

Children's Wellbeing in a Digital World

Year Five
Index Report
2026

internet
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Developed with:

 **BMG**
an RSK company



Welcome

Since our last Digital Wellbeing Index report, landmark regulation in the UK has come into force with the aim of improving the safety of children and young people online. Yet, despite these efforts, children's digital lives have continued to dominate headlines. Fuelled by bold policy positions, like Australia's nationwide restriction on social media for under-16s, pressure is mounting on Government to go further. Just this month, the UK government have published a consultation starting a national conversation on growing up in the online world.

In this context, this year's Digital Wellbeing Index is more relevant than ever. Our index continues to highlight the complex realities of children's online lives. The digital world offers significant benefits, with children finding inspiration and building communities which enrich their lives, yet too many children continue to experience online harm at an alarming rate.

We also find that it is increasingly difficult for children to manage the time they spend online. More children report "doomscrolling" and struggling to switch off,

which is negatively affecting their sleep and social lives as they turn down real-world activities to stay online. While the UK's Online Safety Act (designed to keep children safe in digital spaces) is now in force, it does not adequately address the concerns around children's screen usage and the impact of "addictive" design intended to maximise children's time online.

Against the backdrop of these mounting challenges, parents are continuing to do what they can to support their children. Encouragingly, we are seeing greater openness between parents and children, with more conversations taking place about online safety which are a central part of keeping children safe. We welcome the Government's recognition of the important role parents play through the launch of the Online Safety Parents' Hub, which encourages open discussions and helps families build trust.

The fifth wave of our Digital Wellbeing Index offers valuable new insights into children's digital lives, including that the existing legislation and support for parents is not enough. We find that this year's Index

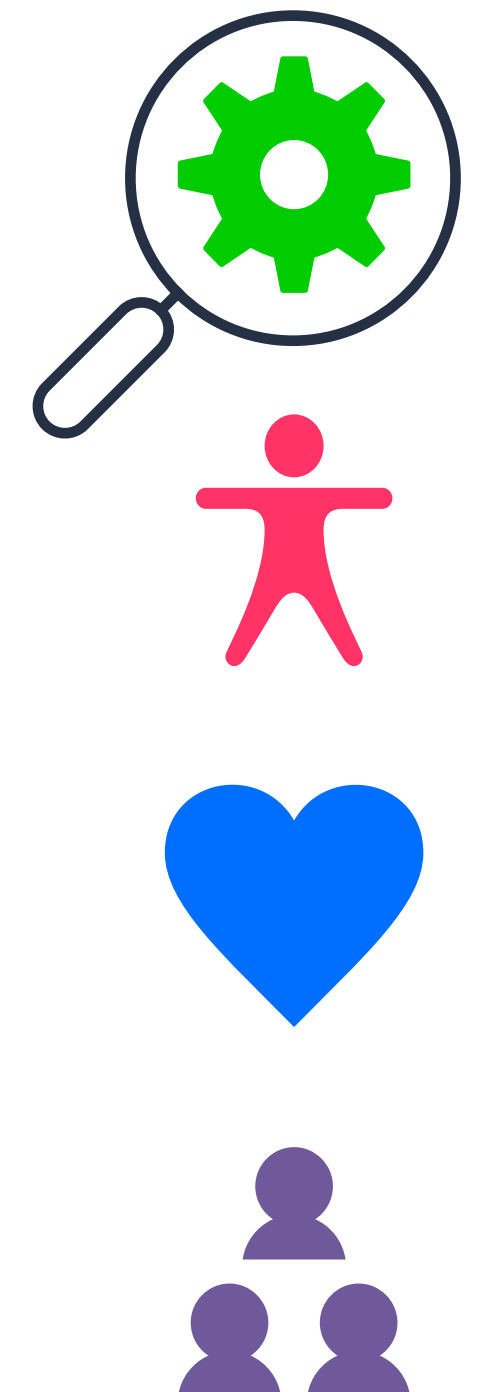
is very similar to last year's with both positive and negative scores continuing to increase, and no change in children's self-reported experience of online harm. To significantly improve children's online safety we need comprehensive regulation, including regulation that addresses the design of digital technologies. Stronger regulation alongside support for parents and children is central to helping families safely navigate this complex digital landscape.

We extend our sincere thanks to everyone who made this research possible, including the team at BMG Research. Above all, we are grateful to the children and parents who shared their experiences. Without their openness and contribution, this Index would not exist.

We look forward to continuing to work across the sector to keep children safe online.

Rachel Huggins

CEO of Internet Matters



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An overview of our report

This report is the fifth in an annual series that evaluates and tracks the impact of digital technology on children's wellbeing and family life. This year's research, populated with data from a 2025 household survey of over 1,000 families, gives an up-to-date picture of the effects of digital technology on children's wellbeing.

We break digital wellbeing down into four dimensions¹, and look at the impact of technology in each of these areas of wellbeing:

- Physical
- Social
- Emotional
- Developmental

We use index scores for each of these spheres to set the scene, before outlining some key changes and stories that sit behind the shifts, helping to bring to life the experiences of children and parents.

The index was designed to measure both the positives and negatives of children's online lives. This year's findings reflect the strengths of this approach, as both the opportunities and risks of being online have become more pronounced.

The report is split into four sections:

Section 1: Setting the scene focuses on how children spend their time online, providing context for understanding changes in their wellbeing.

Section 2: A balancing act highlights the complexities of children's digital lives. We explore the drivers of wellbeing, with a focus on how time spent online is shaping children's online experiences.

Section 3: No significant shift examines the persistent levels of harm that children experience online and the factors that influence these experiences.

Section 4: Parenting in a digital world explores parents' awareness of their children's online lives and the tools and techniques used by parents to support their children to be safe online.



1. For more information about the index see 'Methodology and approach' section.



Key findings

This year's report explores how children's online lives have changed over the past four years. The most striking change is the growing amount of time children spend online and their struggle to regulate this.

Time online is not inherently harmful: as this report shows, digital spaces continue to offer important opportunities for connection, discovery and development. However, when increased engagement is considered alongside children's wellbeing and their exposure to harm, a more complex and concerning picture emerges. While parents are doing more to support their children's digital lives, they too are seeing the negative impacts of the online world on their children's health, relationships and overall wellbeing. At a time when children's access to digital spaces is being contested, understanding this shifting landscape is more essential than ever.

Section 1: Setting the scene An increasingly digital childhood

- **Time spent online continues to rise.** Children spend almost a day a week online, across a range of different activities. In 2022, children spent on average 16 hours online per week, with this rising to 23 hours this year.² This number is even higher for vulnerable children,³ who spend 26 hours a week online.
- **Children are more active, social and creative online.** More children now say they post and comment 'a lot' on social media (26% cf. 17% in 2022) and over two-thirds (68%) of children create content to post online, up from 58% in 2022.

Children spend 23 hours
online a week



2. Between 2022-2024 we measured children's time online across seven activities. This year, we added in three additional options: use of AI tools, watching livestreamed content and livestreaming content – this content accounts for 5 hours of time spent online.

3. Throughout the report we refer to children who have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), who receive special educational needs (SEN) support, and/or who have a physical/mental health condition which requires professional help, as 'vulnerable' or as 'children with vulnerabilities'. We recognise that there are multiple understandings of the term vulnerable, and this definition is for the purpose of this report and year-on-year comparisons.

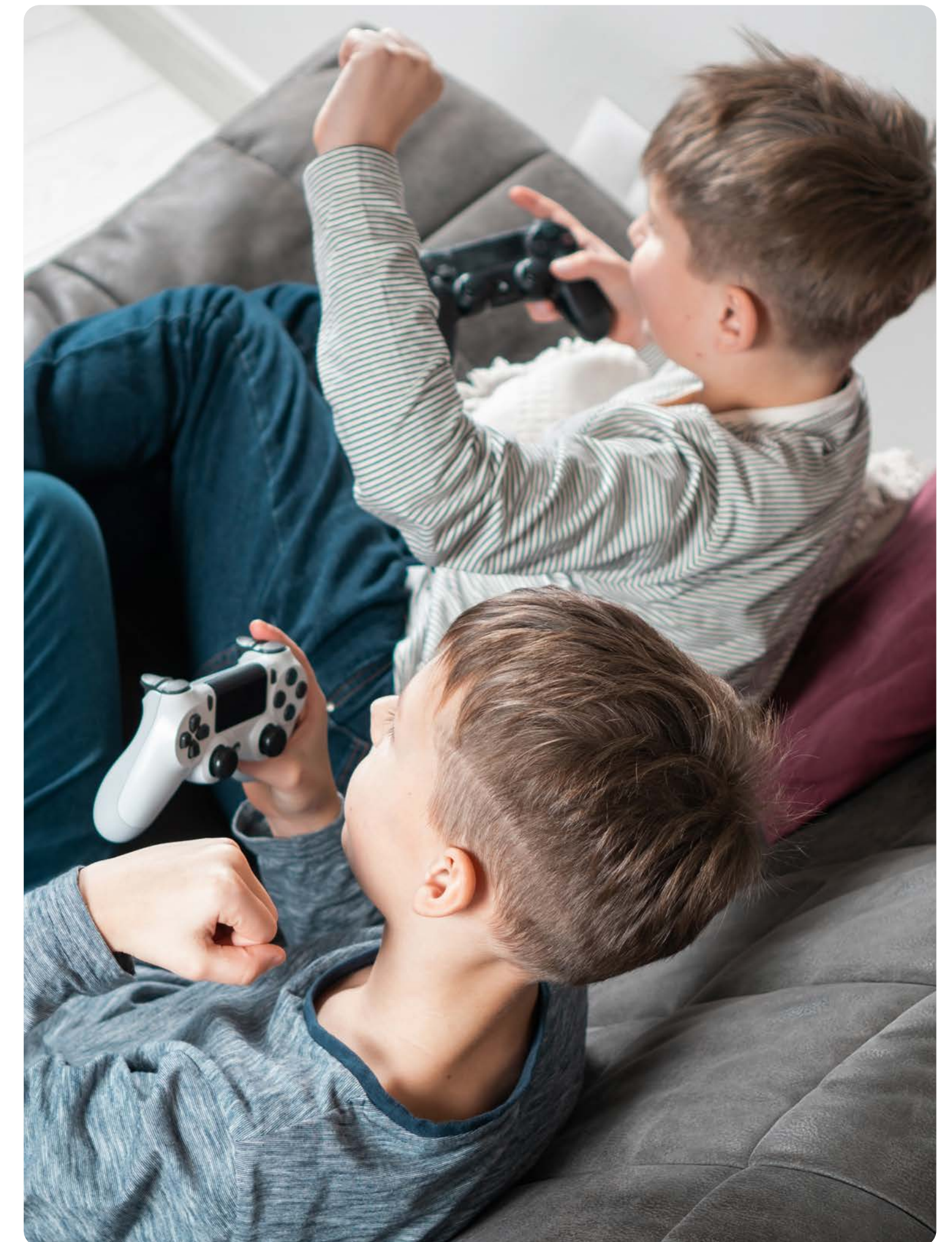
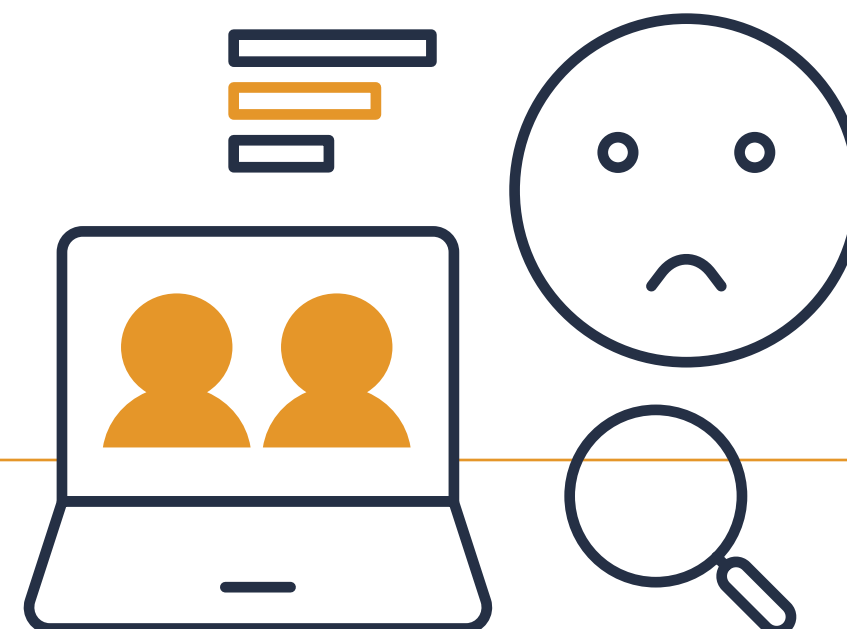
Section 2: A balancing act

