internet
matters.org

Parenting Digital Natives
Concerns and Solutions

January 2018

Introduction

How to parent well in this new 'always on' digital age is one of the defining questions for families. This robust research report looks into what parents of children aged 4-16 think and feel about their childrens' online lives and provides insight into the concerns parents have and what further help they need. Of course, most parents are wise to the fantastic benefits that the internet brings into their homes and pockets. But many, most even, are aware that building digital resilience in their children is now as important as teaching them how to cross a road.

How we do that, in a world where parents have to work to "keep up with the kids" is a real challenge, and I'm delighted that this report demonstrates the impact that Internet Matters is having is real, and current. Parents are looking for a robust, evidenced and independent source of information. When they find internetmatters.org they find just that. Armed with the information and resources they find, parents are better prepared and much more likely to talk to their children about their online life. As our lives become ever more connected – equipping parents to have those conversations has to be a something worth investing our time, talent and money in.

Carolyn Bunting CEO, Internet Matters

Contents

Methodology

All participants completed a screening process to ensure they met the required criteria to take part and were suitable for this research.

- Integrated approach with quantitative element to offer robustness and qualitative methodology to deliver depth and detailed insight

- 20 minute online quantitative survey completed by 2,000 parents of children aged 4-16 years old
  - Nationally representative sample of locations across the UK using an online panel provider

- 1 week online qualitative community completed by 40 parents of children aged 4-16 years old

- Recruited from North, South and Midlands locations across England as well as Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales

TRINITY MᶜQUEEN

Trinity McQueen is a full-service market research and insight consultancy based in London and Leeds. Born out of a brand and communications agency, Trinity McQueen has quickly established a reputation for creative and award winning insight.

Members of The Market Research Society (MRS) and The Association for Qualitative Research, Trinity McQueen are proud to have been recognised constantly by the Market Research Society and marketing industry. Over the last 4 years they have been finalists for a number of MRS awards including Insight Management, Advertising & Media Research and BestNew Agency. Trinity McQueen recently won the 2017 MRS National Award for Best Application of Research for their work with Weetabix.

Meet the parents

This research focuses on parents with children aged 4-16. Parents have varying needs within this broad age group when ensuring their child is safe online. The following section outlines age specific parental needs and concerns in further detail.

"Search engines are unpredictable. The kids were looking on-line for a birthday present for their Nan with me in attendance. They searched for 'Glamourous Grannies', immediately a full page appeared with nude figures!"

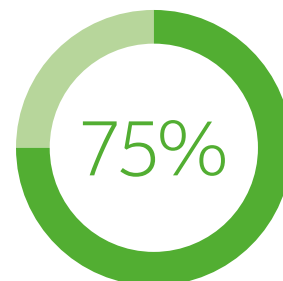## Pre-school (4-5)

Online safety attitudes and behaviour

- Parents do not want their children to spend too much time online. Therefore they have a number of rules in place and are largely in control of online usage. They are able to limit usage to specific times of the day e.g. 1 hour after school or days of the week e.g. weekend only. Parents claim to remove devices from children or ban usage should they rebel against the rules or test the boundaries.

- Parents are relatively confident when deciding which apps and content are safe for their child. Parents particularly trust child specific websites such as YouTube Kids and BBC iPlayer Kids. However, despite this children are still heavily monitored when using devices as parents are concerned they may access content outside these sites.
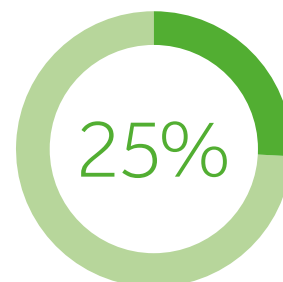
Biggest concerns

Child will unintentionally stumble across inappropriate content without realising they are at risk.
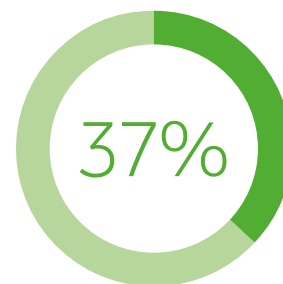
37%

of parents have spoken to their child regarding online safety in the last month

75%

of parents want to learn more about how to keep their child safe and potential issues faced in the future

25%

of parents want specific information about an online safety issue

"My daughter has a YouTube account. She keeps making it public when I've asked her to keep it private. I think she is trying to gain more followers"*

Young children (6-10)
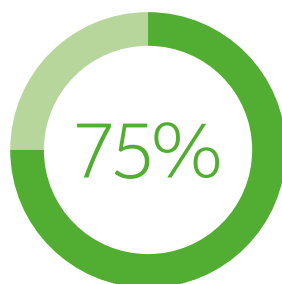
Online safety attitudes and behaviour

- Parents allow their children to have greater autonomy when using devices. However restrictions are in still in place, for example password protection on the Channel 4 app. This is important in situations where children may access content that is deemed to be too mature for them e.g. soap operas.

