

The Cybersurvey

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IN THEIR OWN WORDS

The Digital Lives of Schoolchildren

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theCybersurvey

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Foreword

Listening to the experiences and views of young people about their online lives is mission critical for anyone that is engaging with children and young people. Therefore, Internet Matters was delighted to partner with Youthworks and the University of Kingston on the 2019 Cybersurvey, as nearly 15,000 schoolchildren participated. The survey is online and anonymous and completed in school time. The opinions expressed, the views shared, the examples given are real, unvarnished and sometimes raw. We owe it to these children to listen to what they have to say and address their concerns with them and together make the internet a safer and happier place for them to be.

Some themes emerge throughout this report that should give parents, educators and professionals working with children pause for thought. Firstly, that for many children and young people, the internet is a positive force in their lives. It's how they manage friendships, how they communicate and how they learn. This survey was in field before COVID hit the UK and so although the report cannot speak to the changes lockdown has brought, it does demonstrate the importance of connectivity for children. The report shows us what children are doing online and at what age, which can be used to inform when we talk to our children and our students about their digital lives. We have to talk to them earlier than we think we should.

As ever, there are several areas that should concern us – principally the challenges of harmful content – both for boys wanting to 'bulk up' and girls wanting picture perfect bodies, or even worse anorexic or harmed bodies. This report also shines a light on the racist and homophobic content far too many of our children either see or experience. The normalisation of aggressive language and the impact of our ever more visual society combine to make online a challenging place to be.

Not all children have to deal with those challenges and risks in the same way. This report reaffirms our belief that children experiencing offline vulnerabilities see, experience, encounter and are impacted by the worst of life online. Much more work is needed in this area – including continuing to listen to vulnerable children, equipping those that support them with the tools, resources and confidence to engage meaningfully in their digital lives. We owe it to those children, to get this right.

We hope you find this report insightful and useful. Our thanks to Adrienne Katz at Youthworks and Aiman El Asam from Kingston University for creating such an interesting and thought-provoking report.

About The Cybersurvey

The annual Cybersurvey by Youthworks explores the rapidly changing lives of young people in the digital environment, tracking trends, benefits and emerging concerns. Data is collected from 11-16-year olds in schools, colleges and alternative provision every autumn. A small number of 17-year olds took part this year. A youth participation model helps shape the questionnaire and schools are encouraged to debate the results with young people. Local authorities and children's services use the data to target their efforts and evaluate their services.

14,944 young people took part in the survey during 2019. Of these, 6,045 respondents aged 13 and over answered questions on relationships, meetups and

sexting. This large sample provides unique insights for services and policy makers where the focus is on early prevention and support – and for those concerned with younger teens becoming caught up in digital relationship problems. The focus on vulnerable groups will be valuable to planners and services.

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www.thecybersurvey.co.uk

Methodology and safeguarding

The survey questionnaire and associated procedures received a favourable ethical opinion from Kingston University. Schools are invited to take part and provided with instructions which include safeguarding arrangements and unique codes. Responses are anonymous.

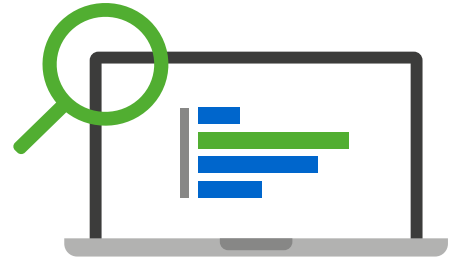
School level data is not shared publicly. Young people are given information about the anonymous survey and its purpose in advance. They understand that taking part is entirely voluntary, that their answers will help others and that while we would like all questions to be answered, they can opt out if they wish. They are told how they can find out about the results and thanked. Helplines are provided at the end of the survey.

Declaration:

This dissemination report commissioned by Internet Matters, forms part of a research programme/project in which the authors (Adrienne Katz and Dr. Aiman El Asam) are working in partnership with Internet Matters. The project titled “*Vulnerability, Online Lives and Mental Health: Towards a New Practice Model*” has financial support from the e-Nurture Network and UK Research and Innovation (Research Council Grant Ref: ES/S004467/1).

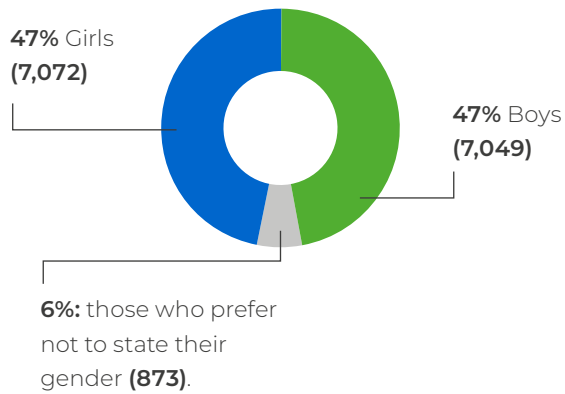


The sample



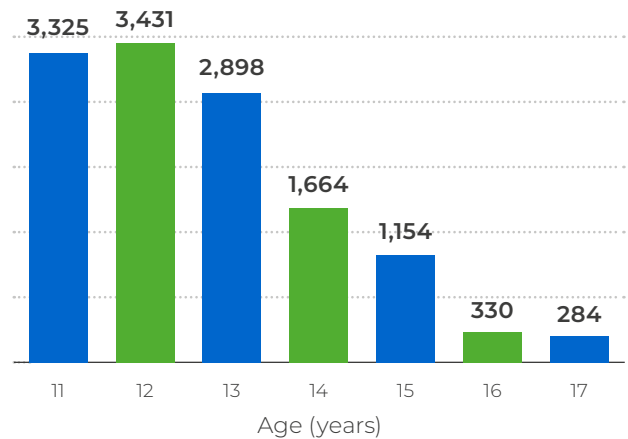
Gender

Total responses used was 14,994.



Age groups

82 schools took part. Not every respondent gave their age.



Regions

16,092 responses were received.
After cleaning 14,994 were used.

- South East, Essex and London - **3,189**
- East of England - **5,503**
- Midlands - **2,645**
- North East, Yorkshire and Humber and Scotland - **1,690**
- North West and Northern Ireland - **1,583**
- South West - **1,482**

6,045 young people aged 13 and over were asked the questions on sexting, relationships and meetups.

All age groups were asked all other questions.

Limitations

This is a snapshot in time. It depends on self-reporting and while it captures entire classes or year groups, it can miss those not in any form of education. The Cybersurvey has been run since 2008 providing an evolving picture of life online for teens. In common with all earlier samples of The Cybersurvey, there are more respondents aged 11-13 than 13-16 and over, due to the year groups school choose to include. A further limitation is that sample omits those not in education.



Vulnerability in the total sample			Among ages 13 and over who answer additional questions	
I have a long-term physical illness	2%	372	3%	173
Care experienced	2%	358	2%	137
I have an eating disorder	3%	385	3%	195
Hearing loss	3%	400	3%	170
I'm a carer for a family member	4%	598	4%	242
I have a learning difficulty	4%	535	7%	421
I'm autistic	4%	646	6%	321
I have a mental health difficulty	8%	1,207	11%	717
Vision impaired	8%	1,146	8%	533
I worry about life at home	10%	1,463	9%	582
English is not my first language	11%	1,676	11%	716
I have anger issues	12%	1,790	13%	797
I have speech difficulties	10%	533	4%	250
None of these apply to me	59%	9,008	57%	3,623

Diverse voices and abilities

This sample includes many young people who have a range of offline vulnerabilities. Typically, they report that several are present concurrently. Anger issues and worries about life at home dominate the personal vulnerabilities this year. These are new questions added in 2019 to reflect young people's concerns. English not being a first language for so many reminds us of the need to deliver resources and advice in languages that all parents and young people can easily access.

Other reports in this series will be available on www.thecybersurvey.co.uk and on the research page on www.internetmatters.org

Major Themes in 2019

Each year The Cybersurvey draws out key themes from what young people tell us about their online lives. This by no means suggests that other issues should be ignored when educating young people about online safety, whether at home or in schools. What it does suggest is that these themes are coming to the fore and sometimes a new behaviour or technology shift begins to emerge - a 'one to watch' - which may prove to be vitally important subsequently.

It has increasingly become clear over the past few years that harmful content is a more widely prevalent negative experience than cyberbullying, which for so long held the imagination of parents, young people, media and educators. The themes outlined here are explored in more detail within this report. Responses should be considered according to the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Each young person should have protection, provision and participation rights without discrimination and all actions should be in their best interests.

This survey ran before COVID-19. It will be a useful benchmark to compare with future Cybersurveys, especially with regard to young people's mental health wellbeing measures, which we will report on separately. So, what did we learn?

1. Content risk is more commonly experienced than contact risk:

- Pro-suicide content is being widely encountered - it is the most frequently seen and very harmful content type, mentioned by one in four of our young people.
- Pro-anorexia content, which we have flagged in several earlier Cybersurvey reports, is joined this year by content encouraging teens to 'bulk up your body'. This is widely seen, mostly by boys. (While fitness is positive, bulking up may be harmful if, to achieve this, a young person is encouraged to buy substances which may not be as labelled).

- Content about self-harm is seen 'often' by already vulnerable teens, especially those with an eating disorder (23%) or speech difficulties (29%), whereas only 9% of young people without vulnerabilities have 'ever' seen it and only 2% have 'often' done so.

2. Parents could talk more to their children about online life in general, rather than only when giving advice:

- Young people were asked whether their parents talk to them about their online lives. Too few show an interest in their child's online life or discuss the digital world generally.
- Some try and limit time spent online but few check the age suitability of games, films, or TV content viewed by their child.
- Parental controls are used erratically.
- General engagement in their teen's online life does help to protect young people.
- Young people do not have the same concerns as adults - they are not 'overloaded with information' as many adults fear and report many positive outcomes from their online experiences.
- A majority of young people believe 'I can manage my online life' and almost 3/4 say 'My parents/carers trust me' to do so.
- Teens are not very likely to report problems, as too many get bad outcomes if they do.
- Half of the young people sometimes believe their parents do not understand enough about online life.

'There's videos of men killing animals and beating them to death.'

Girl, 12

'(I worry about) getting bullied and told to commit suicide.'

Girl, 11

3. The gap widens between vulnerable and non-vulnerable teens:

- Offline vulnerabilities, present before teens go online, are likely to be amplified or exacerbated in the digital environment.
- Those with an eating disorder report extremely worrying online experiences across several different categories of risk.
- Those with hearing loss are once more a cause for concern, as noted in earlier years and they need support to be safe in their online lives.
- Those with speech difficulties emerge as troubling.
- Those with gender issues should be considered vulnerable.
- Online experiences are often influenced by whether or not a young person is vulnerable offline. It represents a digital divide by new measures.
- Multiple offline vulnerabilities can be present concurrently in an individual – our research programme demonstrates that having multiple offline vulnerabilities will increase a young person's likelihood of encountering online risk.

4. Cyberbullying remains stable at 22% of the total sample (this year the survey asked about severity and frequency):

- 39% of those who were cyberbullied rate it as only 'unpleasant' (the least of three options on severity; the worst being 'really awful': 17%, and in the middle: 31% said it was 'nasty').
- But experience of cyberbullying is extremely high for vulnerable groups, in particular those with an eating disorder and those who prefer not to state their gender.

- When young people do tell someone about what they are going through with cyberbullying, almost a third (32%) get a bad outcome.

5. Meetups are commonplace, 18% have done so and many are benign:

- Most of the young people who met up with someone they only knew online, took careful precautions; they met someone who was about their age and did not travel far. 86% arranged to meet up in a public place. They mostly said nothing went wrong, 14% were worried about something that happened at the meet up.
- Already vulnerable teens are more likely to have high-risk meetups with people who were 'not about the same age as me', to travel far for this meetup and to say: 'something that happened at the meetup worried me'.

6. Sexting, desire, coercion and relationship norms:

- The most common reason given for sharing explicit images is 'I was in a relationship and I wanted to'.
- Over 1/3 of boys expected sexting within relationships. New Relationships and Sex Education should address this expectation alongside issues of consent.
- Online identity formation motivates many to try it out – some share for 'fun' or 'because I thought I looked hot' or because 'I wanted to see the reaction I'd get'.
- Pressure or blackmail – some are at greater risk: 18% of girls, 16% of boys and 30% of those who prefer not to state their gender, gave this reason for sharing the image.

'Fake group chats with sexual content.'

Girl, 12

'Random hot pics of hot girls, ads just pop out of nowhere, I don't wanna see that because I'm underage.'

Prefers not to state gender, 15

7. Online aggression is racist, homophobic, often gendered, and hate speech is common:

- More than one in five of those with learning difficulties has often seen comments or messages containing violence, hatred or racist views. Those with speech difficulties are even more likely to come across these.
- Content supporting religious extremist views or terror acts has been seen by 10% of non-vulnerable young people, sadly vulnerable teenagers are reporting far higher rates: 27% of those in care; 31% of those with speech difficulties and 34% with an eating disorder have seen this type of content. They appear to be targeted.

8. Spending quite a bit of money in games:

- Of those who have done this, 76% are boys. Gamers are in a world of player friends. Frequent spenders feel they fit in with others and have no friendships concerns. However there is an inconsistency as they say they cannot talk to friends about personal worries.
- Spending a lot of money in games is widespread. More than half of those with no vulnerabilities say they 'often' spend quite a bit of money in games, while those who are vulnerable may spend because they are tricked, persuaded to do it or did not intend to.

9. Too few of our teenagers are actively following the online safety advice they were taught:

- While 11-year olds are the most likely age group to say they follow the advice, by the age of 15, when risks are high, only 46% say they always follow the advice.
- Young people make suggestions in the report about what they think should be taught.

10. The positive aspects of online life are enjoyed by all young people but appear much more important to already vulnerable teens than to their peers:

- Despite their online problems and greater exposure to risks, they value the internet in a different way and perhaps are more dependent on it. They stand to gain so much from their online access that their safety is all the more important.

11. The influence of vloggers with a particular age group

- The rising popularity of vloggers is illustrated among the 11-13- year olds.

'Webcams of people harming themselves really badly which resulted in death. I found this site by accident and still regret it even though it's been 3 years.'

Girl, 13

'Some websites show extreme diet plans which are not safe.'

Prefer not to state gender, 13

What has changed over the years? 2015-2019

The Cybersurvey asks certain core questions regularly, while adding new ones or exploring specific issues in some years.

While the samples are different, by exploring the core questions for years 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2019 among

similar age groups, it is evident that harmful content is more dominant than cyberbullying, which is the issue often most worrying to parents and on which there is a strong focus in schools. The risks described below are ones that show change over time:



4% → 14%

Being blackmailed to send more images after sexting



6% → 12%

Sharing private or intimate images widely without consent as a form of revenge after a relationship has ended



11% → 13%

Had seen content about self-harm.



4% → 13%

Have experienced racist bullying or aggression personally online



4% → 15%

Have personally experienced homophobic bullying or aggression online

I worry about:

'Adults trying to befriend and hurt me.'

Girl, 12

'Someone trying to get my personal information so they can kidnap me.'

Girl, 11

'If my webcam on my phone gets hacked.'

Girl, 12



Reporting cyberbullying

- Young people are now 1/3 less likely to tell anyone they have been cyberbullied than in 2015.