The uneven impact of time spent online

- **Children's digital wellbeing continues to become more polarised.** Across all dimensions of digital wellbeing, both the positive and negative index scores have continued to increase, building on the 'internet of extremes' observed last year.¹
- **The positives of online life still outweigh the negatives.** Several positive measures of wellbeing have increased over the past four years, with more children using the online world for discovery, inspiration and friendship.
 - **Discovery:** More children are using the digital world to discover new sports and exercises (63% cf. 55% in 2024; 49% in 2022) or to find new hobbies and interests (74% cf. 71% in 2024; 63% in 2022).
 - **Inspiration:** Children say being online is important for finding out what they would like to do in the future (75% cf. 71% in 2024; 67% in 2022).
 - **Friendship:** Children find it important to be online so they can stay in contact with friends or family (83% cf. 77% in 2022), as well as meet people who become good friends (64% cf. 50% in 2022).
- **Children are finding it hard to disconnect and regulate their time online.** Nearly half (46%) of children report that they keep playing the same games or watching the same shows or films even when they are not enjoying them. Children are also turning down real-world social opportunities to stay online (40% cf. 29% in 2024; 28% in 2022).

- **More time online brings some positives but far more negative experiences.** When comparing the wellbeing index scores between those in the highest and lowest quartile of time spent online, we find that as time spent online increases, the positive index scores rise only modestly, while negative index scores increase sharply.
- **This environment creates a complex and contradictory picture.** For example, children who spend the most amount of time online are more likely to say being online has been important for them to meet people who become good friends (73% cf. 56% of those online the least) but also admit that spending time online makes them feel lonely (29% cf. 14%).

Children online the most are more likely to make good friends but also feel lonely



Section 3: No significant shift Children's experiences of online harm remain unchanged

- **Children's experiences of online harm remain unchanged and stubbornly high.** Despite new requirements on technology companies to protect children from harmful content coming into force over the past year, 68% of children report encountering at least one type of harm online. This is in line with previous years (68% in 2024; 67% in 2023).⁴ Some of the most prevalent harmful experiences reported by children were exposure to false information (37%), being contacted by someone they did not know (28%) and seeing violent content online (23%).
- **Some online harms are decreasing.** Over the past year, fewer children report seeing explicit sexual content or nudity (21% vs. 28% in 2024), hate speech (24% vs. 29% in 2024) and self-harm content (16% vs. 21% 2023), changes that align with the focus of the Online Safety Act and Protection of Children Codes.

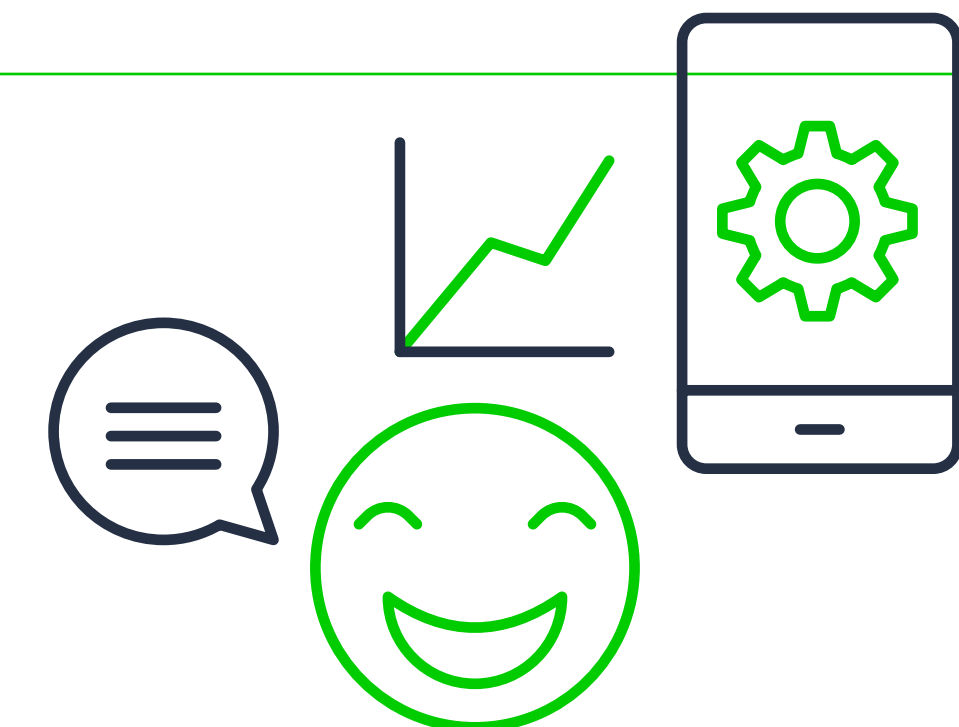
- **Experiences of online harm increase with time spent online.** Those who spend more time online are more likely to experience online harms, with 80% of those in the top quartile of digital usage reporting experience of harms online, compared to 52% in the lowest quartile.
- **Vulnerable children experience more harm.** Nearly eight in ten (79%) report experiencing at least one type of harm, compared to 63% of children without these vulnerabilities. This gap has widened over the past year (79% 2024 cf. 68%).
- **Girls find some harmful content more distressing than boys:** Girls are more likely than boys to find certain content distressing or upsetting: explicit content or nudity (50% cf. 26% of boys), violent content (67% cf. 53%) and racist, homophobic and sexist content (67% cf. 43%).

68%

of children report
encountering
harm online

Section 4: Parenting in a digital world Parents and children are navigating online safety together

- **More parents are using parental controls.** Half (50%) of parents now use these controls, up from 43% three years ago. They are also more likely to use technical tools and controls to limit their children's screen time (31% cf. 18% in 2022).
- **Children are becoming more open with their parents about their online lives.** 61% of children say they are very open with their parents (cf. 56% in 2024) and three-quarters (75%) of children now talk to their parents about content that worries or upsets them.
- **Open communication supports safer and happier online experiences.** Children who describe themselves as 'very open' with their parents also report higher levels of positive emotional experiences online, such as feeling confident (61% cf. 29% of those not open), or being happy (73% cf. 40% of those not open).



4. See 'Methodology and approach' section for further explanation on how the UK Online Safety Act interacts with this data

Methodology and approach

Who did we survey?

Results are based on an online survey of 1,270 UK children aged between 9 and 16, and their parents,⁵ with comparisons made to a similar sample in previous years. Fieldwork for this wave was conducted between 15th September and 1st October 2025.

Wave	Sample definition	n.
2021 (1)	Children aged 9-15 and their parents	1,001
2022 (2)	Children aged 9-16 and their parents	1,138
2023 (3)	Children aged 9-16 and their parents	1,001
2024 (4)	Children aged 9-16 and their parents	1,054
2025 (5)	Children aged 9-16 and their parents	1,270

The survey was completed online with parents who had at least one child between 9-16 years old.⁶ Parents were first asked to answer a set of questions on the use of digital technology in relation to one of their children. The survey was then handed over to this child to answer a similar set of questions. Questions asked to parents and children were very similar to those asked in 2022, 2023 and 2024.⁷

Quotas in line with ONS population estimates were put in place to ensure the sample was stratified by each age group, with equal representation of boys and girls

at each age. This is in line with the approach taken in each previous wave, with the targets of boys and girls at each age in line with UK population estimates.

