



Mind the Gap

Parental awareness of children's
exposure to risks online

Aussie Kids Online | February 2022

eSafety research program



The eSafety Commissioner (eSafety) supports, encourages, conducts and evaluates research about online safety for Australians. The eSafety research program tracks trends and collects, analyses and interprets data, providing an evidence base for developing eSafety resources and programs. eSafety also works closely with domestic and international agencies to proactively identify and explore current and emerging online safety issues.

eSafety research is available at:
esafety.gov.au/research

For enquiries about the eSafety research program, please contact research@esafety.gov.au

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eSafety acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and to Elders past, present and emerging.

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About this report

The internet offers children valuable opportunities to connect with peers, play, learn, be entertained, be creative and seek information. Yet going online also poses risks to children, including cyberbullying, exposure to harmful material, and the potential for online grooming.

Supporting children to safely navigate these risks and avoid being harmed, while enabling them to develop the skills they need to thrive in an increasingly digital world, is one of the greatest parenting challenges of our time.



About this report

In 2021, eSafety commissioned research to explore the opportunities and risks that the internet presents for children in Australia. The research was conducted in August–September 2021 and comprised a national survey of over 3,500 young people aged 8 to 17 and their parents. The survey was an adaptation of the Global Kids Online quantitative methodology.

Findings from this research will inform eSafety’s ongoing online safety programs, including future interventions to assist children to better identify and seek help for online harms, and to assist parents to support their children. This research also aims to contribute to the international evidence base on children’s internet use and is eSafety’s first publication as a member of Global Kids Online.

Mind the Gap: Parental awareness of children’s exposure to risks online starts with a snapshot of children’s online lives. It then explores what parents know – and don’t know – about their children’s online experiences. Finally, the report looks at digital parenting practices and their effects on children’s internet use.

Overall, the data shows that children experience many benefits from using the internet, and that those who have had negative experiences online feel empowered and knowledgeable about the actions they can take in response. Parents have an important role to play, and they are rising to the challenge, with parental awareness and digital parenting having increased since 2016. However, there remain significant gaps in parental awareness of children’s online lives – particularly in relation to children’s exposure to potentially harmful online content. The findings suggest that digital parenting needs to evolve as children grow older, in order to better respond to children’s encounters with harmful content online.

Key findings

Young people engage in a wide range of online activities

- ★ The majority of children used the internet to watch video clips, for learning purposes, for gaming and to use social media. A minority of children have gone online for creative or civic participation.
- ★ Many children have gone online to look for health information, including information about mental, physical and sexual health.
- ★ A third of children sought emotional support online from friends and/or mental health support services.

Children have a positive view of the internet, but this is tempered by the potential for negative experiences

- ★ Children's perceptions of the internet are more positive than negative overall – but they are cautious, with many noting it can be harmful.



Key findings

Significant numbers of children have participated in risky online behaviours or had negative experiences

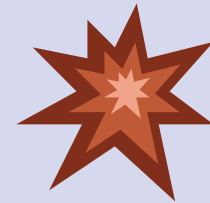
- ★ Six in ten children have communicated with someone they first met online.
- ★ One in eight children have sent a photo or video of themselves to someone they first met online.
- ★ One in eight children have met someone face-to-face after first getting to know them online.
- ★ Close to half of the surveyed children were treated in a hurtful or nasty way online in the past year, while a quarter of the children had themselves treated someone in a hurtful or nasty way online.
- ★ One in ten children have been the target of hate speech online.

Exposure to negative online content and sexual content is prevalent among young people aged 14–17

- ★ Almost two-thirds of young people aged 14–17 were exposed in the past year to negative content, such as content relating to drug taking, suicide or self-harm, or gory or violent material.
- ★ Seven in ten young people aged 14–17 have seen sexual images online in the past year, while close to half have received sexual messages from someone online in the past year.



Most children respond to negative online behaviour by taking action of some kind



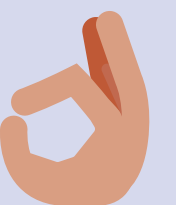
- ★ Almost all the surveyed children did something in response to a negative online experience.
- ★ The most common response was to tell their parents, which highlights the importance of parental support in these instances.
- ★ Children were also likely to take actions such as blocking people, telling their friends, deleting messages, and changing their privacy or contact settings. A quarter of them retaliated or reported the material to the website or social media company.
- ★ Children were likely to feel emotional impacts after a negative experience online, most commonly sadness, anger and not feeling good about themselves.

Many parents underestimate the prevalence of children's negative online experiences



- ★ Although many children tell their parents about bullying experiences, parents don't always recall these to the same extent, suggesting that they don't understand how seriously these experiences are impacting their child.
- ★ Parents have a lower awareness of their child's exposure to harmful online content on topics such as drug taking, suicide, self-harm and unhealthy eating. Parents' awareness of their children's exposure to sexual material is much lower than their actual rate of exposure. This suggests that children may not be telling their parents about experiences that are embarrassing, sensitive or stigmatising.
- ★ Parents seem to have a greater awareness of more serious manifestations of these harms, such as their child being asked to share sexual images of themselves, or where they have been a victim of fraud.

Children feel the level of attention their online activities receive from parents is about right



- ★ Children generally feel their parents have a good idea of what they do on the internet, and the majority feel that the existing level of attention they get from their parents is about right.

Parental mediation can reduce negative experiences, but it also reduces exposure to the benefits of the internet



- ★ Parents use a range of mediation practices to support their children online, with use of these strategies starting to taper off as their children reach their teenage years. Along with guidance and support, parents also set rules and use technical mediation measures such as parental controls.
- ★ Restrictive parental mediation of online activities appears to offer some preventive effect, with children of parents who require them to have permission or supervision for certain online activities being less likely to be exposed to harmful content. However, children with restrictive parents are also much less likely to be engaging in supportive and protective online activities.

Age, location and other demographics influence the way children and parents manage online experiences



- ★ Older children – and those who live in metropolitan areas – tend to have increased digital engagement, including a greater propensity to use the internet for social media, gaming, learning, communicating with others, seeking emotional support and looking for health information.
- ★ Older children are more likely to view the internet as a double-edged sword. They are also more likely to engage in risky behaviours, to have negative online experiences, and to carry out negative behaviour online.
- ★ Older children often prefer to deal with negative online experiences on their own and are less likely to tell their parents. Parents of older children are also less likely to implement parental mediation strategies.
- ★ Parents from regional areas tend to have more rules in place about when, and for how long, their child may go online, while parents from low socioeconomic areas are more likely to be vigilant in monitoring their child's online activity.

Digital engagement has increased since 2016 – and parental mediation has followed



- ★ There is evidence that key shifts have occurred since 2016. Digital engagement has increased among children, such as for online gaming and schoolwork, as well as for seeking health information.
- ★ This increased digital engagement is also likely to bring a greater propensity to engage in risky behaviours and to have negative online experiences.
- ★ There is also evidence of increased parental awareness and confidence in children's ability to cope with issues that occur online. Parental mediation, particularly technical mediation, has also increased.

The research findings point to opportunities to better support parents and children to recognise and navigate online risks



- ★ The research highlights gaps in parental awareness of children's online lives that need to be bridged.
- ★ More could be done to support parents to have conversations with their children about tricky situations with strangers online.
- ★ Parents also need to better acknowledge their children's experiences of hurtful and nasty behaviour online, particularly the emotional impacts, and to be better prepared to support their children if they experience or carry out this behaviour.
- ★ There are opportunities to do more to break down barriers preventing young people from talking to their parents about negative content and sexual material online, to normalise such conversations, and to equip parents to support children in a respectful and judgement-free way.

Methodology

A large-scale online survey was conducted in two parts:

- ★ an initial 10-minute parent survey, where parents were asked about their perceptions of their child's online activity and internet use, and their awareness of their child's negative online experiences
- ★ a 20-minute child survey completed by a child aged 8–17 (as identified by their parent), where children were asked in more detail about their digital skills, online activity, internet use, exposure to harmful content, and any negative experiences they may have had on the internet.

Parental consent was obtained for a child to participate in the survey.

The online survey was an adaptation of the Global Kids Online questionnaire. This survey was submitted as part of the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) approval process, with ethics approval obtained on 6 July 2021 from the Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee.

A total of n=3,651 children and their parent or carer (n=3,590) completed the online survey. This included Australians that may be most at risk online – those that are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer or questioning (LGBTIQ+), Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, culturally and linguistically diverse, or with disability. One child and one parent or carer per household completed the survey.

Significance testing is applied at a 95% confidence interval to compare the relevant sub-groups (e.g. male vs. female, metropolitan vs. regional) in the quantitative analysis.

Numbers in red denote results significantly lower, and numbers in green denote results significantly higher, than comparable sub-groups at a 95% confidence interval.

The full methodology report is available on the eSafety website:
esafety.gov.au/research/parental-awareness-childrens-exposure-risks-online

Methodology

Comparisons with 2016 findings

Throughout the report, broad comparisons are made with findings from eSafety's 2016 Youth Digital Participation Survey. This was a paired survey of 2,278 children aged 8–17 and 2,360 parents. Findings from this survey are not directly comparable with the 2021 findings due to differences in methodology; however, some overarching comparisons can be drawn.



Look out for this icon to see highlights from comparison findings from eSafety's 2016 Youth Digital Participation survey.



Online lives of children and young people

This section provides a snapshot of children’s online lives. It sets out what children and young people do and see online, their views of the internet, and their risky and negative experiences online.



Online activities and experiences

Children and young people commonly use the internet to watch video clips, for gaming and for social media.

Children are more likely to go online for entertainment, to play or to socialise, than for creative participation. Most children (87%) use the internet at least weekly to watch video clips (Figure 1). Six in ten play online games both alone (61%) and with others (56%), while half (51%) visit a social networking site weekly or more often.

A lower proportion, fewer than one in five, use the internet to create their own video or music, or to post a story online weekly or more often – 19% and 16%, respectively.

Young people aged 14–17 are more likely to:

- ★ watch video clips (91% weekly or more often, compared to 81% of children aged 8–10)
- ★ visit a social networking site (82% compared to 22% of children aged 8–10 and 46% of children aged 11–13)
- ★ create their own video or music and post it online (23% compared to 13% of children aged 8–10)
- ★ post their own blog or story online (21% compared to 11% of children aged 8–10).

Children from metropolitan areas are more likely to:

- ★ visit social networking sites (54% weekly or more often, compared to 44% of children from regional areas)
- ★ create their own video or music to post online (20% compared to 14% of children from regional areas)
- ★ post their own blog or story online (18% compared to 10% of children from regional areas).

Boys are more likely than girls to:

- ★ watch video clips (89% weekly or more often, compared to 85% of females)
- ★ play online games alone (71% compared to 52% of females)
- ★ play online games with other people (67% compared to 46% of females).

However, girls are more likely than boys to:

- ★ visit a social networking site (55% weekly or more often, compared to 46% of males)
- ★ create their own video or music to post online (22% compared to 16% of males)
- ★ post their own blog or story online (18% compared to 13% of males).



In 2016:

Children surveyed were asked if they had ever engaged in a range of activities online. The findings were as follows:

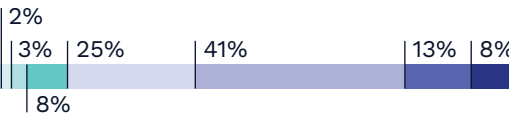
- ★ **73%** watched videos, movies or TV (e.g. YouTube)
- ★ **49%** played online games where they are the only player
- ★ **39%** played online games with or against other people
- ★ **53%** used social media
- ★ **26%** posted content online (e.g. comments, photos, videos, art or music)

Findings for children surveyed in 2021 who had done similar activities at least once or twice in the past year indicate that digital engagement, particularly gaming, has increased since 2016. In 2021, **85%** of children played online games alone, and **82%** played games with other people online.

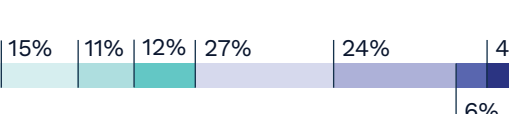
This may be driven by the emergence of popular games such as Fortnite, and the impact of COVID-19 lockdowns.

Figure 1: Use of the internet for social media and gaming

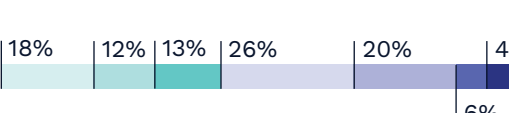
Watched video clips (e.g. on YouTube)



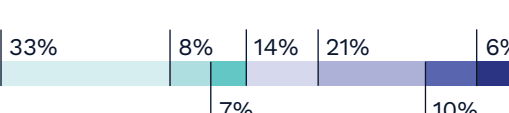
Played online games alone



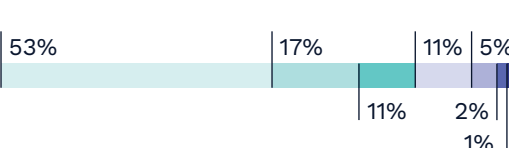
Played games with other people online



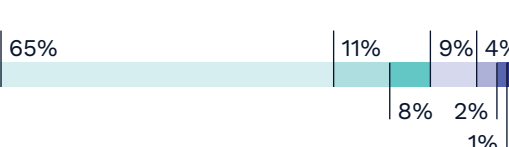
Visited a social network site (e.g. Facebook, Instagram)



Created my own video or music and posted it online



Posted my own blog or story online



Key

- Never
- Just once or twice
- At least every month
- At least every week
- Daily or almost daily
- Several times each day
- Almost all the time
- Significantly higher than comparable sub-groups
- Significantly lower than comparable sub-groups
- M Male
- F Female
- Metropolitan
- Regional
- Low
- Medium
- High

Source: C1. How often have you done these things online in the past year?
Base: Online sample, unweighted, n=3,590. Child aged: 8-10, n=1,329; 11-13, n=912; 14-17, n=1,349.

The internet is an important tool for learning, particularly among older children, but is used less often for certain forms of civic participation

Eight in ten children (79%) use the internet weekly or more often for schoolwork (Figure 2). This is more common among young people aged 14–17 (87%) than among children aged 8–10 (69%).

Around two-thirds of children (67%) use the internet to learn something new at least weekly. This is again more common among young people aged 14–17. Three-quarters (73%) do this weekly or more often, compared to six in ten children (58%) aged 8–10.

Fewer children engage in certain forms of civic participation online. Three in ten (31%) use the internet to look at news online weekly or more often, with young people aged 14–17 more likely to do so (46% compared to 19% of children aged 8–10 and 28% of children aged 11–13). A smaller proportion of children discuss political or social problems with other people online (13%), with those aged 14–17 more likely to do so (20% compared to 8% of children aged 8–10 and 11% of children aged 11–13).

Children who live in metropolitan areas are more likely than those in regional areas to use the internet at least weekly for all of the learning and civic participation activities examined. Children who are in higher socioeconomic areas are also much more likely to use the internet for learning and civic participation reasons.

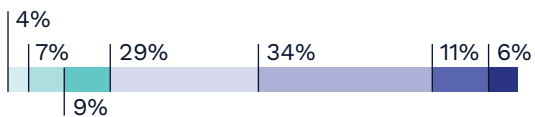


In 2016:

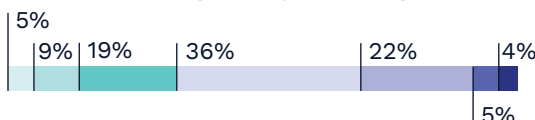
78% of children surveyed said they have used the internet for schoolwork. In 2021, this figure increased to **96%** for those who have used the internet for schoolwork at least once or twice in the past year.

Figure 2: Use of the internet for learning and for civic participation

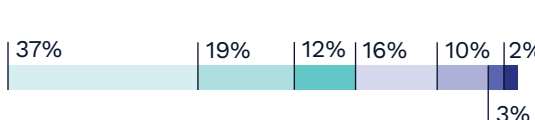
Used the internet for schoolwork



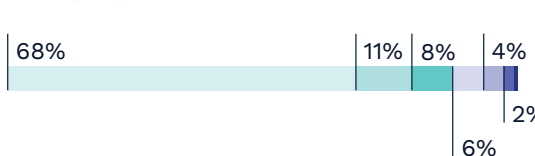
Learnt something new by searching online





































Looked at news online



Discussed political or social problems with other people online



% = Weekly or more often

Net	Age			Gender		Location		SES		
	8-10	11-13	14-17	M	F					
79%	 69%	 83%	 87%	78%	80%	 82%	 74%	78%	 77%	 84%
67%	 58%	 71%	 73%	69%	66%	 69%	 64%	67%	65%	 70%
31%	 19%	 28%	 46%	31%	32%	 36%	 20%	 29%	 29%	 40%
13%	 8%	 11%	 20%	 12%	 14%	 15%	 8%	12%	12%	 17%

Key

- Never
- Just once or twice
- At least every month
- At least every week
- Daily or almost daily
- Several times each day
- Almost all the time
- Significantly higher than comparable sub-groups
- Significantly lower than comparable sub-groups
- M Male
- F Female
- Metropolitan
- Regional
- Low
- Medium
- High

Source: C1. How often have you done these things online in the past year?
Base: Online sample, unweighted, n=3,590. Child aged: 8–10, n=1,329; 11–13, n=912; 14–17, n=1,349.

A minority of young people use the internet to meet and communicate with others regularly, while many more do so at least occasionally

A quarter of children use the internet weekly or more often to talk to people from different cultural backgrounds (Figure 3). One in five (20%) use the internet at least weekly to

make new friends or contacts, while a lower proportion (16%) use the internet at least weekly to add new people or contacts they have never met face-to-face.

Young people aged 14–17 are more likely than younger children aged 8–10 to use the internet at least weekly to:

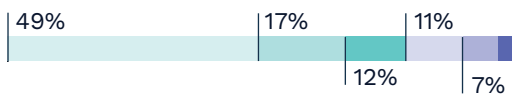
- ★ talk to people from different cultural backgrounds (30% compared to 16%)
- ★ make new friends or contacts (25% compared to 15%)
- ★ add new people or contacts they have never met face-to-face (21% compared to 13%).

Children in metropolitan areas are more likely than those in regional areas to use the internet at least weekly to:

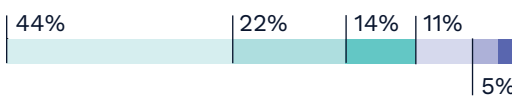
- ★ talk to people from different cultural backgrounds (26% compared to 15%)
- ★ make new friends or contacts (22% compared to 14%)
- ★ add new people or contacts they have never met face-to-face (18% compared to 12%).

Figure 3: Use of the internet to meet and talk to others

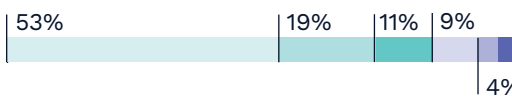
Used the internet to talk to people from different backgrounds to me



Made new friends or contacts on the internet



Added people to my friends or contacts I have never met face-to-face



% = Weekly or more often										
Net	Age			Gender		Location		SES		
	8-10	11-13	14-17	M	F	Metropolitan	Regional	Low	Medium	High
23%	16%	22%	30%	24%	21%	26%	15%	21%	23%	24%
20%	15%	19%	25%	20%	19%	22%	14%	19%	19%	22%
16%	13%	14%	21%	15%	17%	18%	12%	14%	16%	18%

Key

- Never

Just once or twice

At least every month
- At least every week

Daily or almost daily

Several times each day

Almost all the time
- Significantly higher than comparable sub-groups

Significantly lower than comparable sub-groups
- M Male

F Female

Metropolitan

Regional
- Low

Medium

High

Source: C1. How often have you done these things online in the past year?
Base: Online sample, unweighted, n=3,590. Child aged: 8–10, n=1,329; 11–13, n=912; 14–17, n=1,349.

The internet is a source of health information for many children

Close to half of the children surveyed (48%) have looked online for physical health information for themselves or someone they know in the past year, though far fewer (17%) do so regularly (at least weekly) (Figure 4). This was more common among young people aged 14–17 (25% compared to 10% of 8–10 year-olds), girls (19% compared to 15% of boys) and children living in metropolitan areas (20% compared to 10% in regional areas).