- Children are not fully trusted therefore tend not to have access to a personal mobile phone nor do parents allow them to have devices in the bedroom. Hence shared devices, such as the family tablet, must be used within communal areas where parents can supervise their usage.
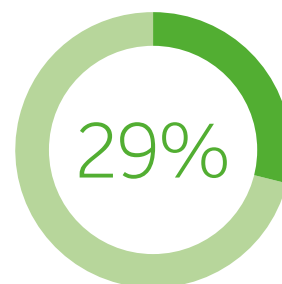
Biggest concerns

As children grow and develop parents want to give them more freedom. However, parents are concerned that their child is still relatively naïve. They can be naturally curious and this can lead to children unintentionally putting themselves in harm's way by seeing inappropriate content or being contacted by people they do not know.
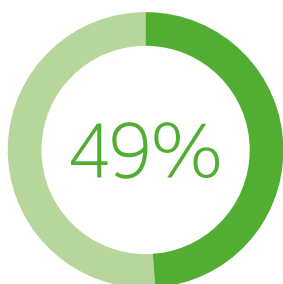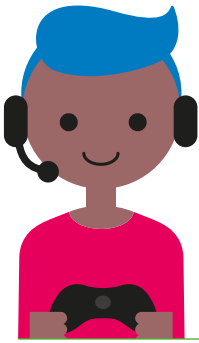
49%
of parents have spoken to their child regarding online safety in the last month

75%
of parents want to learn more about how to keep their child safe and potential issues faced in the future

29%
of parents want specific information about an online safety issue

*The minimum age requirement for YouTube is 13

"My kids are not allowed to keep their phones with them overnight. But as soon as they're up they check Snapchat, Twitter, Instagram and all their social media accounts"*

Pre-teens (11-13)

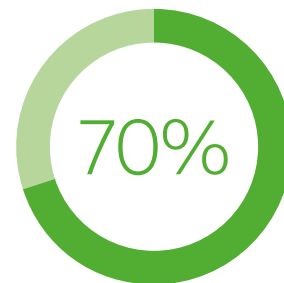*Online safety attitudes and behaviour*

- Parents accept that children are at an age where they will try and break the rules. They feel children are starting to distance themselves and as a result parents feel less in control and less aware of what their child is doing online.

- Children will have started secondary school and having a personal mobile phone is seen as a rite of passage. Parents are less aware of what children are using their mobile phones for outside of the home which makes them nervous.

Biggest concerns

Parents are concerned that children will actively engage in risky and dangerous behaviour such as contacting people they do not know or arranging to meet them offline (despite being warned against this). Parents try and manage the risk within the home e.g. by reminding them not to talk to strangers.
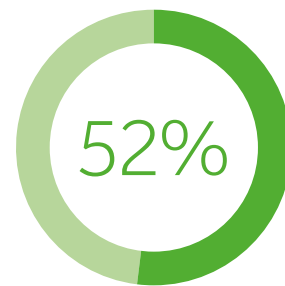
52%

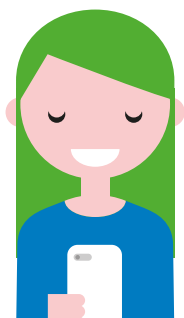of parents have spoken to their child regarding online safety in the last month

70%

of parents want to learn more about how to keep their child safe and potential issues faced in the future

29%
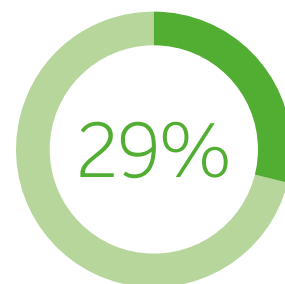
of parents want specific information about an online safety issue

*The minimum age requirement for YouTube, Snapchat and Instagram is 13

"We want to make them aware of what they can do but not frighten them as it is part of growing up"

Teens (14-16)

Online safety attitudes and behaviour

- Parents are finding it increasingly hard to monitor what their children are doing online as they are using multiple devices inside and outside the home. Online activity is therefore largely unsupervised as children are literally left to their own devices.