Weighting

The samples for waves 2, 3, 4 and 5 were weighted consistently to ensure representativeness with the broader population of UK children and so that samples were comparable across years. Targets were gender, age, region and the Index of Multiple Deprivation, as well as parent gender, to ensure a consistent distribution of male and female parents between waves.

How the Index works

Internet Matters produced the first Digital Wellbeing Index in 2021.ⁱⁱ The Index is derived from a framework, developed in collaboration with Internet Matters, by Dr Diane Levine and her team at the University of Leicester. This framework identifies four dimensions where digital technology can have the most impact (both positive and negative) on children's wellbeing:

- **Developmental wellbeing** – realisation of cognitive capabilities and achievement of educational potential; managing financial responsibilities that come with maturation; personal growth.
- **Emotional wellbeing** – healthy emotional development; ability to cope with stress and setbacks; spiritual development; development of thoughtful values and a positive outlook; space and opportunities to flourish; life purpose; autonomy; feeling successful.
- **Physical wellbeing** – achievement and maintenance of healthy thriving; development of physical capabilities; using technology in physical safety; access to supportive or accessibility technologies.
- **Social wellbeing** – participation in wider communities including schools, clubs or societies; being an active citizen; ability to work with others; healthy interaction with online communities; maintenance of positive and sustainable online personae; managing the risks of grooming and exploitation; development and maintenance of good relations with significant people both online and offline; communication with people you know.

The accompanying report presents trends in the Index to set the scene on children's digital wellbeing and explores the key changes and stories that lie behind these shifts.

Limitations around tracking back to the 2021 wave

We now have four comparable waves of data to analyse (2022–2025), but our ability to track results from 2021 is still limited due to the following reasons:

- The 2021 survey was conducted on 9–15-year-olds and their parents. Later waves have included respondents aged 16.
- The questionnaire changed between Wave 1 and Wave 2, including many new questions, order changes, and questions that have been framed differently.
- There are differences in the index calculations since Wave 2 onwards, based on changes to the questionnaire.
- Weighting has been applied to the Wave 2, 3, 4 and 5 results (see above) but was unable to be retrospectively applied to Wave 1.



5. For brevity, we've referred to 'parents' throughout this report, but this could include legal guardians of children aged 9-16.

6. Where parents had more than one child in the 9-16 age range, one child was selected using a 'least fill method'.

7. The 2021 questionnaire contains some of the same metrics but much of the questionnaire was updated in 2022.

Statistical significance

Please note that all the changes highlighted in this report, comparing data from this year against previous waves (covering waves 2-5) or between subgroups, are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level. This means that the observed differences in the findings between periods are highly unlikely to be due to chance and instead reflect genuine changes or trends.

Impact of the UK Online Safety Act

This year's fieldwork dates (15th September to 1st October 2025) took place shortly after the Protection of Children Codes of Practice came into effect (25th July 2025). These Codes set out legal duties that technology companies are required to meet to keep children in the UK safe online.

While this wave may capture early signs of change, it is too soon to draw firm conclusions about impacts on wellbeing. Many questions ask respondents to reflect on their recent experiences, meaning responses are likely to cover periods before the Codes came into force. However, it is worth noting that platforms were already making changes ahead of the enforcement of the Codes, which may have impacted wellbeing scores. We also included additional questions on the Online Safety Act in this survey, and they will be explored in more detail in a separate report.⁸



8. At times we refer to the Online Safety Act as 'the Act' and the Protection of Children Codes of Practice as the 'Children's Codes'.



Section 1: Setting the scene: *An increasingly digital childhood*

Children are spending more time online, across a broader range of activities. Their engagement in online spaces is becoming increasingly interactive with more opting to create and share content rather than just passively consume it.

Children are spending more time online

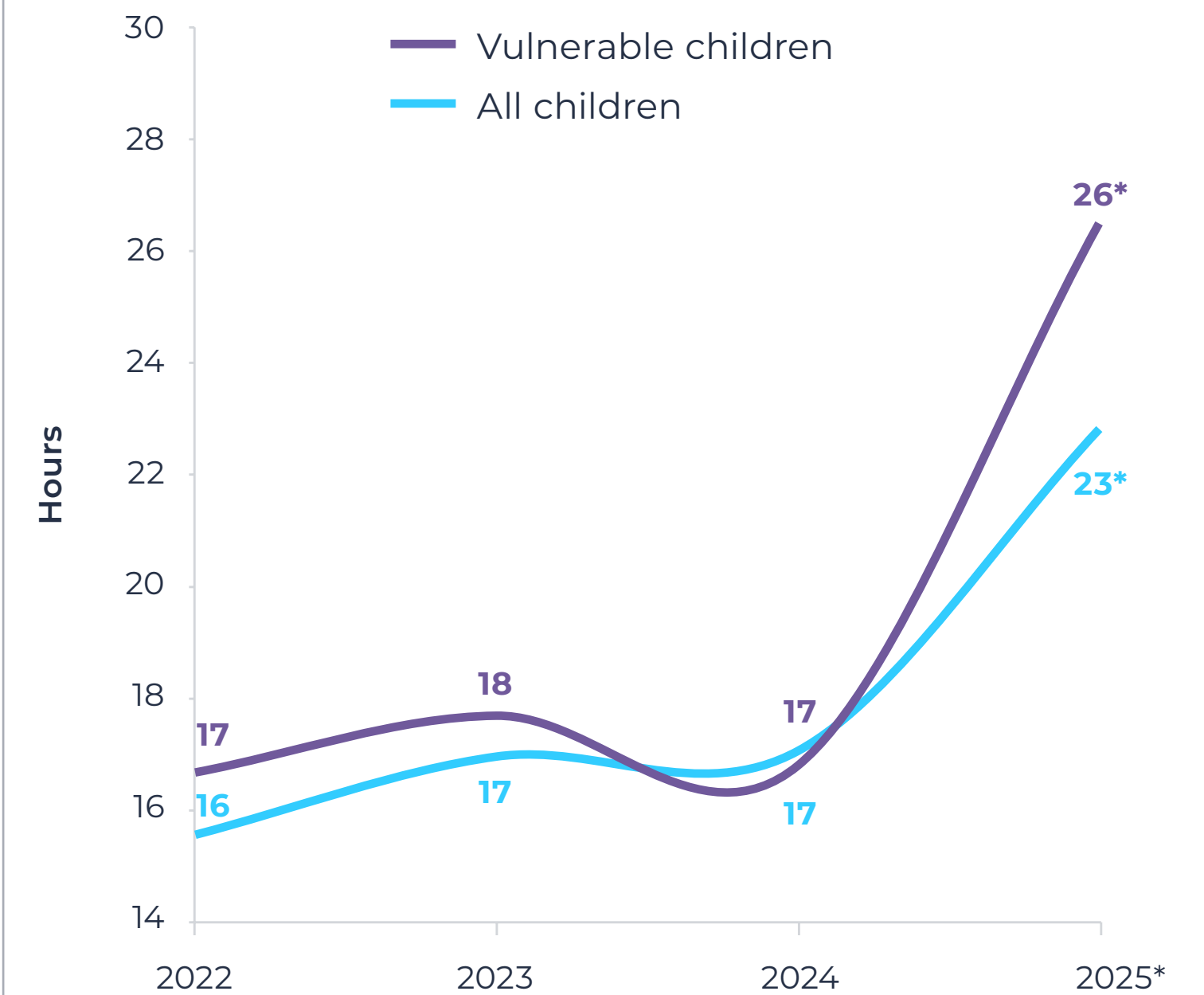
Since 2022, the amount of time children spend online, on average, has risen from 16 hours per week to 23.⁹ For some children this increase has been even more significant, with vulnerable children spending around 26 hours online per week, compared to 17 hours in 2022.¹⁰

Part of this increase reflects the rapid adoption of generative AI, which we began measuring this year. 68% of children report using at least one AI app or platform, with 53% reporting they use ChatGPT, 29% using Meta AI, 24% using Google Gemini/Bard and 12% using Grok.

9. Between 2022-2024 we measured children's time online across seven activities. This year, we added in 3 additional options: use of AI tools, watching livestreamed content and livestreaming content – this content accounts for 5 hours of time spent online.

10. Throughout the report we refer to children who have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), who receive special educational needs (SEN) support, and/or who have a physical/mental health condition which requires professional help, as 'vulnerable' or as 'children with vulnerabilities'. We recognise that there are multiple understandings of the term vulnerable, and this definition is for the purpose of this report and year on year comparisons.

Figure 1. Children are spending more time online: average number of hours spent online per week



Q46. How much time do you spend doing each of these things in a normal week?
All respondents (Wave 2: 1,138; Wave 3: 1,001; Wave 4: 1,054; Wave 5: 1,270), Vulnerable children (Wave 2: 205; Wave 3: 207; Wave 4: 246; Wave 5: 421)
*In 2025 three additional options were included in this question: using AI tools, watching content streamed live, and livestreaming myself or my own content