A third (36%) looked online for mental health information in the past year, though fewer did so regularly, with 13% using the internet weekly or more often to look for mental health information in the past year. Young people aged 14–17 (19% compared to 9% of 8–10 year-olds and 10% of 11–13 year-olds) and girls (15% compared to 11% of boys) were more likely to look online for mental health information.

Almost half of young people aged 14–17 (48%) have looked online for sexual health information in the past year, with one in seven children (13%) doing so at least weekly. This question was not asked of younger children. Children in metropolitan areas were more likely than those in regional areas to have searched for information on sexual health (15% compared to 19%) or mental health (15% compared to 7%).

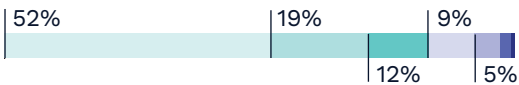


In 2016:

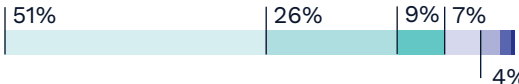
One in ten children surveyed (9%) said they have used the internet to access health services (e.g. mental/physical health, wellbeing sites and apps). While a different metric was used in 2021 – looking for health information online, rather than accessing health services – the rates at which children looked for this information online in 2021 show the growing importance of online sources of health information for children and young people.

Figure 4: Use of the internet to look for health information

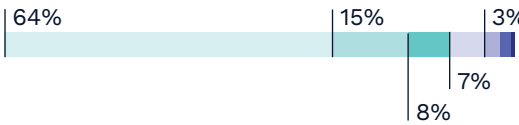
Looked for physical health information for myself or someone I know


























Looked for sexual health information for myself or someone I know



Looked for mental health information for myself or someone I know



% = Weekly or more often

Net	Age			Gender		Location		SES		
	8-10	11-13	14-17	M	F					
17%	 10%	15%	 25%	 15%	 19%	 20%	 10%	15%	16%	 21%
13%	-%	-%	13%	11%	15%	 15%	 9%	13%	13%	15%
13%	 9%	 10%	 19%	 11%	 15%	 15%	 7%	 11%	12%	 17%

Key

- Never

Just once or twice

At least every month
- At least every week

Daily or almost daily

Several times each day

Almost all the time
- ▲ Significantly higher than comparable sub-groups

▼ Significantly lower than comparable sub-groups
- M Male

F Female

Metropolitan

Regional
- Low

Medium

High

Source: C1. How often have you done these things online in the past year (i.e. used the internet to seek emotional support)?
Base: Online sample, unweighted, n=3,590. Child aged: 8–10, n=1,329; 11–13, n=912; 14–17, n=1,349.

The internet is a source of emotional support for one-third of children overall

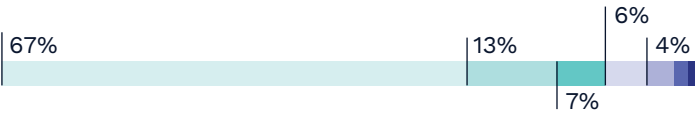
One-third of children (32%) have sought emotional support online in the past year, with one in eight (13%) indicating they have done so at least weekly or more often (Figure 5). Girls aged 14–17 (19% compared to 13% of boys aged 14–17), children in high socioeconomic areas (16% compared to 11% in low socioeconomic areas)

and children in metropolitan areas (14% compared to 8% in regional areas) are more likely to do so at least weekly. Older children are more likely to use the internet to seek emotional support – 17% of children aged 14–17 do this at least weekly (compared to 10% of children aged 8–10).

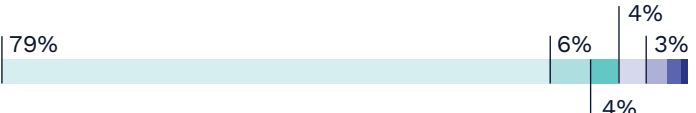


Figure 5: Use of the internet to seek emotional support

Overall



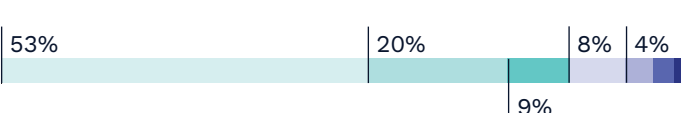
Child aged 8-10



Child aged 11-13



Child aged 14-17



% = Weekly or more often								
Overall	Gender		Location		SES			
	M	F	Met	Reg	Low	Med	High	
13%	10%	15%	14%	8%	11%	12%	16%	
10%	9%	10%	11%	5%	6%	10%	12%	
11%	8%	14%	13%	6%	9%	10%	15%	
17%	13%	19%	18%	12%	18%	15%	18%	

Key

- Never

Just once or twice

At least every month
- At least every week

Daily or almost daily

Several times each day

Almost all the time
- Significantly higher than comparable sub-groups

Significantly lower than comparable sub-groups
- M Male

F Female

Metropolitan

Regional
- Low

Medium

High

Source: C1p. How often have you done these things online in the past year? (Use the internet to seek emotional support)
Base: Online sample, unweighted, n=3,590. Child aged: 8-10, n=1,329; 11-13, n=912; 14-17, n=1,349.

Friends and social media are the main sources of emotional support on the internet, followed by mental health support services

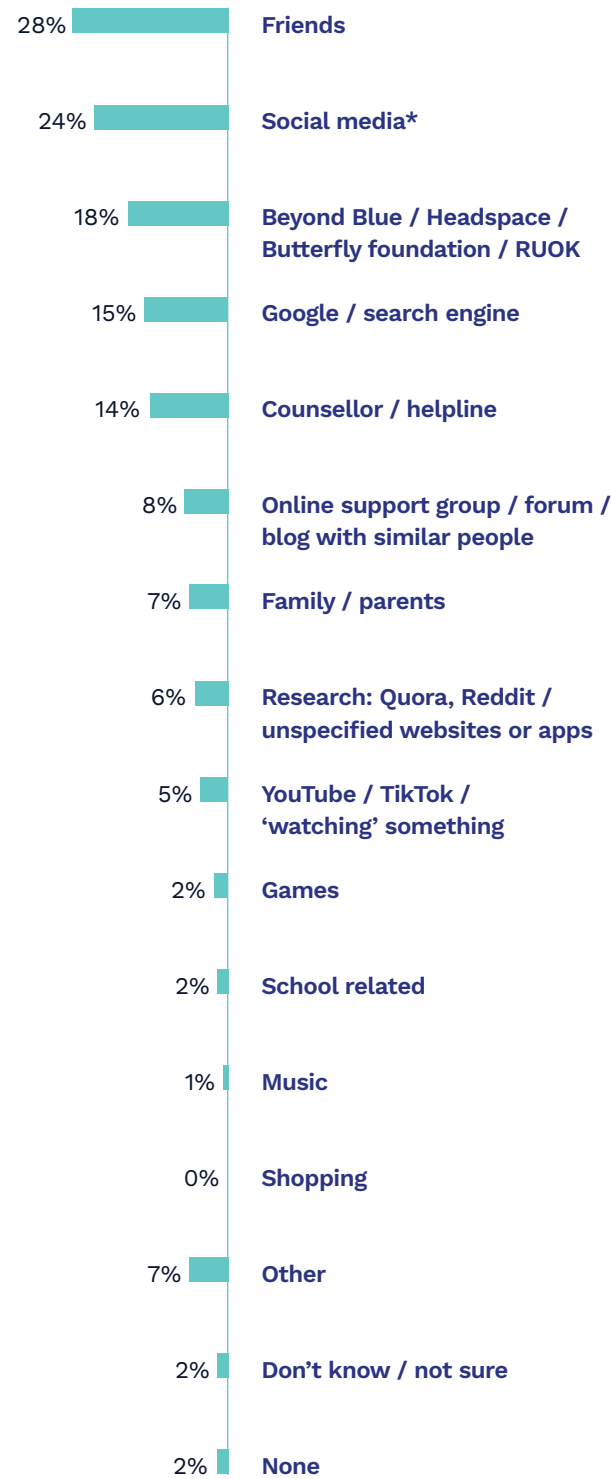
Among children who use the internet to seek emotional support, three in ten (29%) seek support from their friends, while a quarter (24%) search for support on social media (Figure 6). One in five have contacted mental health support services such as Beyond Blue and Headspace (18%), again highlighting the importance of online sources of support for children’s mental health.

Children aged 14–17 are more likely than those aged 8–10 to have sought emotional support from their friends (32% compared to 19%), as well as mental health services such as Beyond Blue and Headspace (22% compared to 7%).

There are a wide range of sources that children use less frequently, including:

- ★ Google or another search engine (15%)
- ★ counsellor/helpline (14%)
- ★ online support group or forum with similar people (8%)
- ★ family and their parents (7%)
- ★ research websites such as Reddit and Quora (6%)
- ★ YouTube, TikTok or another similar platform (5%)
- ★ games (2%)
- ★ school (2%)
- ★ music (1%).

Figure 6: Where a child would go online for emotional support



% = Weekly or more often

Age			Gender		Location		SES		
8-10	11-13	14-17	M	F	Metropolitan	Regional	Low	Medium	High
19%	28%	32%	26%	29%	26%	37%	30%	30%	25%
15%	24%	27%	22%	24%	22%	31%	32%	23%	18%
7%	19%	22%	14%	21%	17%	21%	17%	15%	23%
18%	15%	13%	12%	16%	16%	9%	11%	17%	15%
8%	14%	16%	15%	12%	14%	13%	16%	12%	14%
7%	9%	8%	8%	8%	8%	8%	9%	6%	9%
7%	8%	6%	6%	7%	6%	8%	9%	7%	4%
7%	5%	6%	6%	5%	5%	7%	6%	5%	7%
6%	6%	5%	4%	6%	5%	6%	5%	6%	5%
1%	4%	2%	3%	2%	2%	3%	4%	2%	2%
3%	2%	1%	1%	2%	2%	1%	1%	2%	2%
0%	0%	1%	1%	0%	0%	2%	1%	1%	1%
0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%
18%	4%	4%	10%	6%	8%	4%	8%	6%	9%
3%	2%	2%	3%	2%	2%	2%	2%	3%	2%
2%	2%	1%	2%	1%	2%	2%	2%	2%	1%

Key

- ▲ Significantly higher than comparable sub-groups
- ▼ Significantly lower than comparable sub-groups
- M Male
- F Female
- Metropolitan
- Regional
- Low
- Medium
- High

Source: C2. You mentioned that you have used the internet to seek emotional support. Thinking about all the different ways you go online, where would you go for support?
Base: Child sample, unweighted, use the internet to seek emotional support, n=933.
Note: This question was included after fieldwork commenced. *Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp, Messenger, Tinder/Grinder, Discord.

Children's perceptions of the internet

When surveyed children were asked to identify what the internet would be if it were an animal, most of them listed a large and powerful animal (e.g. a lion, tiger or elephant) or a domestic animal (e.g. a cat or a dog) (Figure 7). The power of the internet is reflected in the high rate of associations with dangerous and predatory animals.

“

A lion, because a lion is king and ruler of the jungle just like the internet and technology rule the human world.



Male, 13,
SA, regional

“

A lion because it's powerful. But you need to be careful that you don't get attacked.



Female, 11,
VIC, metro

“

The internet would be a wild dog – it could be friendly and nice but could be potentially dangerous.



Male, 13,
NSW, metro

At the same time, the internet's ubiquity, children's ease with its role in their lives and the friendly comfort it brings is reflected in some children's choice of very familiar household pets.

“

The internet would be a cat, because it is playful but can bite you when you least expect it to.



Female, 11,
NSW, regional

“

It would be a dog cause a dog is a kind and helpful animal.



Female, 16,
NSW, regional

Many children chose animals that associated the internet with being expansive and all-reaching.

“

A giant octopus because there is so many arms, it lives in the darkness, connects to everything and is mysterious and often identified as scary.



Male, 13,
QLD, metro

“

I think the internet would be a mole as it has a lot of twisting tunnels and pathways and a lot of it is in dark places and hidden which is kind of like being underground which is where moles are.



Male, 9,
WA, metro

Others referred to the speed of the internet – a sloth when it's slow or a cheetah when it's fast – while some likened the reach and connectivity of the internet to an octopus or a bird.

“

Cheetah because the internet speed is fast and I can watch anything that I need to learn.



Male, 8,
VIC, metro

“

It would be a bird because it can travel long distance.



Female, 13,
WA, metro

However, the inclusion of animals such as a snake, a fox or a shark tells us that children also view the internet as something to be wary of and that isn't necessarily always what it seems.

66

Snake because if you don't know how to handle it properly it can poison you and do more harm than good.



Female, 8,
NSW, metro

66

A fox – because they are sneaky and unpredictable, and they have lots of hiding spots. The internet is just like that because there is so much unknown and hidden sites and threats.



Male, 13,
SA, metro

This view is also reflected in those children's responses where negative justifications, or a mix of positive and negative reasons, were given for their animal choice.

66

Crocodile. Vicious, cunning and you need to keep your distance and know which waterhole they swim in.



Male, 9,
QLD, metro

66

A bear. The internet can be like a warm hug or can growl and bite.



Female, 17,
NSW, metro

Figure 7: Imagining the internet as a particular animal (overall)

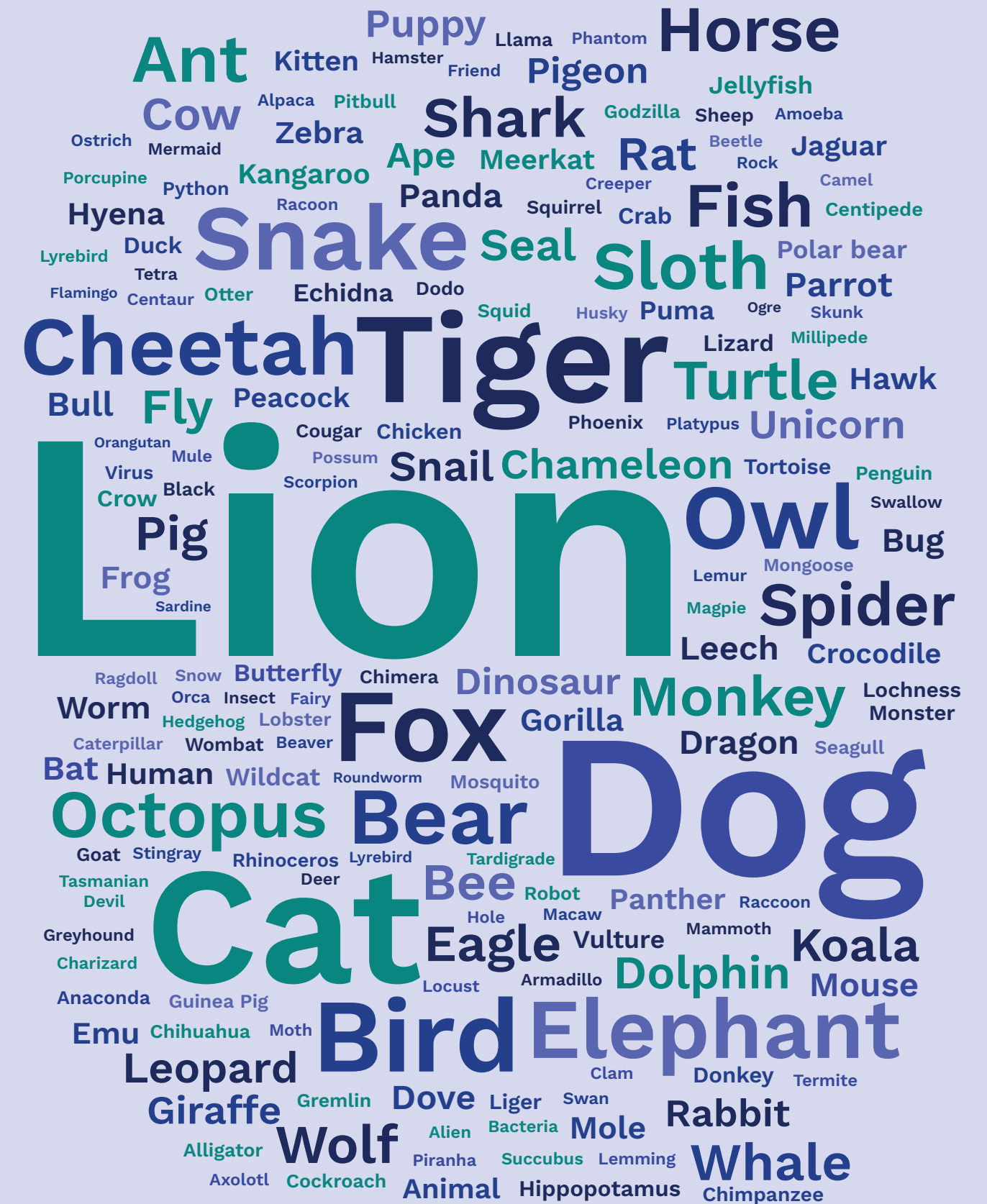


Figure 8: Reasons for imagining the internet as a particular animal



Many children chose an animal that reflected their view of the internet as being smart and informative, or fast and energetic (Figure 8).

66

An elephant, because an elephant never forgets and the internet never forgets information.



Male, 12,
WA, metro

66

The internet would be a chimpanzee as they are very smart and learn quickly. You can teach them a lot of new things and they are eager to learn.



Male, 14,
NSW, regional

Many children indicated other reasons for their choice, such as the internet being unpredictable, mysterious, and a mixture of good and bad. Some associations reflected the internet's playful and approachable nature, including being cute, attractive, friendly, fun, exciting and enjoyable. Other associations touched upon the internet's utility and changing nature, including being helpful, reciprocal, useful, adaptable and developing (Figure 8).

66

Monkey! Fun, light-hearted yet smart and informative, super quick.



Male, 17,
WA, metro

66

**The internet would be a koala,
it's cute and fluffy on the outside
and everything seems fine.
But koalas can be scary and
so can the internet.**

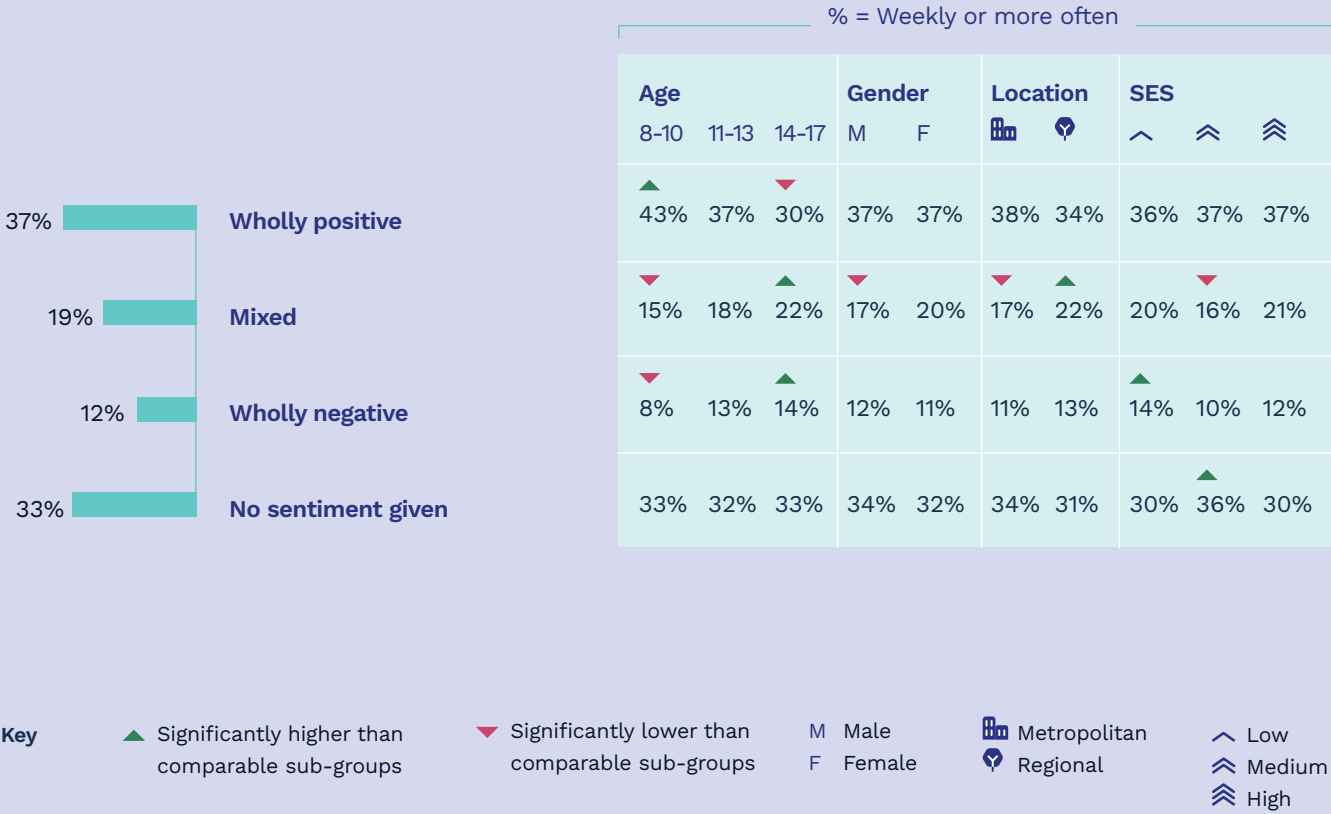


Female, 15,
NSW, metro

Nearly four in ten children (37%) described the internet in a wholly positive way when associating it with a particular animal (Figure 9). Younger children (aged 8–10) were more likely to view the internet positively compared to children aged 14–17 (43% compared to 30%). Those older young people were more likely to describe the internet in a negative way (14% compared to 8% of children aged 8–10).