Sexting and approaches from unknown people

- The percentage of teens involved in sexting has remained remarkably stable since 2015, but the consequences have worsened.
- Being blackmailed to send more images after sexting has more than trebled since 2015 from 4% to 14%.
- Sharing private or intimate images widely without consent as a form of revenge after a relationship has ended, has doubled, from 6% to 12%.
- Experience of fake solicitation has increased from 7% to 11%.

Harmful content

- The percentage of young people who come across pro-anorexia content has decreased slightly from 29% in 2015 to 23% in 2019, but remains high.
- Young people are increasingly exposed to harmful content talking about suicide or self-harm. In 2019, a quarter of teen respondents had seen content talking about suicide and 13% had seen content about self-harm. In 2015, 11% had seen content encouraging self-harm or suicide. (Note the format of the question in 2015 differed slightly.)

Online safety advice or education

- The percentage of those who say they have been taught to stay safe online is very slightly higher in 2019, but there is little change in the percentage of teens who follow what they have been taught. This remains at a little over half, at 58% (it was 57% in 2015 and fell to 53% in 2016, 58% in 2017 where it remains in 2019). This suggests that online safety education has not been regularly followed by over 40% of teens in this age range 11-16 years, and this rate is not improving.

Hatred or aggression

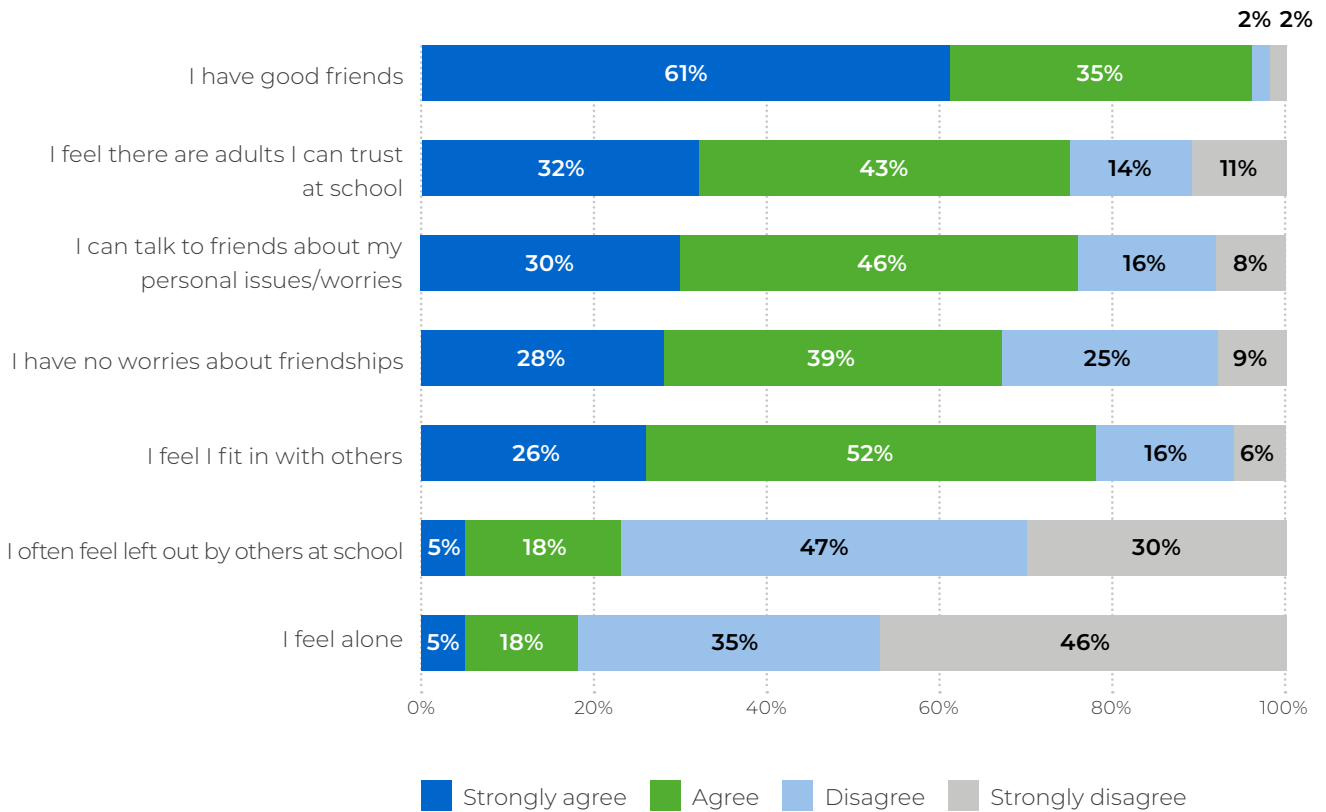
- Despite many campaigns and calls for change, there is no decrease in the percentage of teenagers who have come across websites that promote violence, hatred, or racist views. 18% reported this in 2015, 20% in 2016 and 19% in 2017. In The Cybersurvey 2019, more than one in five (21%) teenagers said they had come across websites with this type of content.
- The percentage who have experienced racist bullying or aggression personally online in 2019 is higher than in 2015; 13% compared to 4%.
- The percentage who have personally experienced homophobic bullying or aggression online in 2019 is almost four times as high as in 2015; 15% compared to 4%.
- The percentage of those who have experienced threats to harm them or their family via the internet, have increased slightly each year from 9% in 2015 to 13% in 2019.

Friendship and emotions



Friendship and Support in Schools

Stability – feeling secure and having trusted friends and adults to turn to – creates a vital and healthy foundation for young people. We began the survey exploring emotional health and belonging.



Friendships

Young people feel they have good friends; 96% 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that this is the case. Over three quarters: 78% feel they fit in with others and 67% have no worries about friendships. Nevertheless, 23% agree or strongly agree that they often feel left out at school and 18% feel alone, rising to 21% of those who prefer not to state their gender.

Who can you turn to for support?

All respondents	Agree or strongly agree	Disagree or strongly disagree
I can talk to friends about my personal issues or worries	76%	24%
There are adults I can trust at school	75%	25%

“Sometimes I feel left out because my friends have like Instagram and things like that and they talk about it at school and I can’t, so I sometimes feel left out.”

Gender – friends and trust in adults

When analysed by gender, all questions show statistically significant differences between gender groups. Those who prefer not to state their gender are least likely to feel well supported. Their trust in adults at school drops from 50% at age 11, to only 19% by age 15.

Fitting in or feeling left out:

- Girls are most likely to agree or strongly agree that they often feel left out by others at school; 27% vs 18% of boys.
- Girls are also more likely to strongly agree that ‘I can talk to friends about personal issues or worries’; 34% vs 25% of boys.
- Boys are more likely to strongly agree that ‘I feel I fit in with others’; 31% vs 23% of girls and boys also strongly agree ‘I have no worries about friendships’; 34% vs 22% of girls.

- Those who prefer not to state their gender are twice as likely as boys or girls to strongly agree that they feel left out.
- Not having the current technology devices or apps can also make young people feel left out.

Those who prefer not to state their gender are less likely to agree that they have good friends, or that there are adults at school they trust. They often feel left out by others at school or feel alone.

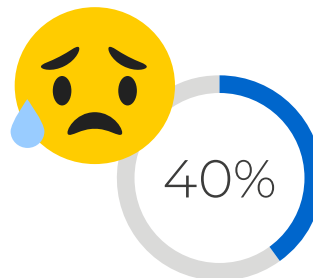
More boys than girls strongly agree that they are able to trust adults at school; 35% vs 30% and only 25% of young people who prefer not to state their gender strongly agree there is an adult they trust.

More than one in five girls say they feel alone and as many as 40% disagree with the statement ‘I have no worries about friendships’ compared to 26% of boys.

One quarter of girls disagree that there are adults they can trust at school, but this rises to as many as 43% of young people who prefer not to state their gender.



More than one in five girls feel ‘alone’



Of girls disagree with the statement: I have no worries about friendships

Emotions



Supporting young people requires an approach that recognises the role played by emotional health in the minefield of their online encounters. Emotions can affect their choices and motivations for actions. Emotional state can influence how they respond when confronted by cruelty or aggression and when it seems someone is offering love.

Teenage angst continues, as shown by these responses to how teenagers feel most of the time.

Thinking about how they feel most of the time:

- **24%** find it hard to make decisions and **19%** say 'people notice that I'm not OK'.
- **27%** feel tired for no reason and **20%** keep wanting to eat, **11%** feel 'it's too much effort to do anything'.
- **26%** say 'I can't sit still'.
- **15%** hardly ever/never feel 'able to concentrate'.
- **20%** don't sleep well.
- **16%** hardly ever or never felt positive about things, while **7%** hardly ever or never 'felt happy'.
- However more than half of teenagers (**52%**) were feeling happy 'most of the time' and **41%** felt this way 'sometimes'.

Gender, age and emotions

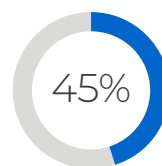
During data collection, young people were highly concerned about climate change and the impacts of hardship on their families. Children's services and mental health services reported they were struggling to cope with demand. Families were under stress. The number of referrals by schools in England seeking mental health treatment for pupils had risen by more than a third in the three years to May 2018 (NSPCC) and in 2019, 90% of GPs saw a further rise in the number of young people seeking help with their mental health (Young Minds). The feelings described by young people in this survey are about how they feel

in general and the survey results do not claim that this is caused by their online lives. It is well documented that through the adolescent years children gradually feel less positive and depression increases.

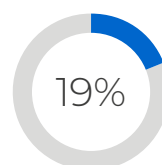
Against this backdrop of anxiety and worry however, it is necessary to consider mental and emotional life when thinking about how to help a young person who is being targeted, exposed to harmful content, taking risks or coming to harm online. Some look to their online lives as an 'escape from their issues' yet this combination of offline adversity and need can make them more susceptible to risk and harm when online, as other users take advantage of or try to manipulate them. Research has shown how some may become 'suitable targets' for cyberhate. (Wachs *et al* 2020 "DNT LET 'EM H8 U!")

Escaping the offline world

The online world can offer a refuge from the worry: More than 1/3 of all teenagers 'feel I am like other people when I'm on a screen' and a quarter say that most of the time, 'my online life helps me escape my issues', a further 35% say this is sometimes the case. However, emotion can override safety advice or contribute to people being less safe online which is why it should always be considered when trying to help a young person stay safe online.



of 11-year olds feel positive 'most of the time' – by age 16 only 29% do so.