More children are creating and sharing content online

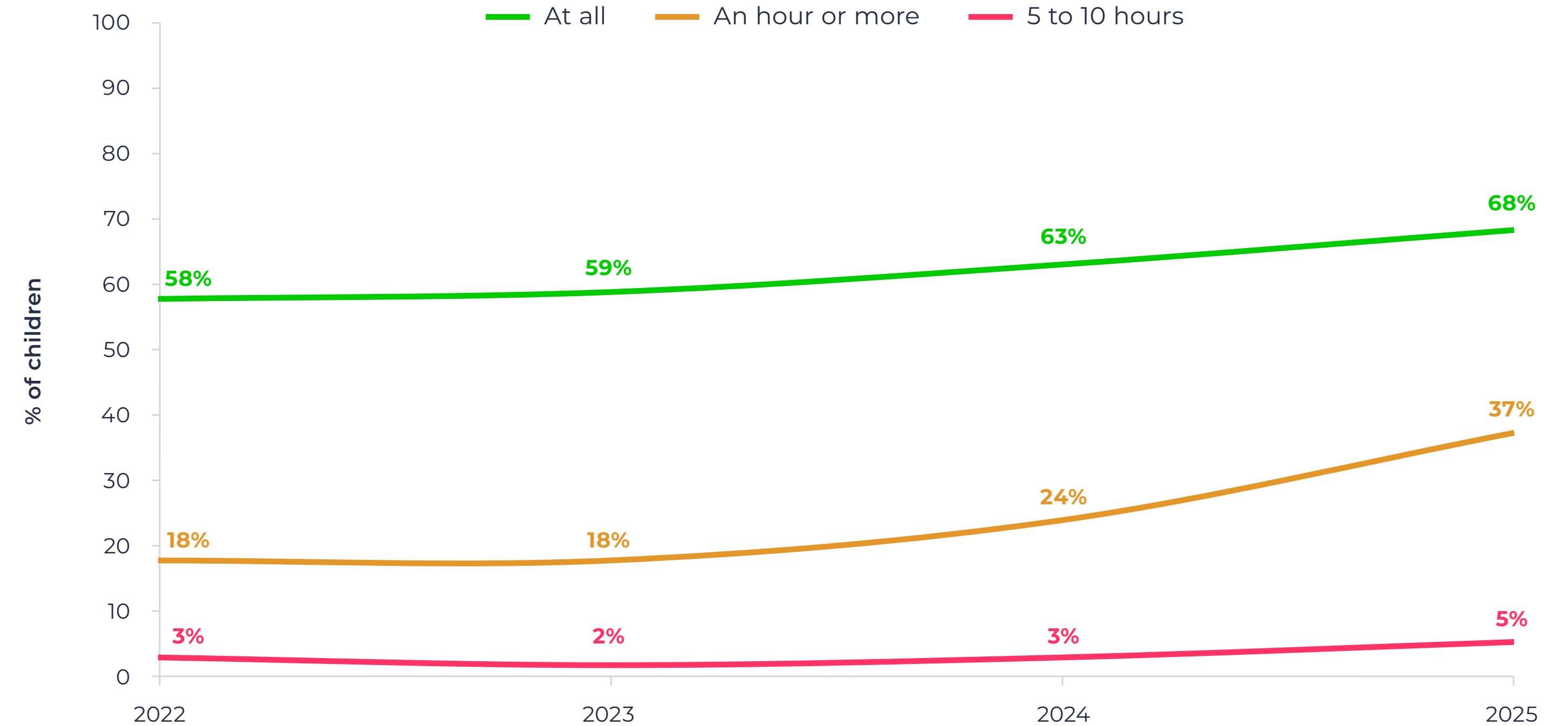
As well as spending more time online, children have become more active, social and creative. For example, the number of children who say they post and comment ‘a lot’ on social media has risen from 17% in 2022 to 26% today. Meanwhile, the proportion of children who describe themselves as passive scrollers has dropped from 32% in 2022 to 22% this year.

Children’s participation in forums and chatrooms (e.g. Discord or Reddit) has also increased substantially, with engagement now 62%, rising from 52% in 2024 and 44% in 2022. At the more extreme end of time spent on this activity, since 2022, the proportion of children spending between five and ten hours on these platforms per week has risen from 3% to 6%.

Content creation is also rising. In 2022, 58% of children said they created content to post online in a typical week. That has now risen to 68%, with over a third (37%) spending an hour or more a week creating content to post online and 5% doing this for between 5 and 10 hours per week.

This increase in time spent online, alongside more active engagement, brings new opportunities for connection, learning and self-expression. Yet, as this report highlights, the expansion of children’s online world also creates more complexity and opportunity for risk.

Figure 2. More children are creating and sharing content: Time spent creating content to post online in a week



Q46. How much time do you spend doing each of these things in a normal week? (Creating content to post online e.g. videos, pictures)
 All respondents (Wave 2: 1,138; Wave 3: 1,001; Wave 4: 1,054; Wave 5: 1,270)

Section 2:

A balancing act:

The uneven impact of time spent online

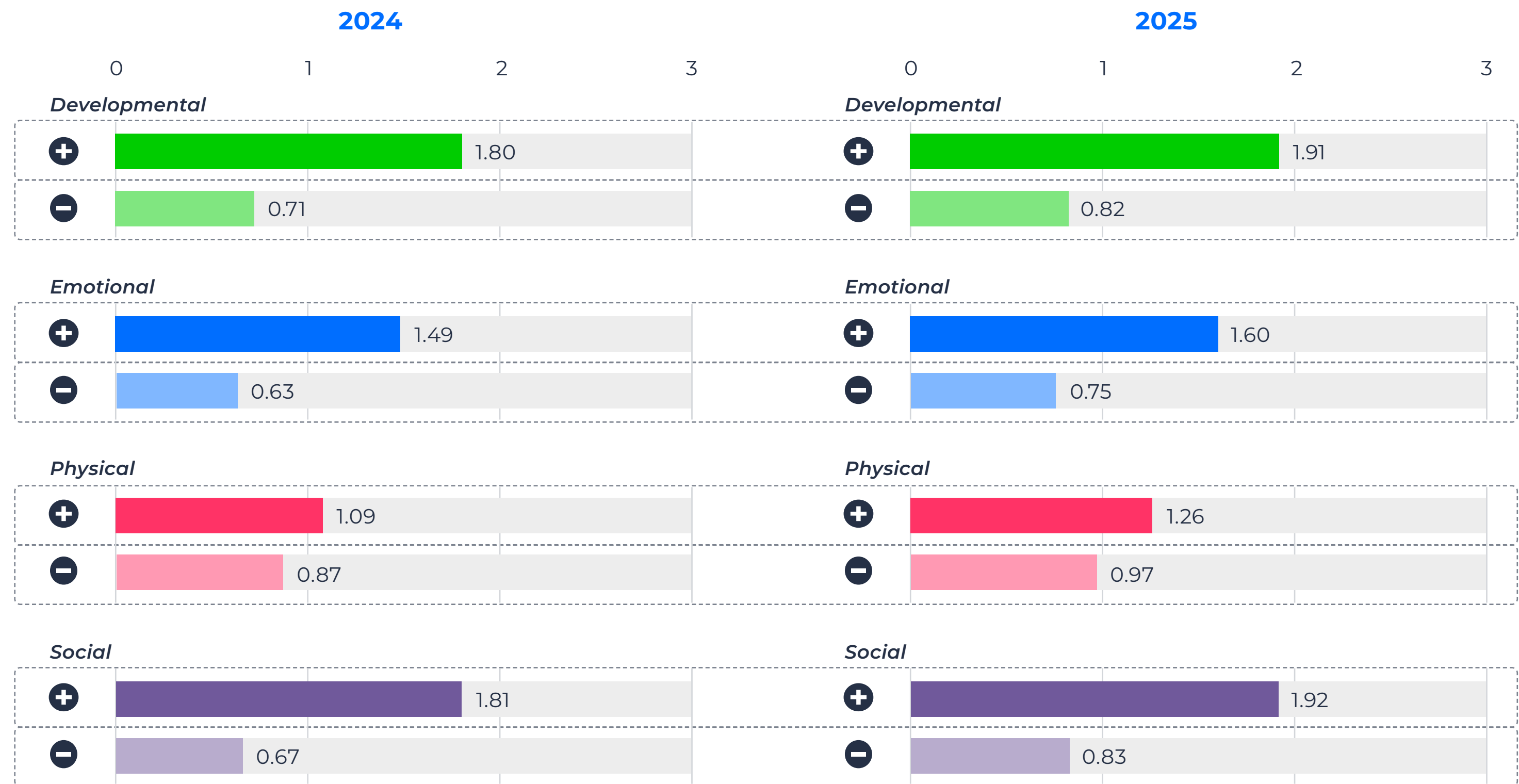
Children's digital wellbeing is becoming more polarised, according to both parents and children. While the positives of online life continue to outweigh the negatives, a growing number of children are struggling to disconnect and regulate their time online, which is driving poorer wellbeing outcomes.

A polarised picture: Positive and negative online experiences are rising in parallel

While this polarisation emerged last year – with children reporting more of the good and more of the bad of online life – over the past 12 months it has intensified further. All the positive and negative index scores, across all dimensions of children's digital wellbeing, have seen notable increases, as shown in Figure 3.

The most pronounced positive change is in the physical dimension, which increased from 1.09 to 1.26. Conversely, the most prominent negative change was the social dimension, rising from 0.67 to 0.83.

Figure 3. A polarised picture: Children's perspectives on their digital wellbeing



Base: All respondents 2024 (1,054) 2025 (1,270)
 Indexes calculated through combination of answers throughout children's questions
 Boxes indicate a significant increase in the score between 2024 and 2025