Young people aged 14–17 were more likely to describe the internet as an animal that was aggressive, angry, dangerous or scary (20% compared to 12% of children aged 8–10). They were also more likely to describe the internet as unpredictable, mysterious, and a mixture of good and bad (12% compared to 7% of children aged 8–10).

Figure 9: Sentiment associated with imagining the internet as a particular animal



Source: L4. Imagine the internet was an animal. What animal would it be and why?
Base: Child sample, unweighted, n=2,945.



Risky behaviour and negative online experiences

The majority of children have been in contact with someone they first met online

Overall, six in ten children (55%) have been in contact with someone they first met online (Figure 10). This is more prevalent among:

- ★ young people aged 14–17 (69% compared to 52% of children aged 11–13 and 43% aged 8–10)
- ★ children from metropolitan areas (59% compared to 48% of children from regional areas)
- ★ children from higher socioeconomic areas (58% compared to 52% of children from low socioeconomic areas).

Nearly half (46%) of those who had been in contact with a stranger indicated that the person they met online was a contact of a friend or family member. A third (37%) said it was someone under 18 that they met online and had no other connection with in their life, and for a quarter (25%) it was someone over 18.

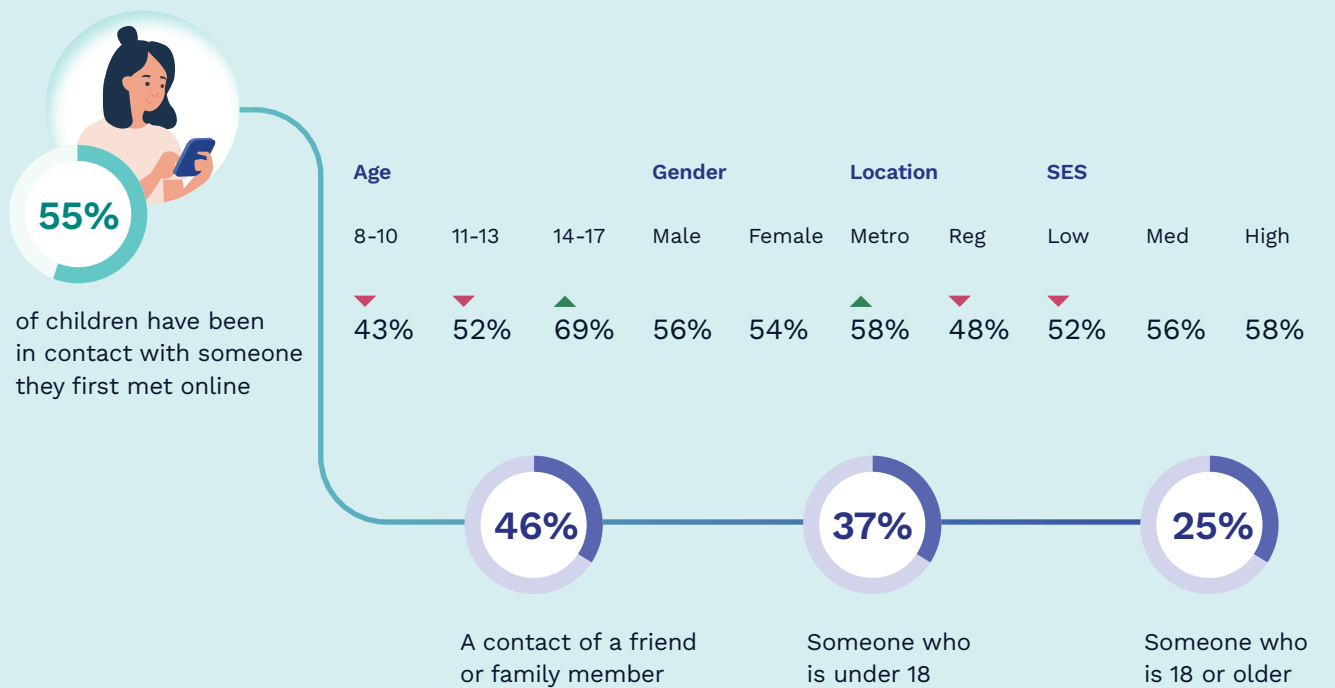


In 2016:

More than one in five children (22%) said they have used the internet to communicate with strangers who they have never met in real life.

While the data isn't directly comparable, it appears likely that children's propensity to communicate with someone they first met online has increased since 2016, suggesting this behaviour has become more prevalent.

Figure 10: Contact with a stranger online



Source: D1. How do you usually communicate with people in this list? (Someone you first met online who was a contact of a friend or family member; Someone who is under 18 who you met online and had no other connection with your life; Someone who is 18 or older who you met online and had no other connection with your life)
Base: Online sample, unweighted, n=3,590.

Some children have provided personal information to strangers or met someone face-to-face after getting to know them online

A small proportion of children have provided certain information about themselves to strangers online (Figure 11). For example:

- ★ One in eight (11%) have sent a photo or video of themselves at least weekly to someone they have never met face-to-face.
- ★ Less than one in ten (8%) have sent their personal information at least weekly to someone they have never met face-to-face.

Older children aged 14–17 (15% compared to 9% of children aged 8–10) and those in metropolitan areas are more likely to send a photo or video of themselves to a stranger (13% compared to 7% of children in regional areas). Children in metropolitan areas are also more likely to send their personal information to a stranger (10% compared to 4% of children in regional areas).

Although many children have had online contact with strangers, fewer children have gone on to meet someone face-to-face after first meeting them online. Overall, one in eight children (12%) said they have met someone face-to-face after first getting to know them online (Figure 12).

Children aged 14–17 were more likely to engage in face-to-face contact (19%) compared to children aged 11–13 and 8–10 (10% and 6%, respectively). This behaviour was also more prevalent among children living in metropolitan areas (13%)

Figure 11: Use of the internet to send photos or videos to someone never met face-to-face

Sent a photo or video of myself to someone I have never met face-to-face



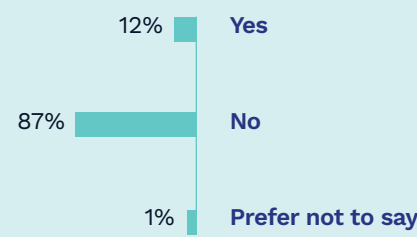
Sent my personal information to someone I have never met face-to-face



% = Weekly or more often										
Overall	Age			Gender		Location		SES		
	8-10	11-13	14-17	M	F	Metropolitan	Regional	Low	Medium	High
11%	9%	10%	15%	9%	14%	13%	7%	9%	12%	13%
8%	8%	7%	9%	8%	9%	10%	4%	7%	8%	10%

Source: C1. How often have you done these things online in the past year?
Base: Online sample, unweighted, n=3,590. Child aged: 8–10, n=1,329; 11–13, n=912; 14–17, n=1,349.

Figure 12: Met someone face-to-face after first meeting online



Key

- Never
- Just once or twice
- At least every month
- At least every week
- Daily or almost daily
- Several times each day
- Almost all the time
- Significantly higher than comparable sub-groups
- Significantly lower than comparable sub-groups
- M Male
- F Female
- Metropolitan
- Regional
- Low
- Medium
- High

Source: G1. In the past year, have you met anyone face-to-face that you first got to know online?
Base: Online sample, unweighted, n=3,590.

% = Weekly or more often										
Age				Gender		Location		SES		
8-10	11-13	14-17	M	F	Metropolitan	Regional	Low	Medium	High	
6%	10%	19%	11%	13%	13%	9%	12%	12%	12%	
93%	90%	78%	88%	85%	85%	89%	87%	86%	87%	
1%	1%	2%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	2%	1%	

Close to half of children have been treated in a hurtful or nasty way online

Just under half (45%) of surveyed children reported that they have been treated in a hurtful or nasty way online (Figure 13).

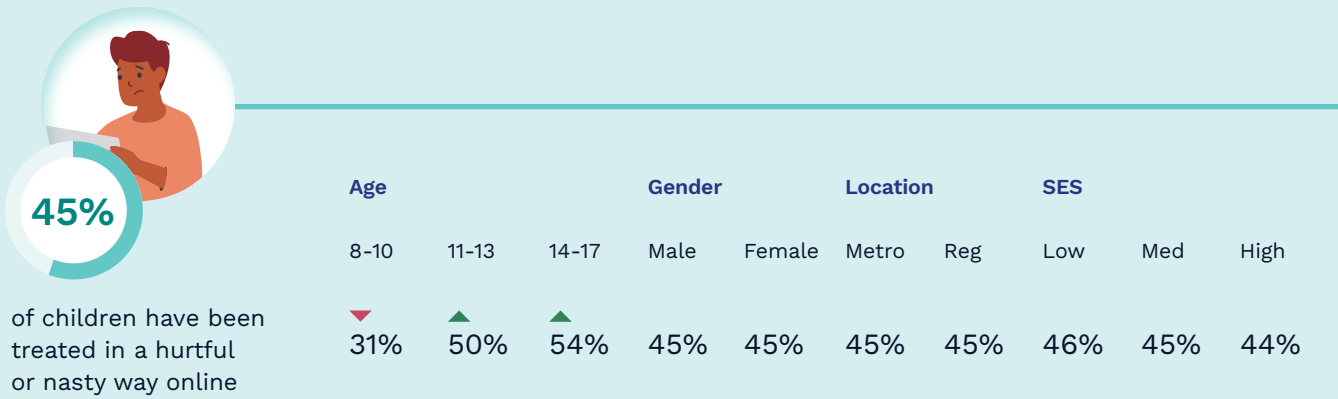
Just over half (54%) of children aged 14–17 were more likely to have been treated in a hurtful or nasty way online compared to children aged 11–13 (50%) and those aged 8–10 (31%).

Perpetration of online bullying behaviours is more common among those who have experienced online bullying

A quarter (26%) of surveyed children revealed that they had treated someone in a hurtful or nasty way online in the past year (Figure 14). Nine in ten (92%) of those children who have treated someone negatively have been treated poorly themselves.

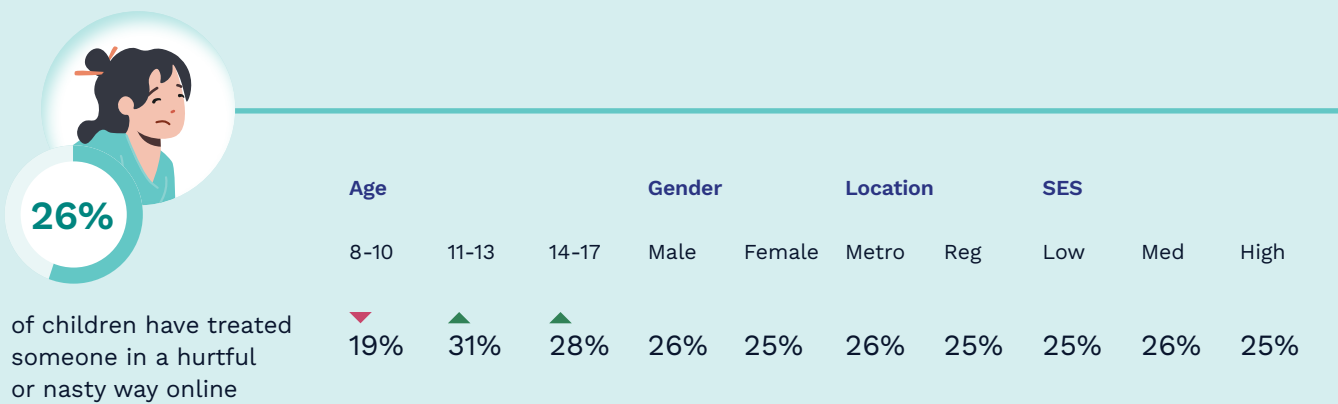
Perpetration was more common among older children, with a little under a third of those aged 14–17 (28%) and of those aged 11–13 (31%) saying they had bullied someone online (compared to 19% of children aged 8–10).

Figure 13: Experience of being treated in a hurtful or nasty way online



Source: I3. In the past year, how often, if ever, has anyone treated you in a hurtful or nasty way online?
Base: Online sample, unweighted, n=3,590.

Figure 14: Experience of treating someone in a hurtful or nasty way online



Source: I3a. In the past year, how often, if ever, have you treated anyone in a hurtful or nasty way online?
Base: Online sample, unweighted, n=3,590.

Girls, children in metropolitan areas and older children are more likely to experience hate speech

One in ten children (11%) indicated they have had offensive things said to them online because of their ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion or disability (Figure 15).

These experiences were more prevalent for females (12%) and those aged 14–17 (14%). Children from metropolitan areas were more likely to have experienced hate speech (12% compared to 8% from regional areas).

Exposure to potentially negative content is prevalent among young people aged 14–17

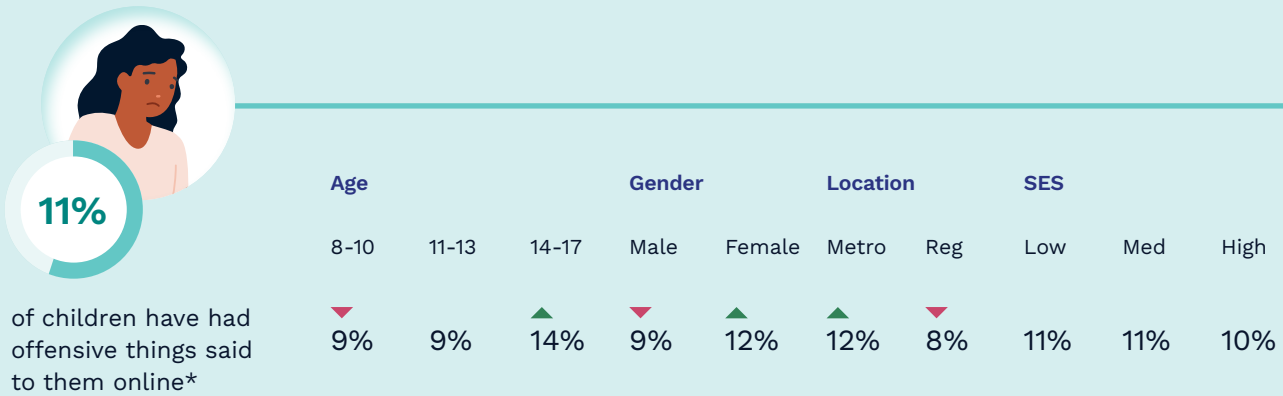
Almost two-thirds (62%) of young people aged 14–17 said they have been exposed to potentially negative user-generated content online (Figure 16). They are most likely to have been exposed to hate messages (39%), to people talking about their drug use (37%), and to gory and violent images (37%).

Girls aged 14–17 are more likely have been exposed to websites or online discussions where people talk about ways to take their own life (23% compared to 16% of boys).

Girls are also more likely to have been exposed to discussions about:

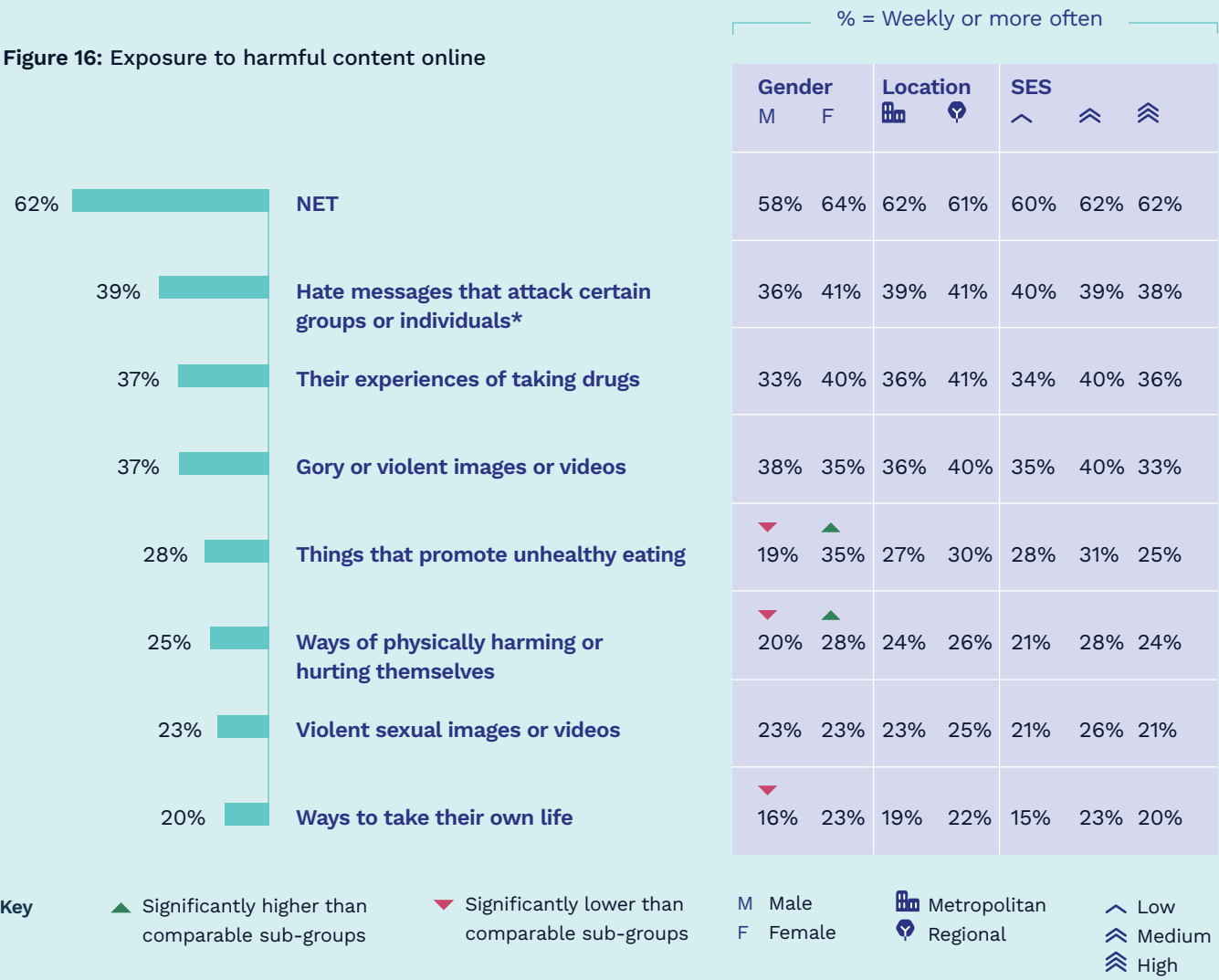
- ★ people’s experiences of taking drugs (40% compared to 33% of boys)
- ★ unhealthy eating and ways to be thin (35% compared to 19%)
- ★ ways of physically harming or hurting themselves (28% compared to 20%).

Figure 15: Experience of hate speech online



Source: I4. Have any of these things happened to you online in the last year?
Base: Online sample, unweighted, n=3,590.
Note: *because of their race, ethnicity, gender, nationality, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability.

Figure 16: Exposure to harmful content online



Source: G4. In the past year, have you seen websites or online discussions where people talk about or show any of these things?
Base: Online sample (aged 14-17), unweighted, n=1,349. Note: *e.g. people of different colour, religion or nationality.