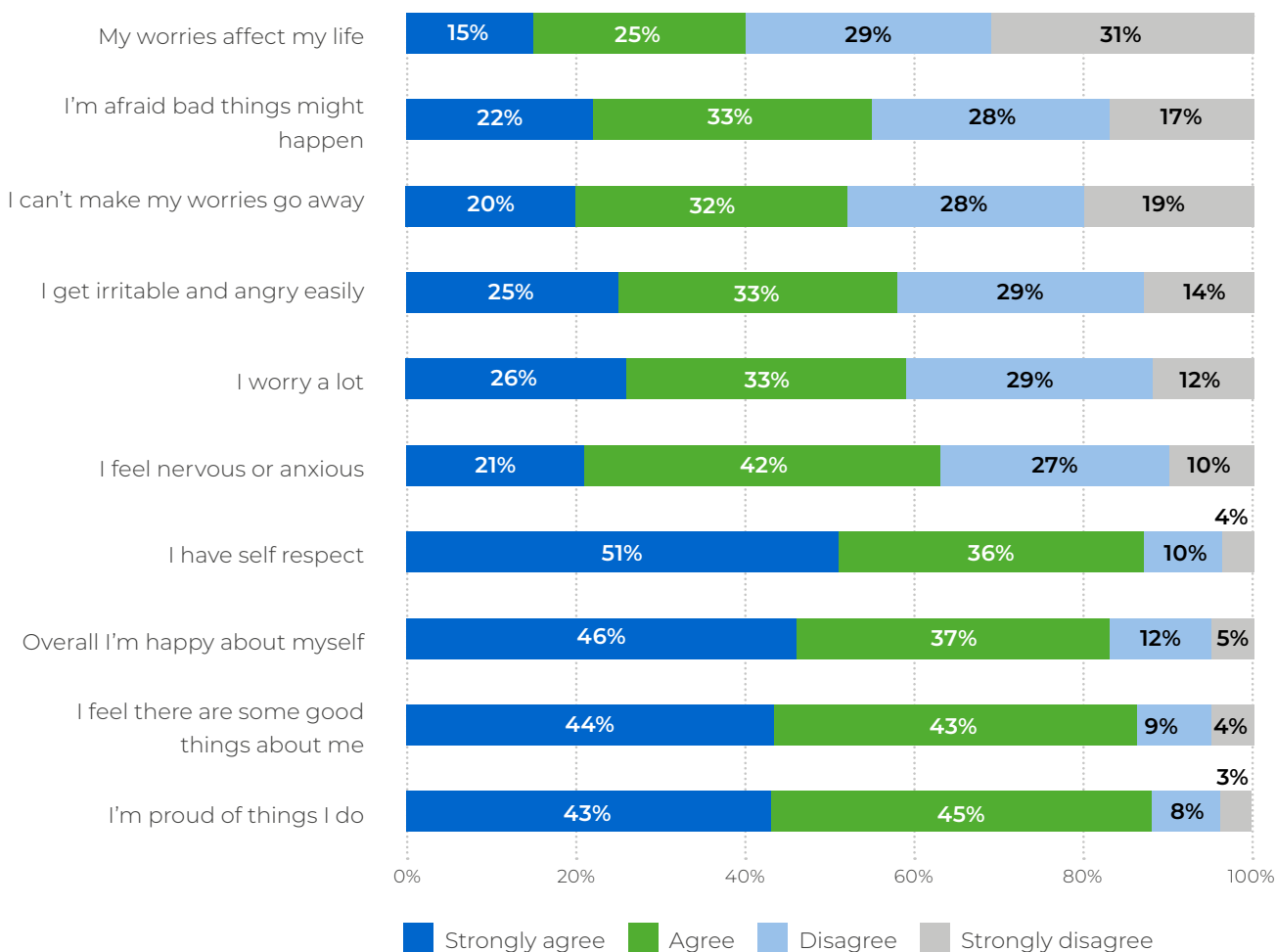


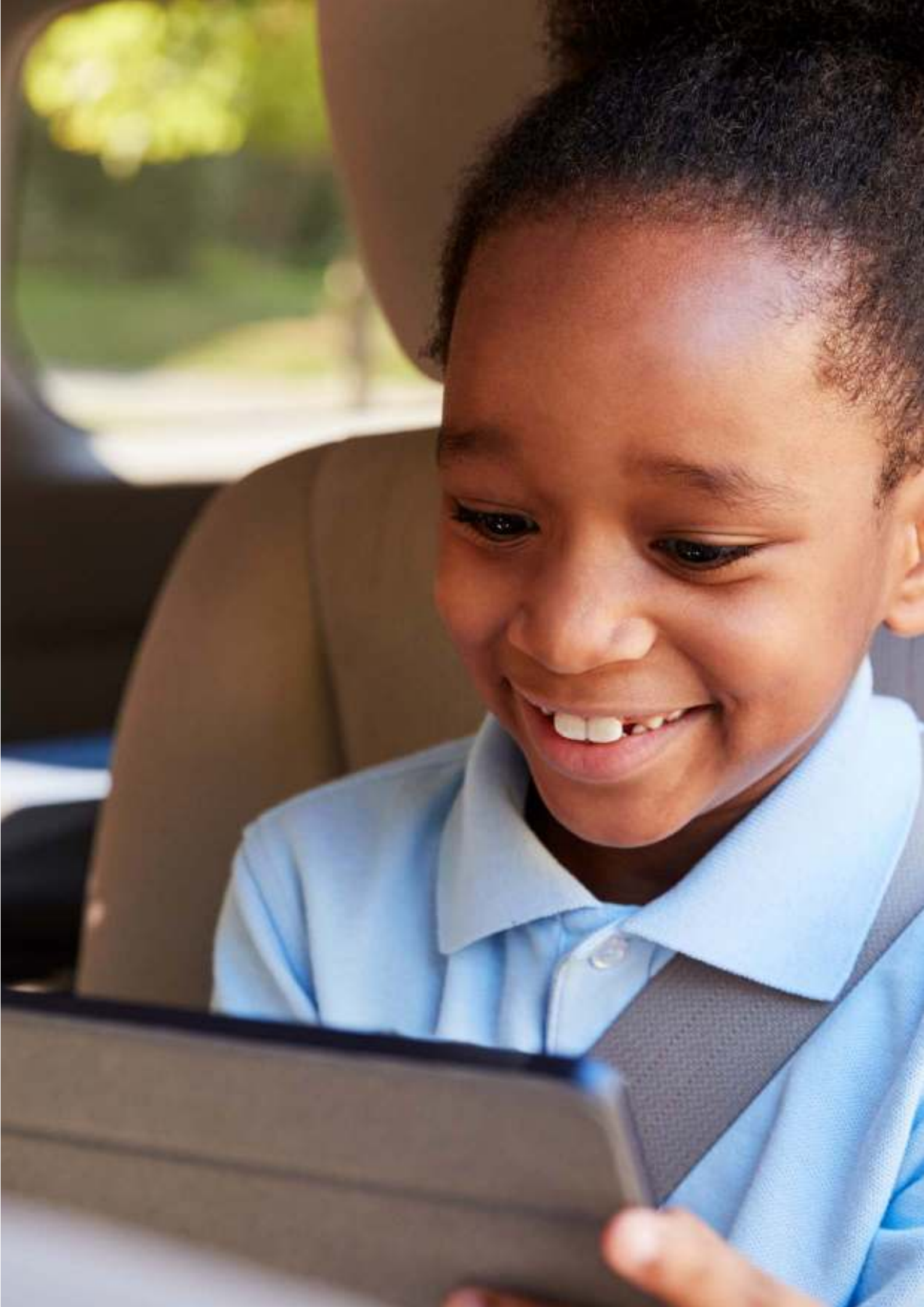
of 16-year olds say 'My worries affect my life.'

We asked children: How do you feel about yourself?

Most of the time young people feel positive, happy about themselves and proud of the things they do. Over half (51%) say they have self-respect most of the time, with a further 36% saying they sometimes do. However, what the above chart illustrates is that there are clearly some people who do not feel happy about themselves (17%) and there a considerable number who feel nervous or anxious most or some of the time (63%).

Nearly six in ten (58%) say they get irritable or angry easily, this represents 25% who say this happens most of the time and 33% who say it happens some of the time. Over half, (52%) say 'I can't make my worries go away' – of these, 20% feel like this most of the time. As many as 22% feel 'bad things might happen' most of the time with a further 33% who feel this way some of the time. In the final statement, 40% of young people say 'my worries affect my life'. Of these, 15% feel this way most of the time and to 25% some of the time.

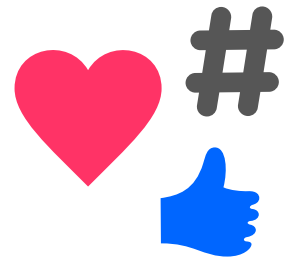




What do children do and how does it make them feel?



What children go online to do



Entertainment in the form of listening to music or watching videos, streaming films or TV content are the most popular online activities in the top five picks young people selected.

Chatting with friends is a close third. These choices are fairly universal however, as we see below, there are differences when it comes to the choices made by girls and boys and favourites change with age. There were very few differences in regions across the country. It is interesting to note that watching favourite vloggers has overtaken watching sport this year.

The top five in order of popularity:

1. Listening to music - **73%**
2. Watching videos, films or streaming TV - **72%**
3. Chat to friends on social media - **70%**
4. Gaming - **61%**
5. Watching favourite vloggers - **30%**

Trends	2015	2016	2017	2019
I go online for gaming	68%	69%	80%	61%
I go online to visit chat rooms	15%	16%	8%	7%
To watch videos/livestreams/tv	78%	78%	83%	72%
To chat to my friends	70%	81%	77%	70%

'I watch TikToks.'

'I like Xbox.'

'Netflix.'

'I look for things to do like crafting.'

Boy, 13

'Callum's Corner.'

Boy, 15

'Pornhub.'

Boy, 11

'I write stories/gacha.'

Girl, 13

'I like cute cat videos.'

Girl, 13

'The Dolan twins.'

Girl, 13

'YouTube.'

Boy, 12

'On Snapchat.'

Girl, 12

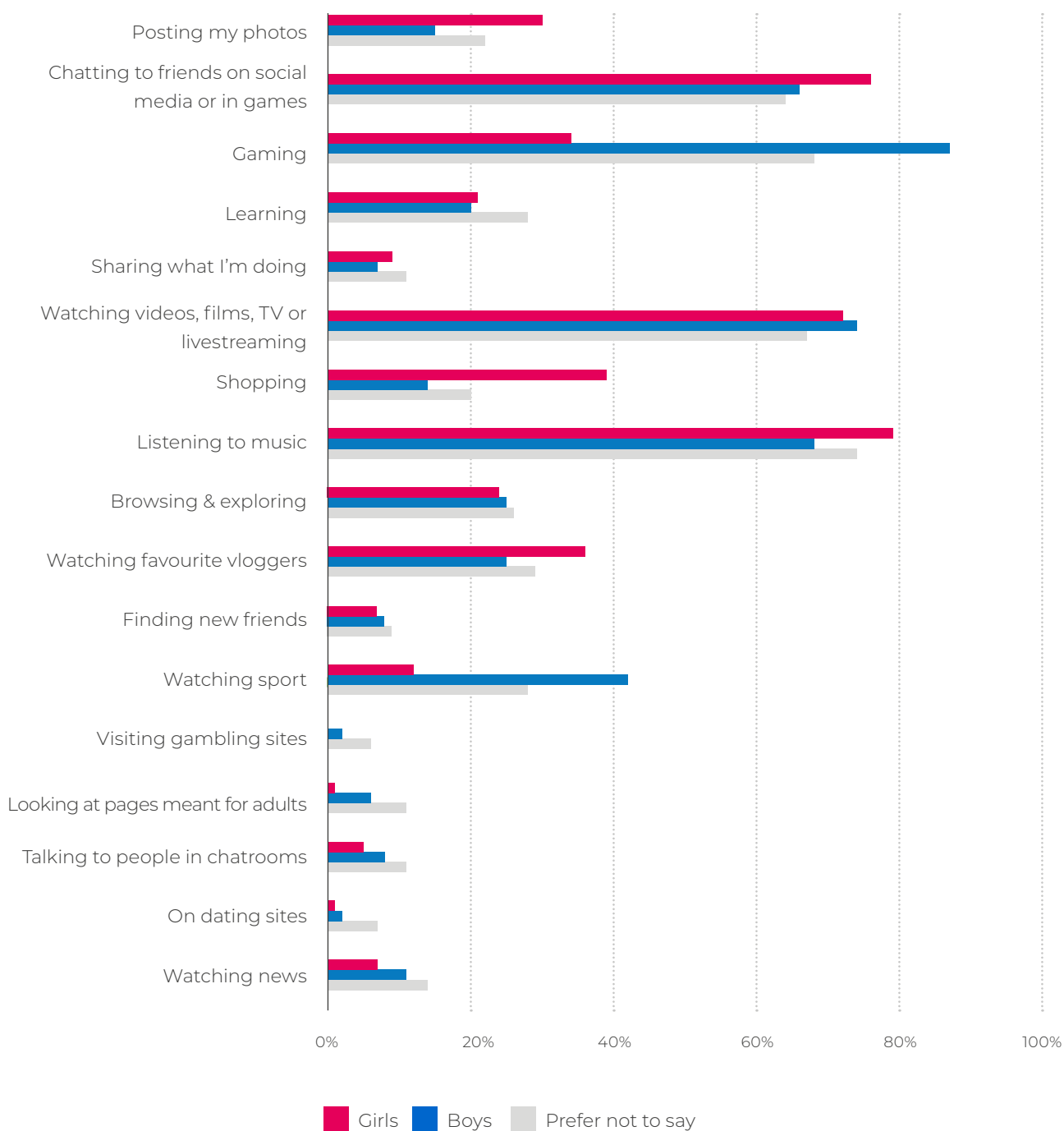
Gender

Almost 3/4 of teens watch videos, films or TV online. Other activities reveal gender differences. There are more than twice as many boys as girls who chose gaming as one of the five things they go online to do most: 87% of boys and 34% of girls. Girls on the other hand are more likely than boys to have selected chatting with friends on social media or in games; three quarters of girls chose chat compared to two thirds of boys. Girls enjoy posting photos – boys are half as likely as girls to have chosen this as one of their top five. More girls than boys chose listening to music: 79% of girls and 68% of boys. Girls are also more likely to be keen on vloggers than boys: 36% of girls to 25% of boys. Of those who prefer not to state their gender, 20% like shopping, 74% listen to music, and 14% watch news. They are also more likely to visit chatrooms, look at pages meant for adults and visit gambling or dating sites.

'Literally nothing - scrolling through Instagram wasting time or snapchat or you tube.'

Boy, 15

Online Life: 5 things you do most – by gender



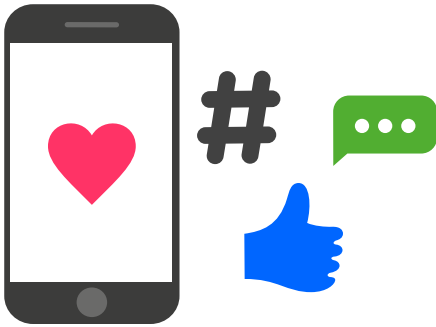


What is popular at different ages?

We wanted to explore the peak ages for online activities to better understand what sort of conversations parents and professional could be having at what age. With nearly a quarter of 11-year olds posting pictures, the time to talk about online profiles and digital tattoos is becoming ever earlier. Moreover, this gives us an indication of what is normal for the young people who participated in the survey.

What do you go online to do?

	11yrs	12yrs	13yrs	14yrs	15yrs	16yrs	17yrs
Posting my photos	23%	24%	23%	21%	21%	24%	32%
Chatting to friends on social media or in games	62%	70%	75%	76%	79%	81%	74%
Gaming	65%	63%	59%	59%	54%	54%	58%
Learning	26%	19%	17%	16%	24%	30%	26%
Sharing what I'm doing	8%	8%	8%	8%	9%	12%	19%
Watching videos, films, TV or livestreaming	69%	73%	75%	79%	75%	77%	66%
Shopping	18%	24%	30%	33%	33%	37%	41%
Listening to music	68%	74%	74%	78%	78%	80%	75%
Browsing & exploring	20%	23%	26%	30%	31%	33%	42%
Watching favourite vloggers	39%	35%	26%	21%	20%	17%	27%
Finding new friends	9%	7%	7%	8%	8%	10%	18%
Watching sport	26%	27%	27%	26%	25%	31%	32%
Visiting gambling sites	1%	1%	1%	2%	3%	4%	16%
Looking at pages meant for adults	2%	2%	4%	8%	8%	16%	23%
Talking to people in chatrooms	7%	7%	7%	8%	7%	7%	19%
On dating sites	1%	1%	1%	2%	2%	4%	18%
Watching news	9%	8%	9%	9%	10%	10%	18%



Many parents may not realise the extent of what eleven-year olds are doing online, or how much of young people's online activity is passive consumption rather than learning or creating. These responses can help parents plan when to open the conversation with their child about where they go and what they enjoy online. Parents might introduce their child to online spaces they have not yet found, where a hobby or interest could be enjoyed. Sites about everything from music to cricket to anime are enjoyed by children. Many creative apps provide new ways to draw or to make short films about the environment. Everything is at their fingertips and enjoying positive activities can be shared with children, helping to build that dialogue and partnership between adult and child.

Online activities such as 'posting my photos' remain at the same level of popularity from age 11 to 16, whereas watching favourite vloggers decreases over time. Almost one in five 11-year olds are shopping online and this grows steadily throughout the teen years. The percentage who chose 'sharing what I am doing'

as one of their top five activities, remains virtually unchanged between age 11 and age 15. This may be why the vulnerable young people who over share are easily noticed by others.

Gaming reduces slightly in popularity after the age of 12, while listening to music and browsing and exploring increase. Watching sport is in the 'top five things I do most' for over a quarter in every age group, rising to almost a third at 16-17-years old. High risk activities - such as visiting gambling sites - doubles and quadruples from a low incidence so that by age 17 we see that 16% of our young people mention it in their top 5. There are many young people with SEND in this age group and they may need help to be online safely, as they talk to people in chatrooms and look at pages meant for adults to a greater extent than their sixteen year old counterparts.

Watching films, TV or livestreaming is one of the most popular pastimes for every age group, particularly for 14-year olds who are branching out, browsing and exploring, and being increasingly adventurous or taking risks.

'Watch anime.'

Boy, 15

'Watch tech reviews, teardowns, durability tests et cetera.'

Boy, 15

'Revision apps.'

Girl, 15

'Watching dance solos for ideas.'

Girl, 13



Children and their Smartphones

Phones and Feelings

18% feel they are 'addicted' to their phone. 19% often get irritated or anxious without it and 31% say 'my phone often makes me feel confident'.

45% never feel 'addicted' to their phone and 48% never feel irritated or anxious without it.

Boys are most likely to say 'my phone often makes me feel confident', and least likely to say that without it they feel irritated or anxious or 'addicted' to it.

'I feel confident about myself because people can't see me through the screen.'

- Boy, 11

'It helps me learn new things.'

- Girl, 11

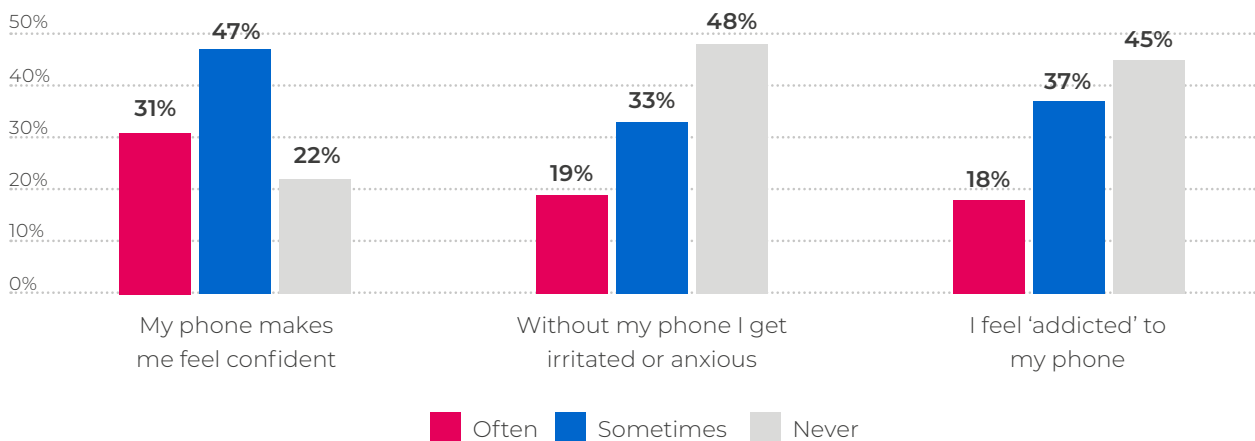
'I feel anxious about losing friends if I'm not on it.'