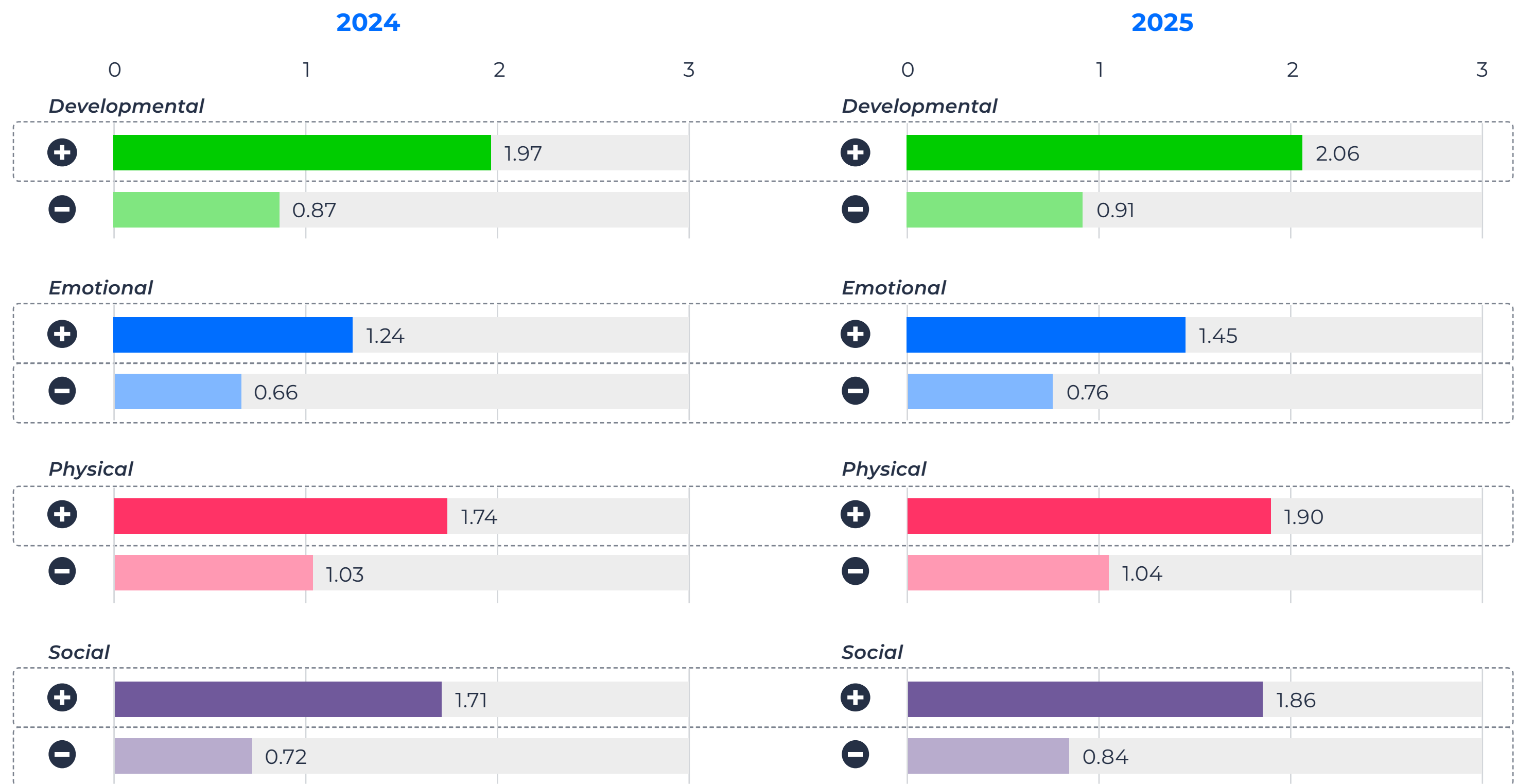
What is an index?

The term index may sound abstract, but each index is built from individual survey questions that capture children's real-world experiences, which are combined to produce an overall score.¹¹ When an index score shifts, it usually represents changes across several survey questions (which are sometimes called measures).

For example, in the positive social index, the increase is driven by more children answering that technology and being online is important for: being able to stay in contact with friends or family; meeting people who become good friends; and helping them find groups or communities that can offer friendship and support.

Parents also reflect on their child's digital wellbeing, with their index scores reinforcing this polarisation in children's online experiences (Figure 4). In the parent index, the largest positive change this year was observed in the emotional index, which rose from 1.24 to 1.45, while the highest negative change was in the social index, which rose from 0.72 to 0.84. The only area where parents did not see a statistically significant shift since our last report was in the negative physical index. However, this continues to be the dimension where parents see the most negative impacts of online life for children.

Figure 4. A polarised picture: Parents' perspectives on children's digital wellbeing



Base: All respondents 2024 (1,054) 2025 (1,270)
 Indexes calculated through combination of answers throughout parent's questions
 Boxes indicate a significant increase in the score between 2024 and 2025

11. For details on the full range of questions we use to calculate the index scores, see Appendix 2.

For vulnerable children, we find that these extremes are even more pronounced. Vulnerable children's index scores are higher than those of children not in this group across all dimensions of wellbeing, as shown in Figure 5. The areas where we see the biggest divide emerge between vulnerable children and their peers is in the negative developmental and negative physical index scores.

These index scores paint a complicated picture of children's online lives. As children grow up in a digital world where connected technology and online services are integral for learning, communication and inspiration, these benefits must be balanced against the challenges that the online world presents for children's wellbeing.

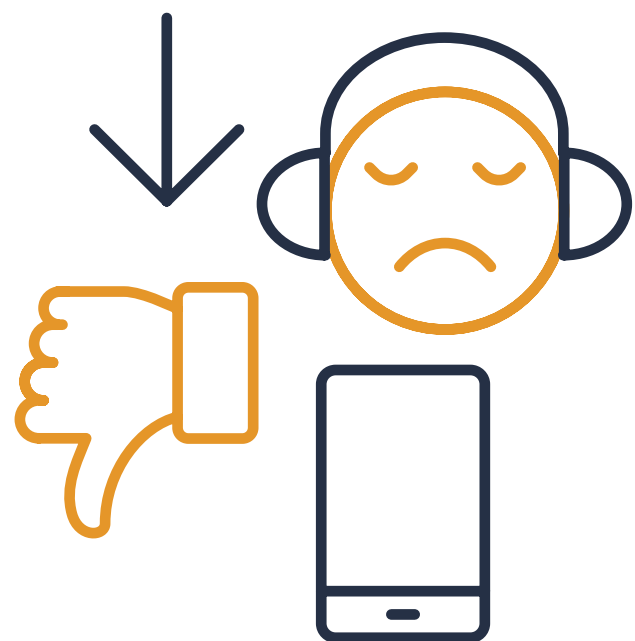
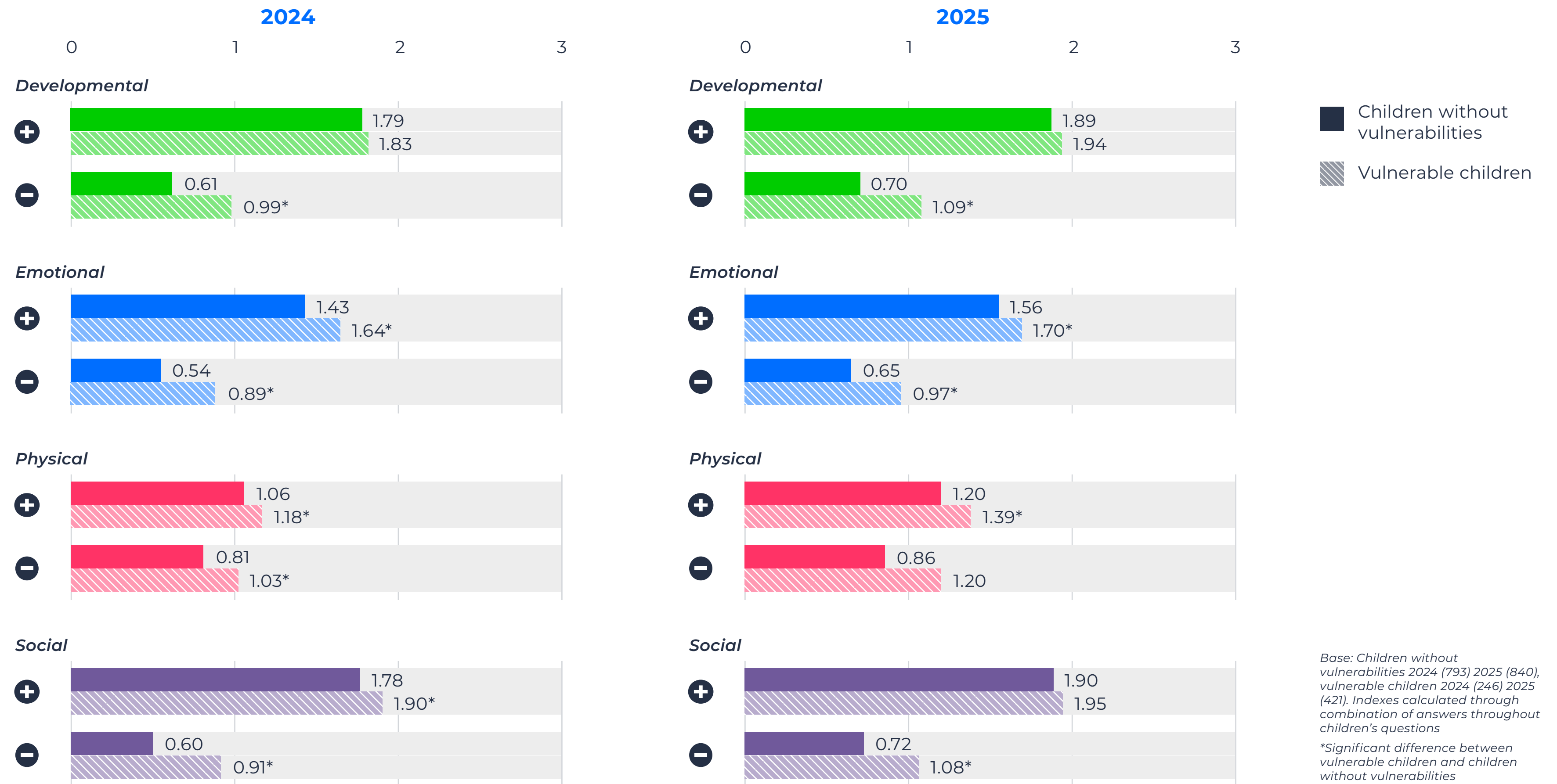


Figure 5. Extremes more pronounced: Index scores for vulnerable children compared to children without these vulnerabilities



The positives of online life: Discovery, inspiration and friendship

The positive elements of online life continue to outweigh the negative, with several positive measures of wellbeing increasing since 2022. This includes more children saying being online is important for finding what they would like to do in the future (75%, cf. 71% in 2024; 67% in 2022) and for being able to find new hobbies or things they are interested in (74%, cf. 71% in 2024; 63% in 2022).

As well as using the online world for inspiration, more children are also using apps, websites, and devices to support their health (60%, cf. 51% in 2024; 44% in 2022) and to discover new sports or exercises (63%, cf. 55% in 2024; 49% in 2022).

