As in previous years, we asked children if they posted videos of themselves online. Most children (73%) said 'no' but over a quarter (27%) said 'yes' in response to this question (see Table 10) - a decrease on last year when 32% of children reported posting videos (which may be explained by children being in lockdown in the previous period).

Do you post videos of yourself online?

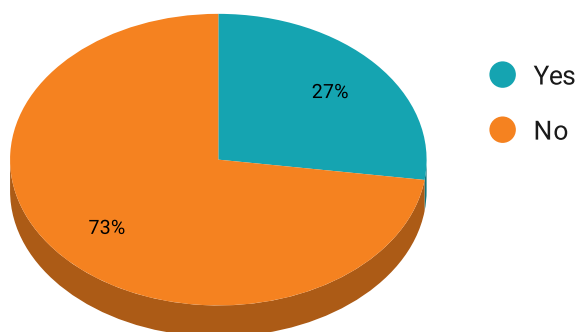


TABLE 10

Girls were much more likely to post videos of themselves than boys (see Table 11 below) with a third of girls (32%) saying 'yes' vs. a fifth of boys (21%) of boys.

Do you post videos of yourself online?

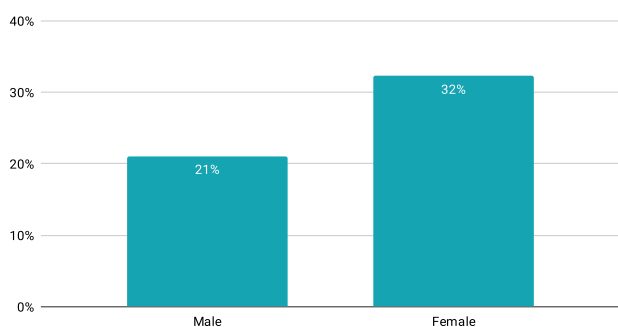


TABLE 11

Short-form user-generated video content is increasingly popular with children both from a content consumption as well as a content creation point of view. The videos are extremely easy to create from a smartphone and are generally up to 60 seconds in length. TikTok is one of the first and is the most popular platform to showcase this content. YouTube released **'YouTube Shorts'**, in late 2020, first in India (after a ban on TikTok) and then more widely in July 2021 and this is an increasingly popular source of entertainment for children. Instagram reels is another popular example, although less so with 8-12 year olds. We're increasingly seeing a move towards what has been coined 'recommendation media', where the algorithm recommends (video) content to users based on their preferences/interests, rather than the feeds of their friends and followers. This approach has been used by the likes of TikTok and YouTube with great success and others, including Meta, are following suit for their services.²

We asked those children that had responded 'yes' to posting videos online where they posted them. Table 12 below shows that **TikTok was by far the most popular place to post videos online**, with 74% of children who posted videos of themselves online posting on TikTok, a decrease on last year's figure of 80%. An increase in posting videos on Snapchat was seen however with 41% of children posting vs. only 30% last year. YouTube, perhaps surprisingly given its popularity among this cohort of children, only accounted for 20% (followed by Instagram at 13%). This suggests that many children are largely consumers of YouTube content rather than content creators on that platform.

If you do post videos of yourself, where do you post them?

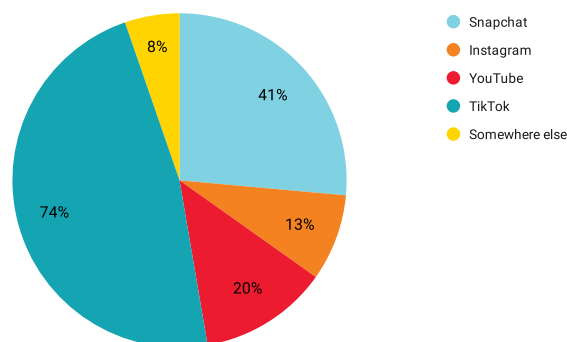


TABLE 12

2 MIGNANO, Michael, Every Media Inc, 'The End of Social Media and the Rise of Recommendation Media: Why friend graphs can't compete in an algorithmic world' (July 2022), Source: https://every.to/p/the-end-of-social-media?utm_source=Digital+Charity+Lab&utm_campaign=54db1098bb-2022-08-LAB-EZINE&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_6ad5fa9ba8-54db1098bb-349233417&mc_cid=54db1098bb&mc_eid=50f67cf0d3

We often discuss sharing personal information in the classroom with children and this includes posting videos of themselves online because they could be sharing more than they intend to - for example, if they are in their school uniform or in a personal space at home such as a bedroom, or giving away geolocation information about where they live. This is particularly important if they have friends and followers online that they don't know in real life, which we will explore in the next section.

Contact with strangers online

In previous years we have focused on asking children if they ever chat to strangers online but in more recent reports we wanted to explore the context in which children engage with strangers online.

Friends and followers on social media

We asked children if they have friends and followers on social media apps that they have not met in real life. As Table 13 shows below, most children - almost two-thirds - (65%) responded 'no'. **Over a quarter (26%) said that they did have friends and followers that they didn't know.** Almost 1 in 10 (9%) said they weren't sure. This latter cohort's response could be related to open accounts, where privacy settings are not enabled and when the user doesn't have to vet incoming friend requests. Consequently, they could be less aware of who is on their friends/follower list.

Kids on social media who have added people that they don't know in real life

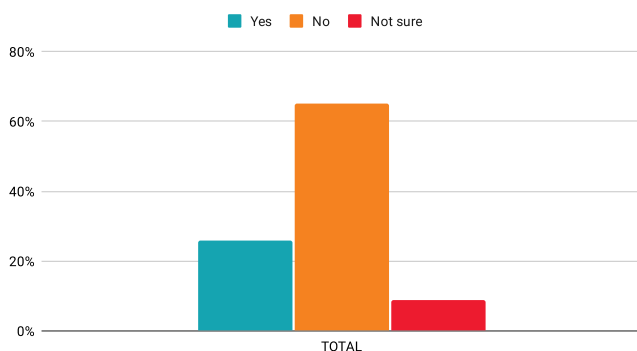


TABLE 13

The gender breakdown in Table 14 shows that the proportion of boys who accepted a friend request from someone they didn't know was greater than the number of girls who said 'yes' (27% of boys vs. 19% of girls). This was in line with last year's findings.

Do you have friends and followers on social media apps that you have not met in real life? (by gender)

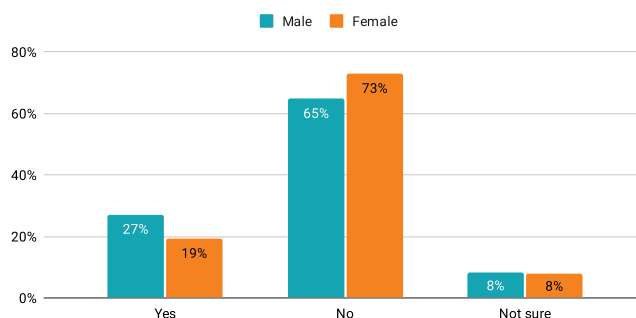


TABLE 14

There were some differences across the age groups in terms of their response to this question as can be seen in Table 15, with 18% of 8-year olds responding 'yes' to this question vs. 30% of 12-year olds, which suggests that the likelihood increases with age.