- Girl, 12

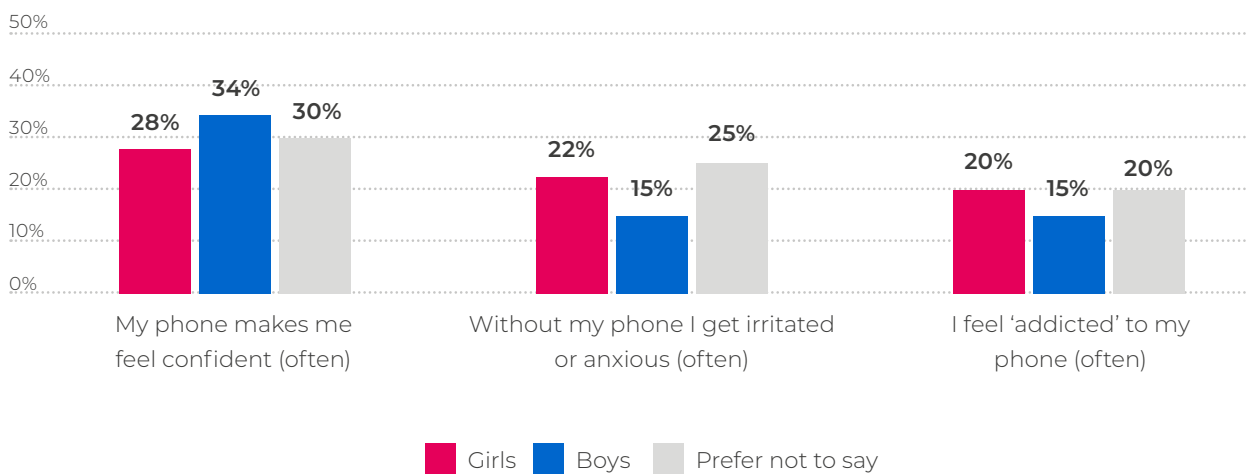
Smartphones bring confidence to many, while others feel they 'fit in' because they have one. A majority feel safer with a phone because they can call home, and others are deeply attached to their phone.

Girls 'often' feel irritated or anxious without their phone. It is precisely this emotional attachment that means the impact of device denial as a form of parental sanction is so hard to bear for many teenagers. This is especially true for care experienced teenagers, for whom life without a phone is simply another way they are identified as 'different'.

You and your smartphone



You and your smartphone – by gender



'I feel confident and free and feel like I can do whatever I can do.'

Boy, 11

'(On my phone) I feel as if I can make myself more likeable.'

Girl, 12



Phones, feelings and vulnerabilities

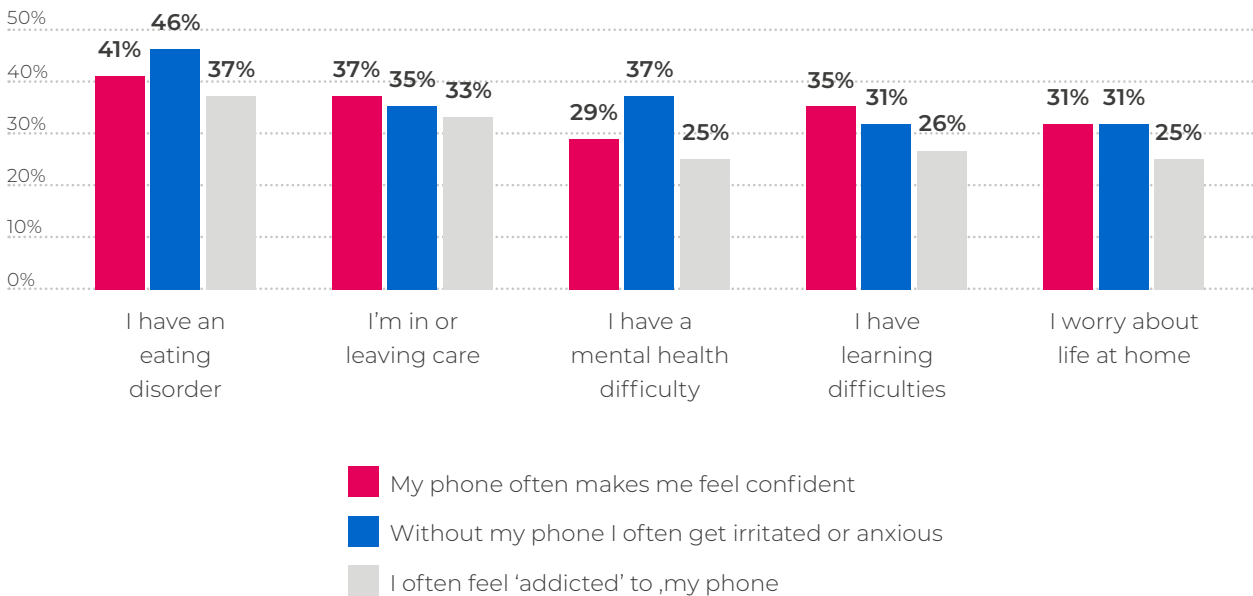
While 18% of all our sample say they often feel ‘addicted’ to their phones, the vulnerable groups are more likely to feel this way. Those with:

- An eating disorder **37%**
- Care experience **33%**
- A mental health difficulty **25%**
- Learning difficulties **26%**
- Worry about life at home **25%**

Almost 1 in 5 of our sample say they often get irritated or anxious without their phone, vulnerable groups are more likely to do so:

- Eating disorder **46%**
- Care experienced **35%**
- Mental health difficulty **37%**
- Learning difficulties **31%**
- I worry about life at home **31%**

You and your smartphone – by vulnerable groups



'I feel way more comfortable behind my screen. I would have a bit more confidence in my speech and it just makes me happy getting to know my friends online and offline.'

Boy, 12

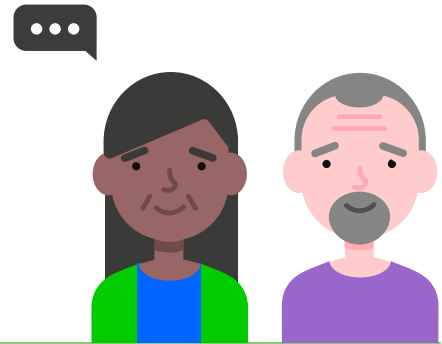
'I'm not allowed out of the house on my own or with friends, so that's the only way I can talk to my friends apart from school.'

Boy, 13

Learning about life online



Advice from parents about online life



Trust, but little advice

Almost 3/4 of our young people say parents or carers 'trust me to manage my online life', and almost 2/3 feel they could turn to their parents or carers if they had a problem online. Over half have other family members they can turn to. Yet despite this trust between them, parents are not likely to simply talk to their young people regularly about online life as distinct from giving advice. Half have set up some parental controls but only 26% of these are set up 'most of the time'. Parents are not consistent about limits on time online or checking whether games or films or TV content are suitable for their 11-16-year olds. 43% 'hardly ever' or never check that games are rated as suitable for their child's age.

How young people handle e-safety advice from parents

- **54%** mostly follow advice from parents.
- **35%** sometimes do.
- **10%** hardly ever or never do.
- **50%** think 'sometimes or most of the time parents don't understand enough about online issues'.
- **64%** say they and their parents are learning to stay safe online together.
- **80%** say 'I can manage my own online safety most of the time'.
- **48%** help people with online problem.

Gender and parental advice

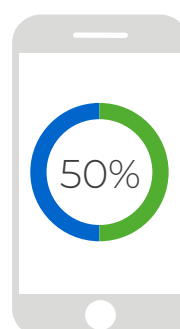
Parents are least likely to talk to their sons about online life. Only 16% of boys say their parents do so most of the time, compared to 22% of girls. Those who prefer not to state their gender are least able to turn to parents if they have a problem online. 21% said they 'hardly ever or never' do so - in contrast to only 12% of girls and 14% of boys – and 30% would not turn to other family members for support.

Gender - a reason for less safety advice?

Girls are most likely to follow advice from parents or carers; 59% say they do so 'most of the time'. By contrast, those who prefer not to state their gender are twice as likely to say they 'hardly ever or never' follow it: 16% compared to only 8% of girls. This could be because 27% of them say that 'my online life has sometimes caused difficulties with my family and friends'. They are twice as likely as either boys or girls to say this occurs 'often'. These difficulties could close off dialogue between parent and teen.

About 2/3, 67% of girls and 64% of boys say of their parents: 'we are learning to stay safe online together'. However, this drops to 55% among those who prefer not to state their gender, underlining the extent to which they appear isolated from parental advice and support regarding online life. These children also report lower confidence about managing their online safety themselves, being three times more likely than girls or boys to say they can 'hardly ever or never' do so: 12% in contrast to 4% of girls and boys.

There is no reason why gender should impact on the support and advice any child receives and if anything, these young people who are either questioning their gender or prefer not to state it, should be offered greater online safety support because of their weaker friendship groups and problems talking about online life with their parents. Despite their difficulties, 1 in 5 of them help other people with their online problems.



think 'parents sometimes don't understand enough about online issues.'

Online safety education

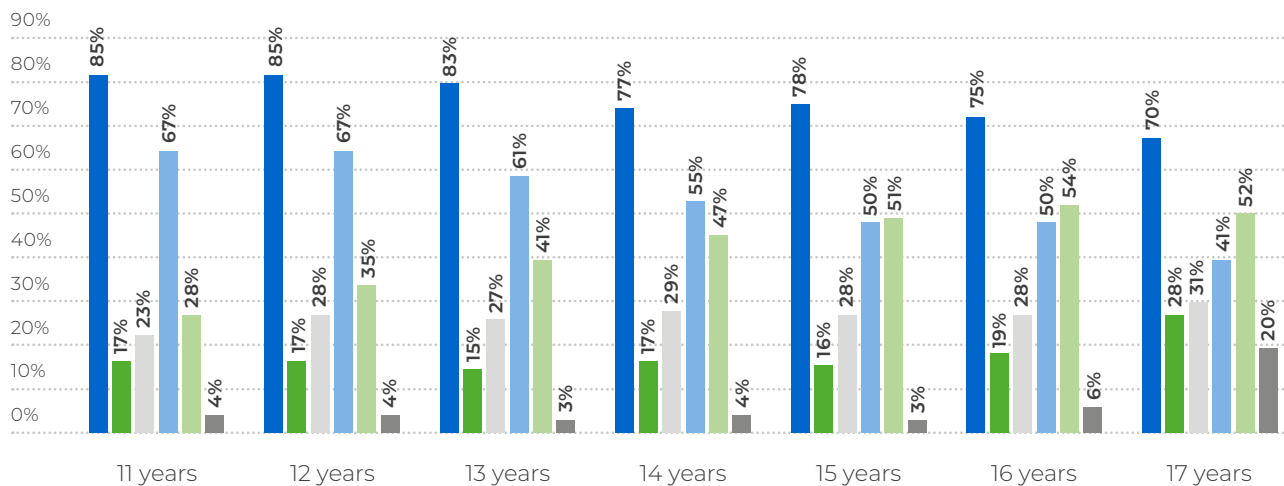
Young people were asked if they had been taught how to stay safe online and who taught them.

Looking at their answers by age, clear patterns emerge. There is a dip in those saying they learned at school around the age of 14 when teens encounter a remarkable array of online challenges, in particular within relationships and branching out online in new directions. Parents' input dwindles steadily after age 12. Teenagers' increasing independence can be seen

as they 'work it out for myself', learn from a website or from friends, although it cannot be known if this is good advice or not.

It would help increase their autonomy and their ability to help one another if they were regularly given updated lists of safe reliable online sources of help. Schools and parents should adapt the advice to be age appropriate, discussing issues of interest or concern to teenagers.

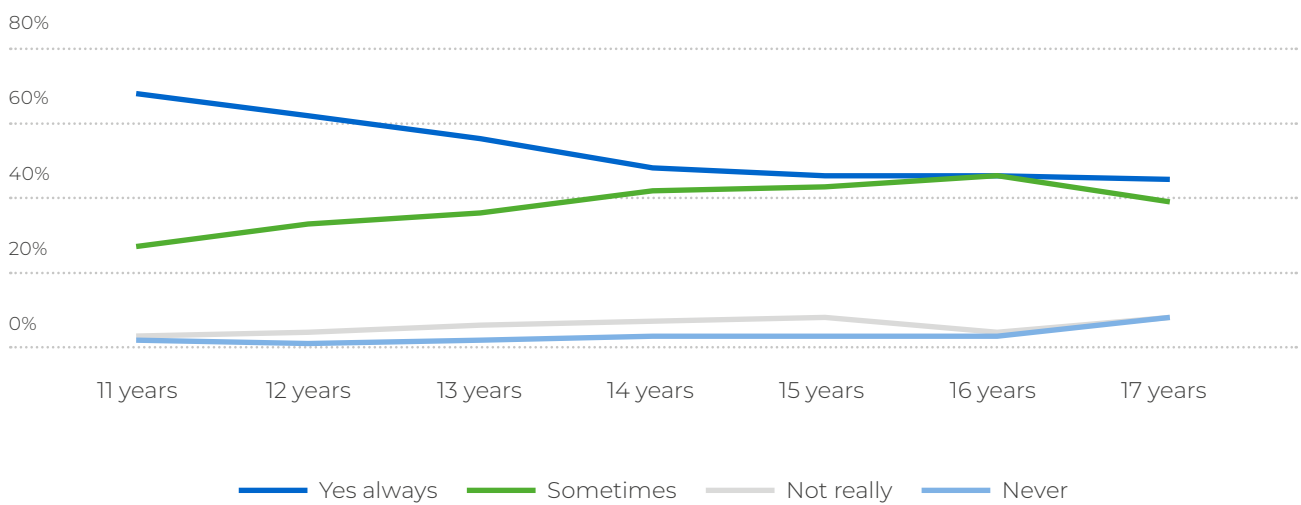
Have you been taught how to stay safe online? – by age



- I learned at school or college
- I learned from a website
- I learned from friends
- I learned from my parents or carers
- I worked it out for myself
- I have not been taught how to stay safe online



If you were taught to stay safe online, do you follow the advice? – by age



At age 15-16, **over 40%** of young people only 'sometimes' follow the advice, while those who say they 'always' follow it have decreased from **68%** at age 11 to **43%** at age 15.

Family help:

'My sister taught me.'

Girl, 11

'My family doesn't know much about this catfishing or hacking. Yesterday I had to correct them when they said cheat instead of hack. They are different.'

Boy, 14

'I learnt the dangers of internet safety when I started gaming with my dad when I was young.'

Boy, 11

'I was taught basic stuff by my grandad but that's about it.'

15, Prefers not to state gender



Learning at school:

'I have been taught at school, but often in not a very effective way, that seemed to insult us, or assume we are dumb about being online. This can cause a bad attitude towards it, and the school/teachers don't seem to have noticed.'

Boy, 13

'Have been told at school but in irrelevant ways.'