Exposure to sexual material online is prevalent among young people aged 14–17

Seven in ten young people aged 14–17 (71%) have seen sexual images on the internet, while just under half (47%) have received a sexual message from someone online (Figure 17).

A quarter (25%) have opened a message or a link that showed pictures of naked people, and one in ten (11%) reported they have been asked by someone on the internet to send sexual images of themselves.

Girls aged 14–17 were more likely than boys of the same age to have:

- ★ opened a sexual message or link (28% compared to 21%)
- ★ been asked by someone on the internet to send sexual images of themselves (14% compared to 7%).

Other types of negative online experiences

Children’s experiences of other types of negative incidents online include (Figure 18):

- ★ clicking on a pop-up link and their device getting infected (13%)
- ★ their personal information being used in a way they didn’t like (9%)
- ★ someone finding out where they were by tracking their device (7%)
- ★ being a victim of online fraud (6%)
- ★ having someone pretend to be them online (6%).

Figure 17: Exposure to sexual messages

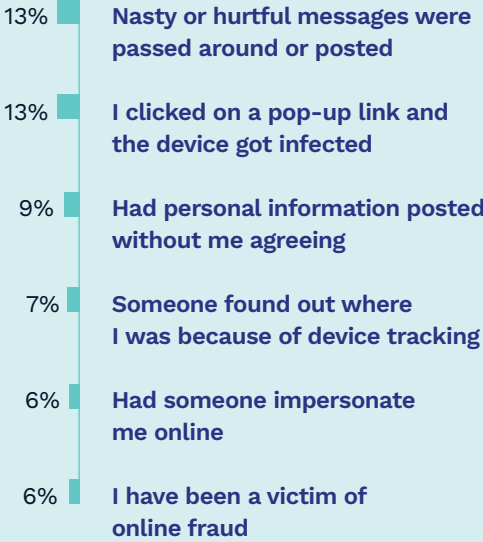


% = Weekly or more often




































Gender		Location		SES		
M	F	Metropolitan	Regional	Low	Medium	High
72%	70%	69%	76%	72%	74%	66%
44%	49%	47%	45%	46%	48%	45%
21%	28%	24%	27%	24%	28%	22%
7%	14%	11%	12%	10%	12%	11%

Source G.3. In the past year, how often have you seen sexual images online? H.1. In the past year, how often have you received sexual messages online? This could be words, pictures or videos. H.2. In the past year have any of these things happened to you online? Base: Online sample (aged 14–17), unweighted, n=1,349. Note: *Or of people having sex that they didn't want.

Figure 18: Other negative online experiences



% = Weekly or more often

Age			Gender		Location		SES		
8-10	11-13	14-17							
									
8%	14%	17%	10%	15%	14%	11%	11%	14%	14%
									
14%	13%	11%	13%	13%	15%	9%	12%	13%	13%
									
7%	8%	11%	8%	10%	10%	7%	8%	9%	10%
									
5%	6%	10%	7%	8%	8%	5%	6%	7%	9%
									
6%	6%	7%	5%	7%	8%	3%	5%	7%	7%
									
6%	6%	6%	5%	7%	7%	4%	6%	5%	8%

Key ▲ Significantly higher than comparable sub-groups ▼ Significantly lower than comparable sub-groups M Male F Female Metropolitan Regional Low Medium High

Source: I4. Have any of these things happened to you online in the past year? Base: Online sample, unweighted, n=3,590.

Responses to negative online behaviour

Children were most likely to say they felt sad or angry as a result of a negative online experience

After experiencing negative online behaviour, more than half (55%) of the surveyed children indicated they felt sad (Figure 19). A slightly lower proportion felt angry (43%) or didn't feel good about themselves after the incident (38%). A third (33%) felt left out, or lost some of their friends, while one in five (20%) said they felt helpless and powerless.

A lower proportion, less than one in five, said:

- ★ their mental health was impacted or affected (17%)
- ★ their reputation was damaged (13%)
- ★ they didn't feel close to their family or friends (12%)
- ★ their schoolwork suffered (10%).

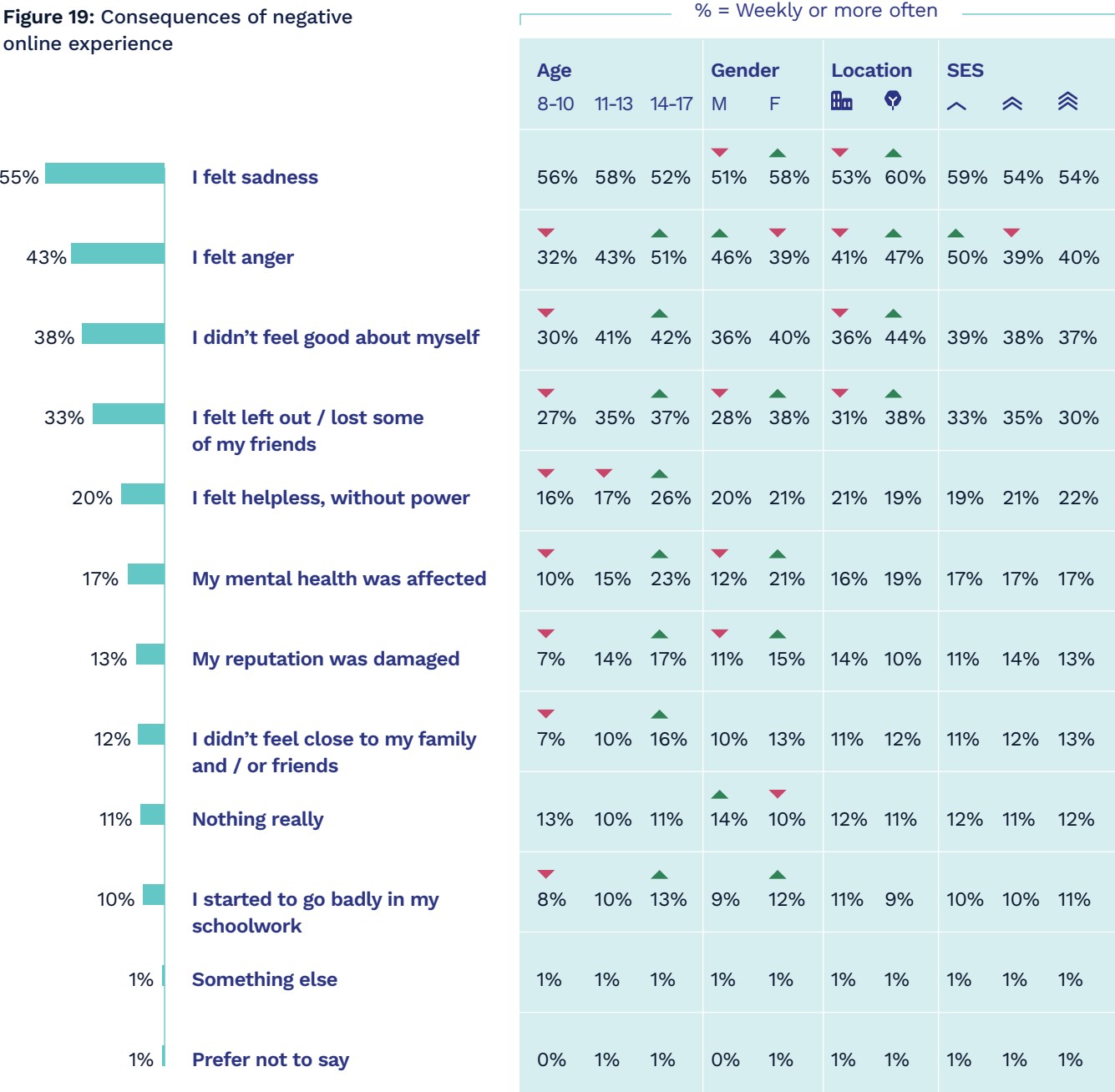
Around one in nine (11%) said that nothing happened after they had a negative online experience.

Children aged 14–17 were significantly more likely to feel angry (51%), to have lower self-esteem (42%), or to feel left out (37%) or helpless (26%), compared to children aged 8–10 as a result of a negative online experience.

Girls were more likely to feel sad (58% compared to 51% of boys) and left out (38% compared to 28% of boys), while boys were more likely to express anger, following a negative experience online. Girls were also more likely to feel their mental health was affected (21% compared to 12% of boys) and that their reputation had been damaged (15% compared to 11% of boys).

Children from low socioeconomic areas were significantly more likely to feel angry after a negative online experience (50% compared to 39% of children from medium socioeconomic areas).

Figure 19: Consequences of negative online experience



Key ▲ Significantly higher than comparable sub-groups ▼ Significantly lower than comparable sub-groups M Male F Female Metropolitan Regional Low Medium High

Source: I5. Thinking about the last time any of these things happened to you, did any of the following things happen?
Base: Online sample, unweighted, experienced negative behaviour online in the last year, n=2,051.

Almost all children did something after a negative online experience

Ninety-three per cent of children did something in response to a negative online experience. Two-thirds told their parents about the incident (67%) or unfriended or blocked the perpetrator (63%) (Figure 20).

Children also said they:

- ★ told their friends (61%)
- ★ tried to get the other person to leave them alone (55%)
- ★ deleted any messages from the person (50%)
- ★ changed their privacy or contact settings (41%)
- ★ stayed offline for a while (35%)
- ★ closed their social media or gaming account (19%).

In line with the above finding about perpetration of bullying, a quarter (25%) of the surveyed children retaliated, while a smaller proportion reported the negative behaviour:

- ★ 23% reported it to the website or social media company
- ★ 18% reported it to their school
- ★ 9% reported it to the police
- ★ 8% reported it to eSafety or another organisation

- ★ 8% contacted Kids Helpline or Lifeline.

Younger children (72%) were more likely to have told their parents about a negative online experience, while older children were more likely to have attempted to deal with the situation on their own:

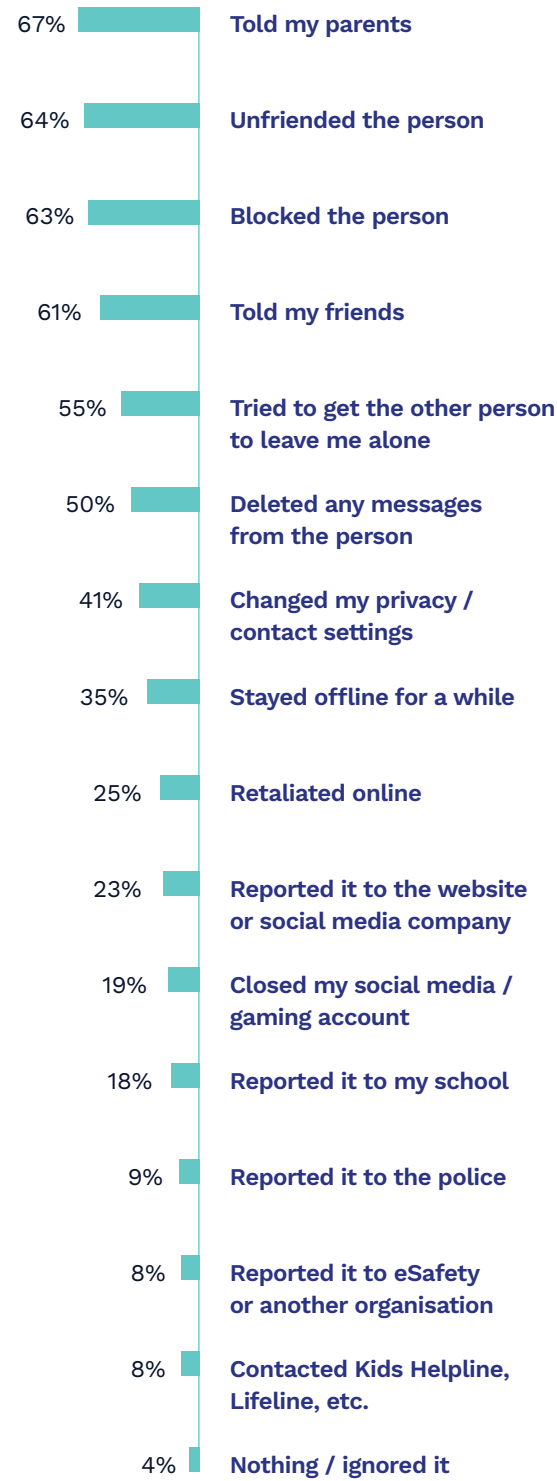
- ★ 71% unfriended the person (compared to 55% of children aged 8–10)
- ★ 70% blocked the person (compared to 54% of children aged 8–10)
- ★ 56% deleted any messages from the person (compared to 41% of children aged 8–10)
- ★ 45% changed their privacy settings.

Despite experiencing negative online behaviour, children aged 14–17 were less likely to stay offline after the incident (33% compared to 39% of children aged 8–10).

Girls were more likely to have told their friends (68%) or the police (11%), compared to boys (54% and 7%, respectively).

Children from regional areas were more likely to have told their parents about a negative online encounter (73% compared to 65% of children from metropolitan areas) and were less likely to report the behaviour to the website or social media company (18%), the police (6%), or eSafety or another organisation (4%).

Figure 20: Action taken after negative online experience



Key

- ▲ Significantly higher than comparable sub-groups
- ▼ Significantly lower than comparable sub-groups
- M Male
- F Female
- Metropolitan
- Regional
- Low
- Medium
- High

Source: I6. Still thinking about that last time any of these things happened, did you do any of these things afterwards?
Base: Online sample, unweighted, experienced negative behaviour online in the last year, n=2,051.

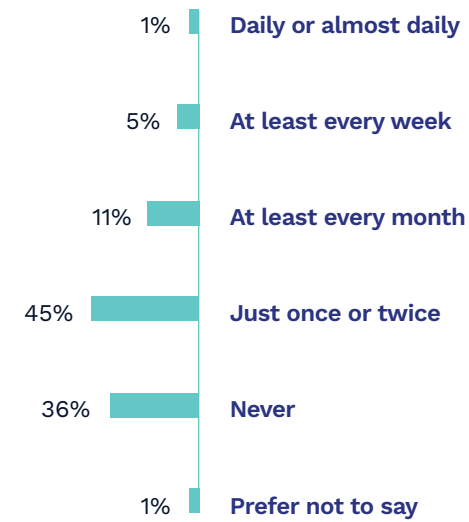
Most children have been bothered or upset by something that happened online

Six in ten children (63%) have experienced something online that has bothered or upset them in the past year (Figure 21). This mostly occurred infrequently, with 6% of children experiencing this weekly or more often, 11% monthly, and 45% saying this happened just once or twice.

Children aged 14–17 were more likely to have experienced this (70% compared to 54% of children aged 8–10). Boys were less likely than girls to have been bothered by something online (61% compared to 65%).



Figure 21: Experience of being bothered by something else that happened online



% = Weekly or more often

Age			Gender		Location		SES		
8-10	11-13	14-17	M	F	Metropolitan	Regional	Low	Medium	High
1%	1%	2%	1%	2%	1%	1%	2%	1%	1%
5%	4%	6%	4%	6%	6%	3%	4%	6%	5%
8%	11%	15%	10%	13%	12%	9%	9%	11%	15%
40%	49%	47%	46%	44%	44%	47%	44%	46%	45%
45%	35%	28%	38%	34%	36%	38%	39%	36%	34%
1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%

Key

▲ Significantly higher than comparable sub-groups

▼ Significantly lower than comparable sub-groups

M Male
F Female

Metropolitan
 Regional

Low
 Medium
 High

Source: F1. In the past year, how often has anything happened online that bothered or upset you in some way? (e.g. made you feel uncomfortable, scared or that you shouldn't have seen it)?
Base: Child Online sample, n=3,590.

Children’s views on parental awareness of their online lives

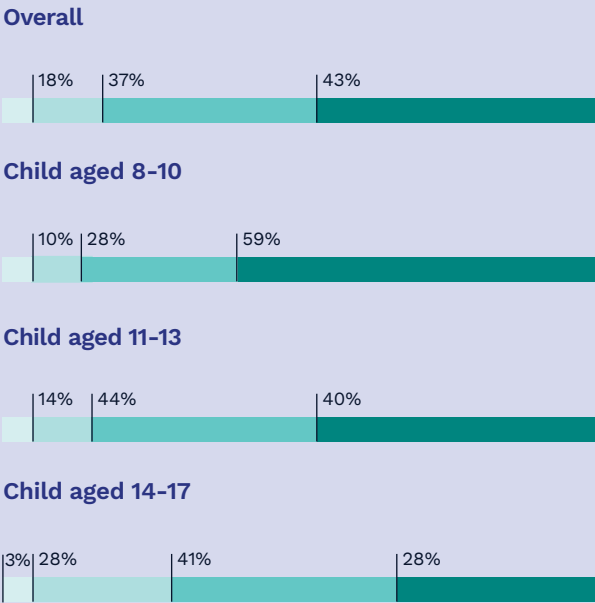
Most children think their parents know quite a bit about their online lives, and few want them to know more

Children – and especially those in younger age groups – feel that their parent or carer is generally aware of what they do on the internet. Eight in ten (80%) of all surveyed children think their parent or carer knows either quite a bit or a lot about their online activity (Figure 22). This is higher among children aged 8–10 and 11–13 (87% and 84%, respectively), and lower among children aged 14–17 (69%).

Children aged 8–10 in regional Australia are more likely than those in metropolitan areas to think their parent or carer knows about what they do online (92% compared to 85%). This finding was also similar for children living in low socioeconomic status areas (92%).

One in seven children (14%) said they would like their parent or carer to take more interest in what they do on the internet. This was lower than the proportion who said they would like their parent or carer to take less interest in what they do (19%) (Figure 23). This preference decreases as they get older, with only one in ten children aged 14–17 (10%) suggesting they would like their parent or carer to take more interest in their online activity. There were no significant differences between gender, location and socioeconomic status.

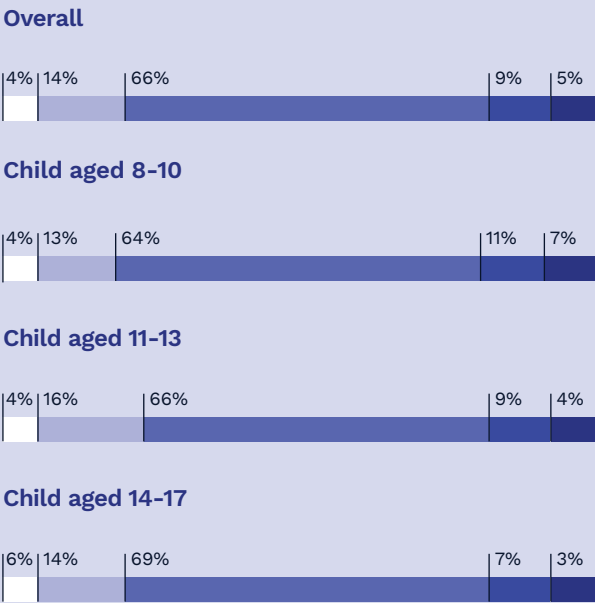
Figure 22: Child’s perception of how much their parent knows about what they do online



Source: K3. How much do you think your parent/carers know about what you do on the internet?
Base: Online sample, unweighted, n=3,590. Child aged: 8-10, n=1,329; 11-13, n=912; 14-17, n=1,349.

% = Quite a bit and a lot								
Overall	Gender		Location		SES			
	M	F	Met	Reg	Low	Med	High	
80%	80%	79%	79%	82%	82%	79%	77%	
87%	88%	87%	85%	92%	92%	85%	84%	
84%	84%	85%	85%	84%	84%	84%	85%	
69%	68%	70%	68%	70%	69%	69%	68%	

Figure 23: Level of interest child would like parent to have regarding what they do online



Key

- Nothing

Just a little

Quite a bit

A lot
- A lot less

A little less

Stay the same

A little more

A lot more
- Significantly higher than comparable sub-groups

Significantly lower than comparable sub-groups
- M Male

F Female

Met Metropolitan

Reg Regional
- Low

Medium

High

Source: K4. Overall, would you like your parent/carers to take more or less interest in what you do on the internet, or to stay about the same?
Base: Online sample, unweighted, n=3,590. Child aged: 8-10, n=1,329; 11-13, n=912; 14-17, n=1,349.