Do you have friends and followers on social media apps that you have not met in real life? (by age)

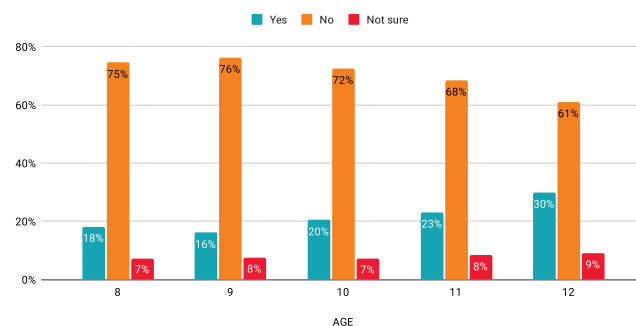


TABLE 15

We wanted to explore this further so we asked those that had said 'yes' to this last question why they had decided to accept the friend request and we provided a number of options as can be seen in Table 16 below. **The most common response was because 'They were a friend of a friend' (43%)** and this reason largely increased with age, with 35% of 9-year olds and 47% of 12-year olds providing this as their reason (the only deviation on this trend was that 57% of 8-year olds gave this as their reason). We know from talking to children in the classroom that they think a 'friend of a friend' seems like a safer option than a total stranger, but (as we remind them) they could still be a total stranger! Almost a third of respondents (31%) said 'I don't know' and girls were much more likely to provide this as their response (37% vs. 26% of boys) than boys. A third (33%) reported that they'd accepted friend requests on the basis of perceived shared interests and 22% said they added them because they wanted more followers. These numbers serve to illustrate that we need better strategies for educating children on the importance of keeping their friends and followers lists to just those people they know well offline.

If you have friends and followers on social media that you have not met in real life, why did you decide to accept them?

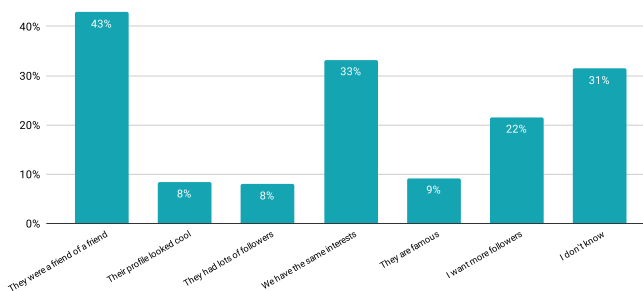


TABLE 16

Whilst many children will tell us in the classroom that they know they shouldn't be engaging with people online that they don't know offline, they don't always apply this knowledge in practice, as some of the data in this report will illustrate. This is of concern for younger children in particular, because of the way social media and messaging apps are inherently designed and structured, which is part of their business model: users are encouraged to share, to engage with others and are rewarded for having a large number of followers by having their content promoted. Accounts have traditionally been set to 'Public' by default, which has meant that it is up to the child (or parent) to ensure that this is switched to 'Private'. We have started to see some changes to this default setting since 2021 with some of the more popular apps making accounts for 13-16 year old users private by default. Children may not be aware that they even need to take such a step unless being closely monitored by a parent.

Use of Privacy Settings on Social Media

We wanted to explore this further so we introduced a new question into the survey this year to better understand children's use of privacy settings on social media. We gave them a number of options to tick: that their settings were set to 'private', to 'public', to 'private or public - depends on the app', 'I'm not sure' and 'I told you already, I DON'T use any social media'. Table 17 below provides an overview of the responses and from it we can see that **many children (42%) are using privacy settings**. 16% reminded us that they were not using any social media at all. **A fifth of the children are making the decision by app so are using privacy settings in some cases and 8% told us that their accounts were set to public.** 14% of children responded that they 'weren't sure'. Ideally if children in this age range are using social media apps (all the ones they're using, as we've pointed out above, have minimum age restrictions of at least 13), then we would strongly recommend that their accounts are set to private.

The settings on my social media accounts are... (by age)

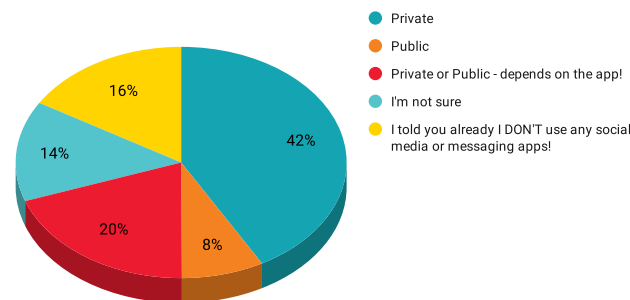


TABLE 17

The age breakdown in Table 18 shows that children were more likely to use privacy settings as they get older (likely as a result of education and awareness on the subject increasing) and the gender breakdown in Table 19 shows that boys were more likely than girls to have their accounts set to 'public' (12% vs. 5%) and girls were more likely to be using private settings (47% vs. 36% of boys).

The settings on my social media accounts are... (by age)

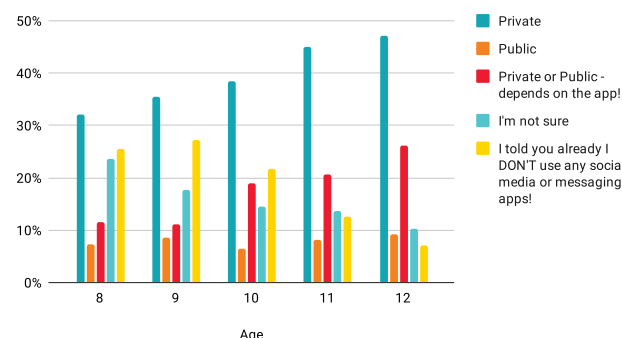


TABLE 18

The settings on my social media accounts are... (by gender)

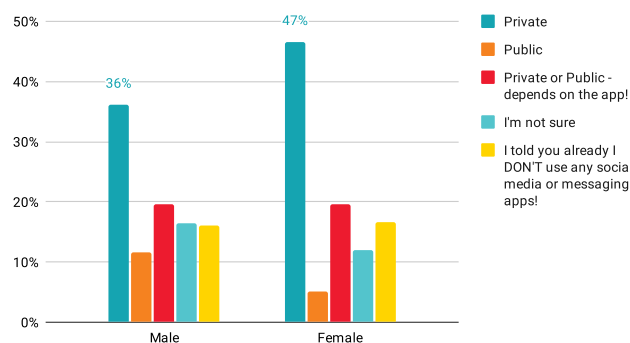


TABLE 19

Gaming online

We know from our conversations with children in the classroom that online gaming is hugely popular and this is borne out in the survey findings. **81% of the children we surveyed stated that they played at least one online game. Roblox was the most popular online game** with this cohort of children, with almost a third (32%) of the children stating that they played it, closely followed by Minecraft (30%), Fortnite (19%) and FIFA (14%). These findings are consistent with last year's findings.

Children under 13 playing over-18s games

We also asked children whether or not they played games with an age-rating of over-18 in the last year. As can be seen in Table 20 below, **whilst almost two-thirds of children (67%) responded 'no' or 'I don't game' to this question, 19% stated that they did** (up by 2% on last year) and 14% said they weren't sure (also up 2%).

Have you played a computer or video game that has an age rating of over 18s in the last year?

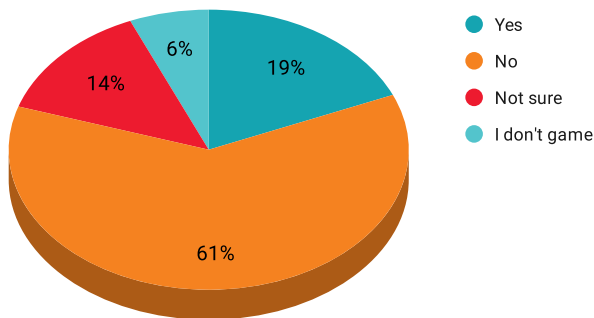


TABLE 20

The gender breakdown in Table 21 is also interesting in that it shows that **the overall figure was heavily weighted towards boys with almost a third of all the boys surveyed (31%) stating that they had played an over-18s game** vs. only 8% of girls.