Boy, 14

'They tell us every day, but the 2000-year-old videos don't work anymore or apply anymore.'

'School doesn't teach you about how to handle stress.'

Girl, 13

'Police came into school and talked about it.'

Girl, 11

'No one really listens.'

I identify as a man, 14

Self-taught:

'I'm self-taught; I don't ask my parents about anything.'

Boy, 15

'It is pretty obvious.'

Boy, 13

'I mean, it's not hard, is it?'

Girl, 14

'Common sense, along with some experience.'

Boy, 14

'In-game player safety tutorials.'

Gender not stated, 13

'Everyone is talking about it, but I've been self-aware since I was 7, no cookies, VPN, proxy, fake names, gpps spoofing and anti-trackers since I was 8.'

Boy, 13

'I went onto the learning channel (Lazarbeam).'

Girl, 12



Suggestions for Educators

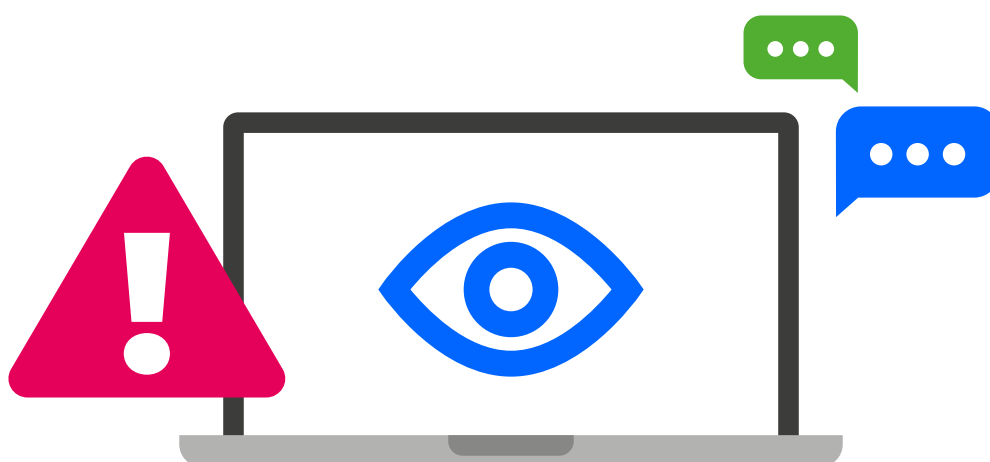
Less 'being told' and more 'real-life situations'

Young people have suggestions for improving online safety education and focus largely on the content of what is taught. They want to gain practical skills to increase their autonomy and independence.

Statements about online safety simply being 'common sense' were made by 28 young people, 'Seemed like common sense to avoid dodgy sites and all that stuff' said one, but many wanted concrete help and advice to cope with real life situations.

Disappointment with online safety lessons is also present: 'school really didn't help though.' Or (I was taught) 'but not very well'.

There are requests to move away from 'scary' stuff and deliver more helpful competencies or 'happy things' which is a reminder that an approach which scares young people with tales of what could happen then demands compliance with rules, is unlikely to succeed and may upset some or even limit their online activities. There is inevitably a view among a few teens that they know what they're doing and don't need or want advice: 'just leave me alone I know what I'm doing'.





In their own words, they would like:

'I'm not sure because it scares young people, but then what if they're not safe online?'

Gender not stated, 11

'More of real-life situations to see how they actually do it, rather than just being told.'

Girl, 11

REAL things that happened to REAL people.'

Boy, 12

'More awareness about paedophiles, I don't feel it gets talked about much (like about what they do etc.)'

Girl, 12

'Showing kids how fast a picture can get around the world.'

Girl, 12

'What the laws are about online safety.'

Boy, 11

'How to control your life on the internet.'

Girl, 11

'How to spot an illegal site or a hack.'

Boy, 14

'What you should teach is stuff about people being scammers because when I first played my fave game a group of players scammed me and I got bullied for it - so just teach little kids not to do bad things on the internet it will get found out.'

Girl, 12

'What is illegal online. How to protect your device from being hacked.'

Boy, 13

'More to do about sending nudes and inappropriate messages.'

Girl, 12

'I would like to see more ways on how to handle cyberbullying and how to completely avoid it.'

Boy, 12

'Malware, viruses, other open doors to your system - how to close/remove them and how to stay protected from them.'

Boy, 12

'About illegal shopping or warn them about how worthless virtual currency is.'

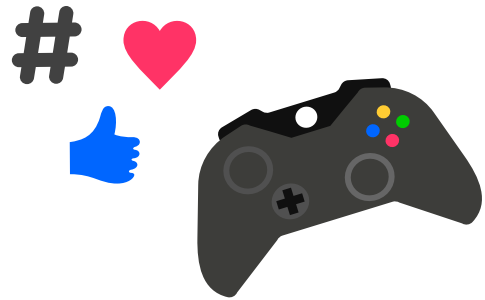
Boy, 12

'How to set up my activision ID so I can add my friends on call of duty.'

Boy, 16

Start teaching people about TOR. That place is terrible, useful, but terrible.'

Boy, 15



Changes in regulations:

'More age restrictions.'

Girl, 11

'About age ratings, and website content (like if it's true or not).'

Girl, 11

We need:

'Someone who is not condescending....'

Boy, 14

'Support for Religion.'

LGBTQ+ Girl, 12

'Children being taught at a young age about online safety.'

Girl, 12

'Steps to help and happy things.'

Girl, 12

Why this is needed:

'Because then if it happens to them, hopefully it does not, but if it does, then they know what to do!'

Girl, 11

Less worry:

'There is nothing to worry about as long as you're not stupid.'

Boy, 13

Better responses:

59% of young people who had reported online aggression said they were dissatisfied with what happened as a result.

Impacts of life online



'I feel like I am a character in a game.'

Boy, 12

'I feel like some people make profiles online to find our better selves which I agree with.'

Boy, 15

'I'm scared if I show my face my friend would make fun of me and not be my friend anymore.'

Boy, 12

'I feel like I'm like others because everyone is there.'

Boy, 11

The most frequently felt effects of being online are 'helping me to relax after school' (84%) and 'preventing boredom' – reported by 87%. Young people believe that the internet opens up lots of possibilities for them (27% often and 37% sometimes) and they feel connected to and supported by others (28% often and 41% sometimes). It enables users to find their tribe or community – 'people like me'.

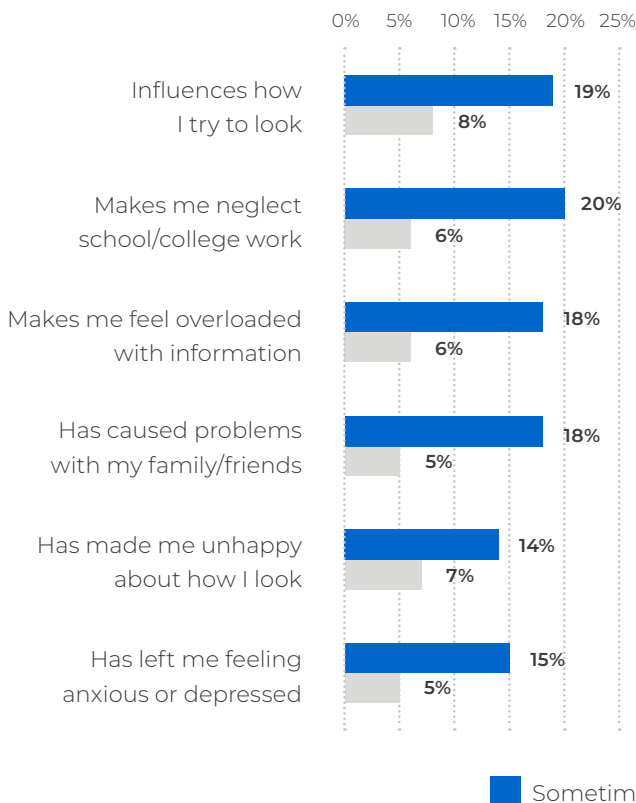
Nearly at quarter (24%) say they often escape their offline problems by going online, with a further 33% saying this is sometimes the case.

Online life can cause problems with family and friends, but this only happens frequently for 5%. It is thought to cause teens to neglect homework in much the same

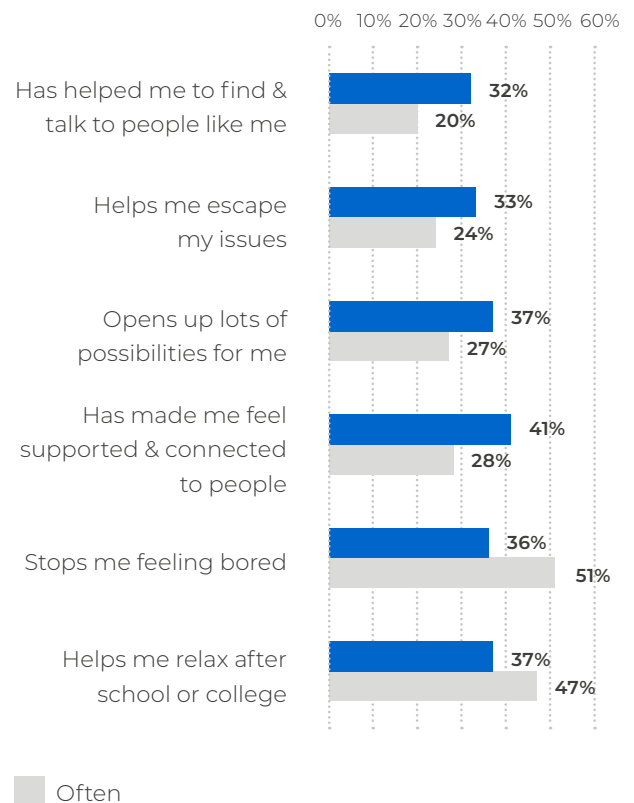
way as TV was once viewed, but only 6% believe this happens 'often', while 20% think it happens 'sometimes'.

More worryingly, online life can leave users feeling anxious or depressed, 5% say this happens 'often' and 14% chose 'sometimes'. Contrary to what adults believe, only 6% say 'it often makes me feel overloaded with information'. 7% say their online life 'has often made me unhappy about how I look' while 15% sometimes feel this way. In an image obsessed society, ranking people by how they look, the tension is evident. At the same time young people are being targeted with persuasive design to stay in the game or the app, often without realising it. The positives and negatives are ranked and illustrated below.

My online life: Negatives



My online life: Positives



Answered: 13,500

'Because I'm on my phone or listening to music most of the time, my family and friends (not all) have stopped talking to me. I wait in my room on my phone for someone to talk to me until I give up or fall asleep.'

Girl, 11

A digital lifeline?

There are considerable numbers of young people who think of their online life as a lifeline. More than a quarter (29%) of those who prefer not to state their gender feel that 'My online life helps me escape my issues', compared to 27% of boys and 20% of girls.

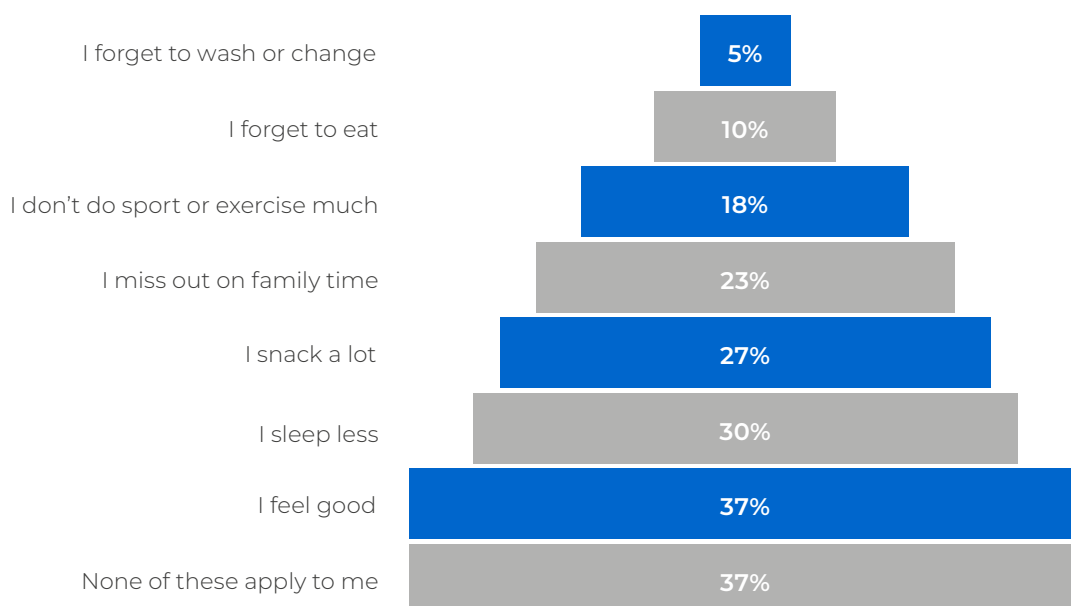
While the digital environment may be a lifeline for young people looking to escape their offline problems, and that is where they often find support or distraction - there is also a particular risk for very needy people. They are easily spotted online by those who are looking for someone to manipulate or approach¹ (described in Look At Me: Teens, Sexting and Risks, 2020).

Being in the right spaces can make a young person feel 'supported and connected to people' or able to find and talk to 'people like me'. Nearly a quarter of boys and those who prefer not to state their gender mentioned finding 'people like me' in contrast to 16% of girls.

Online life is more likely to 'cause problems with my family' for youngsters unwilling to state their gender. Boys are least likely to be influenced to look a certain way or to be unhappy about how they look. Girls are least likely to feel 'my online life opens up possibilities for me' which might suggest they need encouragement to explore online spaces and opportunities more.

Physical impacts of online life were explored revealing some loss of sleep and snacking in front of the screen. Less exercise and loss of family time were described, and a few forget to wash or eat.

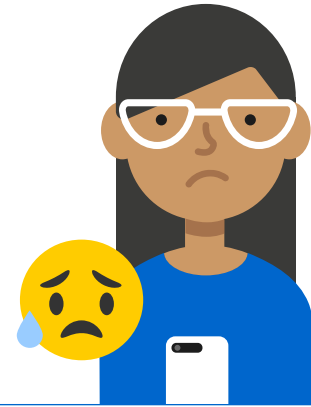
Because of my time spent online...