% = A little and a lot more								
Overall	Gender		Location		SES			
	M	F	Met	Reg	Low	Med	High	
14%	14%	14%	15%	12%	15%	13%	14%	
18%	18%	18%	18%	18%	18%	18%	18%	
13%	13%	12%	14%	10%	14%	11%	14%	
10%	9%	11%	11%	7%	12%	9%	10%	



Digital parenting

This section explores parents’ awareness of their children’s online experiences, and compares this to children’s self-reported encounters with risky and negative experiences online. It then looks at the various digital parenting practices used, comparing some of these with children’s awareness of these practices, and considers the effects of digital parenting on children’s use of the internet.

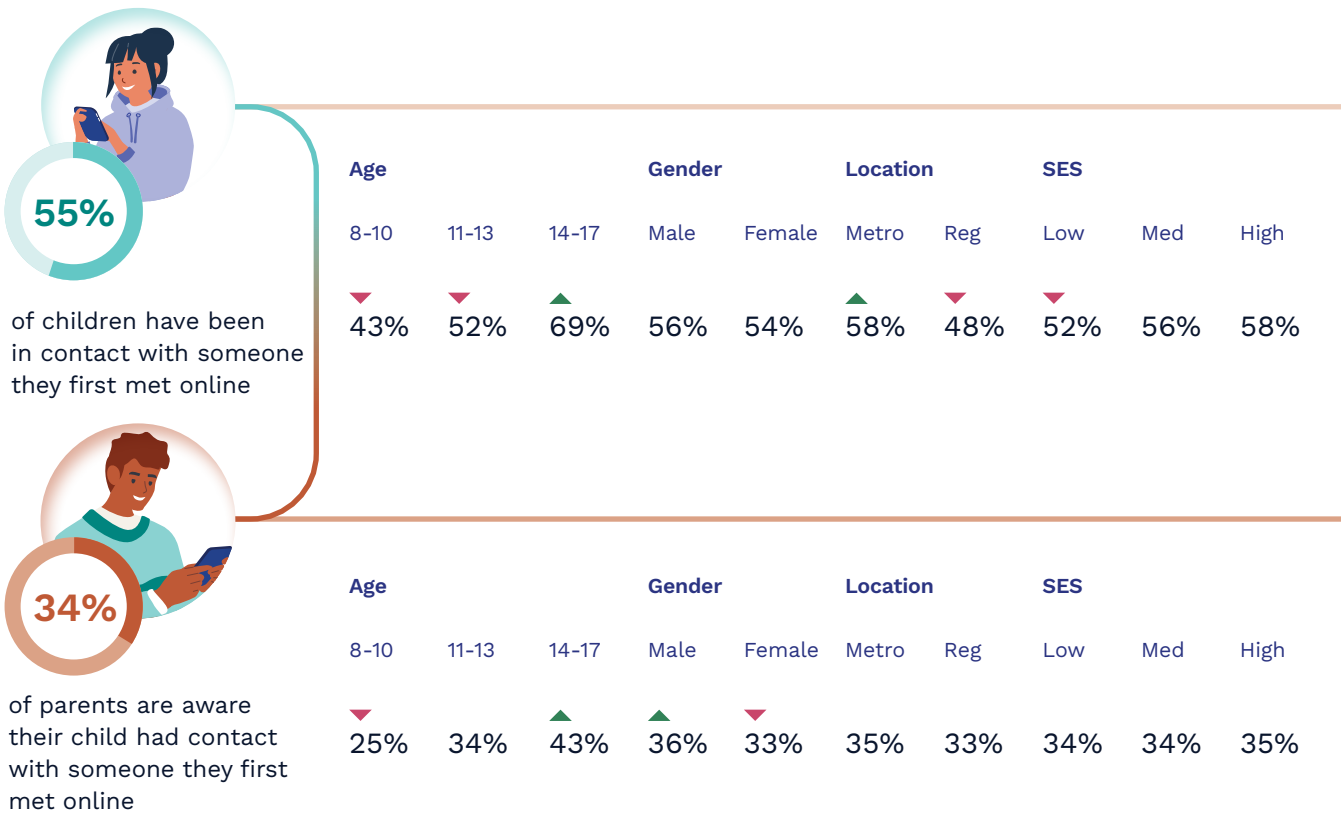


Parental awareness

Online contact with strangers is more common than parents are aware

Overall, six in ten children (55%) have been in contact with someone they first met online, while only a third (34%) of parents are aware that their children have engaged in this behaviour (Figure 24).

Figure 24: Contact with a stranger online (child’s reported experience and parent’s awareness)



Source: S15. As far as you are aware, in the past year, have any of these things happened to your child aged <INSERT SELECTED AGE> online? D1. How do you usually communicate with people in this list? (Someone you first met online who was a contact of a friend or family member; Someone who is under 18 who you met online and had no other connection with your life; Someone who is 18 or older who you met online and had no other connection with your life) I6. Still thinking about that last time any of these things happened, did you do any of these things afterwards?
Base: Parent Online sample, unweighted, n=3,590. Child Online sample, n=3,590.



In 2016:

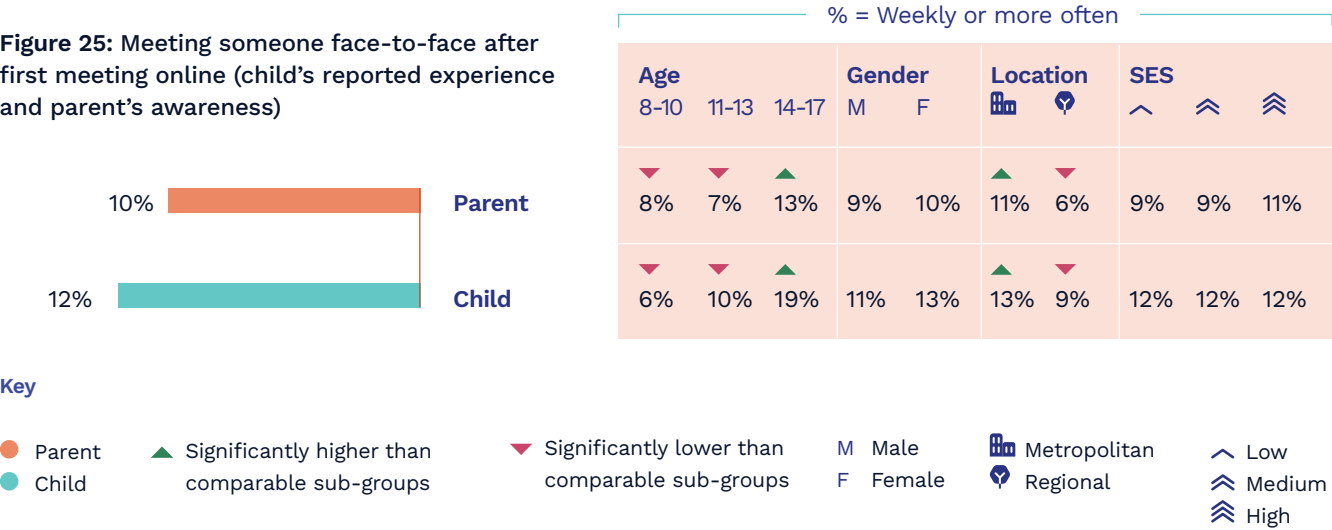
22% of children surveyed said they had used the internet to communicate with someone they hadn't met in real life – indicating that this behaviour has potentially become markedly more prevalent. In comparison, **55%** of children in 2021 had communicated with someone they first met online.

17% of parents surveyed were aware that their child had been contacted by a stranger or had received repeated unwanted communications online in the last 12 months. In comparison, **34%** of parents in 2021 were aware that their child had communicated with someone they first met online.

Overall, one in eight children (12%) said they have met someone face-to-face after first getting to know them online (Figure 25). A smaller proportion (10%) of parents said they had knowledge of their child doing this.

Parents of children aged 14–17 (13%) and those living in metropolitan areas (11%) were more likely to be aware compared to parents of children aged 11–13 and 8–10, and those living regionally.

Figure 25: Meeting someone face-to-face after first meeting online (child's reported experience and parent's awareness)



Source: S15. As far as you are aware, in the past year, have any of these things happened to your child aged <INSERT SELECTED AGE> online?
G1. In the past year, have you met anyone face-to-face that you first got to know online?
Base: Parent Online sample, unweighted, n=3,590. Child Online sample, n=3,590.

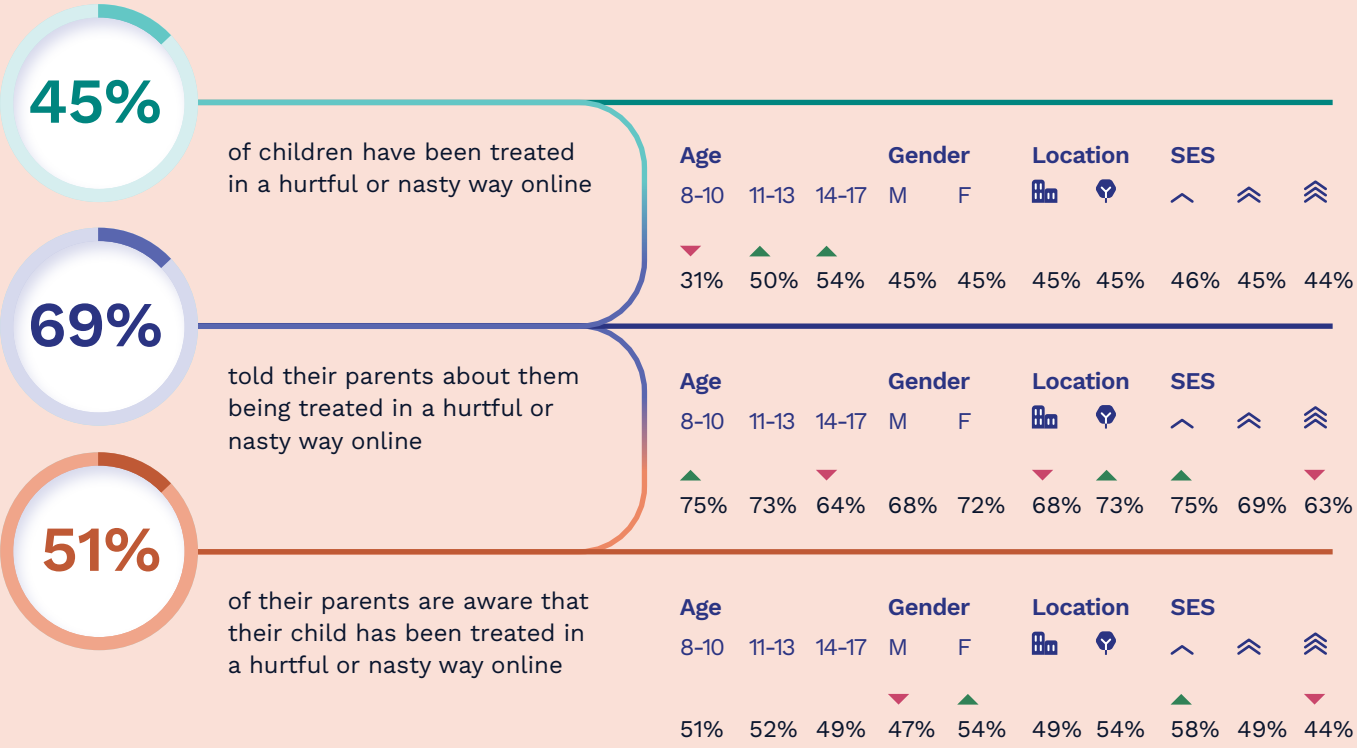
Children treated in hurtful or nasty ways online mostly tell their parents, yet many parents remain unaware of their child's experience

Just under half of surveyed children (45%) reported that they have been treated in a hurtful or nasty way online, and of this proportion, seven in ten (69%) told their parents about this experience (Figure 26). This response indicates that children see their parents as a key source of support, and that most are likely to go to their parents when they have a negative online experience. However, only half (51%) of parents whose children had been treated in a hurtful way online claimed to be aware of what their child had experienced and shared with them.

Despite being more likely to experience this online behaviour, 14–17 year-olds were less likely to have told their parents about it (64% compared to 75% of children aged 8–10).

- ★ Children from metropolitan (68%) and higher socioeconomic areas (63%) were also less likely to tell their parents about an incident that occurred online where they were treated in a nasty or hurtful way.
- ★ Parents from lower socioeconomic areas (58%) were more likely to have been aware of their child being treated in a hurtful way online (compared to 44% from high socioeconomic areas).
- ★ Parents were also more likely to have been aware of their child experiencing this kind of behaviour if their child was female (54% compared to 47% who have a male child).

Figure 26: Being treated in a hurtful or nasty way online (child’s reported experience and parent’s awareness)



Source: S15. As far as you are aware, in the past year, have any of these things happened to your child aged <INSERT SELECTED AGE> online? I3. In the past year, how often, if ever, has anyone treated you in a hurtful or nasty way online? I6. Still thinking about that last time any of these things happened, did you do any of these things afterwards?
Base: Parent Online sample, unweighted, n=3,590. Child Online sample, n=3,590.

This gap between parental knowledge and children’s sharing perhaps indicates that parents may have difficulty in remembering things that don’t seem significant to them, despite those things being significant to their children. It is interesting to compare this finding with that noted in the following section on hate speech, where the gap is essentially non-existent.

It may be that parents are unaware of the emotional and mental health impacts of their children being treated in a hurtful or nasty way online, with the children commonly feeling sad, angry and not good about themselves after a negative online experience.

Parents have low awareness of their children having treated someone in a hurtful or nasty way online, even when their child has revealed their negative behaviour

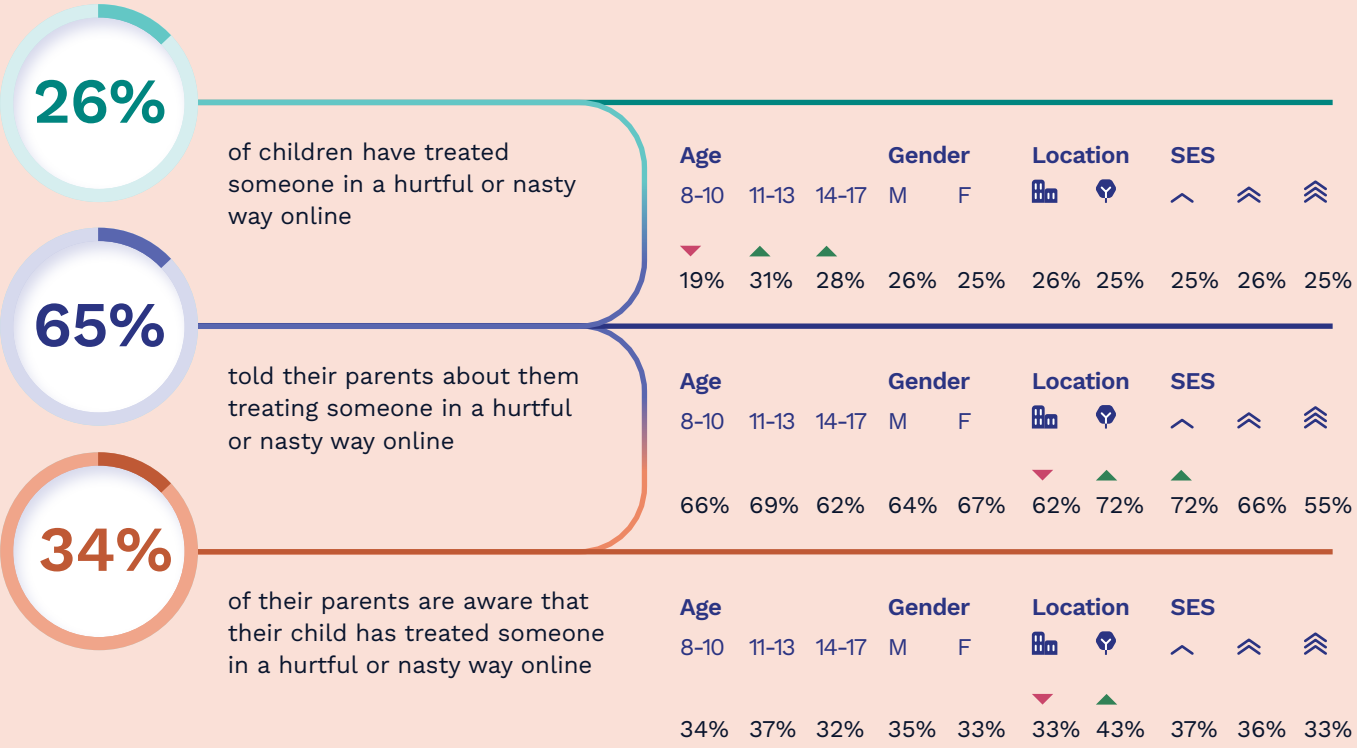
A quarter (26%) of surveyed children revealed that they had treated someone in a hurtful or nasty way online in the past year (Figure 27).

Two-thirds (65%) of children who had treated someone negatively online told their parents they had done so. Children aged 14–17 and those from metropolitan areas were less likely to have told their parents about their negative behaviour (62% and 62%, respectively).

Only a third (34%) of parents of these children were aware that their child had treated someone in a hurtful or nasty way online. Parents from regional areas were more likely to have been aware of their child’s harmful behaviour (43% compared to 33% from metropolitan areas).

The gap between the proportion of parents aware of their child’s behaviours and the proportion of children who have told their parents suggests that parents might ignore, forget or dismiss their child’s confession – or perhaps find it difficult to acknowledge that their child has acted in these negative ways.

Figure 27: Treating someone in a hurtful or nasty way online (child’s reported experience and parent’s awareness)



Source: S15. As far as you are aware, in the past year, have any of these things happened to your child aged <INSERT SELECTED AGE> online? I3. In the past year, how often, if ever, has anyone treated you in a hurtful or nasty way online? I6. Still thinking about that last time any of these things happened, did you do any of these things afterwards? Base: Parent Online sample, unweighted, n=3,590. Child Online sample, n=3,590.

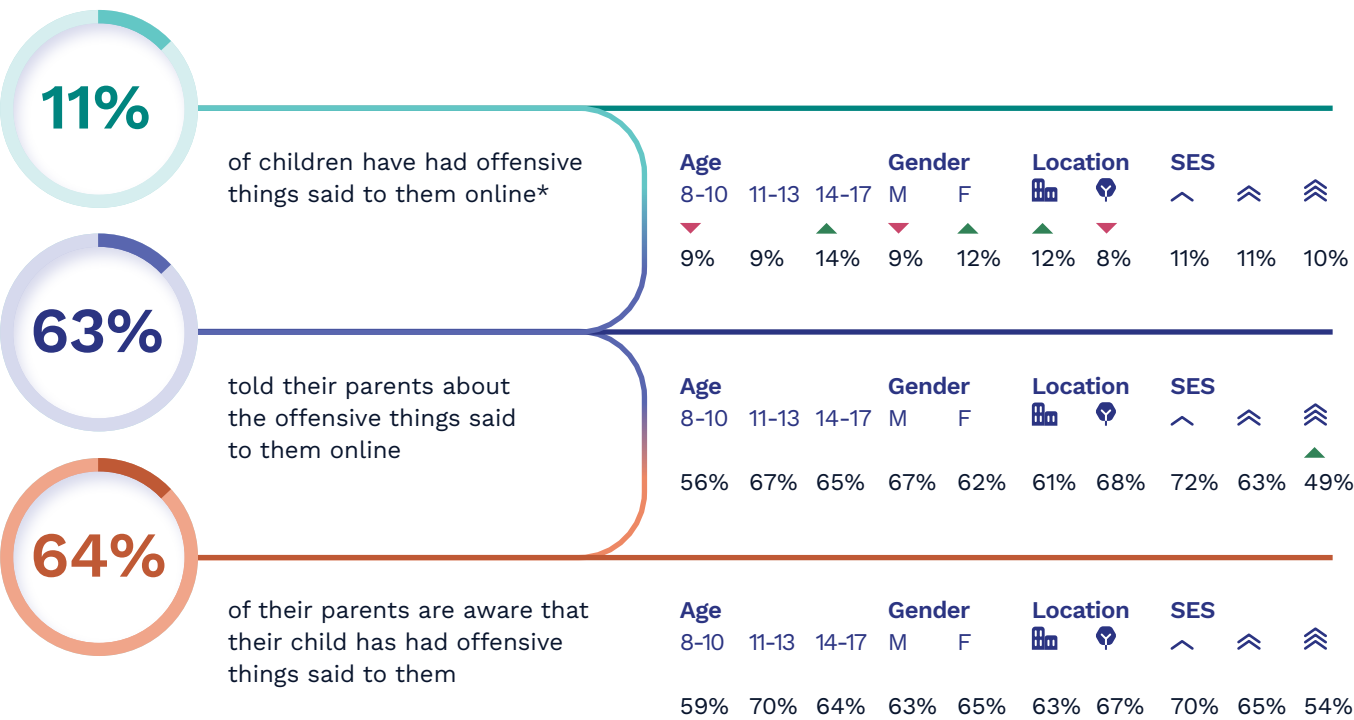


Parents have strong awareness of children’s experiences of online hate

One in ten children (11%) said they have had offensive things said to them online because of their ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion or disability (Figure 28). These experiences were more prevalent for girls (12%) and those aged 14–17 (14%). Children from metropolitan areas were more likely to have experienced hate speech (12% compared to 8% from regional areas).