- The key difference between children of this age and those in the younger age brackets is that these children are regularly using several social media accounts. Parents, however, do not fully understand how to use these accounts or the features associated with them and hence rely on their child to educate them.

Biggest concerns

Parents with children in this age bracket tend to have the least awareness of what their child is engaging with online. Children are the experts in the online world, especially with regards to social media, therefore parents fear they are getting left behind. They are constantly trying to strike a balance between laying down the rules and building trust so that children can make important decisions for themselves as they progress into adulthood. Parents are concerned they will not know their child is in danger and therefore will be unable to help.
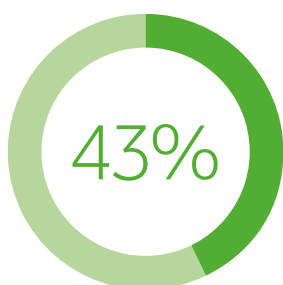
43% of parents have spoken to their child regarding online safety in the last month
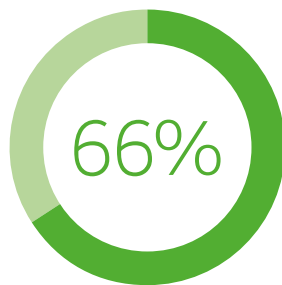
66% of parents want to learn more about how to keep their child safe and potential issues faced in the future
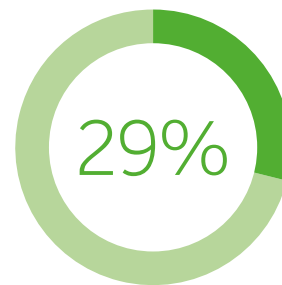
29% of parents want specific information about an online safety issue

Overarching concerns

Keeping up with the kids

Parents are concerned about the typical worries associated with the online world such as;

- **Content** - what are children looking at
- **Contact** - who are they speaking to and
- **Conduct** - how they present themselves and engage with others

"The online landscape is constantly changing and the rules of what you can and can't do online are constantly being challenged"

Parents face a wealth of new challenges. Inspired by their favourite vloggers and online influencers, children from 6-16 are creating their own video content, via social media apps. This is an everyday occurrence, in a constantly changing online landscape.

Therefore parents are navigating the 'new normal' when it comes to what is deemed to be acceptable for this generation. These are situations they have not experienced before and therefore are often unsure of how to react.

Key concerns revealed are;

Talking to strangers online

Contact with strangers who might be much older whilst gaming

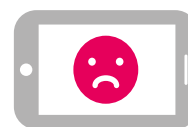*"I heard a much older voice of a man coming through the Xbox and realised it was someone my son was playing against"*

Sharing personal information with strangers

Snapchat location or Facebook/ geo location settings

"Today I found out my granddaughter can track friend's location on Snapchat. Not sure if this is open to all or whether people can find her"

Impact of social media on child's mental wellbeing

Obsessive behaviour and the need to stay connected

"My daughter talks a lot about Snapchat 'Streaks'... which I know nothing about. They apparently have to continue sending each other an image every day without breaking the chain"

Parenting in a social media world

The world of social media can be uncharted territory for those parents who have limited exposure to using such sites or apps. Therefore parents are concerned their children may be faced with dangers that they have no knowledge of. This study revealed that there were 3 specific concerns amongst parents;

"My daughter was using Instagram and Snapchat and admitted, after a while, that she had a second account. She had been chatting with a girl in America...she was going to come to the UK and hoped to meet my daughter. I had to explain to my daughter that we had no evidence that this girl was who she said she was"

Contact with strangers online

Parents have traditionally warned children of 'stranger danger'. However, this concept is not always understood by children in the context of the online world. Younger children find it difficult to grasp why someone would create a fake profile online and in reality may not be who they claim to be. This creates a real concern for parents and therefore they have a need to access more information and resources to help keep their children safe;

- Parents want to understand the best way to explain the dangers to their children, using the appropriate tone and language so that they understand. Parents feel their children often confuse online friends that they have never met in real life with real friends and find it hard to differentiate between the two. This makes it extremely important for parents to ensure that their child understands why they shouldn't accept friendship requests from people they do not know.