Have you played a computer or video game that has an age rating of over 18s in the last year? (by gender)

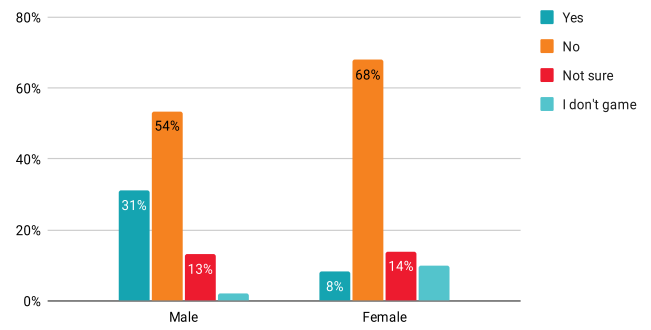


TABLE 21

The age breakdown is provided in Table 22 below and showed that the likelihood of children playing over-18s games increased with age (apart from 18% of 8-year olds) with 15% of 9-year olds playing them and this rises to almost a quarter (24%) of 12-year olds (equating to 262 12-year olds).

Have you played a computer or video game that has an age rating of over 18s in the last year? (by age)

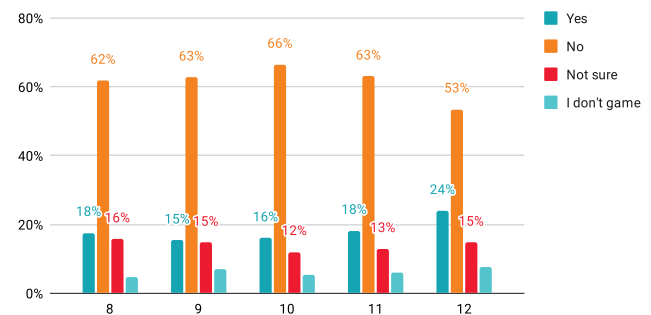


TABLE 22

As we have noted in previous reports, the concern with children playing overage games is that they contain content that is not appropriate for a child. They may contain content of a sexual nature, extreme or gender-based violence or simply bad language. As can be seen from the 'deeper dive' below, we can also see a clear association between children playing over-18s games and children having a negative online experience.³

³ χ^2 test was conducted using SPSS.



A Deeper Dive 1

Can a correlation be made between children who are playing over-18s online games and children being bothered by something online?

To investigate if and what kind of association there is between playing over-18s online games and experiencing something negative online, only gamers (i.e. those who reported playing any online game) were selected for further analysis (children who reported that they weren't sure were also excluded). In addition, we only selected those children who had answered the question 'Have you ever been bothered by something online?' with a clear 'yes' or 'no' rather than 'I'm not sure'.

The association between playing over-18s online games and experiencing something negative online was significant: $\chi^2(1, N=3141) = 95.72, p < .001$. The percentage of children in the total sample of gamers experiencing something negative online was 28.9%; the percentage dropped to 24.6% in the case of children who reported not playing over-18s online games, whereas it increased to 43.3% in relation to the children who reported playing over-18s games. **This showed that playing over-18s online games is significantly associated with the experience of having been bothered by something online for children.**

Engaging with strangers in the context of an online game

We asked children in the survey if they ever play online games with people they have not met in real life. Table 24 below indicates that half of the children (50%) said they did not. **A third (33% - 1,455 children) however said 'yes',** 10% said they weren't sure and 7% said they didn't game.

Do you ever game with people you have not met in real life?

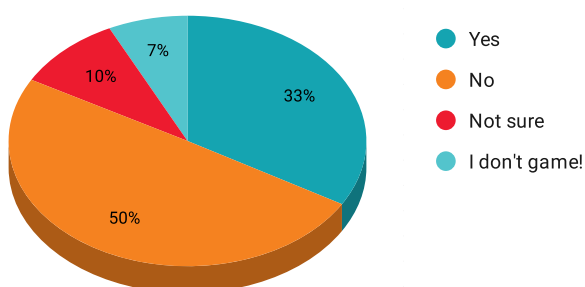


TABLE 24

The likelihood of children playing games with people they did not know offline increased with age with 27% of 8-year olds responding 'yes' to 38% of 12-year olds (see Table 25).

Do you ever game with people you have not met in real life? (by age)

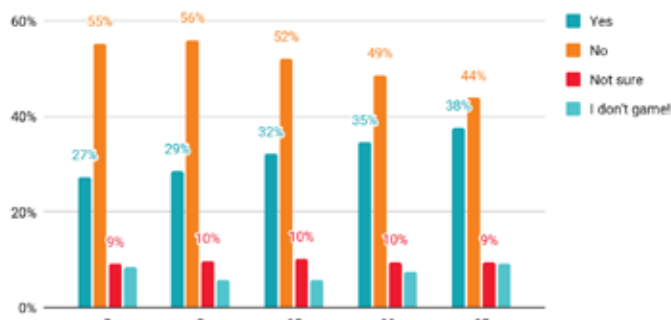


TABLE 25

There was some difference in how boys and girls reported on this (as shown in Table 26) with 40% of boys reporting that they had played online games with people they didn't know as compared to 28% of girls. **Boys were therefore more likely to play games with people they don't know.**

Do you ever game with people you have not met in real life? (by gender)

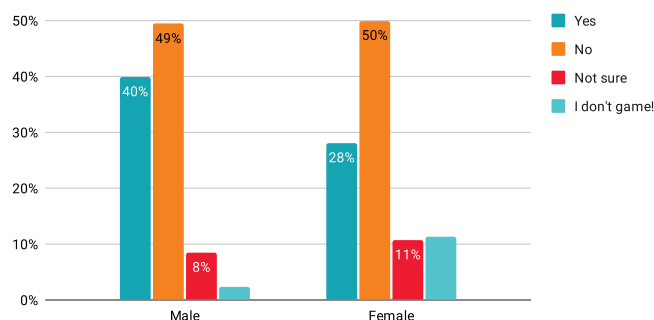


TABLE 26

We also asked children if a stranger (defined as someone they had not met in real life) had ever tried to chat to them or add them as a friend in a game. Table 27 below illustrates that 29% of children said 'never' (as compared to 40% in the 2019/20 findings) whilst **most children (64%) said that a stranger had tried to contact them in a game with 44% saying that this had happened 'a few times' and a fifth of children (20%) saying it had happened 'lots of times'**. Those reporting 'lots of times' and 'a few times' represents a slight increase on last year when it was 61%.

Has anyone ever tried to chat with you or add you as a friend in a game that you have never met in real life?

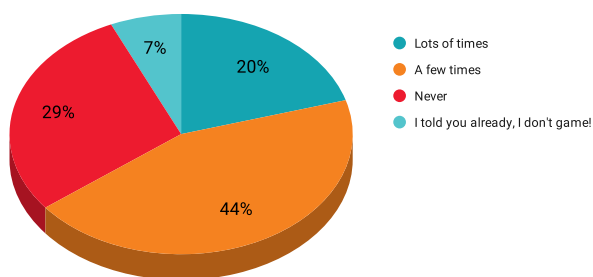


TABLE 27

In previous years, we have found a notable difference in the way that boys and girls respond to this question, with boys more likely to say that they have been contacted by someone that they didn't know than girls. That gap has narrowed this year as Table 28 illustrates below. Two-thirds of the boys surveyed (66%) told us that it had happened 'lots of times' (23%) or 'a few times' (43%) vs. 63% of girls.

Has anyone ever tried to chat with you or add you as a friend in a game that you have never met in real life? (by gender)

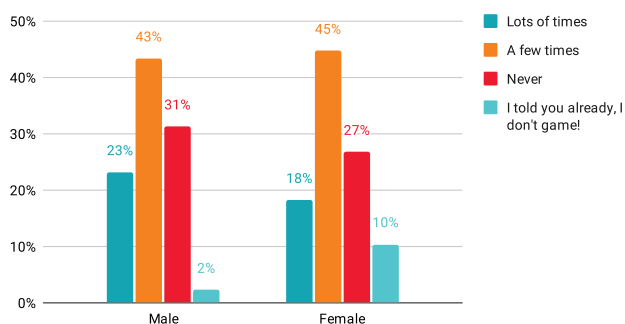


TABLE 28

Whilst most of these interactions are unlikely to be sinister in nature, they open the door to the possibility of the few that might be and we need children to be wary about people they don't know that they encounter online. Many games are designed to encourage online interactions with others and the figures in Table 27 above illustrate how common it is for a child to be approached in a game by someone they don't know. Asking children to never chat to people they don't know can be a challenging message to get across however, since many see it as part of any game that offers a multiplayer function and therefore entirely normal. Whilst we would always encourage children to never engage online with people they don't know offline, we add that if they were ever to find themselves in that situation in a game, that they should never take it any further - for example, by sharing personal information, by adding them as a friend or by engaging in private messaging with someone they don't know. We also urge them to talk to a trusted adult if anything or anyone they encounter online makes them feel scared or uncomfortable.