After experiencing this type of hate speech, six in ten children (63%) told their parents about it. A similar proportion (64%) of parents were aware that their child had been a victim of hate speech. This lack of any measurable gap between the child’s telling and the parent’s awareness of the event is an interesting contrast to the previous section on the experience of bullying and suggests that parents take hate speech more seriously.

Figure 28: Exposure to hate speech online (child’s reported experience and parent’s awareness)



Source: S15. As far as you are aware, in the past year, have any of these things happened to your child aged <INSERT SELECTED AGE> online? I3. In the past year, how often, if ever, has anyone treated you in a hurtful or nasty way online? I6. Still thinking about that last time any of these things happened, did you do any of these things afterwards?
Base: Parent Online sample, unweighted, n=3,590. Child Online sample, n=3,590.
Note * because of their race, ethnicity, gender, nationality, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability.

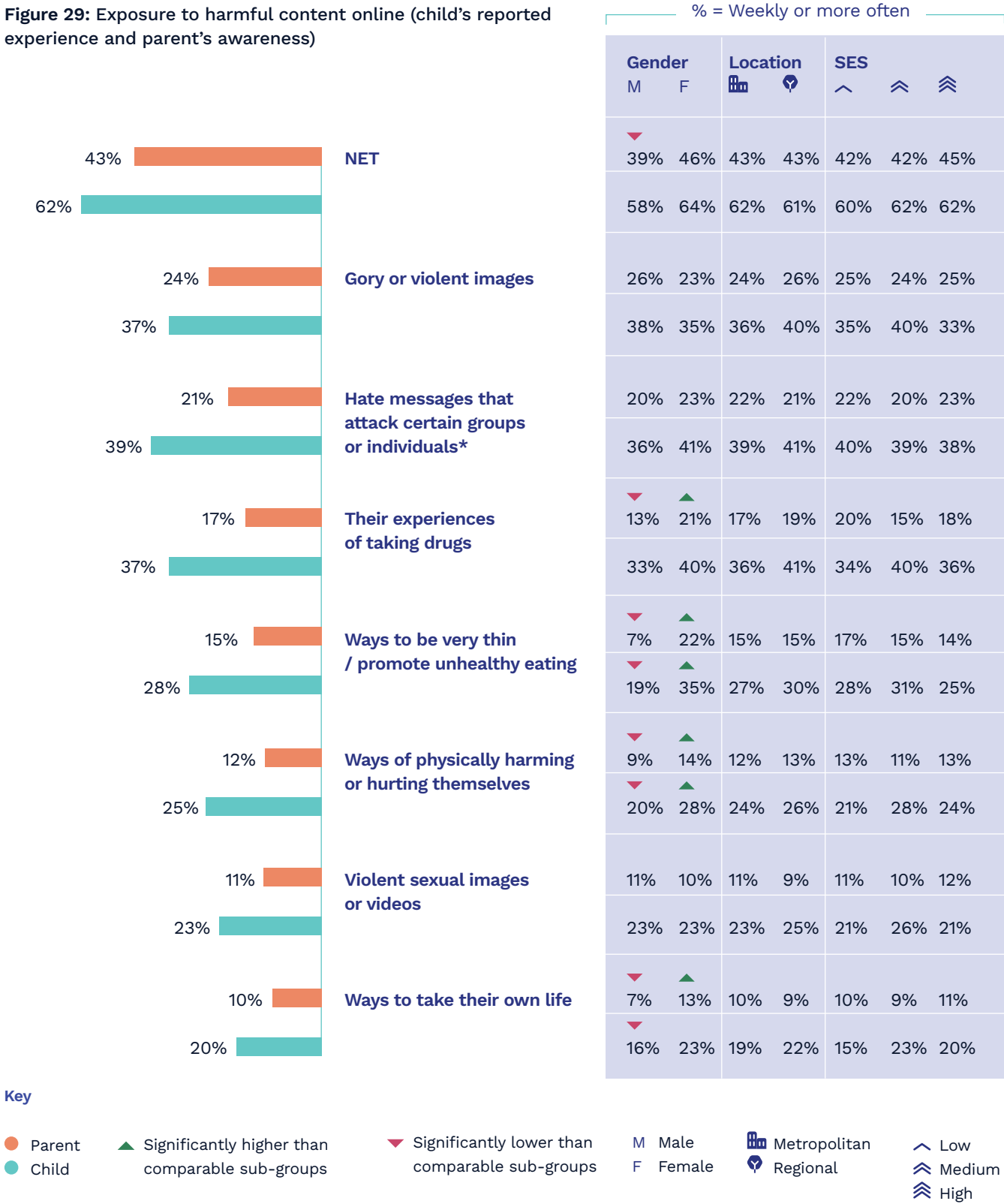
Many parents are unaware of the extent to which their children are exposed to certain types of harmful content

Almost two-thirds of children aged 14–17 (62%) said they have been exposed to some form of harmful content online in the past year, while four in ten parents (43%) are aware of this (Figure 29). This exposure included websites or discussions where people talked about or showed potentially negative content about topics such as drug taking, suicide, self-harm and unhealthy eating, as well as hate speech, gory images and violent sexual material. This finding suggests that young people are less likely to tell their parents when they come across harmful content online that concerns sensitive or stigmatised issues.

Parents of girls aged 14–17 (46%) are more likely to be aware that their child has been exposed to any form of harmful content than are parents of boys the same age (39%) including:

- ★ talking about their experiences of taking drugs (21% compared to 13% of parents of boys)
- ★ Ways to be very thin/things that promote unhealthy eating (22% compared to 7%)
- ★ ways of physically harming or hurting themselves (14% compared to 9%)
- ★ ways to take their own life (13% compared to 7%).

Figure 29: Exposure to harmful content online (child's reported experience and parent's awareness)



Source: S16. As far as you are aware, in the past year, has your child <INSERT SELECTED AGE> seen a website or an online discussion where people talk about or show any of these things? G4. In the past year, have you seen websites or online discussions where people talk about or show any of these things?
Base: Parent Online sample (parents of children aged 14–17), unweighted, n=1,349. Child Online sample (aged 14–17), unweighted, n=1,349.
Note: *e.g. people of different colour, religion or nationality.

Parents' awareness of child's exposure to sexual material is much lower than their actual rate of exposure

Exposure to sexual material online is prevalent among young people aged 14–17. Seven in ten (71%) children aged 14–17 have seen sexual images on the internet, while a quarter (25%) have opened a message or link that showed pictures of naked people.


In contrast, parental awareness of their child's exposure to sexual images and images of naked people is low, with only around half of parents whose child was exposed to these being aware of it (Figure 30):

- ★ 34% were aware of their child seeing sexual images on the internet
- ★ 12% were aware their child has opened a message or link that showed naked people.

Even greater is the gap between the proportion of children who have received a sexual message (47%) and the proportion of parents who are aware of this (16%).

However, when their child has been asked by someone on the internet to send sexual images of themselves, parents tend to be more aware. Ten per cent of parents are aware that this has happened, while 11% of children have had this happen to them.

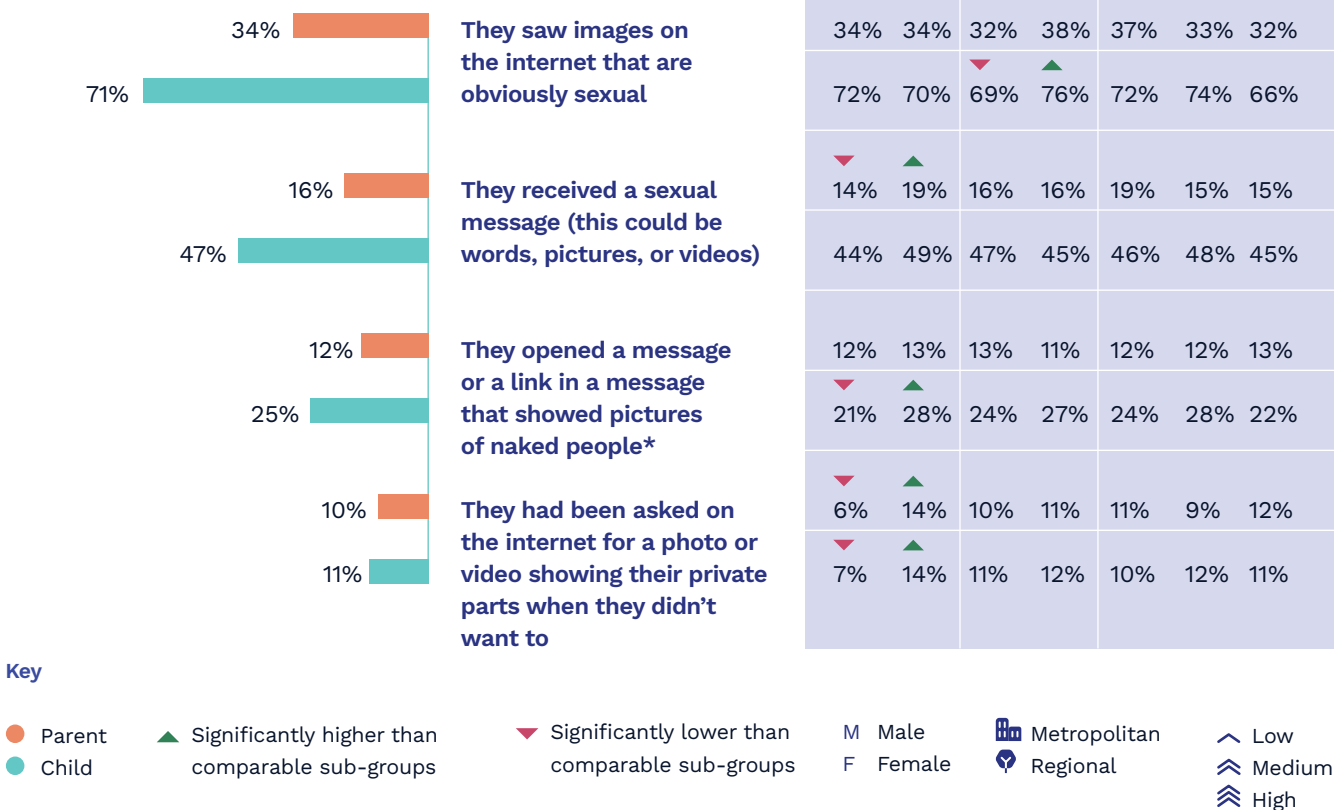
As with the previous section, this difference suggests that young people are hesitant to tell their parents when they come across harmful online content that concerns sensitive and stigmatised issues. However, it also suggests that young people recognise the seriousness of being asked to send sexual images of themselves, and that they will go to their parents in these more serious situations.



In 2016:

16% of parents surveyed indicated their child had been exposed to sexual/pornographic content online.

Figure 30: Exposure to sexual messages online
(child's reported experience and parent's awareness)

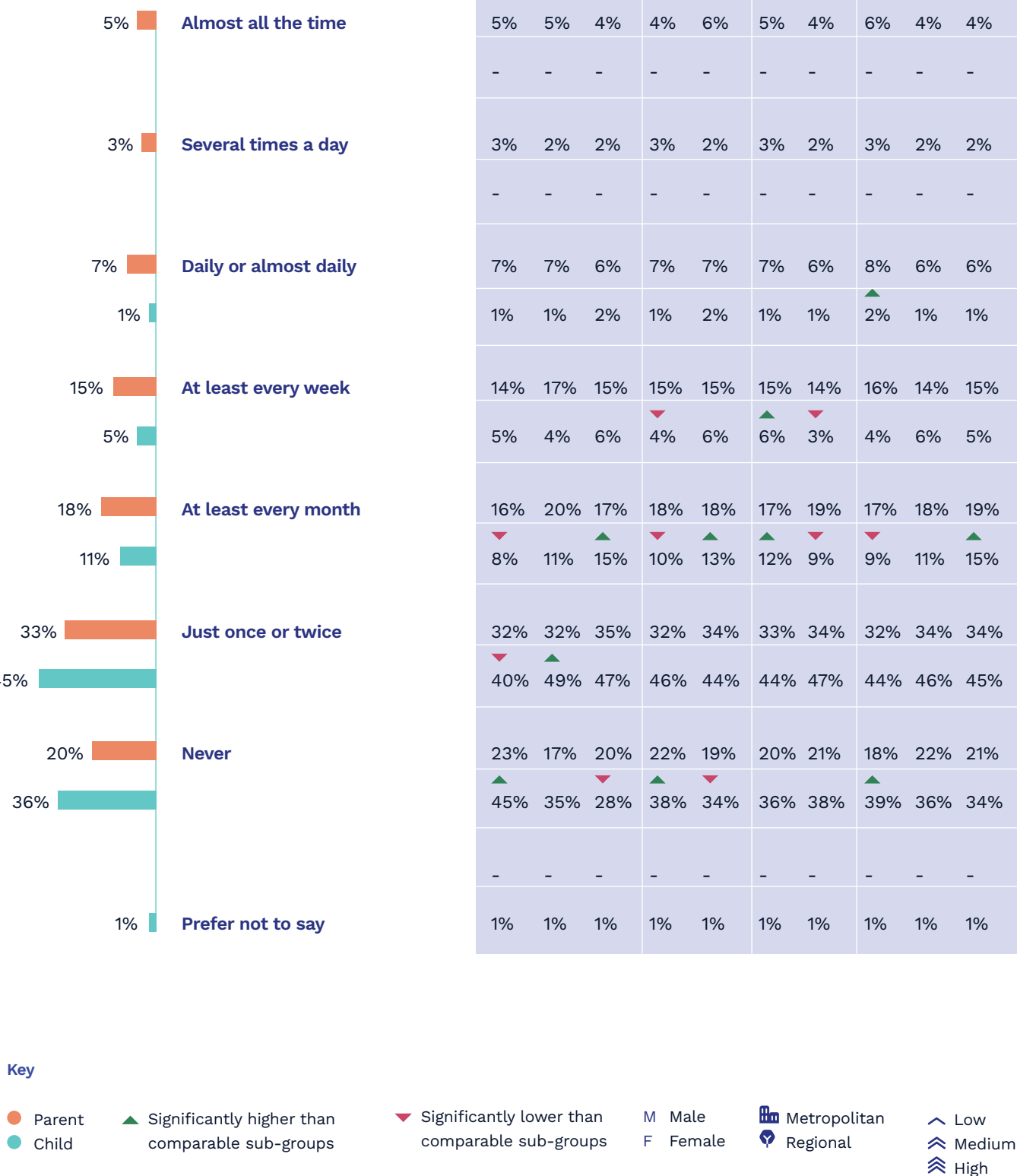


Most parents say their child has told them about an online experience that bothered or upset them

Eight in ten parents (80%) said their child has told them about things that have bothered or upset them online in the past year. However, this happens irregularly, with only 29% of parents revealing that this happens weekly or more often (Figure 31). One in five parents (20%) said that their child has never told them about anything that has bothered or upset them online.

In contrast, six in ten children (63%) have experienced something online that has bothered or upset them in the past year, with this occurring less frequently than parents perceive, with 6% of children saying this happens weekly or more often. It may be that parents tend to overestimate the frequency of their child telling them about upsetting online experiences.

Figure 31: Exposure of child to something that bothered them online
(child's reported experience and parent's awareness)



Parental awareness of other types of negative online experiences their children have had tends to be in line with their child's experiences

Compared to the results presented in the previous section, parental awareness of their child's negative online experiences was very similar to their child's reported experience (Figure 32). These negative online experiences include:

- ★ their child clicking on a pop-up link and their device getting infected (12% of parents aware, while 13% of children reported experiencing this)
- ★ their child's personal information being used in a way they didn't like (7% of parents aware, 9% of children experienced this)
- ★ their child having someone pretend to be them online (7% of parents aware, 6% of children experienced this)
- ★ their child being a victim of online fraud (6% of parents aware, 6% of children experienced this)
- ★ someone finding out where their child was by tracking their device (5% of parents aware, 7% of children experienced this).

- ★ Around one in eight children (13%) had experienced someone creating a hostile or hurtful page or image about them, while only 6% of parents were aware that their child was a victim of this online behaviour.

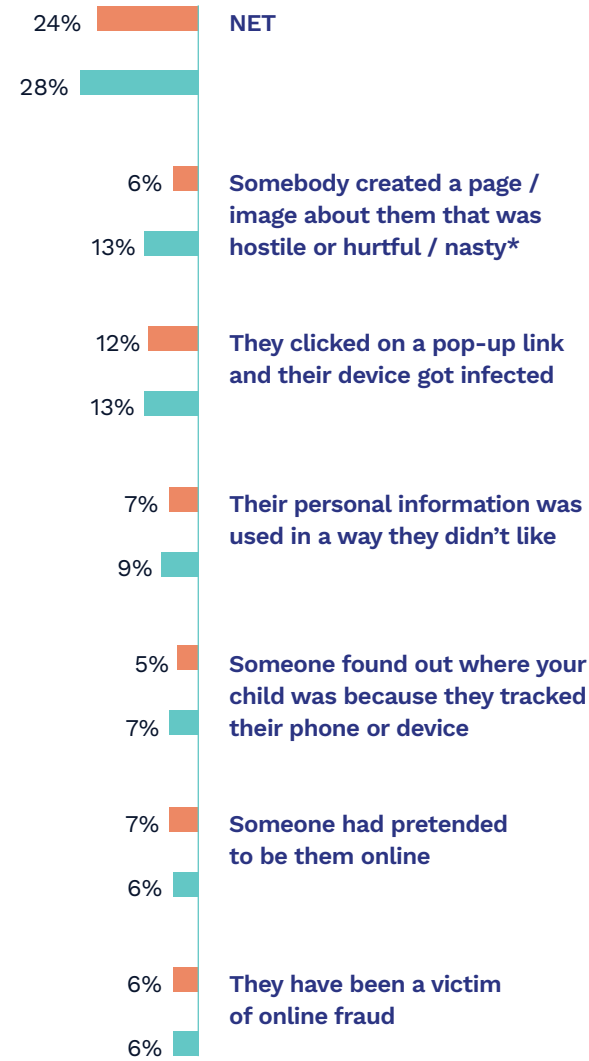


In 2016:

Parents surveyed in 2016 indicated their child personally experienced these issues in the last 12 months at lower levels than in 2021. For example, in 2016:

- ★ **9%** had clicked on a pop-up link and their device got infected
- ★ **3%** had their personal information used in a way they didn't like
- ★ **3%** had someone pretend to be them online.