- Parents want to understand how they can empower older children to prevent them from putting themselves in such a situation in the first place. The focus for parents therefore is to educate children to make considered decisions for themselves as they develop from teenagers into adulthood.
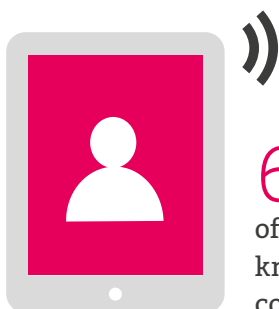
60%
of parents want to know more about contact with strangers

"My worry is that as my son is getting older, his knowledge of tech is more advanced than mine and he can hide stuff he's doing online"

Accessing sexual content online

Over half of parents want to know how to prevent or deal with their child accidentally or deliberately accessing sexual content online. Parental concerns differ based on the age range of their children;

• Parents with younger children (4-10), are concerned that their child will accidentally stumble across inappropriate content. This has, for some parents, prompted them to set up parental controls as a result of the guilt they felt having been faced with unexpected situations. For example, children searching 'glamourous granny' with the aim of finding a suitable birthday gift for their grandmother uncovered explicit nude content. Parents accompanying this search did not anticipate this and were shocked.

• Parents with older children (11-16) are worried as they believe children are deliberately accessing sexual content online, actively putting themselves at risk. Given the increase in the number of devices being used by older children this is becoming harder to moderate. Some parents have explicitly told their child not to search this type of content having 'caught them in the act' in the past. However, parents don't feel children will listen to them or respect these rules. Parents also worry that children are the experts themselves and therefore can easily cover their tracks by deleting their internet history, hence making it even harder for parents to have sight of what they are doing online.

Creating and sharing sexual content

For older children (11-16), parents have an added layer of worry as they are concerned children will create and send sexual content. Parents fear children will be easily convinced to send videos/photos of themselves to others without understanding the consequences and may be easily led by older children or adults. Parents believe that seeing sexual images is to some extent normalised online and parents are concerned that this can convince children to create and post explicit or inappropriate images of themselves.

Impact of content on mental health and wellbeing

Parents are concerned that children look up to particular influencers e.g. YouTuber vloggers. This can create a specific perspective on what is deemed to be attractive. Parents are concerned that this can in turn create a downward spiral, leading to low self-confidence. Parents want information that supports them in helping children differentiate between what is real and what is staged as well as the truth of what happens to images before they are posted e.g. airbrushing, editing and selectively picking the best images. The vlogger culture is mentioned by several parents as they feel their children aspire to having this lifestyle which can lead to unrealistic expectations that are hard to manage.

"We now know it was a dating app my daughter had downloaded and was speaking to a much older guy without us knowing anything about it"
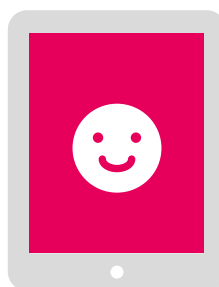
37% of parents are interesting in learning more about health and wellbeing issues

"I had a situation with my daughter when she was 14, she was being bullied by a girl in her year who she had been friends with. This girl didn't speak to her at school but would then send horrible messages to my daughter via text, Snapchat and Facebook messenger"

Online bullying

Online platforms and devices allow bullying to reach further than ever before and parents need advice on how to manage this across devices and platforms. Key concerns amongst parents are;

• Being the last to know. Parents feel they are the last to know about any concerns their children have and so are always reacting to issues, as children are reluctant to share their issues for fear that it will get worse if they tell someone. Parents want to know how they can recognise the signs and encourage children to disclose concerns before the situation escalates.

• Parents are unsure who to turn to for support. They feel social media providers have some level of responsibility and should play an important role in keeping children safe online. However they accept that due to the vast level of activity taking place online it can be difficult to monitor. Parents therefore want to know how to apply relevant settings on social media accounts to avoid this happening in the first place.

• There is a thin line between friendly banter and bullying. Parents are unsure when to intervene and how to approach this in a sensitive manner if they sense their child is being bullied by someone in their friendship group. Similarly, parents want to educate their own child on ensuring they do not cross the line and bully another child with what they think is playful comments.