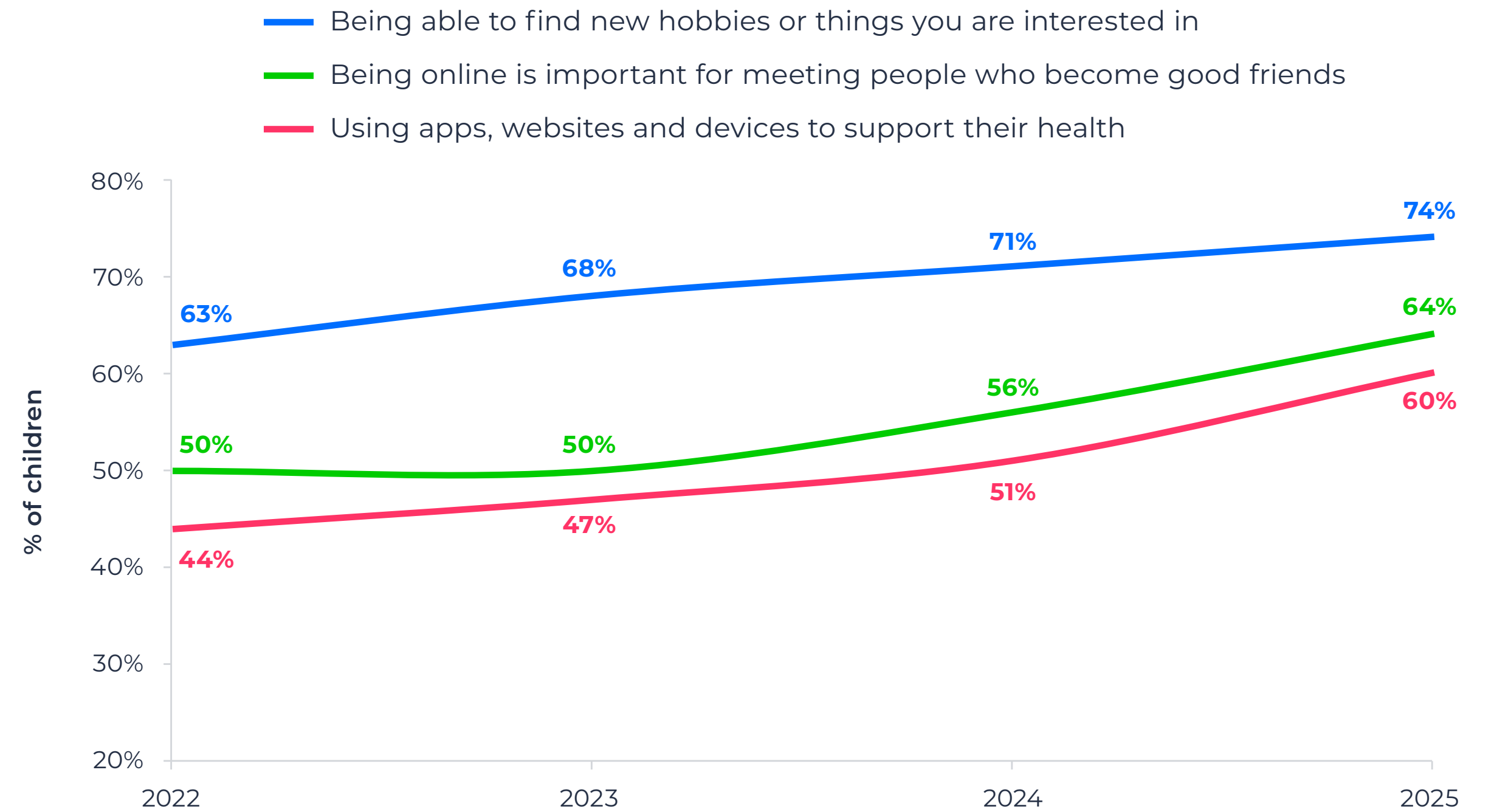
Children also find being online important for staying in contact with friends or family that they wouldn't otherwise be able to (83% cf. 77% in 2022), and meeting people who become good friends (64% cf. 56% in 2024; 50% in 2022).

Parents too see these benefits around socialising and discovery. More parents are reporting that the internet is very important for their children to be able to stay in contact and maintain relationships with those that are important to them (45% cf. 30% in 2022) and for their child's ability to participate in activities and moments that are important to them (39% cf. 20% in 2022).

Two-thirds (67%) of parents also said that being online has allowed their child to feel part of a group that they otherwise would not have (cf. 60% in 2022). Parents are also reporting that digital devices and being online have allowed their child to see things or people that inspire them to try new things (78% cf. 73% in 2022) and to discover and pursue interests and hobbies that make them happy (75% cf. 68% in 2022).

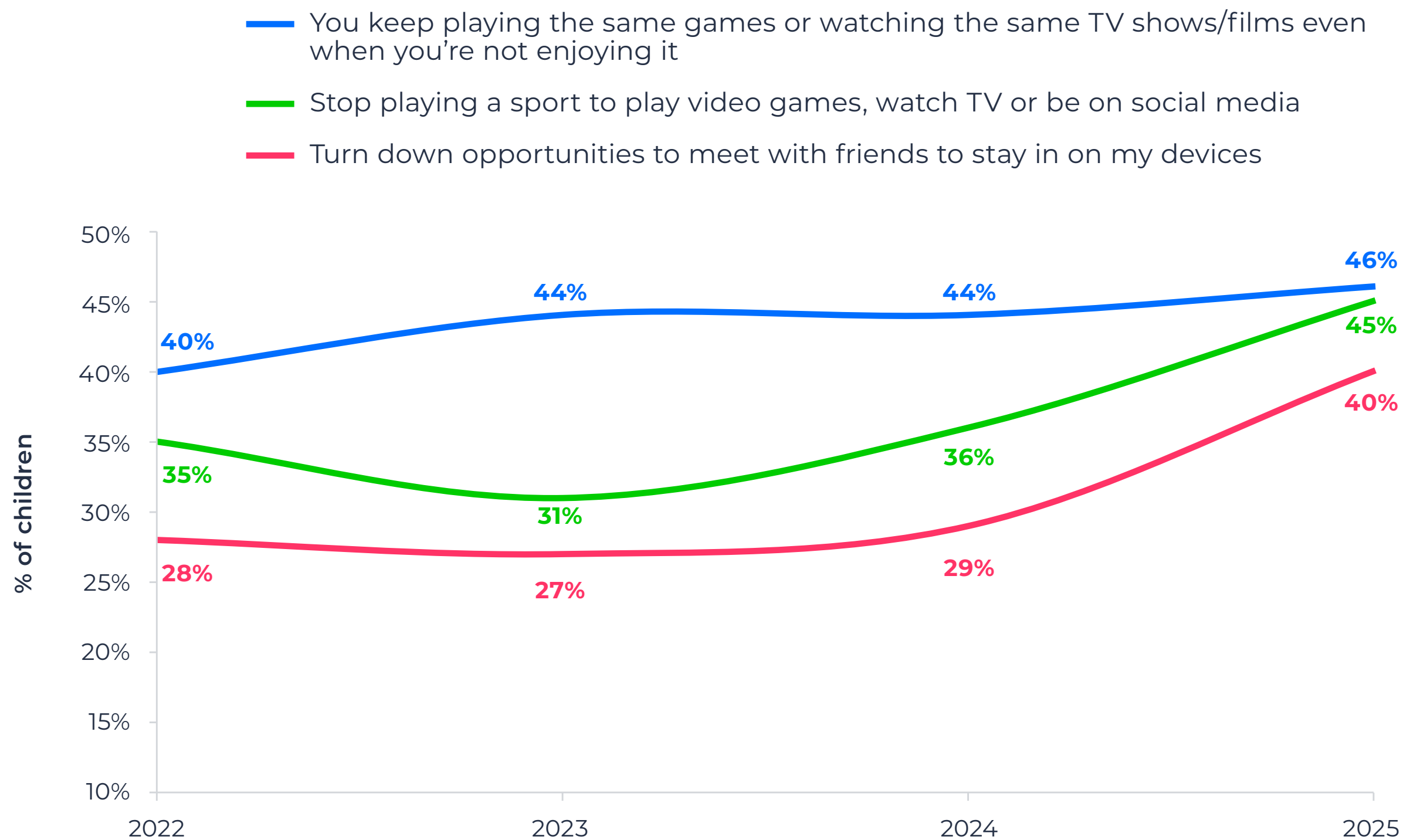


Figure 6. Positives of online life: Increase in positive children index measures



Q60. How important do you think technology and being online has been for you for these things? / Q54. How often do you do any of the following things? / Q55. How important do you think technology and being online has been for you for these things? / All respondents (Wave 2: 1,138; Wave 3: 1,001; Wave 4: 1,054; Wave 5: 1,270)

Figure 7. Children are finding it harder to disconnect: Increase in negative children index measures



Q59. How often do these things happen? / Q58. How much do each of these things sound like you? / Q54. How often do you do any of the following things? / Q57. How often do these things happen?
 All respondents (Wave 2: 1,138; Wave 3: 1,001; Wave 4: 1,054; Wave 5: 1,270)

Children are finding it harder to disconnect – and this comes at a cost

When we look at the individual measures of wellbeing driving the increases in the negative index scores, we find they point to an overarching issue: children are struggling to regulate their time online which is having a detrimental impact on wellbeing.

This is reflected in our last four years of data which shows children are finding it increasingly difficult to disconnect and put their devices down, often opting for online activity over real-world connections. This year, 46% of children reported they keep playing the same games or watching the same TV shows or films even when not enjoying them, up from 40% in 2022. Furthermore, 45% admit to stopping playing sport or doing exercise because they want to play video games, watch TV or be on social media (cf. 36% in 2024; 35% in 2022). Three-fifths (59%) of children also say they stay up late on their phone, playing games or watching TV.

Parents are also seeing this change, with over a third (37%) now reporting that their child turns down opportunities to meet with friends so they can stay in on their phone, computer or

games console (cf. 31% in 2024; 26% in 2022). A similar number of parents say their child has stopped doing sports or exercise because they are too busy on their devices (37% cf. 31% 2022).

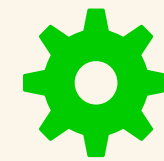
This is having a physical, emotional and social strain. 29% of children report that spending a lot of time online negatively affects their physical health (cf. 18% in 2022). More dependence on the online world is also taking an emotional toll: more children now say that if they miss out on friends' social media activity, it makes them upset (39%, cf. 29% in 2024; 24% in 2022). It can also strain offline relationships with two-fifths (40%) of children turning down real-world social opportunities to stay online (cf. 29% in 2024; 28% in 2022).