Figure 32: Exposure of child to negative online experiences (child's reported experience and parent's awareness)



% = Weekly or more often

Age			Gender		Location		SES		
8-10	11-13	14-17	M	F	Metropolitan	Regional	Low	Medium	High
22%	24%	26%	22%	25%	27%	16%	22%	22%	27%
23%	29%	33%	26%	31%	31%	22%	26%	28%	31%
5%	6%	7%	5%	7%	7%	3%	6%	6%	7%
8%	14%	17%	10%	15%	14%	11%	11%	14%	14%
13%	13%	10%	13%	12%	14%	8%	13%	11%	12%
14%	13%	11%	13%	13%	15%	9%	12%	13%	13%
6%	8%	9%	7%	8%	9%	4%	7%	7%	9%
7%	8%	11%	8%	10%	10%	7%	8%	9%	10%
5%	3%	7%	4%	6%	6%	3%	4%	5%	7%
5%	6%	10%	7%	8%	8%	5%	6%	7%	9%
5%	7%	9%	6%	8%	8%	5%	6%	7%	8%
6%	6%	7%	5%	7%	8%	3%	5%	7%	7%
5%	5%	6%	5%	6%	7%	3%	4%	6%	6%
6%	6%	6%	5%	7%	7%	4%	6%	5%	8%

Key

- Parent
- Child
- Significantly higher than comparable sub-groups
- Significantly lower than comparable sub-groups
- M Male
- F Female
- Metropolitan
- Regional
- Low
- Medium
- High

Source: S17. As far as you are aware, in the past year, have any of these things happened to your child aged <INSERT SELECTED AGE> online?
I4. Have any of these things happened to you online in the last year?
Base: Parent Online sample, unweighted, n=3,590. Child Online sample, n=3,590.
Note: *or hurtful messages were passed around or posted where others could see.

Parents tend to have confidence in their children's ability to cope with issues that occur online

Most parents feel that their child can cope with things that bother or upset them online, with eight in ten parents (80%) confident that their child can definitely cope or cope a fair amount with things that bother or upset them online (Figure 33). This perception was lower among parents of children aged 8–10, with seven in ten (72%) indicating they feel their child can definitely cope, or cope a fair amount, with things that bother them online.

The finding that children are, in a practical sense, able to take action in response to negative experiences online suggests that parents' confidence in their children's ability to cope in a practical sense is well founded. However, the emotional impacts reported by children in response to a negative experience suggest they may need more emotional support than parents realise.

Parents of children aged 14–17 were much more confident of their child's ability to cope – almost nine in ten (87%) said their child would definitely be able to cope, or to cope a fair amount, with online issues that bother them. Parents of male children and of those living regionally were more confident of their child's ability to cope (89% and 91%, respectively).



In 2016:

In 2016, **51%** of parents surveyed agreed that their child can deal with things on the internet that bother them.

A different metric was used in 2021 – **80%** of parents expressed the view that their child can cope at least a fair amount with things that bother or upset them online.

However, this does suggest that parents in 2021 are more confident in their child's ability to deal with online issues than in 2016.

Figure 33: Parent's belief that their child can cope with things that bother or upset them online

Overall



Child aged 8-10



Child aged 11-13



Child aged 14-17



% = A fair amount and definitely

Overall	Gender		Location		SES		
	M	F	Metropolitan	Regional	Low	Medium	High
80%	80%	80%	79%	82%	80%	81%	78%
72%	71%	72%	71%	74%	75%	73%	65%
82%	82%	83%	83%	81%	81%	82%	86%
87%	89%	84%	85%	91%	86%	89%	84%

Key

- Not sure

● Not at all

● Not very much
- A fair amount

● Definitely
- ▲ Significantly higher than comparable sub-groups

▼ Significantly lower than comparable sub-groups
- M Male

F Female

Metropolitan

Regional
- Low

Medium

High

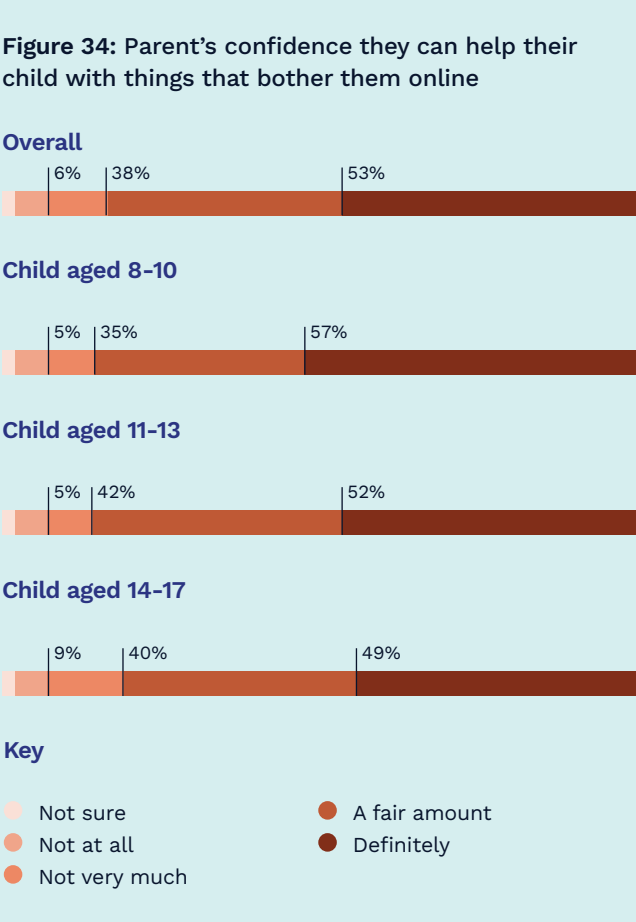
Source: S14. Do you think your child aged <INSERT SELECTED AGE> can cope with things online that bother or upset them?
Base: Online sample, unweighted, n=3,590. Child aged: 8-10, n=1,329; 11-13, n=912; 14-17, n=1,349.

Parents' confidence in helping their children with online experiences

Most parents are confident of their ability to help their child with things that bother them online, with 91% of parents indicating they would definitely be able to help, or to help their child a fair amount (Figure 34).

Parents of children aged 8–10 from regional areas are more likely to feel confident about helping their child (96% compared to 90% of parents of same-aged children from metropolitan areas), while parents with children of the same age from high

socioeconomic areas are less likely to feel confident of helping their child cope with things that may bother them online (86% compared to 96% of parents of children aged 8–10 from low socioeconomic areas). Parents of children aged 14–17 from high socioeconomic areas are also less likely to feel confident of helping their child cope with things that may bother them online (85% compared to 91% from low, and 90% from medium, socioeconomic areas).



Source: S13. Do you feel you can help your child aged <INSERT SELECTED AGE> to cope with things online that bother or upset them?
Base: Online sample, unweighted, n=3,590. Child aged: 8-10, n=1,329; 11-13, n=912; 14-17, n=1,349.

Parental mediation practices

Three types of parental mediation practices were examined in this research:

- ★ ‘enabling’ mediation, where parents attempt to provide guidance and advice to their children that helps them to go online
- ★ ‘restrictive’ mediation, where parents attempt to control access and set rules about their children using the internet

★ ‘technical’ mediation, where parents use software or other technology-based tools to control or limit internet use and monitoring and checking.

The majority of parents reported engaging in a range of enabling, restrictive and technical mediation practices, with higher proportions of parents doing this in 2021 than in 2016 – particularly for enabling practices.

Parents tend to use a range of enabling mediation strategies to support their child online

Almost all parents said they encourage and provide support for their child online; however, a lower proportion of children are aware and acknowledge that their parent or carer implements these enabling forms of digital parenting (Figure 35). This disparity is greatest for parents who encourage their children to explore and learn things on

the internet and who do online activities with their children. Parents of children aged 14–17 are less likely to implement any of these measures regarding their child’s internet use. Children from regional areas are more likely to say that their parents do any of these things.



In 2016:

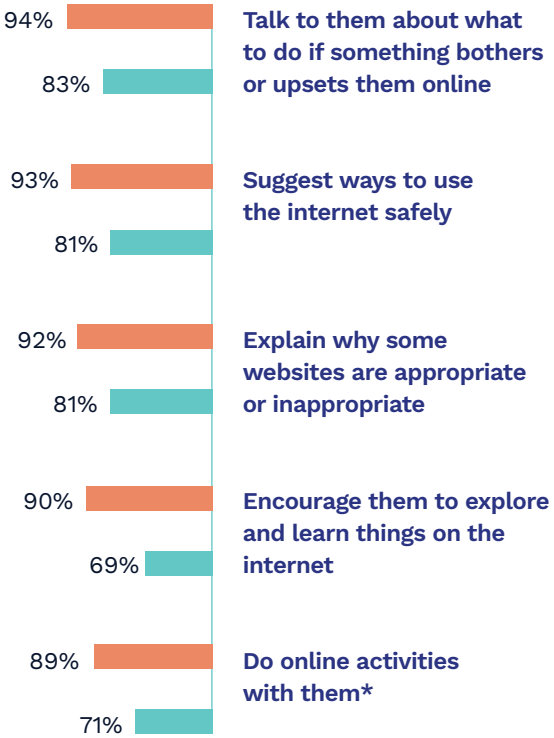
The majority of parents (**79%**) indicated they had rules in place for their child’s online activities.

Many parents also indicated they had discussed the following with their child:

- ★ being responsible and respectful online: **49%**
- ★ ways of staying safe online: **48%**
- ★ what to do if something on the internet bothers them: **42%**
- ★ why some websites are good or bad: **42%**.

In 2021, the proportion of parents who have discussed similar things with their child has risen steeply, with almost all parents (**94%**) saying they have talked to their child about what to do if something bothers or upsets them online, suggested ways to use the internet safely with their child (**93%**) and explained why some websites are appropriate or inappropriate (**92%**).

Figure 35: Parent’s enabling of child’s internet use



% = Ever done these things											
Age			Gender		Location		SES				
8-10	11-13	14-17	M	F	Metropolitan	Regional	Low	Medium	High		
	▲	▼									
93%	97%	92%	94%	93%	93%	95%	95%	93%	93%		
▲	▲	▼	▲	▼	▼	▲	▲		▼		
85%	87%	77%	84%	81%	80%	88%	86%	82%	79%		
	▲	▼									
93%	97%	91%	93%	94%	93%	95%	95%	93%	92%		
▲	▲	▼			▼	▲	▲		▼		
83%	85%	77%	82%	80%	79%	86%	84%	82%	76%		
	▲	▼									
94%	97%	88%	93%	92%	92%	94%	92%	93%	92%		
▲	▲	▼			▼	▲	▲		▼		
84%	85%	76%	82%	80%	79%	87%	84%	81%	78%		
	▲										
89%	93%	89%	91%	89%	90%	90%	91%	89%	90%		
▲	▲	▼			▼	▲	▲				
72%	72%	65%	71%	68%	68%	73%	73%	68%	67%		
	▲	▼									
95%	92%	81%	89%	89%	89%	89%	90%	88%	89%		
▲		▼			▼	▲	▲	▼	▼		
81%	71%	61%	71%	70%	69%	75%	78%	68%	67%		

Key

- Parent

● Child
- ▲ Significantly higher than comparable sub-groups

▼ Significantly lower than comparable sub-groups
- M Male

F Female
- Metropolitan

Regional
- Low

Medium

High


Source: S8. In the past year, how often did you do these things when your child aged <INSERT SELECTED AGE> used the internet?
K1. Have your parents, friends or teachers done any of the following?
Base: Parent Online sample, unweighted, n=3,590. Child Online sample, n=3,590.
Note: *e.g. going to websites, playing games, looking at social media together.

Rules about when children go online, and for how long, are less common than rules about what they do online

More than half (59%) of parents indicate they set rules about when their child is allowed to go online, and for how long (Figure 36). Even more common is the setting of rules about what their child may do online – which 94% of parents and 85% of children say happens (Figure 37).

Parents and children also tend to agree on what activities are allowed to be done at any time unsupervised. More passive activities, such as listening to or watching music and films (59%) and watching video clips (54%), tend to be allowed by more parents than

activities that are more interactive and have greater potential risk, such as using a recording device (34%) or visiting a social networking site (35%) (Figure 38). Older children tend to be allowed to do any of these things at any time without supervision, while those from lower socioeconomic areas are less likely to be able to use a web or phone camera (34% compared to 43% of children from high socioeconomic areas).

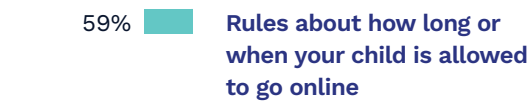


In 2016:

Parents indicated they have rules about any of the following for their child:

- ★ how long they can be online: **57%**
- ★ the websites their child can access: **54%**
- ★ when their child can go online: **50%**
- ★ the social media, email and gaming accounts their child has: **48%**
- ★ the age ratings of any apps their child uses: **42%**
- ★ what their child can post publicly: **41%.**

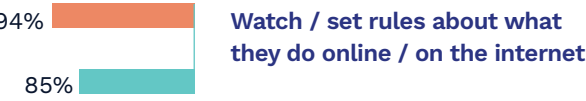
Figure 36: Restrictive mediation: Rules about time spent online



Source: S11. Do you use any of the following?
Base: Parent Online sample, unweighted, n=3,590.

% = Weekly or more often											
Age			Gender		Location		SES				
8-10	11-13	14-17	M	F	Met	Reg	Low	Med	High		
66%	68%	45%	60%	57%	57%	63%	61%	58%	58%		

Figure 37: Restrictive mediation: Rules about what is done online



Key

- Parent

● Child

▲ Significantly higher than comparable sub-groups

▼ Significantly lower than comparable sub-groups

M Male

F Female

Metropolitan

Regional

^ Low

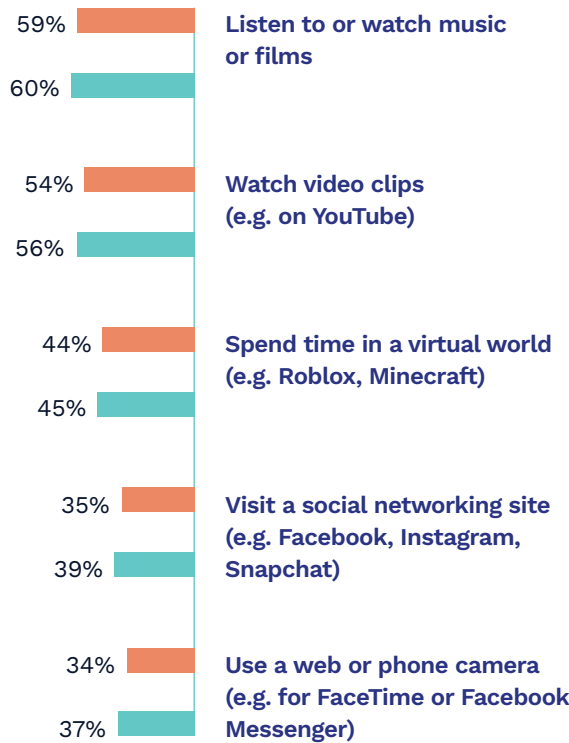
≡ Medium

≡ High

Source: S8. In the past year, how often did you do these things when your child aged <INSERT SELECTED AGE> used the internet? K1. Have your parents, friends or teachers done any of the following?
Base: Parent Online sample, unweighted, n=3,590. Child Online sample, n=3,590.

% = Ever done these things											
Age			Gender		Location		SES				
8-10	11-13	14-17	M	F	Met	Reg	Low	Med	High		
97%	97%	88%	94%	93%	94%	94%	94%	93%	94%		
90%	90%	78%	87%	84%	84%	89%	89%	85%	82%		

Figure 38: Restrictive mediation: Child allowed to do these things without permission or supervision (parent vs child perspective)



% = Allowed without supervision

Age	8-10		11-13		14-17		Gender		Location		SES		
	8-10	11-13	14-17	M	F		M	F	Metropolitan	Regional	Low	Medium	High
Listen to or watch music or films	37%	58%	82%	58%	60%	59%	59%	60%	59%	59%	59%	59%	61%
	39%	60%	82%	59%	62%	60%	60%	62%	60%	60%	60%	60%	62%
Watch video clips (e.g. on YouTube)	31%	50%	79%	52%	56%	54%	53%	53%	53%	53%	53%	53%	57%
	33%	55%	79%	54%	57%	56%	56%	55%	55%	56%	55%	56%	56%
Spend time in a virtual world (e.g. Roblox, Minecraft)	26%	44%	62%	45%	43%	44%	44%	43%	43%	45%	43%	45%	43%
	26%	44%	65%	46%	45%	45%	47%	45%	45%	46%	45%	46%	45%
Visit a social networking site (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat)	10%	25%	68%	32%	39%	36%	33%	32%	36%	39%	32%	36%	39%
	10%	30%	72%	35%	42%	39%	38%	36%	38%	43%	36%	38%	43%
Use a web or phone camera (e.g. for FaceTime or Facebook Messenger)	14%	26%	60%	31%	38%	35%	32%	30%	35%	40%	30%	35%	40%
	16%	30%	64%	34%	41%	38%	35%	34%	37%	43%	34%	37%	43%

Key

Parent

Child

Significantly higher than comparable sub-groups

Significantly lower than comparable sub-groups

M Male

F Female

Metropolitan

Regional

Low

Medium

High

Source: S10. Do you allow your child aged <INSERT SELECTED AGE> to do the following things online and, if so, do they need your permission to do them? K2. Which of the following are you allowed to do? Chart shows activities allowed any time or without permission/supervision. Base: Parent Online sample, unweighted, n=3,590. Child Online sample, n=3,590.

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Digital parenting | Parental mediation practices

Most parents also use some kind of technical parental controls

Six in ten parents (59%) set rules about when their child is allowed to go online, and for how long, while four in ten (43%) apply parental controls to block and filter certain websites, and three in ten (31%) use parental controls to filter the apps they can download. Parents of boys are more likely to have parental controls in place that block or filter some types of websites (46% compared to 41% of parents of girls).

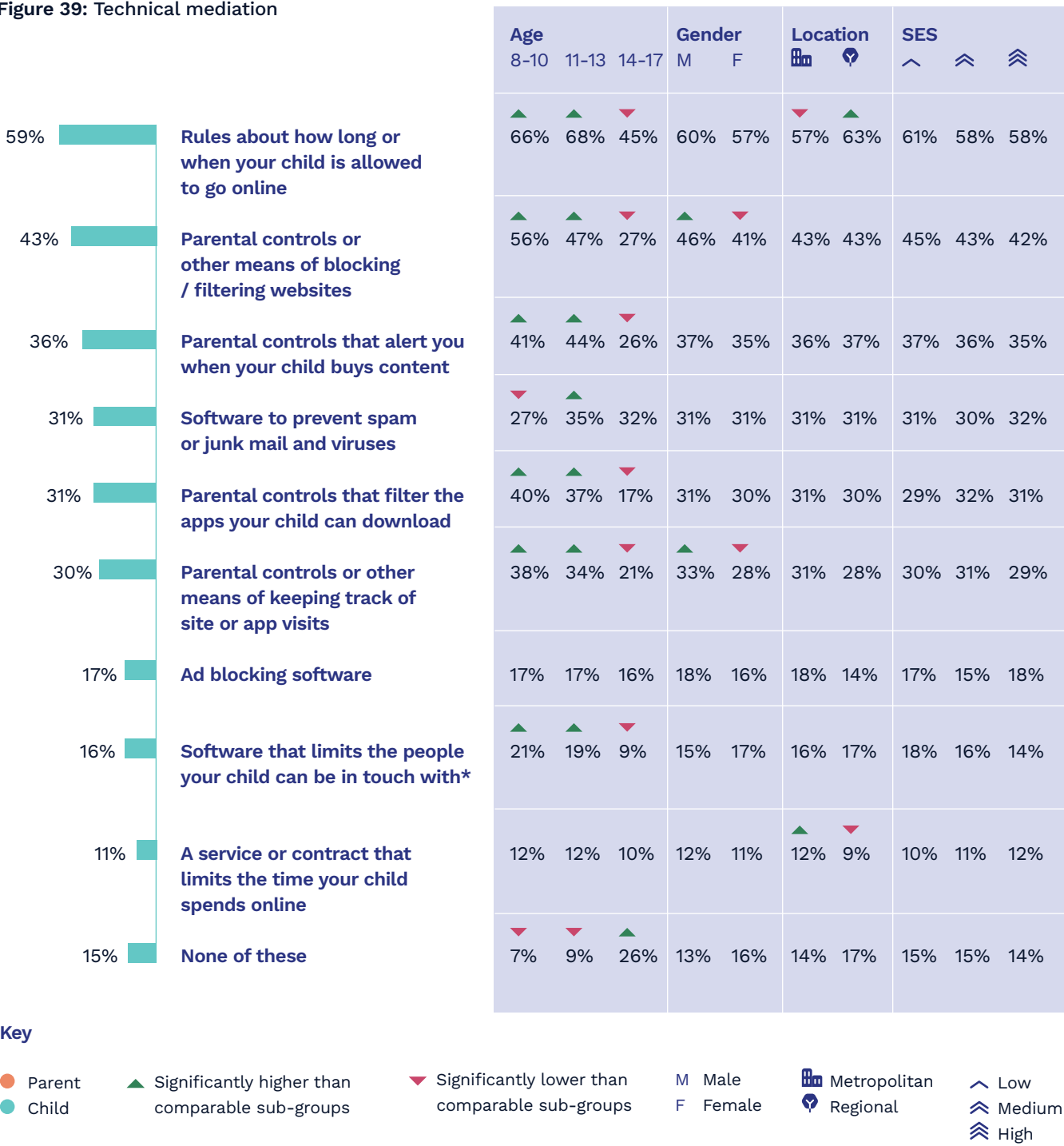
Parents with children aged 14–17 are less likely to apply parental controls that:

- ★ block or filter certain websites (27% compared to 56% with children aged 8–10, 47% with children aged 11–13)
- ★ filter the apps their child can download (17% compared to 40% with children aged 8–10, 37% with children aged 11–13).