Ultimately parents feel this is a big task and teachers play a key role in educating children and policing such activities as this often infiltrates the school environment too. In order to tackle these issues successfully 3 things have to happen;

• Open dialogue between parents and children

• Platform and social media providers doing more to protect children

• Parents and children empowered by information from schools

"My nephew sent flirty Snapchat messages to a random name on my son's phone – only it was a dirty message and was sent to my son's school friend. The girl had screenshot the message and sent it round the school. It was a nightmare unfolding second by second.

The shame…"
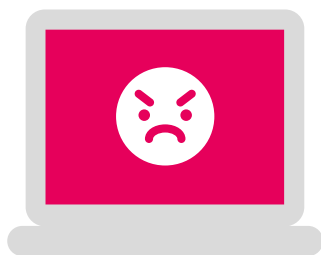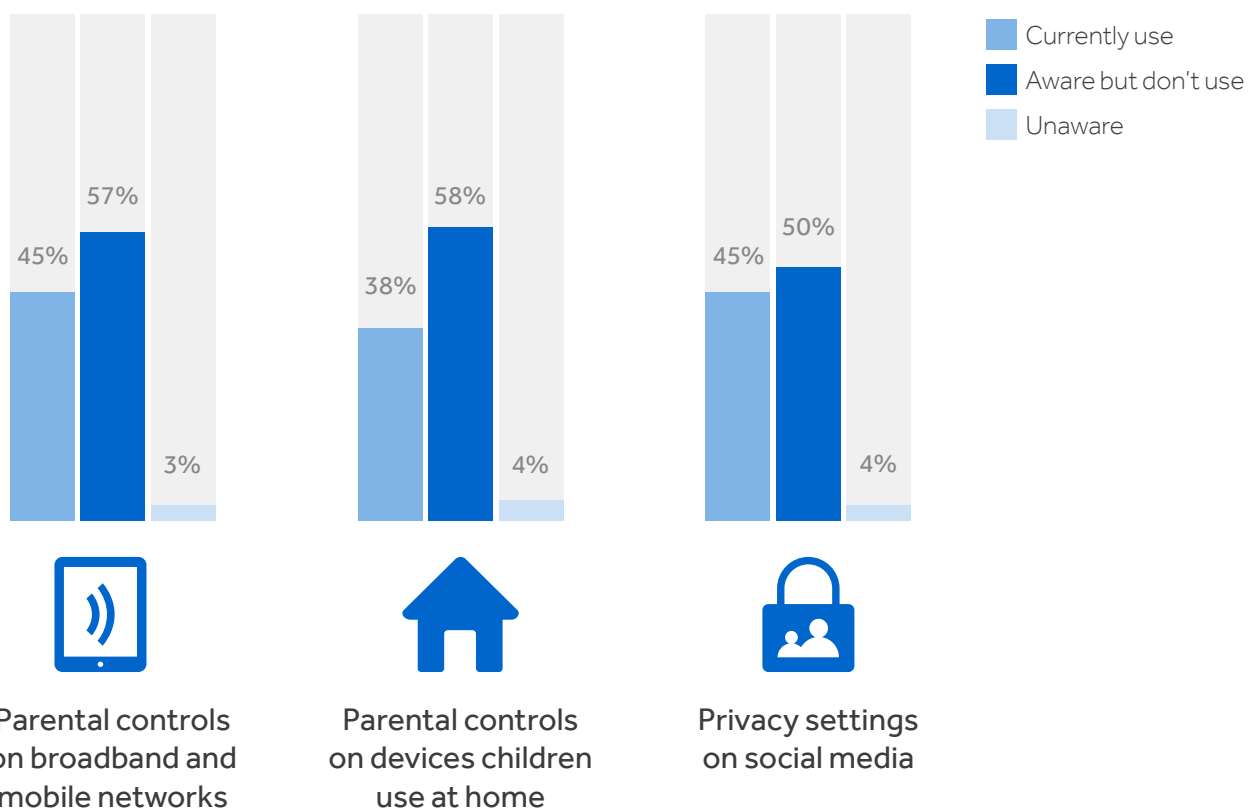
59%
of parents want to know more about online bullying

Parental Controls

Awareness of parental controls is high, but most parents don't apply them for real and perceived reasons

Parental controls: necessity or nuisance?

Expectations of parental controls are both high and sophisticated - and it is the gap between expectations and experiences which lead to many parents not applying them. Parents want a mechanism that facilitates the device, rather than inhibits it.