This shift towards greater device use at the expense of real-world connection does not occur in a vacuum. It reflects the commercial and design choices that shape children's online environments. Many platforms use features such as personalised algorithms, infinite scroll, autoplay, and streaks to capture and retain users' attention. For children, who are still developing self-regulation skills, these features can make disengagement more difficult.ⁱⁱⁱ

More time online brings some positives – but far more negatives

This is particularly concerning as while increased time online can offer some benefits, our data show that these are modest compared with the sharp rise in negative experiences. To help understand the relationship between time spent online and wellbeing, we can group children into quartiles based on the average amount of time they spend online across a range of activities.¹² When we examine these quartiles, children in the highest quartile for time spent online experience both more positives and negatives, across all dimensions of wellbeing, when compared to those in the lowest quartile of time spent online. Below we highlight examples for each dimension of wellbeing.

Given we can see increases in both the positive and negative measures of wellbeing, it might appear that they offset each other, suggesting that higher levels of online use result in a neutral overall effect on wellbeing. However, a closer examination of the data indicates that this is not the case.



Developmental

Children in the top quartile of online use are more likely to say that being online is important for learning new things that people wouldn't teach them in real life (76% cf. 66% of children in the lowest quartile). However, they are almost twice as likely to say they 'doom scroll', running out of things to see on social media so scrolling through the same things again (56% cf. 34%).



Emotional

Those who are online the most are much more likely to say they can be themselves online or on social media (66% cf. 44% of children who spend the least time online), yet they are more likely to see things online that worry or upset them (58% cf. 33%).



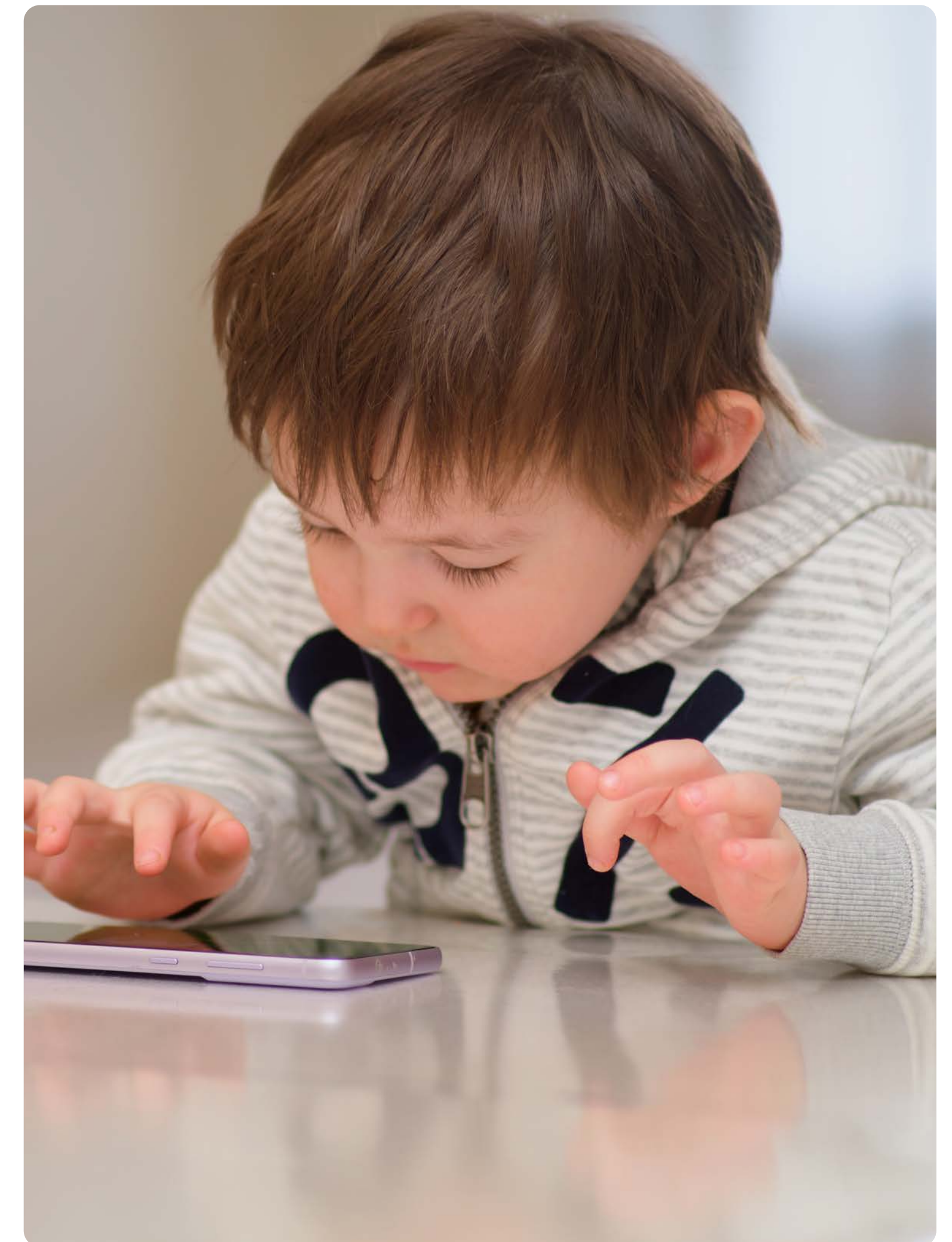
Physical

Children who are online the most are more likely to use their phone to arrange to meet up to play sports or do activities outside (77% cf. 54% for those who spend the least amount of time online). However, they also admit to stopping playing a sport or doing exercise because they want to play video games, watch TV or be on social media (54% vs. 34%).



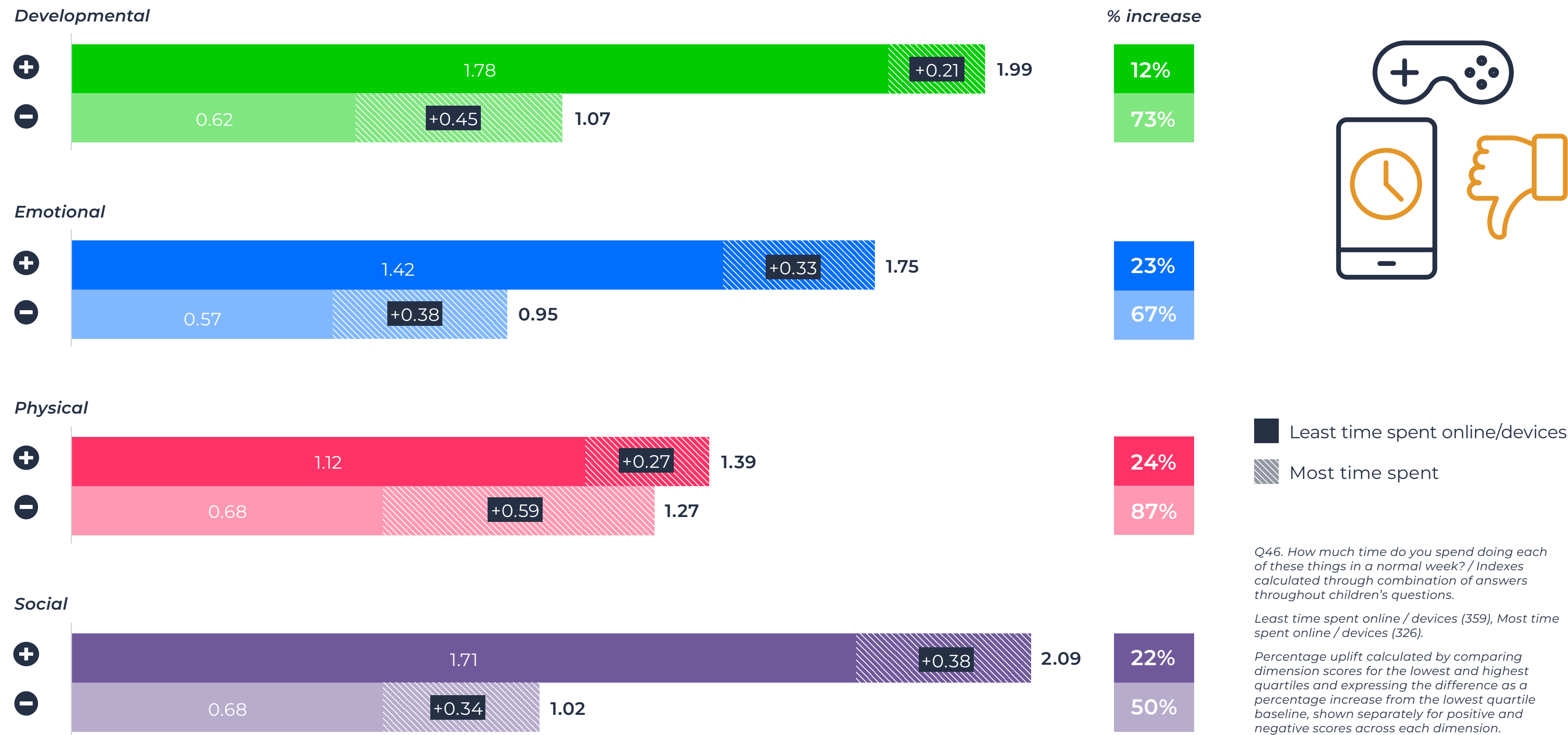
Social

Children who spend the most amount of time online are more likely to say being online has been important for them to meet people who become good friends (73% cf. 56% of those online the least) but also admit that spending time online makes them feel lonely (29% cf. 14%).



12. The online time quartiles are calculated based on "Q46. How much time do you spend doing each of these things in a normal week?". For each activity the time spent is calculated from the midpoint of the answer given. Respondents are then divided into quartiles based on total amount of time spent online / on devices per week. Those in the upper quartile are statistically significantly more likely to spend 2+ hours a week across each individual online activity / device, those in the lowest quartile are statistically significantly more likely to spend an hour or less across a week on these activities / devices.