Parents from regional areas are more likely to have rules in place about when their child is allowed to go online, and for how long (63% compared to 57% from metropolitan areas), and are less likely to have a service that limits the amount of time their child can spend on the internet (9% compared to 12% from metropolitan areas).

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Figure 39: Technical mediation



Source: S11. Do you use any of the following?
Base: Parent Online sample, unweighted, n=3,590. Note: *through voice calls and messages.

Technical measures are also used by parents to monitor their child's internet use

Around a third (36%) of parents use controls that alert them when their child wants to buy content, or that keep track of the websites their child visits (30%) (Figure 39).

Parents of boys are more likely to have parental controls in place to keep track of the websites their child visits (33% compared to 28% of parents of girls).

Parents with children aged 14–17 are less likely to apply parental controls that:

- ★ alert them when their child wants to make in-app purchases (26% compared to 41% with children aged 8–10, 44% with children aged 11–13)
- ★ keep track of the websites their child visits (21% compared to 38% with children aged 8–10, 34% with children aged 11–13).



In 2016:

Parents surveyed in 2016 were generally less likely to use technical mediation than in 2021. For example, in 2016 they:

- ★ turned off data access on their child's device: **20%**
- ★ used internet filters to block some content: **17%**
- ★ disabled in-app purchases: **16%**
- ★ turned off location function on device(s): **14%**

Parents check their children’s activities online in a variety of ways

Parents also check a range of aspects of their child’s internet activity. The most common thing that is checked is apps downloaded, with almost half (46%) of parents checking this at least weekly (Figure 40). At least four in ten parents do one of the checking activities set out in Figure 40 at least weekly.

Parents of boys are more likely to check their child’s in-app purchases (46% compared to 42% of parents of girls).

Parents from low socioeconomic areas are more likely to be vigilant in checking their child’s online activity. Half (52%) check the apps their child has downloaded weekly or more often (compared to 41% from high socioeconomic areas), which friends they have added (48% compared to 36%) and their messages (48% compared to 36%).

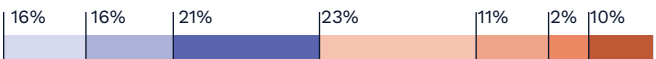


In 2016:

Seven in ten parents surveyed in 2016 (**70%**) have monitored their child’s internet use in some way. In 2021, each of the six monitoring activities listed were undertaken at least once or twice in the last year by the majority of parents surveyed (ranging from **70% to 84%**).

Figure 40: Monitoring online activity. Checked the following in the last year.

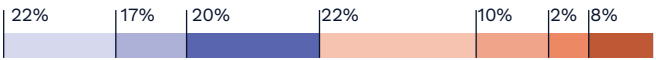
The apps your child has downloaded



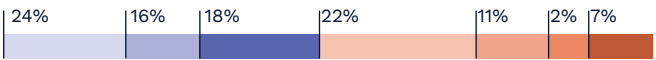
The in-app purchases your child has made



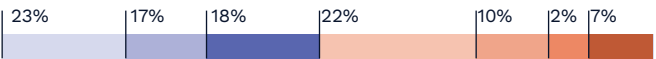
Friends or groups added by your child



Messages in your child’s email or other apps



Your child’s browsing history



Your child’s social media profile



% = Weekly or more often

Overall	Gender		Location		SES		
	M	F	Metropolitan	Regional	Low	Medium	High
46%	48%	46%	46%	48%	52%	46%	41%
44%	46%	42%	43%	45%	47%	43%	40%
42%	42%	42%	41%	43%	48%	41%	36%
42%	43%	41%	41%	44%	48%	41%	36%
41%	41%	41%	41%	41%	46%	41%	35%
39%	37%	41%	39%	37%	43%	39%	34%

Key

- Never

Just once or twice

At least every month

At least every week

Daily or almost daily

Several times each day

Almost all the time
- Significantly higher than comparable sub-groups

Significantly lower than comparable sub-groups
- M Male

F Female

Metropolitan

Regional

Low

Medium

High

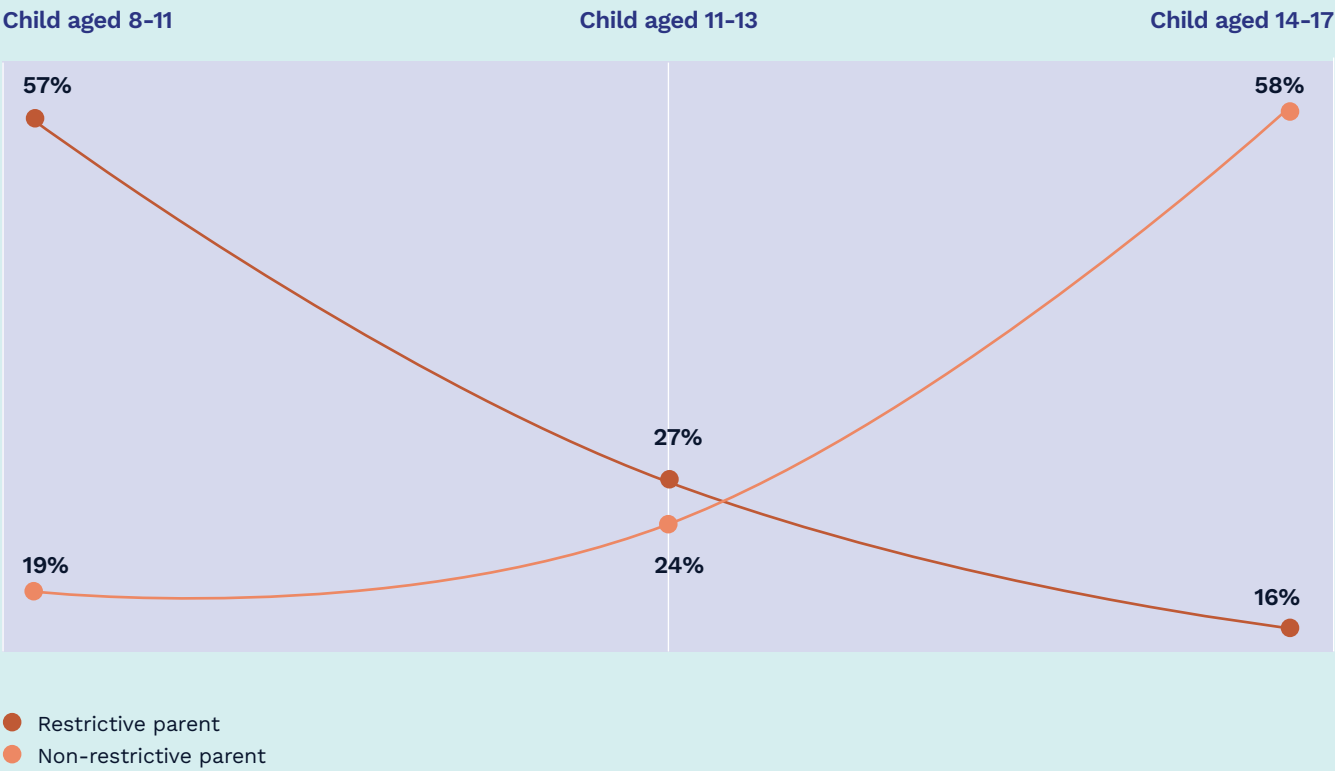
Source: S12. Over the last year, how often have you checked the following?
Base: Parent Online sample, unweighted, n=3,590.

Interactions between parental practices and children's experiences

There is a relationship between a child's age and their parent implementing certain restrictive online measures (e.g. requiring their child to have permission or supervision to use a web or phone camera, listen to music or watch films, visit a social media site and spend time in a virtual world). Parents of younger children are more likely to restrict what their child does and sees online.

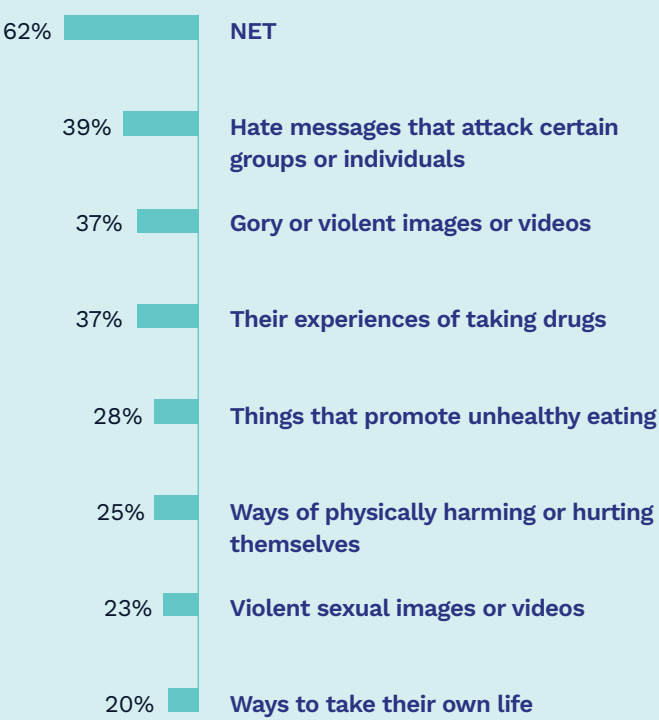
More than half (57%) of parents with a child aged 8–10 implement at least one restrictive online measure (Figure 41). This figure drops to 27% of parents with a child aged 11–13 and to 16% of parents with a child aged 14–17.

Figure 41: Relationship between parents implementing restrictive measures and their child's age



Source: Relationship between a parent implementing restrictive measures and their child's age (S10, A2).
Base: Parent Online sample, unweighted, n=3,590. Restrictive parent, n=1,722; Non-restrictive parent n=1,868.

Figure 42: Child's exposure to harmful content and parent's use of restrictive measures



Parent implements restrictive measures for child's online safety	Parent does NOT implement restrictive measures for child's online safety
54%	64%
32%	41%
28%	39%
27%	40%
22%	30%
17%	27%
14%	26%
14%	21%

Key

▲ Significantly higher than comparable sub-groups

▼ Significantly lower than comparable sub-groups

Source: G4. In the past year, have you seen websites or online discussions where people talk about or show any of these things?
Base: Online sample (aged 14-17), unweighted, n=1,349. Restrictive parent, n=269; Non-restrictive parent n=1080.

Children whose parents use these restrictive measures are less likely to be exposed to harmful content online (54% compared to 64% of children whose parents don't restrict their internet use) (Figure 42). While these restrictive measures are important in shielding children from harmful content, findings suggest that they can also hinder children's ability to use the internet in more meaningful and positive ways (Figure 43).

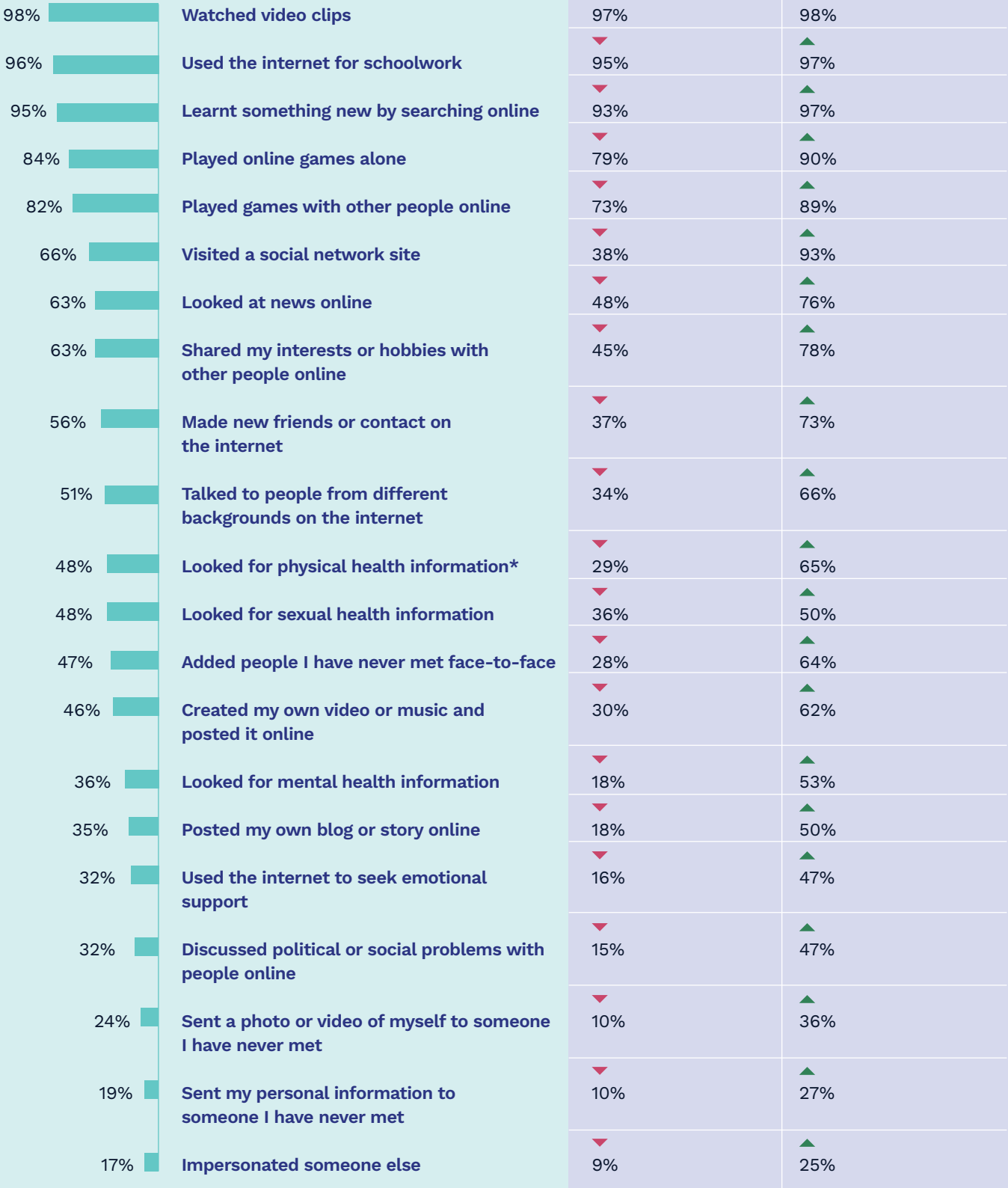
It's clear from Figure 43 that children whose parents place restrictions on their online activities are much less likely to use the internet for schoolwork, to learn, to seek information, and to meet and interact with others. More analysis needs to be done to determine whether these parental restrictions differ depending on their child's age, and how that would subsequently affect the types of online activities that their child participates in. However, these early indications are broadly consistent with international evidence that children who receive restrictive mediation from their parents are much less likely to take part in diverse activities online, including informational and creative activities (Global Kids Online (2019). Global Kids Online: Comparative Report, UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti, p. 42). These findings suggest that it is important for parents to work in partnership with their children to find a balance between restrictive forms of parental mediation that help keep children safe, and supporting their children to use the internet in age-appropriate ways.



In 2016:

A similar relationship between a child's age and restrictive parental mediation was evident. In 2016, parents of young people aged 14–17 were less likely to limit their child's internet use than parents of younger children – only **45%** indicated they implemented any form of restriction compared to **71%** of parents with children aged 13 and younger.

Figure 43: Child's online activity and parent's use of restrictive measures



Key ▲ Significantly higher than comparable sub-groups ▼ Significantly lower than comparable sub-groups

Source: G4. In the past year, have you seen websites or online discussions where people talk about or show any of these things?
Base: Parent Online sample, unweighted, n=3,590. Restrictive parent, n=1,722; Non-restrictive parent, n=1,868.
Note: *Only asked of children aged 14–17. Online sample (aged 14–17), unweighted, n=1,349. Restrictive parent, n=269; Non-restrictive parent n=1,080.



Conclusion

The internet is central to children's lives today, with the vast majority of Australian children and young people aged 8–17 learning, playing, socialising and being entertained online. These forms of digital engagement have increased dramatically over the past five years. However, other activities are less prevalent. The use of online sources of health information is less common among children, although there is evidence that this has grown significantly in the last five years. Fewer children post their own creative content, or engage with civic participation activities online, suggesting there is scope to encourage these forms of digital engagement among Australian young people.

Alongside its benefits, the internet presents a unique set of risks not faced by children in the past. Many children aged 8–17 have had contact with a stranger online or have been treated in a hurtful or nasty way online. The majority of young people aged 14–17 have had exposure online to some form of potentially negative content, as well as to sexual material. One in ten children have been the target of hate speech online. Children experience a range of emotional responses to such negative online encounters, such as sadness, anger and lowered self-esteem. Encouragingly, most children and young people are taking action in response to a negative experience online, suggesting they have gained the digital skills and self-efficacy to cope with these experiences.

These positive and negative aspects of their online lives are reflected in young people's perceptions of the internet. Children of all ages surveyed in 2021 expressed nuanced understandings of the internet, describing it as dangerous, knowledgeable, friendly, fun, aggressive, sneaky, unpredictable. They recognise its power and reach, and its capacity to inform, but they are cautious, with many noting it has the potential to be harmful.

Parents are a key source of support for children in navigating the digital world, with two-thirds of children telling their parents when they experience something negative online. Yet parental awareness remains low in relation to three key areas of children's online lives. First, online contact with strangers is more common than parents are aware. While some of this contact may be benign, some could be more sinister. More could be done to support parents to have conversations with their children about tricky situations with strangers online.

Conclusion

Second, there is a disparity between children telling their parents about hurtful or nasty behaviour they have experienced, and parents indicating their awareness of it. This suggests that parents may be unaware of the emotional and mental health impacts such experiences are having on their child. While children are showing they have the practical skills to cope with others' hurtful or nasty behaviour (e.g. by blocking, unfriending, reporting them, etc.), they may need more support than parents realise to cope with the emotional and mental health impacts. Similarly, there is low awareness by parents of their children bullying others online despite their child telling them they have done so. This needs to be better acknowledged by parents so that they can support their children when they do hurt someone else online.

Third, many parents of young people aged 14–17 aren't aware of their child's exposure to negative content or to sexual material online. This gap in awareness exists despite most parents having conversations with their children about inappropriate content online. These findings show that young people aren't telling their parents about their exposure when it comes to harmful content that concerns stigmatised or sensitive issues. This suggests that more needs to be done to break down these barriers, to encourage more young people to share their concerns with their parents, and to equip parents with the skills to have respectful and supportive conversations with their teenagers about these issues. The data suggests that young people and parents need to be equipped with

better knowledge of the negative effects of exposure to harmful online content. Raising awareness of these issues requires recognition of their inherent stigma and sensitivity, alongside young people's growing sense of independence and desire for autonomy.

The digital world is one of unique risks and opportunities that today's parents didn't encounter as children. Parents are rising to the challenge, by managing and monitoring their children's internet use, as well as by talking to them about online safety. However, there is scope to build on current digital parenting practices. This is particularly important when restrictive digital parenting practices start to be relaxed. As children grow older, there needs to be a balance between imposing restrictive measures that safeguard them from harm and empowering them to use the internet in age-appropriate ways. This research shows that parents need to be more alert to children's experiences of online risk, and also require more tools to better support children if they encounter risk online. In particular, awareness needs to be raised in relation to harmful online content. While significant progress has been made in raising awareness about online bullying and normalising children having conversations about it with parents, there is now an opportunity to do the same for exposure to harmful online content.