Awareness and usage of parental controls (%)

Legend:
- Currently use
- Aware but don't use
- Unaware

Parental controls on broadband and mobile networks
- 45%
- 57%
- 3%

Parental controls on devices children use at home
- 38%
- 58%
- 4%

Privacy settings on social media
- 45%
- 50%
- 4%

Based on this we can conclude that it would benefit parents greatly if they understood more about how parental controls and privacy settings are set up and used, in particular;

1. They are simple and easy to set up
2. Offer reassurance and clarity on exactly what their child is protected against
3. Provide sophisticated protection to filter out inappropriate content on devices, networks, apps and websites
4. Understand how different parental controls and privacy settings work together and independently

However, the perceived reality is;

Parental controls do not offer the level of protection parents want

- **Controls don't always work as anticipated.** Despite these being in place content is still accessible and not filtered as expected as innocent searches can produce inappropriate content.

  "My son was searching for football results and came across football hooligans fighting which I didn't expect"

- **Children are <u>deliberately</u> bypassing controls.** Especially amongst older children, who are actively seeking inappropriate content, they are able to find other less regulated means of accessing this.

  "I didn't realise that you can access nudity and sexual content through the apps such as Instagram even when you have device settings on their phone"

- **Controls are not rigorous enough.** Tablet pin is easily guessed or even seen by the child allowing them free reign of the device and apps. Furthermore passwords saved using device cookies removes a barrier for children.

  "Our daughter downloaded £70 worth of games off Amazon...don't know how she bypassed our login and password"

- **Controls only protect children within the home.** Older children (14-16) with a personal smartphone are able to access content using 4G without restrictions. Some parents are aware of the network provider requesting a pin number to access content deemed to be suitable for 18+ audiences however parents are unsure whether this is asked each time.

  "When they are out and about they use 4G data so they are free to access anything"

Parental controls are too restrictive for parents

- **Parental controls are too stringent.** This was for parents with older children (14-16). One mum mentioned that her girls wanted to buy clothes online however because the sites have underwear on them it wouldn't let them access them. This is frustrating for both parents and kids. Kids aren't looking for anything they shouldn't be and its getting in the way of their general browsing and purchasing. Results in parents just removing parental controls altogether.

  "I've had to take the controls off because the girls were buying clothes online and it wouldn't let them access sites with underwear"

- **Inhibits freedom to enjoy watching content.** This was for parents with younger children (4-13) who are able to access and use devices themselves such as the TV/iPad. For example parents have a pin on the Channel 4 app on the tablet but parents want kids to be able to access children's programmes but not older content. They aren't sure how to set this up so that it is possible. So what happens is that all content is restricted and kids keep asking parents to enter pin. Frustration leads to parents removing the pin altogether.

  "The Channel 5 app has a pin but this also blocks viewing of all its children's programmes"

What parents want

Based on everything we have addressed within this report we can conclude that parents welcome more information on keeping their children safe online. There are four top areas to address;

Parents want to understand what parental controls do and how to use them

Currently parents do not fully understand how to apply safety settings and what this protects children against. Rapidly developing technology and multiple platforms, each with specific settings of their own, makes this even harder for parents to navigate.

Language and tone to adopt when speaking to own children

Speaking to the child in a way that they will take parental concerns seriously instead of dismissing them. Also advice on how to approach these potentially sensitive subjects in the appropriate way for a child of a specific age.

A clear destination for online safety information

Parents want a single source of information that they can refer to in order to educate themselves as well as accessing for more specific live concerns. Internet Matters provides just that resource.

Greater support from schools to reinforce the message

Teachers are key influences for children of this age group therefore training teachers to address online safety well can only be a good thing.
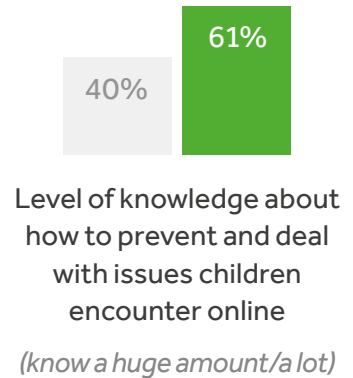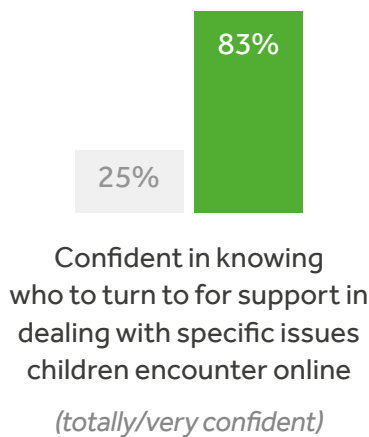
Parents have told us what they want and need – and Internet Matters exists to provide parents with the knowledge and confidence they need to talk to their children about their digital lives. Finding Internet Matters makes a demonstrable difference to how parents think, talk and what they do.