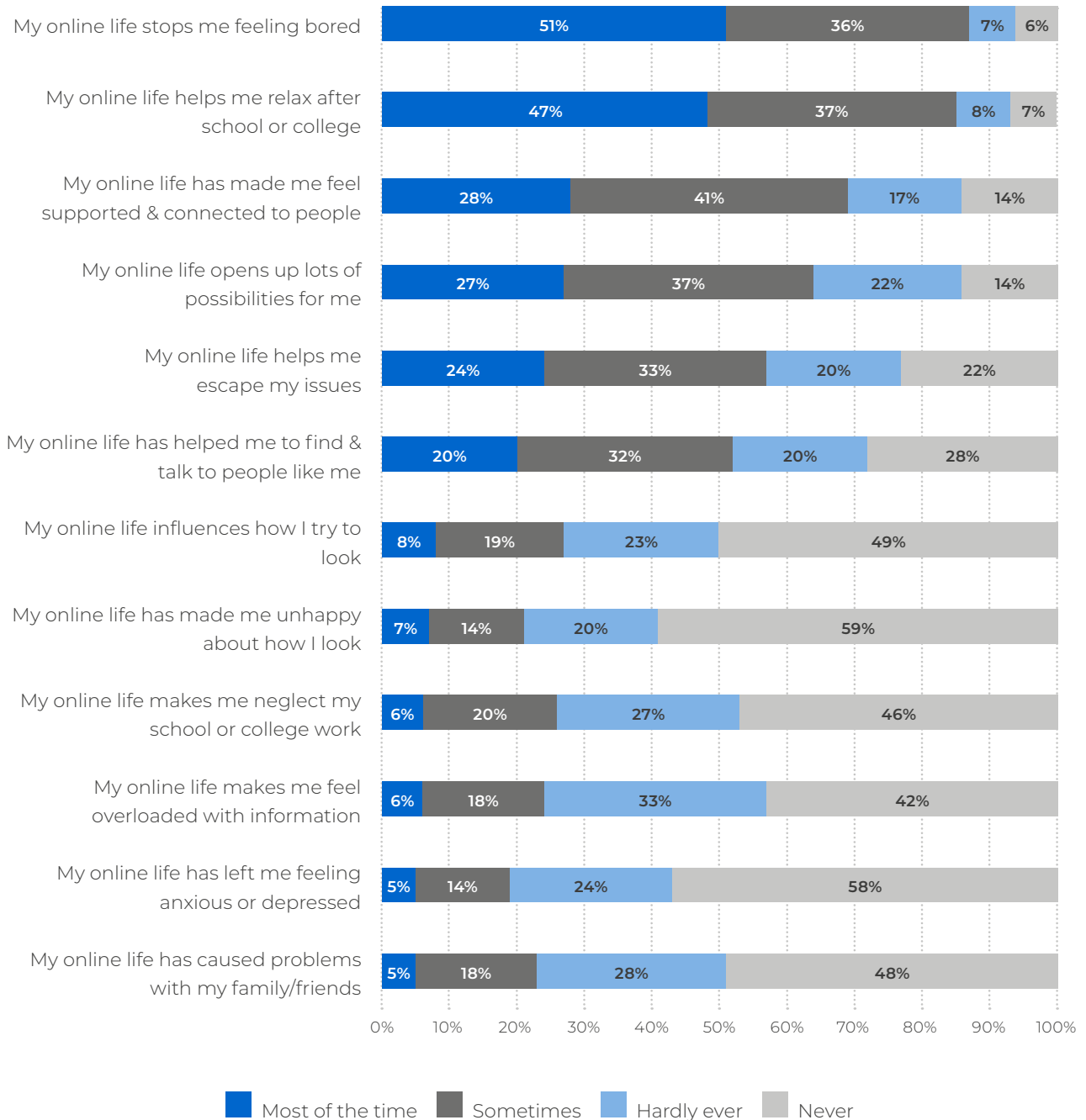
1. Adrienne Katz and Aiman El Asam (2020). 'Look At Me: Teens, Sexting and Risks' Youthworks in partnership with Internet Matters,

'I get affected as it makes me feel like everyone else has a better life than me.'

Girl, 11



Has your online life affected you in any of these ways?



'I feel like, especially in our day in age, our phones and social media defines us. If you don't have a good enough phone you're a loser or if you're not active enough you're definitely not popular enough so basically you have to be the average perfect person on social media or else you're not good enough.'

Girl, 12

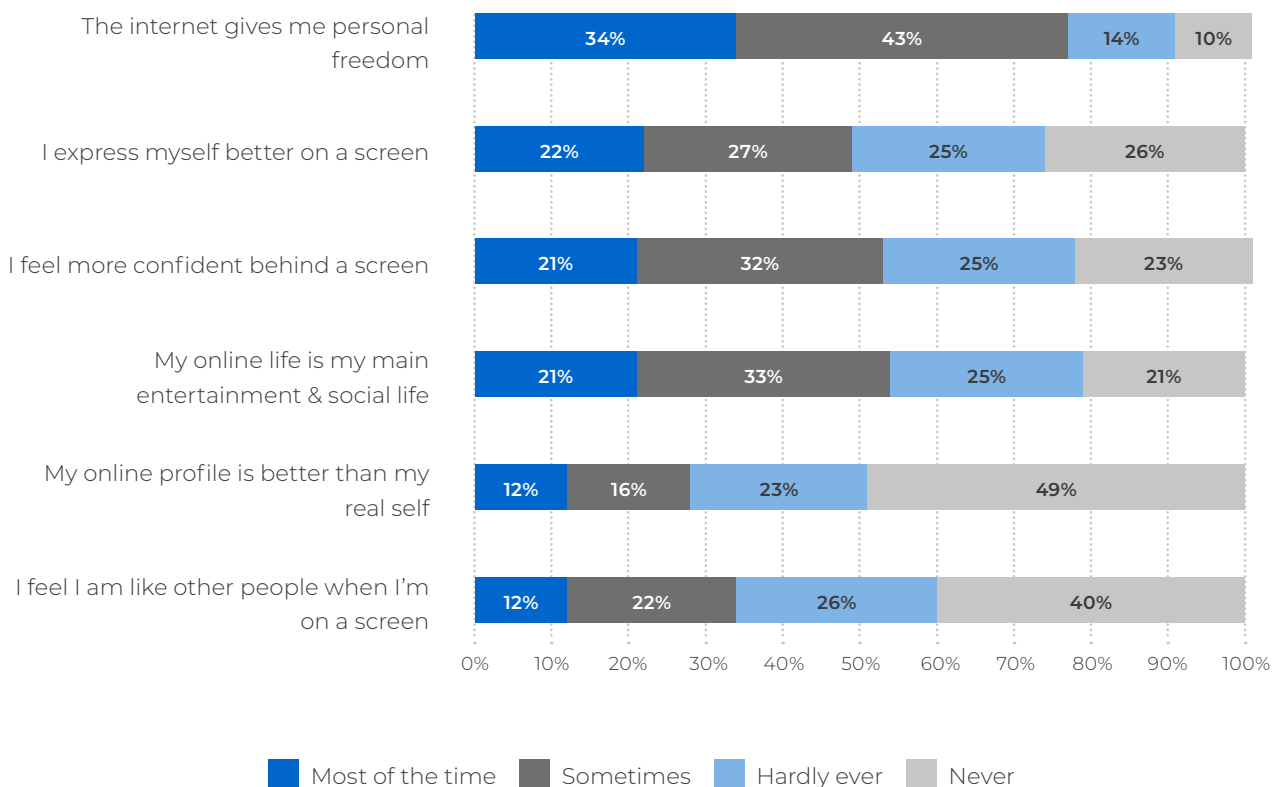
Positive impacts – personal freedom

The personal freedom the internet offers is experienced by more than 3/4 of our respondents. 53% feel more confident when behind a screen, 49% say they express themselves better on a screen and one third feel the equalising effect of the online world when they say 'I feel I am like other people when I'm on a screen'. Over half the young people say 'my online life is my main entertainment and social life' showing their reliance on it. More ambivalent is the response 'my online profile is better than my real self' which was selected by 27%.

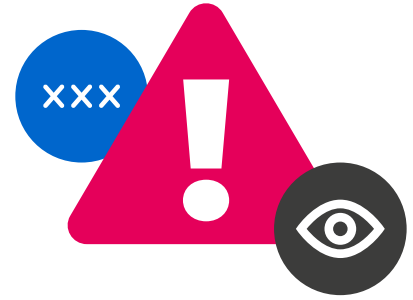
- **37%** say 'because of my time online I feel good'.
- **More than ¾** say 'the internet gives me personal freedom' sometimes or most of the time'.
- **Just over half** feel more confident behind a screen.
- **Around half** said 'I express myself better on a screen'.
- **54%** say 'my online life is my main entertainment and social life'.

Answer options are: Most of the time, Sometimes, Hardly ever and Never. Asking about frequency shows which impacts might have a more lasting or significant impact while others might suggest an occasional or passing fallout or implication.

Thinking about online life, tick statements that are true for you



Risks Online



While most of the young people had never experienced these risks, the following messages emerged from the survey:

- **Unknown 'friends':** The most frequent risk encountered by more than half our respondents is adding friends without knowing who they are. 19% have done this often and 34% once or twice.
- **In-game spending:** 16% have 'often' spent quite a bit of money in online games. 27% did so once or twice.
- **Scary people:** 26% say they have come into contact with 'scary people', 5% often, 21% once or twice.
- **Hacking:** 4% have had credit card details stolen and used. 19% have had their social media account hacked.
- **Scams:** 21% have believed something that turned out to be a scam. 4% often, 17% once or twice.
- **Credit card problems:** 9% report having problems when using a credit card online. Education for online life often overlooks the fact that teens are shopping online with parents' cards.



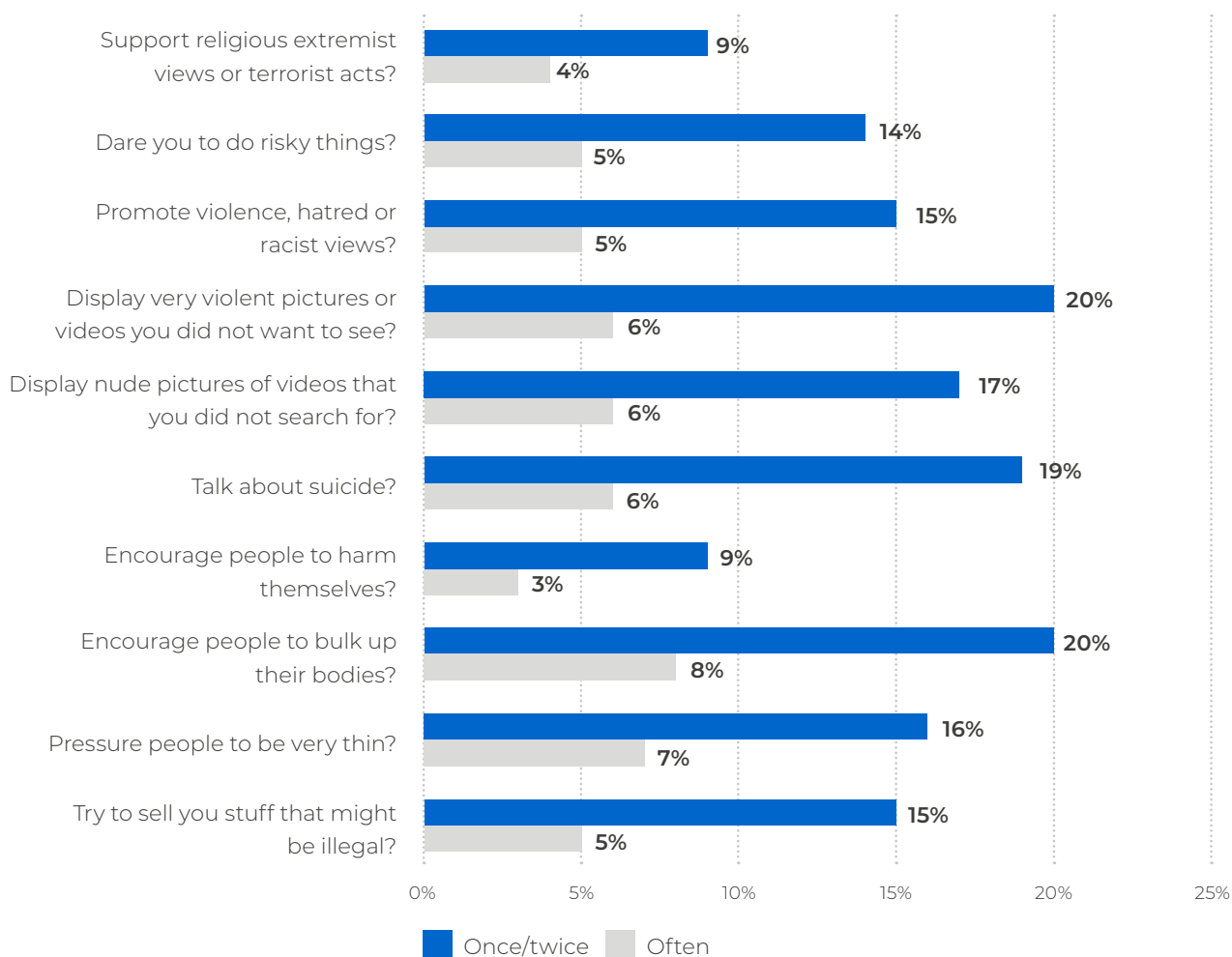


Harmful Content

Young people were asked if they had ever come across content of the following types. It is possible, even likely, that any young person might come across some content like this once or twice. They could be curious or come across it by chance or their friends may be sharing it. However, if they are returning frequently or 'often' it implies a choice.

The phrase 'come across' was chosen to imply no blame or judgement, to encourage young people, to feel able to answer freely. They are anonymous within the survey. Those who 'often' view harmful content, though small in numbers, give cause for concern. The same individuals appear to be frequently viewing many types of potentially harmful content. Research on vulnerable children shows that those with offline vulnerabilities are more likely than other young people to be viewing harmful content.² Clearly significant numbers of young people had never come across this content.

Have you ever come across websites, forums or social media that...? – by frequency



² Katz, A & El Asam, A. (2019) *Vulnerable Children in a Digital World. Internet Matters and Youthwork.* El Asam, A and Katz A, (2018) *Vulnerable Young People: Their Experience of Online Risks. Human-Computer Interaction.*

As seen on screen



About your body:

- **28%** have seen sites, forums or social media that encourage people to bulk up their bodies.
- **23%** have seen pro-anorexia content.
- **25%** have seen pro-suicide content.
- **12%** have seen pro self-harm content.

'My online life makes me not want to eat at all and makes me feel self-conscious.'

Girl, age not given

'Been told to kill myself multiple times and hate crime to my form tutor.'

Girl, 12



Nudity and violence:

- **26%** have seen very violent images they did not want to see.
- **23%** have seen nude images they did not search for.

'I worry that somebody will send me a nude when I never wanted them to.'

Girl, 12



Illegal goods:

- **20%** have been offered illegal goods.

'I trade on eBay.'

Boy, 13



Extremist views:

- **11%** have seen content supporting extremist views or terrorist acts.
- **20%** have seen content promoting violence, hatred or racist views.

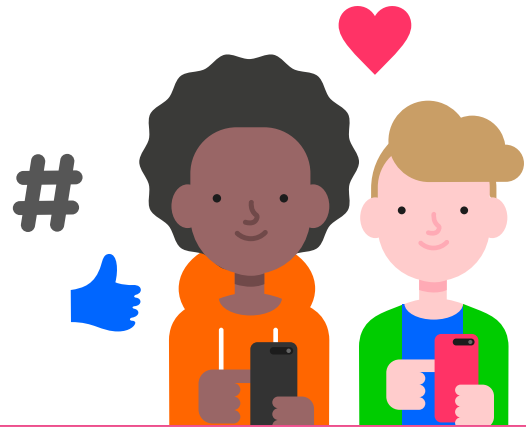


Dares or challenges:

- **19%** have been dared to do risky things.

Relationships in a digital world





Relationships:

70% of young people said the internet had helped them make a good relationship with someone, with 32% saying it happened often.

Control:

22% have felt someone was trying to control or stalk them online.

Coercion:

17% said someone they had met online had tried to persuade them into sexual activity they did not want. Of these, 5% said it happened often.