Negative experiences online

We asked children if they had seen something online in the last year that they wouldn't want their parents to know about. From focus group discussions we have held with children in the past, this content could relate to horror movies, games that their parents don't know they play (for example in someone else's house) or violent/sexual content either in a game or that has come up during an online search. On a positive note, **the vast majority of children (80%) said that they had not**, but a fifth of children (20%) said that they had (see Table 29). This is slightly lower than last year when 22% of children responded 'yes' to this question.

Have you seen something online in the last year you wouldn't want your parents to know about? (8-12 year olds)

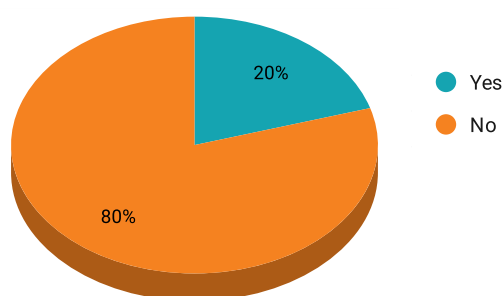


TABLE 29

Table 30 below shows the age breakdown and the figure remains fairly consistent across the age groups with 19% of 8-year olds and 21% of 9-year olds reporting that they had seen something online that they wouldn't want their parents to know about, and 22% of all 12-year olds that we surveyed.

Have you seen something online in the last year you wouldn't want your parents to know about? (by age)

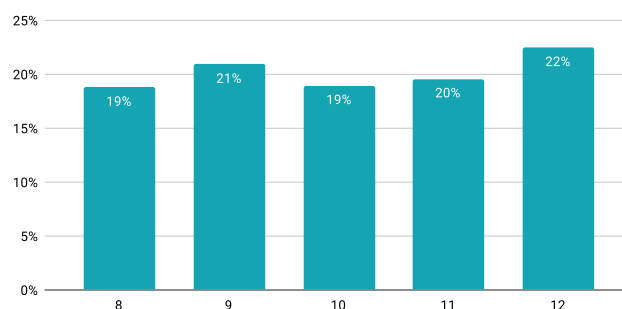


TABLE 30

Last year, we noted a gender difference in those reporting that they had seen something in the last year that they wouldn't want their parents to know about, with more boys (27%) than girls (18%) providing this answer. This year however, that gap has narrowed as can be seen in Table 31 below with 22% of boys and 19% of girls responding 'yes'.

Have you seen something online in the last year you wouldn't want your parents to know about? (by gender)

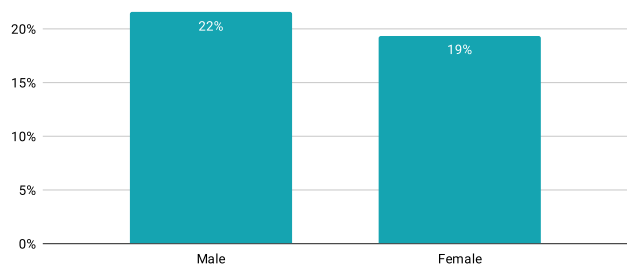


TABLE 31

Our experience from talking to children in the classroom indicates that children are largely positive about their online lives and that they generally feel safe when they are online. In our survey, we asked children 'In the last year, have you seen or experienced something online that bothered you? (e.g. made you upset, or scared, or wish you had never seen it)' and happily, for almost two thirds of children (62%) the answer to this question was 'no', as can be seen in Table 32 below. Consistent with last year's figures however, just over a **quarter of all children surveyed (26% - 1146 children), stated that they had seen something that bothered them online** with 12% saying they weren't sure.

In the last year, have you seen or experienced something online that bothered you?

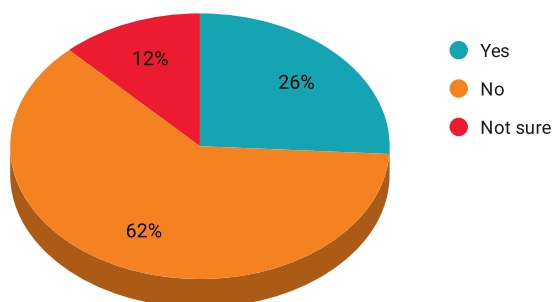


TABLE 32

As can be seen in Table 33 below, with the exception of over a third (35%) of the 8-year olds that we surveyed responding 'yes' to this question, there was some consistency across the responses from 9 - 12-year olds with 28% of 9-year olds and 24% of 12-year olds responding 'yes'. There was also consistency across the gender responses with 24% of boys and 28% of girls reporting that they had been bothered by something online.

In the last year, have you seen or experienced something online that bothered you?

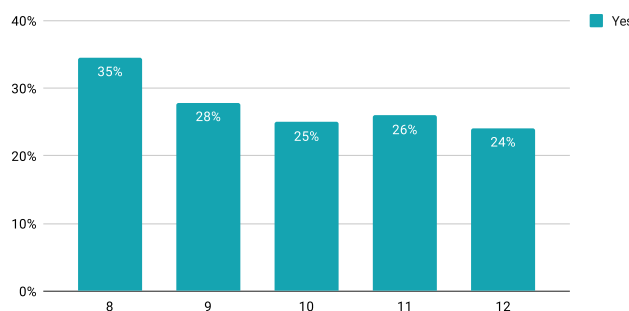


TABLE 33

When we ask a question like the one above, we always want to gain some insight into what children did when this happened, so our follow-on question is, 'If you answered 'yes' for the last question, what did you do about it? (you can choose more than one answer)' and we provide a range of options for them as is outlined in Table 34 below. **It is certainly positive to see that more than half of the children (54%) said that they had told a parent or a trusted adult**, which is absolutely the best strategy. **29% however, said that they kept it to themselves - which was consistent with last year's finding on this question.** This is a concern, especially if it was something that required intervention.

If a child was bothered by something, what did they do? (8-12 year olds)

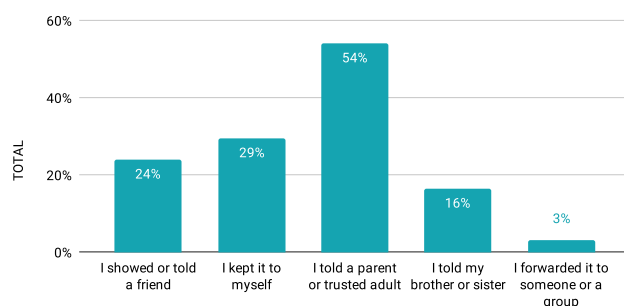


TABLE 34

The gender breakdown provided in Table 35 in relation to action taken is quite revealing in that more girls told a parent or trusted adult than boys (59% vs. 47% of boys) and more boys said they had kept it to themselves (34% of boys vs. 26% of girls).