Positive impact of Internet Matters website

■ Opinion before visiting
the Internet Matters website

■ Opinion after exploring the
Internet Matters website

83%

20%

Confident in finding
information you need to
protect children online

(totally/very confident)

83%

25%

Confident in knowing
who to turn to for support in
dealing with specific issues
children encounter online

(totally/very confident)

61%

40%

Level of knowledge about
how to prevent and deal
with issues children
encounter online

(know a huge amount/a lot)

Visiting the Internet Matters website has a strong positive impact upon parents in 3 specific areas; Think, Talk, Do

1 *More likely to __think__ about online safety issues
regarding their children*

Visiting Internet Matters has a strong positive impact upon parents'
intention to spend more time thinking about online safety issues

84%
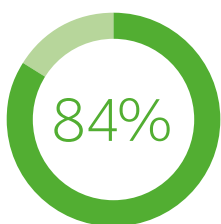
feel better
prepared to
handle issues that
might come up in
the future

79%
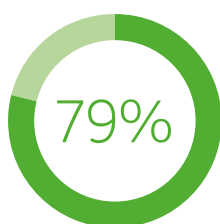
learnt something
new from Internet
Matters that will
help keep children
safe online

76%
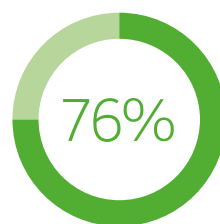
feel they are much
more likely or more
likely to spend more
time learning about
online safety

*"I feel more
confident of where
to go to find help
in the future now
that I know about
Internet Matters.
I have already
recommended the
site to friends and
have saved it as
a shortcut in my
desktop favourites"*
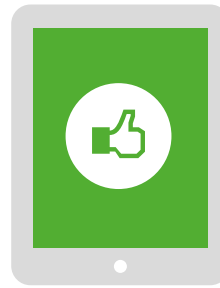
88%
of parents felt they would definitely or probably recommend Internet Matters website having reviewed the content

2

More likely to <u>talk</u> about online safety issues with others

Visiting Internet Matters has a strong positive impact upon parents' intention to spend more time talking about online safety issues

72%
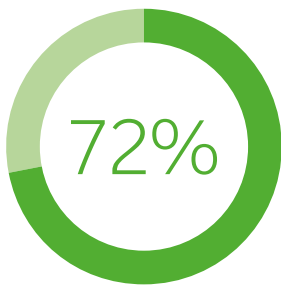
are much more or more likely to talk to their partner/other parents about online safety to explain what they have learnt and the resource available

77%
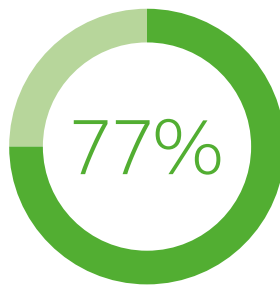
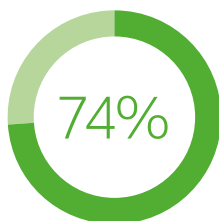are much more or more likely to talk to their child about keeping safe online

" I'm going to take a different approach and talk more to my child and try and explain by use of the websites I've seen how you can get into a dodgy situation by not meaning to and how to avoid these situations"

3
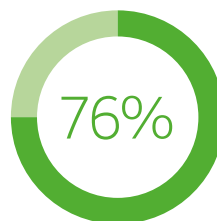
More likely to <u>do</u> something differently

Visiting the Internet Matters has a strong positive impact upon parents' intention to take specific action

70%
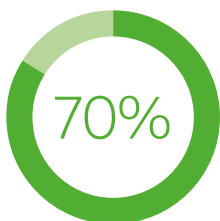
are much more or more likely to set up parental controls on devices and broadband networks their children use

74%

are much more or more likely to check their children's privacy settings on social media

76%

are much more or more likely to be aware of what children are doing online

"Whilst I did have some safety measures in place I have never really discussed internet safety with my children. This I will now change. I have also checked the settings in their phones and iPads"

internet
matters.org