Revenge sharing of images:

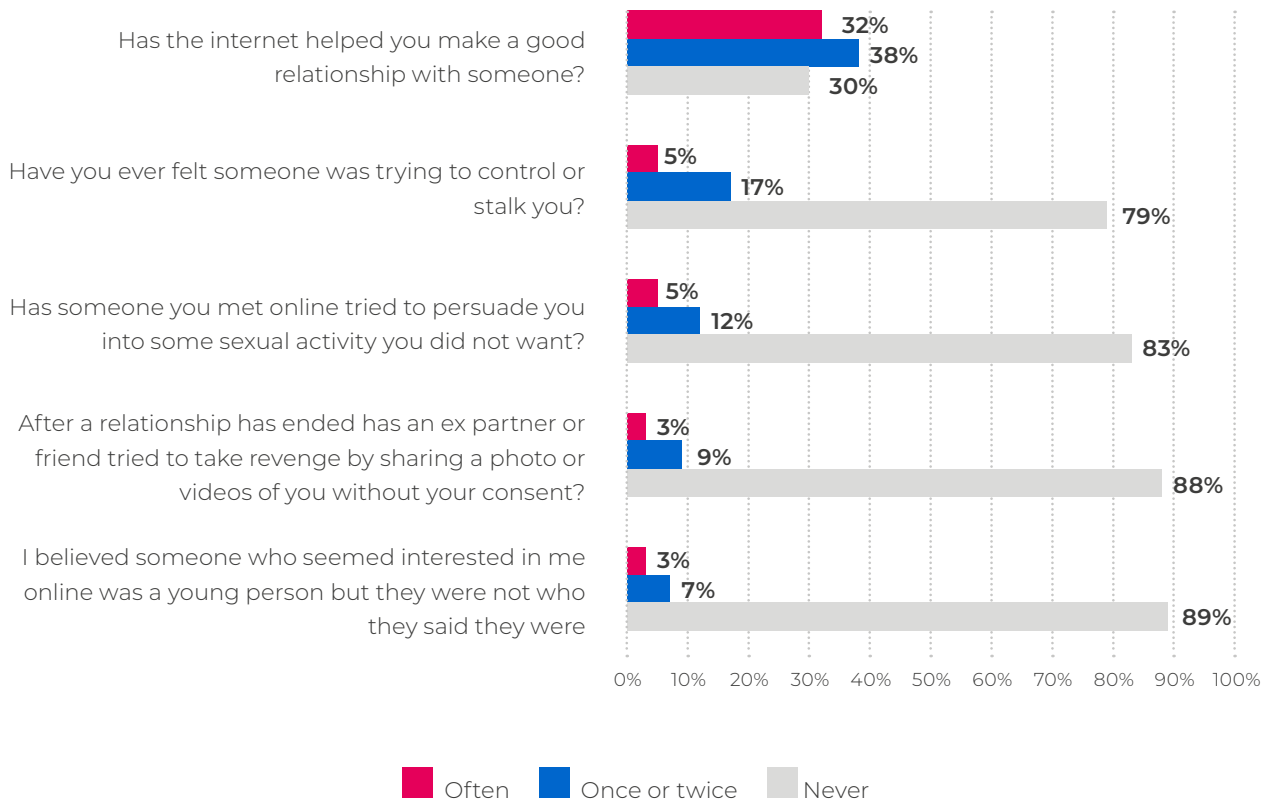
12% reported experiencing some form of revenge sharing of a photo or videos without their consent after a relationship ended. 3% said it happened often.

Fake solicitation:

10% had encountered someone who seemed interested in them, but they were not who they had said they were.

Sexting:

At age 15 and over, 17% of teens are sharing explicit images, videos, or livestreaming. This accelerates quickly in the mid-teens, from 4% at age 13, to 7% at age 14. The rate then more than doubles between ages 14 and the 15.



Answered: 6,087 (age filtered)

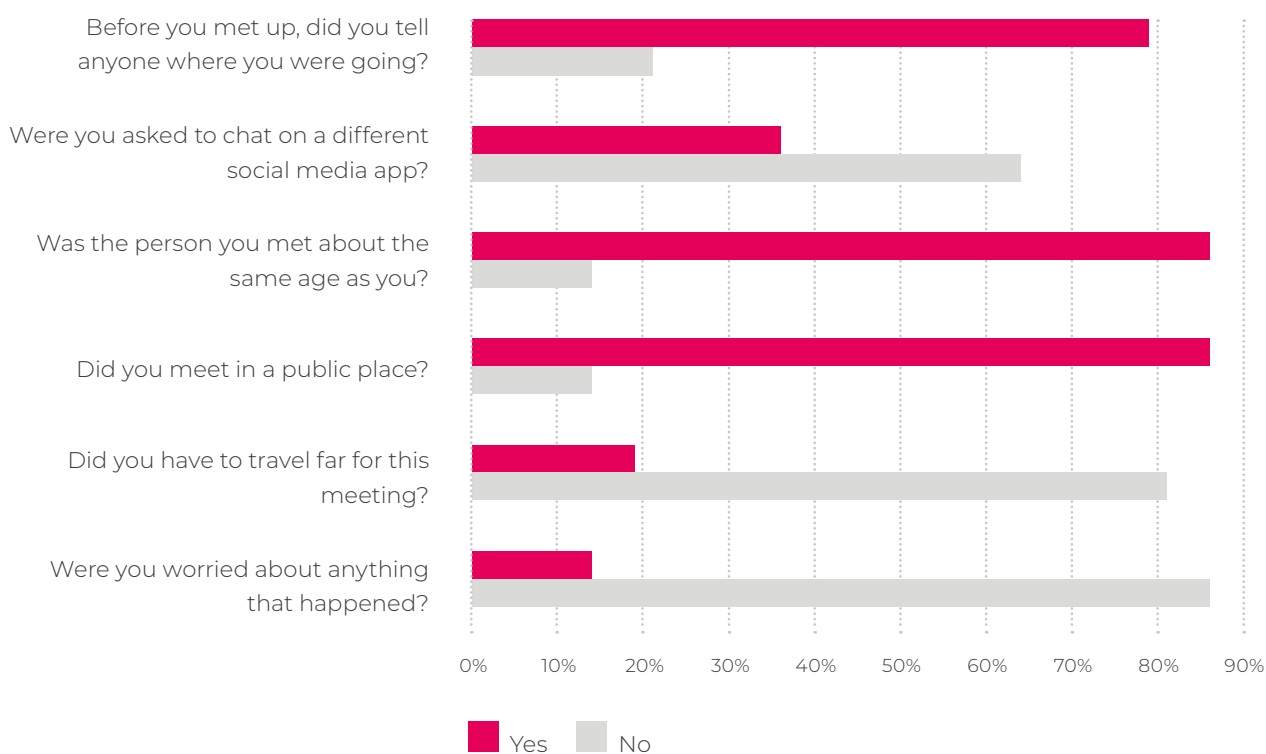
'I was not worried. I knew this girl was local. Technically, we met online. But it was clear she was a real person and still is, to my knowledge since I am still her friend to this day. I have met people online, but I haven't met up with them because they live too far. I have FaceTimed and phoned these people. I know they are real teenagers because I am not ignorant enough to be persuaded otherwise. Internet safety is just common sense.'

Girl, 15

Meetups with someone met online

Just under 1 in 5 of the young people participating in the survey (18%) or 1,103 people, have met up in real life with someone they only knew online. Of these people:

Meeting up – Those who answered 'yes'



Meetup risks

Adults often have a very one-dimensional view of meetups, but they take place for a wide range of reasons, as we have seen in past Cybersurveys. This year's figures show:

- **86%** met in a public place.
- **79%** told someone else where they were going beforehand.

- **86%** said the person they met was about their age.

But 19%, or 208 people, had travelled far to the meetup and 14% - or 154 people - said they were worried about something that happened during the meetup. The comments reveal some went with a parent or grandparent to the meetup, others met up in person with someone they knew through a friend or a gaming or sports event.

'No, it was a friend I met when he was on a call with my other friends and we met at school. I knew who he was.'

Boy, 13

'Met for trade, was selling Chanel for a couple of pounds.'

Boy, 13

Sharing explicit images

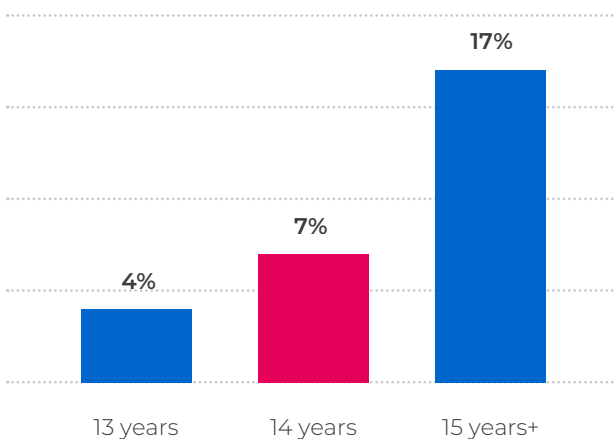
Sexting has long been said to be 'endemic' among teens. However, the picture from young people aged 13 and over in The Cybersurvey is more nuanced:

- Sexting is not widespread among all teens but is worryingly prevalent among those who are already vulnerable offline in other ways. They find themselves in high risk situations facing an array of scenarios and potentially harmful encounters which make their online lives a safeguarding concern, and potentially an amplifier or trigger for their mental health difficulties. Compared to teens who do not share nudes, sharers are more likely to have looked at content talking about self-harm or suicide.
- Among those who shared nudes, 18% were pressured or blackmailed into it.
- Vulnerable young people are far more likely to be pressured or blackmailed to share nudes, often with distressing consequences such as being threatened if they don't send further images, or having their image shared in revenge by a former partner or

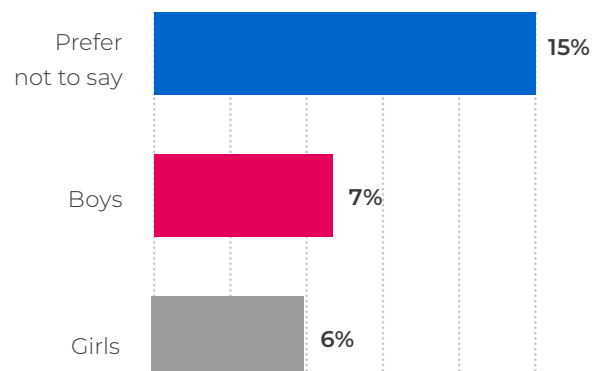
friend when a relationship breaks up. They are also often bullied or harassed because of the image as others get to see it. Their eagerness to be accepted is exploited by others as they overshare frequently, looking for affirmation or affection. This is noticed by others who take advantage of it.

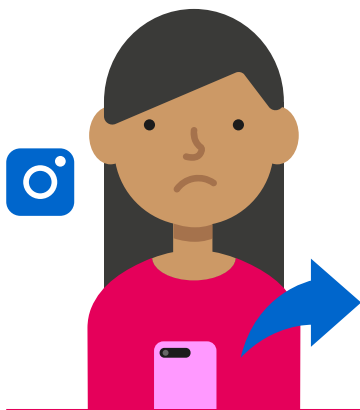
- In stark contrast, there are young people who share nudes because they want to within a relationship; do it 'for fun', or because they thought they 'looked good'. The majority say that nothing bad happened as a result. Some insist they are still happily in this long-term relationship. This renders rules about online safety meaningless in their eyes and they go on to ignore many of them, living as they do in a sexualised world.
- The Cybersurvey found that less than 1/3 of those who share nudes follow the online safety advice they were taught, while 14% say they did not receive it. Effective online safety advice needs to be delivered alongside sensitive relationships education as a life skill.

Sexting: I have done this – by age

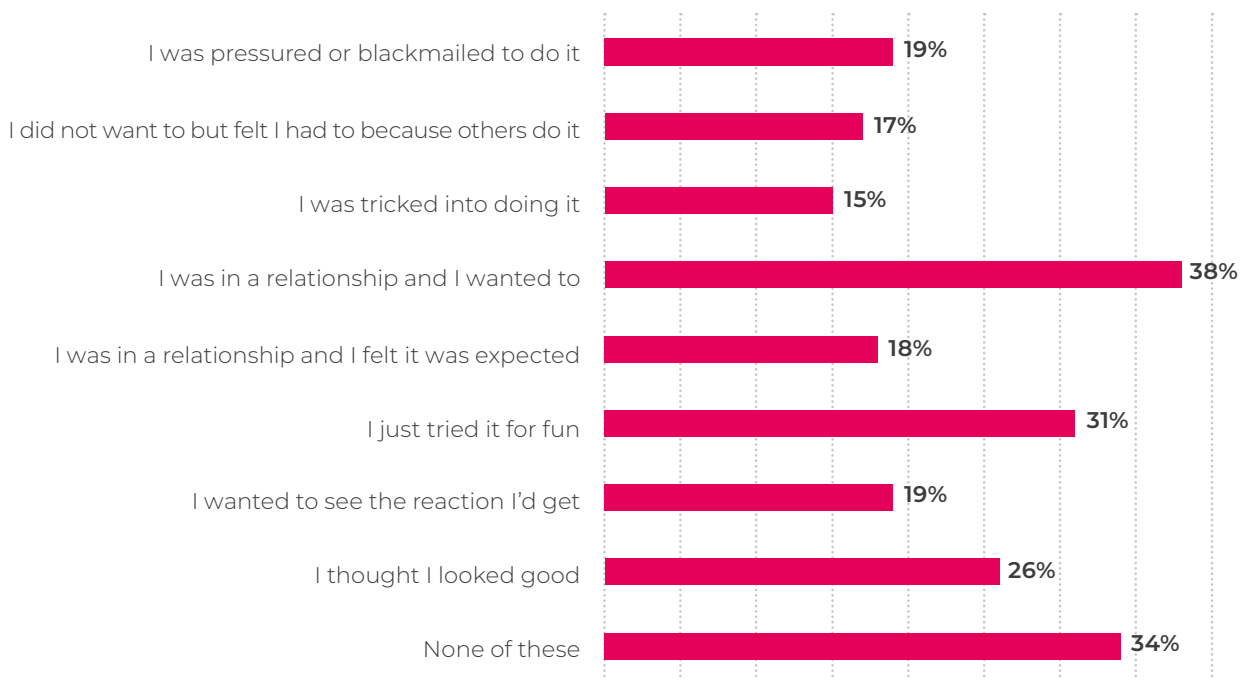


Sexting: I have done this – by gender

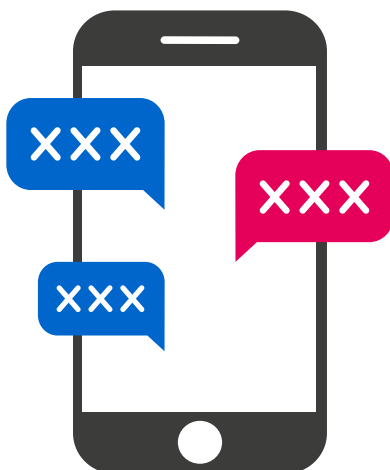




If you have posted a nude or sexual photo, was it because...?



Answered: only those who did share explicit images + age filtered.



Because he chatted to me and said remember I will hack you if you don't give me it, I replied and said I'm blocking you after it went on for 3 weeks.'

Boy, 11

34% said it was for none of these reasons. Some other suggested reasons included:

'Just a joke with the boys.'

Boy, 16

'I actually liked the person and thought it would make her like me.'