If a child was bothered by something, what did they do (by gender)

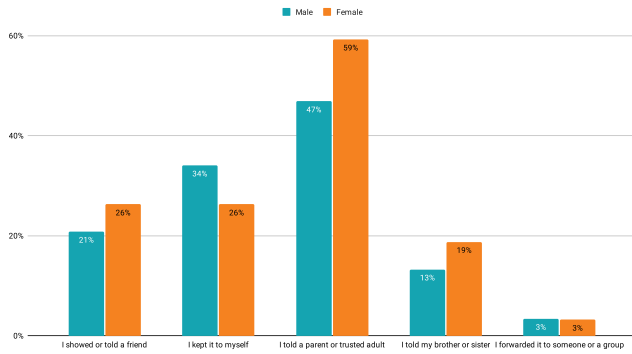


TABLE 35

Online Bullying

Consistent with last year's survey, we included a question related to online bullying. As before, we avoided use of the word 'bullying' but instead outlined a number of negative experiences online that constitute bullying and asked children to tick any experiences that were personally relevant to them. The option was also provided to say 'I haven't experienced any of these'. Fortunately, most children (72%) hadn't had any of these experiences, which means that the **overall percentage of children who had experienced some form of bullying online was 28%**. Some children ticked more than one box.

Considering only the group of those who reported at least one of the bullying experiences, **the most common experience was being kept out of chat/messaging groups (experienced by 16% of children)**, followed by 14% of children who had been sent hurtful messages and 9% who had had nasty comments posted about them. A full breakdown is provided in Table 36 below, which takes into account only the 28% who had at least one bullying experience:

Experiences of Bullying



TABLE 36

The age breakdown provided in Table 37 below shows that the numbers were reasonably consistent across the age group, although 11- and 12-year olds were the groups most likely to have experienced bullying (31%).

Experiences of bullying that kids have had online

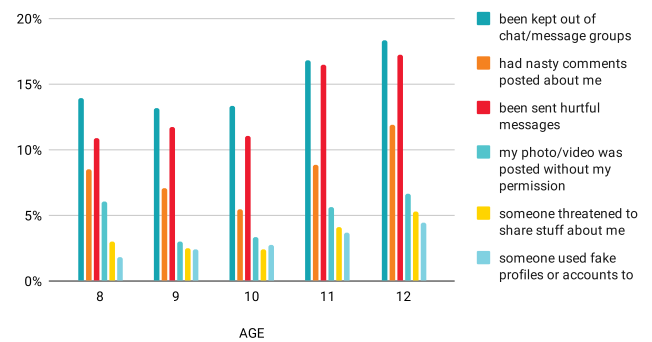


TABLE 37

The gender breakdown (provided in Table 38 below) was relatively consistent overall with 29% of girls and 27% of boys having experienced bullying online, but on closer inspection, some small variations with girls being more likely to have been sent hurtful messages than boys (16% vs. 12%).

Experiences of bullying that kids have had online (by gender)

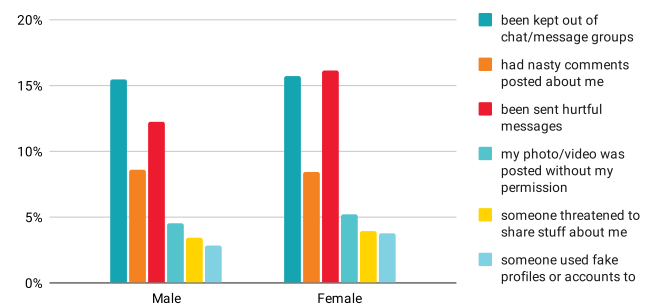


TABLE 38

Again, we asked those children who reported one or more of these experiences, what they did when this happened and **most children (60%) told a parent or trusted adult**, which is positive (see Table 39). 29% of children showed or told a friend but **a third of the children (33%) kept it to themselves** - this is an increase of 4% on last year. As with the finding related to children who had been bothered by something online, it is worrying that any child would keep this information to themselves, but especially so when it is such a high percentage of children who are affected overall.

What did they do about it?

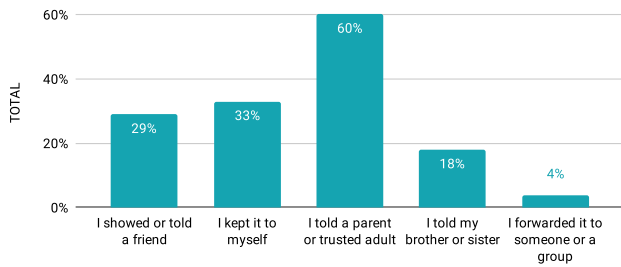


TABLE 39

The age breakdown shows that 11-year olds were the least likely age to have told a parent. The gender breakdown in Table 40 below shows that more girls told a parent or trusted adult (58% vs. 42%) and boys were more likely to have kept it to themselves (a third of boys 35% vs. 24% of girls), which indicates the need to do more work with boys in particular to report negative online experiences to a trusted adult.

If a child was bullied, what did they do (by gender)

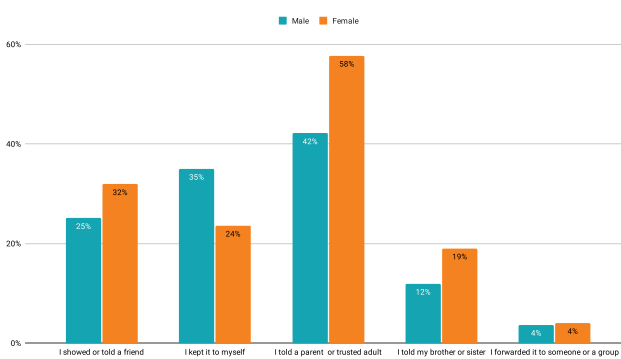


TABLE 40

Parental Mediation

Conversations with a trusted adult

Parental engagement in their children's online lives is one of the most important strategies for both protecting and empowering them online. Regular conversations between parent and child is central to effective mediation, as well as keeping an eye on what they're doing, ensuring there is good communication in place, putting in place good boundaries around use and access, modelling good practice and behaviour and utilising technical controls where possible and appropriate. Obviously, these strategies should evolve as the child grows and their needs (for example, for greater independence and privacy) change.

We asked children how often they talked to their parents about what they see, hear and do online. As you can see from Table 41 below, the vast majority of children were talking to their parents regularly with most (38%) saying that they had talked to their parents 'most days' and a quarter of children (25%) saying that they spoke to them 'about once a week' or 'once a month (11%)'. So overall, **74% of children reported talking to their parents pretty regularly**. This is slightly down on last year when this overall finding was 78% and whilst the figure for this year is still positive, we obviously want to see this trend going in only one direction because of its central importance as a strategy.

How often do you talk to your parents about what you see, hear and do online?

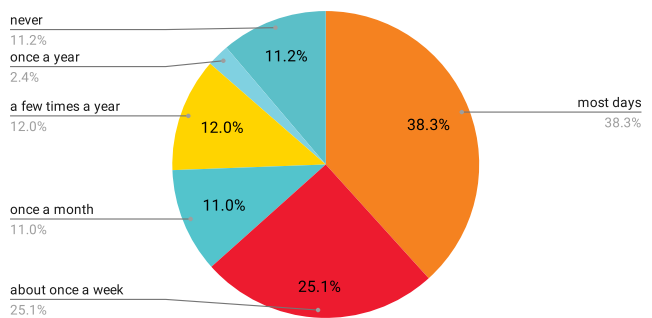


TABLE 41

A few children however, tell us that they 'never' talk to parents or carers about online safety (11%) or rarely do so (2%). The age breakdown in Table 42 below shows that 8-year olds were the most likely to have 'never' talked to their parents about online safety (15%) followed by 9- and 10-year olds (12%). Given we know that a significant proportion of children aged 8 - 10 years were active online and owned their own devices, it underlines the importance of getting support from, and having conversations with, a parent or carer.

Percentage of children who never talk to their parents about when they see, hear and do online

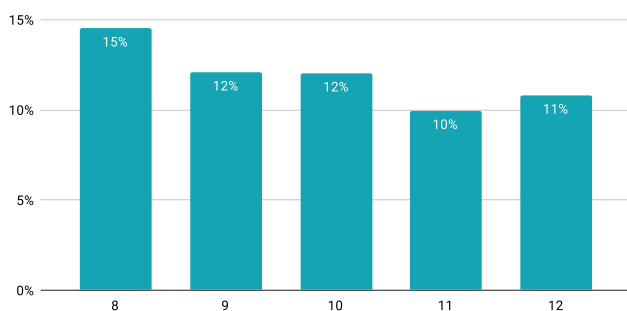


TABLE 42

The gender breakdown provided in Table 43 below shows some consistency although girls were more likely than boys to have spoken to their parents about their online use on a daily basis (41% vs. 35% of boys). Girls were also less likely to 'never' or rarely talk to their parents about their online use (11% vs. 16% of boys).

How often do you talk to your parents about what you see, hear and do online (by gender)

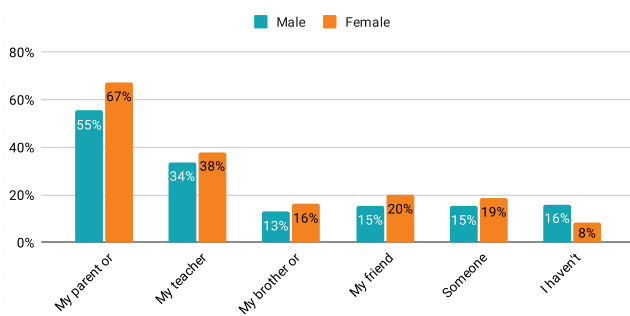


TABLE 43

We also wanted to get a sense of who children have spoken to in general about online safety over the last year. They could tick more than one answer. 62% of children reported that they had spoken to a parent or carer (see Table 44) and 36% saying they'd spoken to a teacher. Again, this is slightly down on last year - where these numbers were 68% and 37% respectively. Like the 11% of children who have 'never' spoken to a parent or carer about online safety, **12% of children reported that they 'haven't talked to anyone in the last year about staying safe online'**. The gender breakdown follows a similar pattern to the question above with 16% of boys and 8% of girls reporting that they hadn't spoken to anyone in the last year.

Who have you talked to in the last year about how to stay safe online?

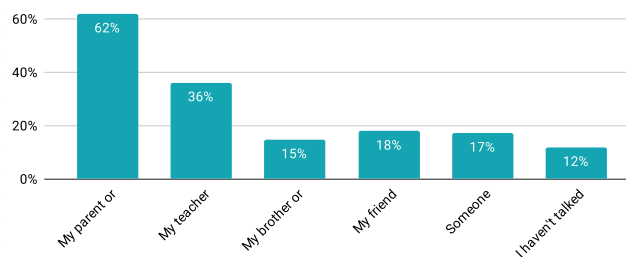


TABLE 44

Rules for going online

As noted above, putting in place boundaries for going online is a helpful mediation strategy for many parents. We asked children, 'If you have rules at home for going online, which answers best describe those rules?' and provided a number of options - they can tick any that apply. Rules will differ between households but as with other areas of children's lives that involve any kind of risk, such as learning to cross the road or ride a bike, it's important to have good strategies for helping to mitigate against those risks, including rules, conversations, education and training.

As can be seen in Table 45, **most children had some sort of rules in place, which is really positive**. The responses varied from 'I'm not allowed to add friends I don't know in real life' (59%) to 'I'm only allowed online at certain times' (27%), to 'A parent or carer can always see what I'm doing' (22%) to 'I'm not allowed online before bedtime' (24%) or devices not being allowed in bedrooms (17%). **A small but notable percentage of children (15% - 661 children - a 2% increase on last year) stated that there were 'no rules' at home for going online**. Boys were more likely to give this response than girls (19% vs. 13% of girls). Surprisingly, the most likely age cohort to report that there were 'no rules' is the 8-year olds with almost a fifth of them (20%) giving this as their response followed by 19% of 12-year olds (see Table 46).

Whilst many of these results are positive, since they show overall that most parents have put some rules in place, there is also another side to each statistic. **If only 17% of children say they weren't allowed to use devices in their bedrooms for example, that would suggest that this was not a rule in most households and that most children could use them in bedrooms**. Ideally, for younger children, there would be rules in place around where children are online in the household because if they are in their bedrooms with the door shut, the parent or carer is largely (or completely if there is no monitoring happening through parental controls) excluded from what their children are doing online. We also have to recognise that as children get older, as their capacities evolve and their



A Deeper Dive 2

Can a correlation be made between children who report that they have 'no rules' in place about going online and children who are playing over-18 online games?

To investigate if and what kind of association there is between having rules on using digital devices and playing over-18 online games we selected children who clearly reported whether or not they had rules. The variable related to rules was re-coded into two categories (1=no rules, 2=rules).

The association between playing over-18 online games and having no rules about using the digital devices was significant: $\chi^2(1, N=3492) = 338.10, p < .001$. Indeed, the percentage of children in the total sample who reported having no rules was 14.1%; whilst the percentage dropped to 8.2% for those children who reported not playing over-18 online games, the same percentage increased to 33.9% for those children who reported playing over-18 online games. **This showed that playing over-18 online games is significantly associated with having no rules in place on device use and access.**

need for privacy becomes greater, this particular rule may no longer be appropriate. For younger children however, this is an important one to consider having in place, as it will provide a good opportunity to both engage with them and keep an eye on what they're doing online.

If you have rules at home for going online, which answers best describe the rules?

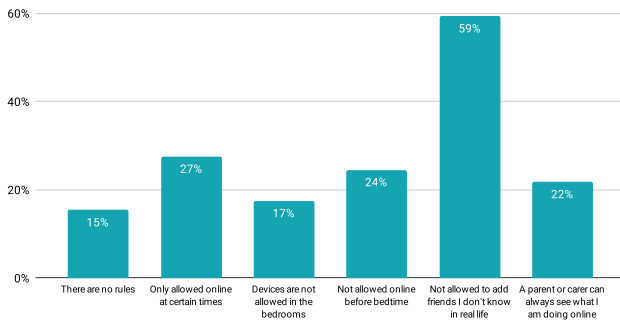


TABLE 45

What rules do you have at home?

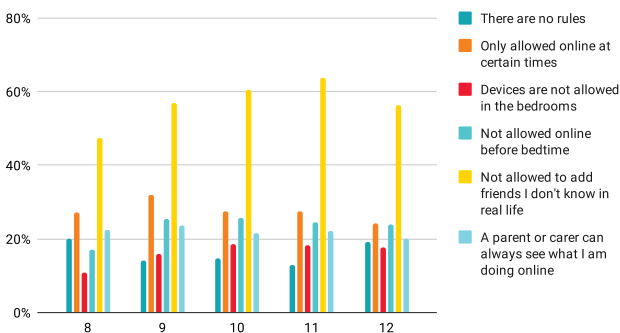


TABLE 46

As can be seen in our 'A Deeper Dive 2', we wanted to explore if there was an association between children who report having 'no rules' about going online and the children playing over-18s games:⁴

⁴ χ^2 test was conducted using SPSS.

When are you usually allowed to go online? (8-12 year olds)

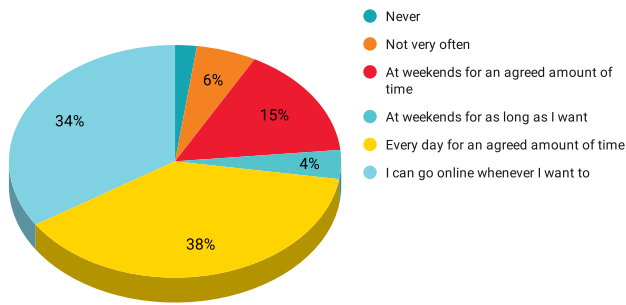


TABLE 47

The findings were relatively consistent across the genders as can be seen in Table 48 below.