Boy, 14 (who was later bullied and harassed because of the photos)

'After a year and a half into a relationship, it took a sexual turn we were both ok with and everything is completely consensual.'

Non-binary, 14

'She asked me to, we traded nudes.'

Boy, 14

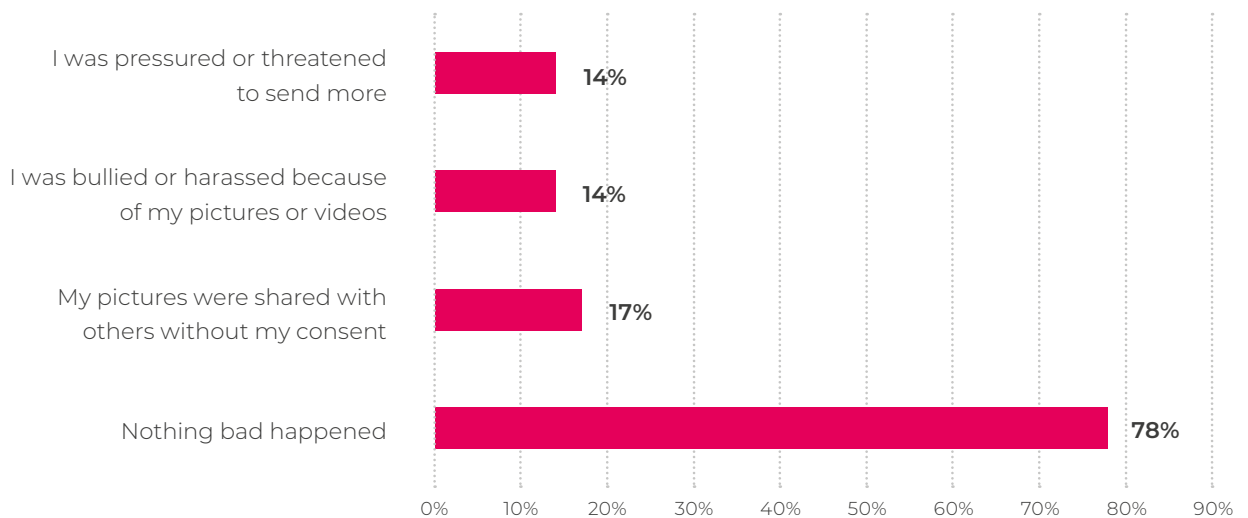
'He told me not to tell.'

Did not state gender, 17

Consequences of sexting and features of teen life:

- **78%** said nothing bad happened after they sent the image/video/livestream.
- **17%** said their photos were shared further without their consent.
- **14%** were bullied or harassed because of these images.
- **14%** were pressured or threatened to send more images.

What happened after you shared this photo?



Answered: 422 - only those who did share explicit images + age filtered 42 skipped.

Cyberbullying

A definition of cyberbullying was provided in the question:

Cyberbullying is when someone uses the internet, social media, messaging services, online games or any digital technology to target, threaten, insult, upset or humiliate someone else (or a group) on purpose, again and again. It can be:

- nasty or threatening messages.
- posting photos, videos or posts about you online.
- commenting on your posts or pictures saying nasty things.
- revealing personal issues about you online.
- spreading rumours about you.
- starting a group chat to talk about someone or leave them out.
- targeting you over and over in an online game.

Do you think you have been cyberbullied?

22% said yes and they were then asked.

How bad would you say it was?

3 choices of severity

- 39% classed their experience as 'unpleasant'.
- 31% said it was 'nasty'.
- 17% said it was 'really awful'.

How often did it happen?

- 20% said it happened every day.
- 39% said it happened a couple of times a week.
- 41% said it happened once every few weeks.

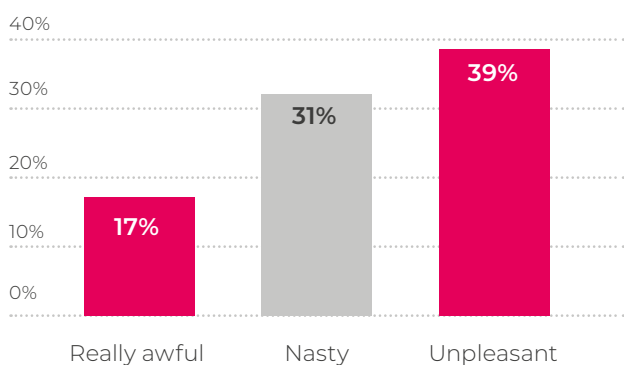
If you were cyberbullied, did you tell anyone?

65% told someone, 35% did not – this is the highest percentage not telling anyone since 2015.

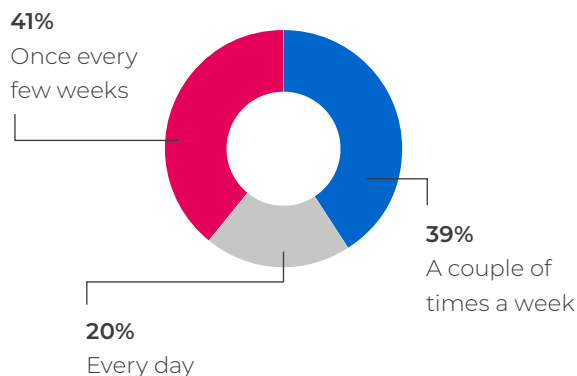
After young people told someone they had been cyberbullied:

- 68% found that it stopped.
- 23% said it stayed the same.
- 9% said it got worse.

About the cyberbullying that happened to you: how bad would you say it was?



How often did it happen?





Cyberbullying has remained stable over time with fewer now feeling they can tell someone.

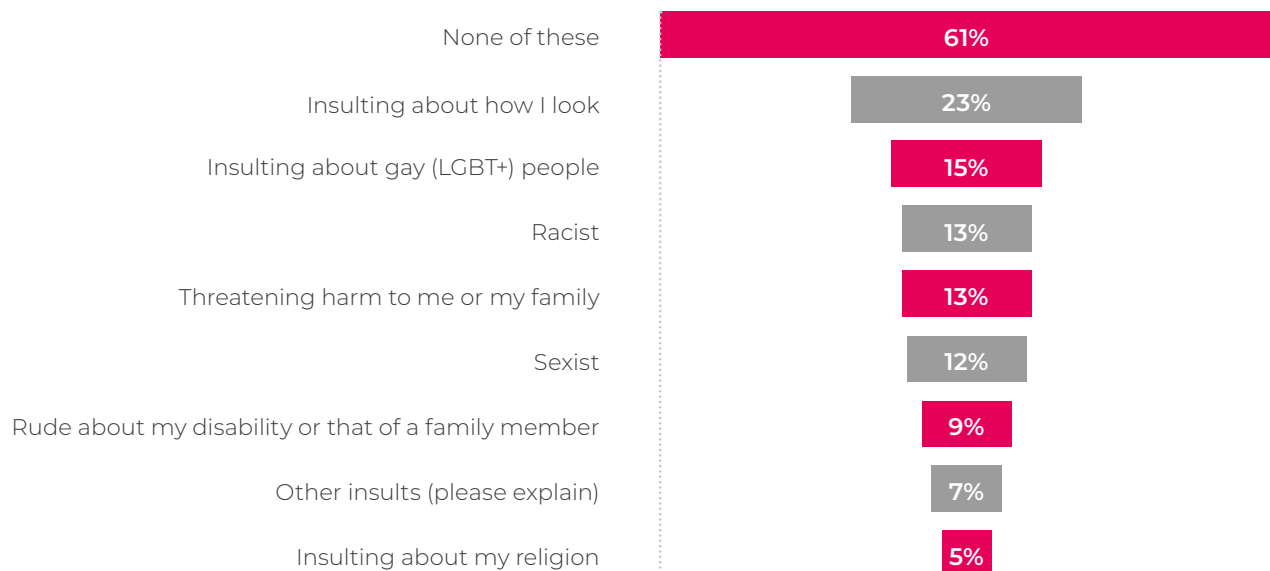
Cyberbullying over time	2015	2016	2017*	2019
I was cyberbullied	21%	23%	21%	22%
If cyberbullied, did you tell anybody? No	27%	27%	21%	35%
If you told someone, did it stop? Yes	63%	65%	64%	68%

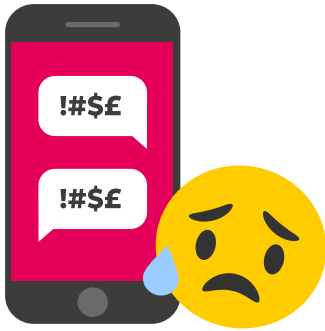
*Survey didn't run in 2018

Online aggression

Some types of aggression do not meet the definition of bullying, especially online, where various types and levels of aggression are common such as comments, images or 'jokes'. Bullying behaviour is usually defined in schools using the criteria set out by the Anti-Bullying Alliance, where the behaviour is intentional, often repeated and involves an imbalance of power. The survey explored both. It asked about experiences of Cyberbullying and in a separate question, explored wider online aggression generally in an attempt to understand the nature of discriminatory messages teenagers received and the comments they saw. Some teens are in an online environment filled with aggressive exchanges. Some young people had not received any of the examples given and they selected: 'None of these'.

Have you received messages that were:





How often did it happen?

'Just every second of the day.'

Trans Boy, 11

'Nearly every day at school since we came back and every night on the internet.'

Girl, 11

'It happened for a day then I told my parents and it all stopped immediately.'

Girl, 11

'She would keep sending me more and more horrible videos and I got fed up of it and was really upset.'

Girl, 11

'Once or twice if I fell out with someone.'

Girl, 12

'Not that often though, I stopped it from happening.'

Boy, 13

'It happened for like a week then died down.'

Girl, 14

Resilience:

'It has only happened to me once, but I instantly blocked and reported them, but I did show my mum first.'

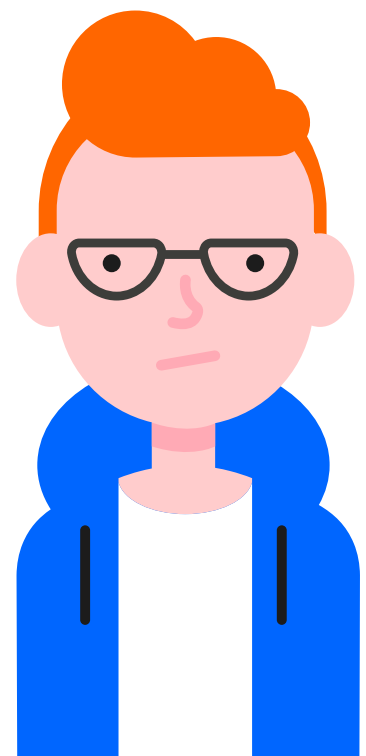
Girl, 12

'It did stop as I controlled the scenario, but it happened every day for a while.'

Boy, 14

'Someone was pestering me about my medical issues asking for a picture of something very personal.'

Boy, 13





Conclusion





Re-think and refresh the advice

There is a need to refresh and adapt online safety advice to be relevant, age appropriate and practical. The Cybersurvey has repeatedly found that too few young people follow the advice.

Focus on the mid-teen years with new ideas

A new dialogue is needed with young people in their mid-teens. At this age identities and relationships are formed and they are experimental and taking risks. They are bored with school online safety lessons and say they want to explore how to handle real situations, not be given rules.

Being vulnerable offline can lead to high risk online

Targeted support is required for young people who are already vulnerable offline. Cases should be escalated for safeguarding or for priority access to mental health services where necessary.

Address emotional health and offline vulnerability

Emotional health and pre-existing offline vulnerability influence how some young people act online, leading them to take risks or, because of a need for affirmation, to overshare or eagerly believe people they do not know. This should be acknowledged and safer ways to fulfil emotional needs can be introduced to them.

Training for services and professionals working with vulnerable groups

Services around the child need specialist training and procedures to be able to support vulnerable young people to handle their complex digital experiences.

Providers should do more to remove more harmful content

The exposure of so many children to content talking about suicide cannot be brushed aside. They may be sharing it, but it is often found somewhere online first. The pro-anorexia and other body image content being seen is alarming not only because of the direct harm caused by an eating disorder but also because those with eating disorders scored the highest levels of online risk in a number of questions that did not ask about body image.

Engage parents in new ways

Parents need the confidence to engage with and sustain the conversation with their teenager about online life. Their life experience can come into play here as it is not solely a digital issue - about which they may feel inadequately informed - but about human relationships and interactions. It will not be enough to talk to eleven-year olds and then leave it to luck.

1. *The Guardian*, 29th November 2019 *Children Across The UK Go On Strike to Demand Action on Climate*

2. NSPCC 14th May 2018, *School referrals for mental health rise by a third*. In a Freedom of Information request to NHS Trusts in England the NSPCC found schools seeking professional help for pupils from NHS Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) made 123,713 referrals since 2014/15. Overall, the number of referrals to CAMHS from schools has steadily increased each year since 2014/15, reaching 34,757 in 2017/18 – the equivalent of 183 every school day.

3. *Young Minds* 7th November 2019 *Survey of GPs*.

Concluding remarks

What can adults do in the face of a lack of trust and teen's desire for autonomy?

In these voices of young people there are some urgent trends that cannot be ignored. There is a lack of trust in adults to help effectively when something goes awry online and a feeling that parents often don't understand online life. There is a tendency to say that school online safety lessons are not teaching what is relevant and up to date, or what these young consumers say they need.

Another strong thread is autonomy. Educators and parents could recognise and support this by helping those who want to find out how to stay safe online for themselves. They can be signposted to safe sources of information, helplines and resources. Parents and young people can explore how to stay safe online together and have a non-judgemental dialogue about this. Digital competence is an essential skill young people need. It is not achieved by scare stories of what might happen or glib rules.

A new decade – a new approach to online safety education

We cannot continue doing things the same way for another decade. As we have seen since the survey began in 2008 a considerable number of young people continue to say they were taught online safety, but don't generally follow this advice. Many are not satisfied with how it is taught or the content. Our reliance on the internet during COVID-19 has made it urgent. New approaches to teaching online safety in a fully integrated way, rather than as a stand-alone subject, are needed. Basic guiding principles and a best practice code are lacking. Co-design with young people might be a starting point, followed by evaluations of online safety programmes, their content and delivery methods.

Gender difference

It is not equitable that gender dictates how much support teens get on digital issues. Those questioning or changing their gender, as well as those who prefer not to state it, should be considered a vulnerable group who need more support not less. Boys get less support than girls. On the other hand too many girls are scared not empowered by what they are taught.

Digital disparity if you are already vulnerable offline

Since 2011 The Cybersurvey has identified how young people with offline vulnerabilities report very different online experiences and risks encountered when compared to the majority of their peers. Our knowledge has developed considerably with the research programme set up to study this four years ago and we encourage all schools and services to respond to the needs of those who have offline vulnerabilities that may influence their online lives. www.internetmatters.org/about-us/vulnerable-children-in-a-digital-world-report/

The role of emotional health

Young people are critical of the way adults respond when the young person has a problem online. Responses should be non-judgemental and consider the emotional need or motivation which influenced the young person's behaviour or reaction to what happened. Social isolation can drive people online to seek connection, others want to escape worries at home. Young people should not be made to feel solely responsible for what has gone wrong online, when there are so many other factors beyond their control, including bad actors. If they are burdened with this, they may feel immense guilt. They may fear telling someone, with disastrous consequences. However exploring what they might safely do when they feel these emotions, may provide them with safer options.



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