I can go online whenever I want (by gender)

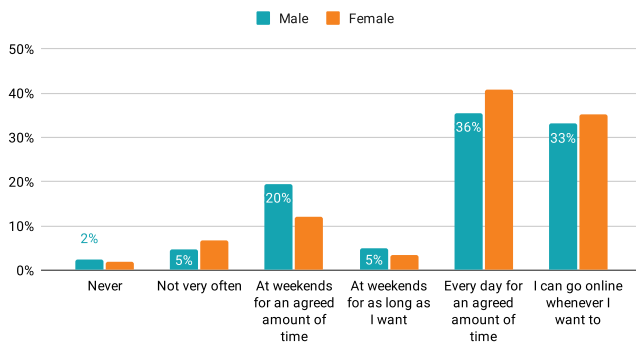


TABLE 48

We delved more deeply into this specific response 'I can go online whenever I want to' and we noted that it steadily increased with age (see Table 49 below) with 26% of 9-year olds providing this response rising to 30% of 10-year olds, 36% of 11-year olds and 44% of 12-year olds.

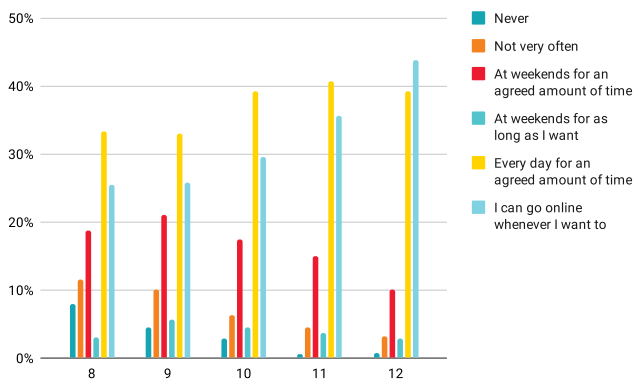


TABLE 49

We decided to look more closely at this cohort of children (who reported that they can go online whenever they want) to explore the association between unlimited access and being bothered by something online. See 'Deeper Dive 3' below:⁵



A Deeper Dive 3

Can a correlation be made between children who have unlimited access to the Internet and children who have been bothered by something online?

To investigate if and what kind of association there is between having unlimited access to the Internet (i.e. I can go online whenever I want) and having been bothered by something online, the variable related to the access was re-coded into two categories (i.e. 1=limited access, 2=unlimited access), and we selected children who clearly reported whether or not they had had a negative experience online (i.e. children who said they were 'not sure' were excluded for greater clarity). **The association between having unlimited access and being bothered by something online was significant:** $\chi^2(1, N=3874) = 40.81, p < .001$. Indeed, the percentage of children in the total sample who reported having been bothered by something online was 29.5%; the percentage decreased to 26.2% for children who reported having some limits to their Internet access, whilst the percentage of children who accessed the Internet whenever they wanted increased to 36.1%. **This showed that having unlimited access to the Internet is significantly associated with having a negative online experience.**

⁵ χ^2 test was conducted using SPSS.

Feedback from Teachers and Parents

After we deliver our classroom sessions to pupils, we ask teachers to provide feedback so we can monitor the quality and impact of the talks and/or identify key internet safety issues that the school may be experiencing. Similarly, after we deliver a talk to a group of parents or carers, we ask the parents to provide us with feedback. All feedback is voluntary and anonymous, unless the respondent wishes to add their name to a testimonial. While Covid-19 has had many serious impacts on schools over the last two years, it continues to impact the collection of feedback.

In previous years, a trainer would have asked a teacher for feedback immediately after the session to be inputted on their own device - Covid-19 measures means that we no longer share devices and the teacher has to remember to log in later with the feedback. In addition, we have noted that nearly all schools have continued to opt for their parent sessions to be delivered via webinars, this is likely as schools want to reduce f2f gatherings and most parents are now used to attending meetings and talks online.

After the webinars, parents are asked to fill in a feedback form after the session, however many do not as they have logged off as the session ended and before the request was made by the trainer, or feedback requests are easier to ignore online. For these reasons, our feedback from teachers and parents is lower than previous years.

Teachers

We collected data from 46 teachers this year. As in previous years, it is encouraging to hear that teachers find the sessions beneficial and believe that the pupils have a better understanding of the online world after our sessions. Some of the feedback included:

- 72% of teachers rated the sessions as 'excellent', with 28% rating them as 'good'.
- 100% would recommend our sessions to other schools.
- 100% said it was beneficial to use external cybersafety experts.
- When asked to rate the trainer, 93% said the trainer was 'excellent' and 7% said good.
- When asked if the pupils were engaged during the sessions, 76% said pupils were 'very engaged'.
- 63% of teachers thought that the sessions enhanced the pupils awareness 'a lot', while 30% reported 'hugely'.
- Teachers were asked if the sessions had improved their own knowledge and 50% said 'a lot' and 17% said 'hugely'.

How significant is online safety as an issue in your school?

Teachers were asked to consider whether internet safety was a significant issue in their school. As per Table 50, 63% reported that it was a significant issue.

Would you consider online safety to be a significant issue in your school?

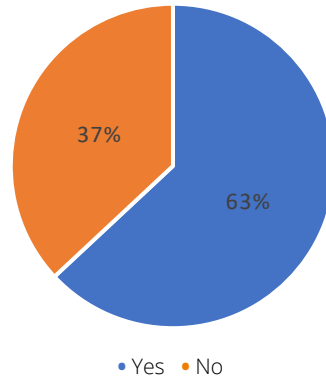


TABLE 50

Dealing with online safety issues over the past year

We asked teachers to outline how many online safety issues they have had to deal with over the past year. In our experience, most incidents relate to some form of cyberbullying. Table 51 below shows that 35% had dealt with at least one incident, an increase from last year when only 21% reported 1 incident. A further 20% of teachers dealt with 2-5 incidents and 2% dealt with more than 5 incidents. **This means that well over half of the teachers surveyed (57%) have had to deal with cyberbullying through the school year.**

How often have you had to deal with online safety incidents (cyberbullying etc) in your school over the past year?

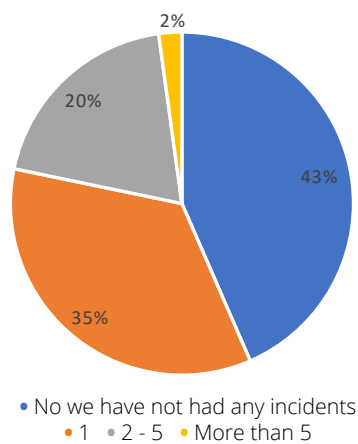


TABLE 51

Teaching online safety in the classroom

We asked teachers how often they delivered online safety education in the classroom and Table 52 paints a positive picture with 57% covering the topic 2 - 4 times a year and 15% covering it five times or more in a year. 26% are covering it just once a year and a tiny minority of 2% said that they never cover it. These results are similar to last year.

How often do you as a teacher deliver online safety education in the classroom?

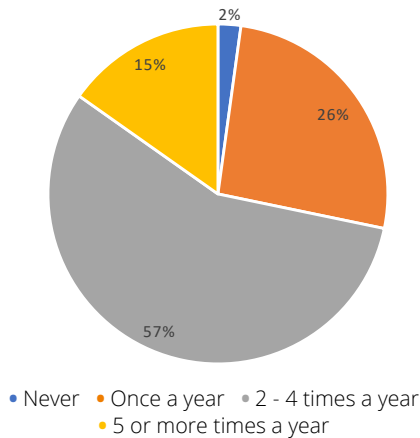


TABLE 52

Do teachers feel equipped with the skills and knowledge to teach online safety to children?

The good news is that most teachers (65% - see Table 53) said that they did feel that they were, as compared to 35% who did not. This is a small improvement from last year, and a continuing positive trend we have noted over the last 7 years of reporting on it. However the need for more training and support for teachers should also be highlighted, with over a third responding 'no' to this question.

Do you feel you have sufficient knowledge/skills to effectively deliver educational messages relating to online safety?

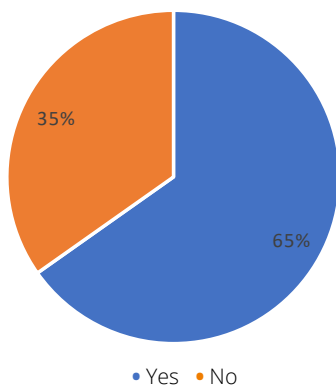


TABLE 53

Parents

We spoke to over 2,000 parents over the course of the school year both in schools, specialist organisations and in the workplace. Only 119 completed the feedback survey following the sessions.

Like the teacher feedback forms, many of the questions are focused on the quality of delivery but a key objective of our education programme is to reach parents and enhance their awareness of the risks, opportunities and safeguards relating to internet use, so we also gather data around what they've learnt. In terms of quality, 98% of the respondents rated the session 'good' (35%) or 'excellent' (73%) and 95% would recommend them to others.

We ask parents how confident they feel that they can apply what they've learnt in the session at home. As Table 54 illustrates, 36% felt 'very' and 55% felt 'quite' confident that they could apply what they'd learnt at home. This is very important in terms of achieving the objective we have set around empowering parents to take simple steps towards online safety at home.

How do you feel about being able to apply something you have learned in the session to your own setting or context?

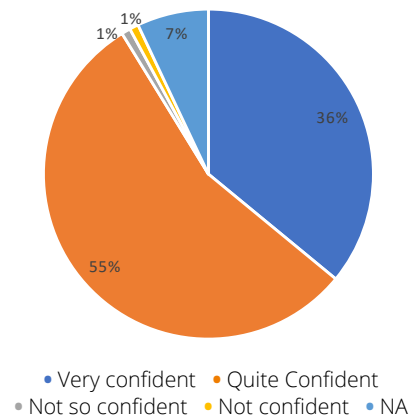


TABLE 54

CONCLUSION

We published our first annual report in September 2016, having been fully operational for just six months (January to June 2016). At that stage, we had spoken to 2,321 children in 43 schools across Dublin and Wicklow counties. This is our seventh annual report and in the intervening years, we have continued to evolve our educational offerings to include a much wider range of talks and in 2021 launched a standard of best practice for schools on online safety called the CyberSafe Tool for Schools (to which we now have 178 schools registered). We have also managed to reach far more children - almost 40,000 across Ireland, the majority of which have been of primary school age and 9,000 parents.

What have we learnt since 2016? In short, a lot. We have learned that the online world is hugely significant to children, that it's an important aspect of their social connectedness and that they largely see it in positive terms. We've seen the opportunities for children to learn, create and connect with friends online being brought into sharper focus during the periods of school restrictions and lockdowns of 2020 and 2021. We've seen teachers and parents grappling with children's online access and its impact. Almost two-thirds of teachers (63%) told us that online safety was a significant issue in their school and well over half (57%) have had to deal with online safety incidents in the classroom over the past year.

We've also learnt far more about the risks and vulnerabilities children are exposed to online. There is hard evidence, for example, that attempts to contact children with the intent to cause harm (online enticement) and self-generated child sexual abuse material has grown at an alarming and exponential rate between 2020 and 2022. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) in the US, which manages a global Cyber Tipline, identified a 97.5% increase in online enticement reports between 2019 and 2020⁶ and more recently, data released by the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) showed a 360% increase in self-generated child sexual abuse imagery of children aged between 7 and 10 in the first half of 2022 as compared to the first half of 2020.⁷ These are largely children sitting in their own homes and in their own bedrooms - where we assume that they are safe from harm. The IWF CEO Susie Hargreaves says self-generated imagery of this kind should be "entirely preventable".⁸

In the simplest terms, as a society we need to get to grips with the extent to which children are exposed to risk and harm online and fundamentally start to address it in a more meaningful way. There is no chance of turning back the tide. If the findings in this report do little else, they highlight how active and engaged primary school aged children are in the online world and how much access they have to it. There are, of course, many positive considerations to this use and access but we are failing children unless we adequately prepare them for it.

We urgently need to mitigate those risks by educating children to be safe and smart online and by educating their caregivers to actively support and guide children, as well as making informed decisions about their access and use. Moreover, we must ensure, through legislation, that the online services who create the online environments in which children gather, are truly accountable for the design of those environments and for the content they host in them.

The legislative landscape is undergoing much-needed and arguably overdue changes in Ireland, which will provide online users with greater control and more powers to address online harms. **Coco's Law**: the Harassment, Harmful Communications and Related Offences Act, which makes it an offence to share intimate images (with or without the intention to cause harm) and will also address more serious incidents of cyberbullying, was enacted in 2021. **The Online Safety Media Regulation Bill**, which should put greater onus on the online service providers to address harmful content, is likely to pass before the end of 2022 and an Online Safety Commissioner is currently being recruited.

It must, however, include an Individual Complaints Mechanism to ensure that there is true accountability in place as regards how complaints are handled both in terms of takedowns and timeframes. One of the arguments against providing for such a mechanism under the legislation is that it would be quickly overwhelmed. If the online services however, are doing their job effectively and in a timely manner, this should not be the case. If it comes down to resources, then we urge the Government to ensure it is available for minors (those under-18) at a minimum.

6 National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) - <https://www.missingkids.org/theissues/onlineenticement>

7 Internet Watch Foundation press release (August 2022), <https://www.iwf.org.uk/news-media/news/20-000-reports-of-coerced-self-generated-sexual-abuse-imagery-seen-in-first-half-of-2022-show-7-to-10-year-olds/>

8 Huge rise in self-generated child sexual abuse content online', Dan Milmo, 9th August 2022, source: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2022/aug/09/self-generated-sexual-abuse-of-children-aged-seven-to-10-rises-two-thirds>

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Legislation:** We urge the Government to pass the **Online Safety Media Regulation Bill** at the earliest opportunity. It must:
 - Be amended to include an **Individual Complaints Mechanism** so that all users have greater power to address online harms and to make the online service providers more accountable to their users and more transparent about their complaints handling processes. If this decision rests on resourcing issues then the mechanism should at least be put in place for minors (those under age 18).
 - The Online Safety codes proposed under the new legislation must include standards around the **safe and ethical design of services** with a particular focus on those services that are likely to be accessed by children.
- **Education:** There needs to be much greater focus given to the education of children and parents in online safety and digital well-being. The relevant content in the current primary school curriculum is completely outdated (1999) and needs urgent updating.
 - We believe that it is essential that all children benefit from a Digital Literacy education at both primary and secondary level that is fit for purpose. Given the extent to which children are living out their lives online, **Digital Literacy must become the fourth pillar of our education system**, alongside reading, writing and arithmetic, so that children develop the right skills for their safe and positive use of technologies. This will require investment in curriculum development, teacher training and supplementary resources.
 - Every school needs a **digital champion** (a teacher or principal) who can lead on policy development, support and delivery of digital literacy and digital wellbeing education to children, parents and teachers. This will involve training teachers, developing new resources and signposting to the many effective resources that are available.

TEACHER TESTIMONIAL

“Thank you so much for delivering our session. It was really informative and relevant for our class. It was realistic in that it addressed that most children are online and gave them useful strategies for staying safer online. I would highly recommend it to any school!”

STEPASIDE EDUCATE TOGETHER

This report (and much of the work that has gone into it)
was produced with the kind support of:



Sara Emmanuel

PARENT TESTIMONIAL

"Cybersafe's webinar on Digital Media Literacy was extremely clear, concise and informative. It gave me a much better understanding of the pitfalls of online life. It also helped me to better understand what younger generations growing up in the digital age are going through.

I would highly recommend this webinar to others!"

ATTENDEE FROM THE OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC PROSECUTIONS



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