Figure 8. More time online brings some positives – but far more negatives: Index dimensions for lowest and high quartile of users



As time spent online increases, the positive index scores rise only modestly, while negative index scores increase sharply. This is illustrated in Figure 8, which compares the wellbeing scores of children in the lowest quartile of time online with those in the highest quartile. If we take the developmental index score, we see that the negative index score is 73% higher for children in the highest quartile, than those in the lowest. This is a markedly steeper increase than the 12% rise observed in positive development outcomes between the two groups.

This suggests that children's digital wellbeing is strongly influenced by how much time they spend online, with increased time associated with much sharper rises in negative wellbeing measures than in positive ones. This is further reinforced in Section 3 where we highlight how experiences of harm increase as children spend more time online.

Given this, if we are to meaningfully improve children's wellbeing, we must support them to manage their time online. In the UK, the current regulatory approach to children's online safety focuses on reducing children's exposure to harmful content and contact. While the following section highlights why this is essential, any regulatory approach to improving children's online lives should also include addressing persuasive platform design to help support healthy digital engagement.

Section 3: No significant shift: *Children’s experiences of online harm remain unchanged*

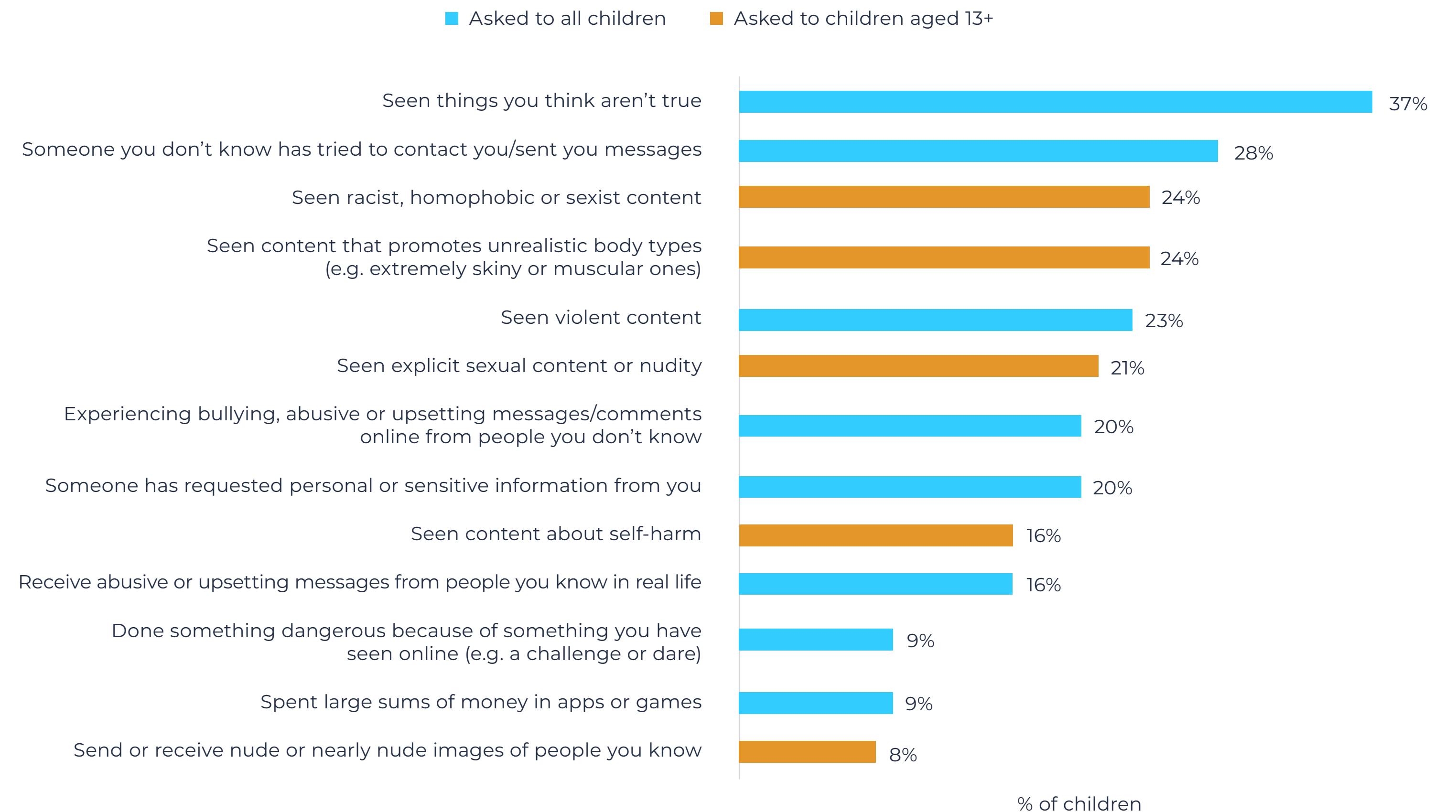
Children continue to experience unacceptable levels of harm online – with two-thirds of children reporting that they have experienced at least one type of harm. This includes being contacted by strangers, viewing violent content or coming across false information.

Experience of harm remains unchanged

This year, 68% of children reported encountering harm online, the same figure as a year ago (68% in 2024; 67% in 2023). Of these harms, the most prevalent experienced by children was exposure to false information (37%). Over a quarter of children (28%) also report being contacted by strangers and 23% said they have seen violent content online (see Figure 9).

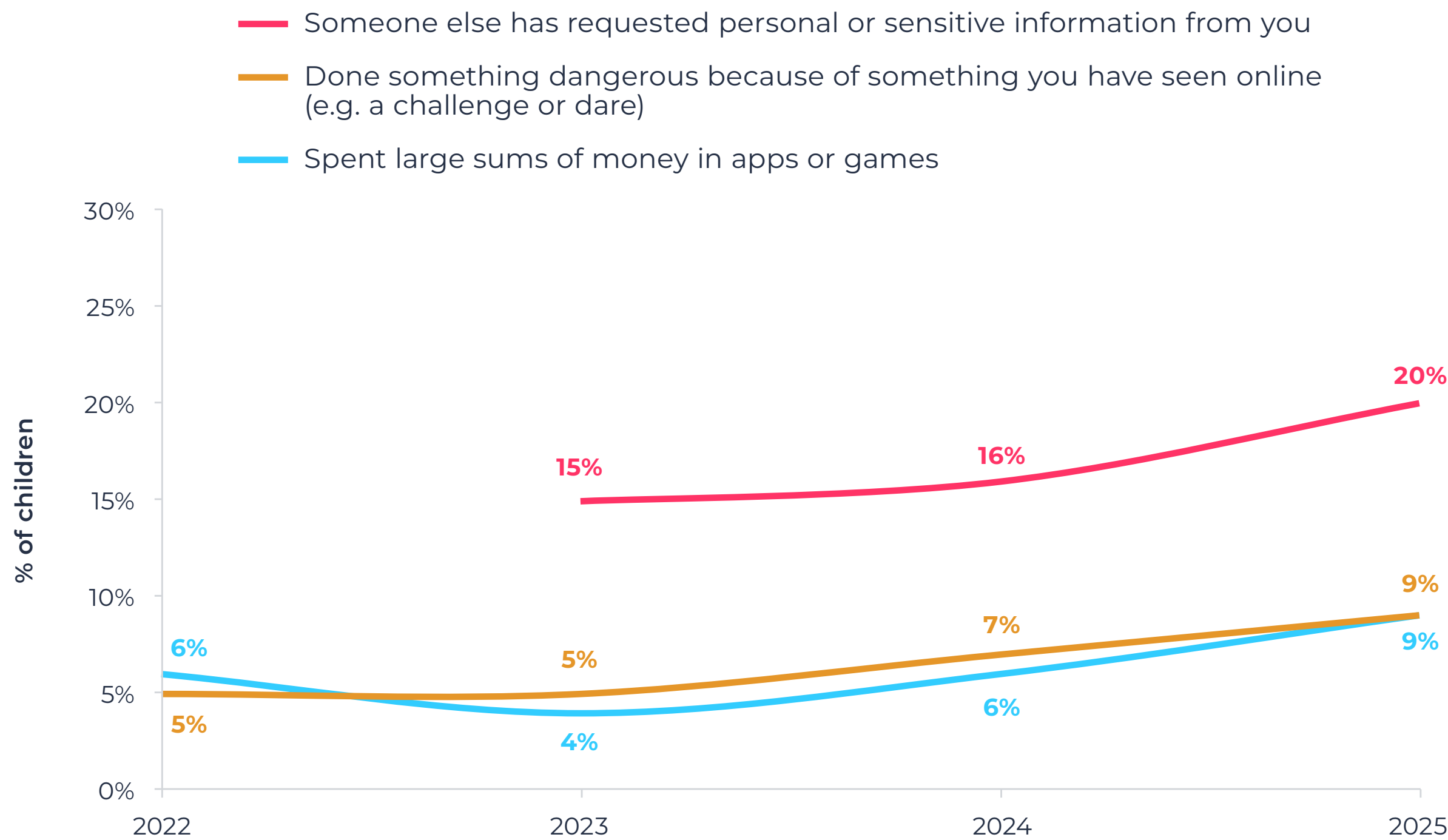
For vulnerable children, levels of harm are even higher, with 79% having experienced at least one type of harm (cf. 63% of their peers without these vulnerabilities). This is a persistent gap that has widen in the past year (79% 2024 cf. 68%).

Figure 9. Experience of harm remains unchanged: Children’s self-reported experiences of online harms



Q51. Have you had any of the following experiences online?
All respondents (1,270) 13+ only (624)

Figure 10. Exposure to some harms have increased: Children's experiences of online harms overtime



Q51. Have you had any of the following experiences online?
All respondents (Wave 2: 1,138; Wave 3: 1,001; Wave 4: 1,054; Wave 5: 1,270)

Exposure to some harms have increased

This year has also seen children's exposure to certain harms increase. More children report that someone has requested personal or sensitive information from them (20% cf. 16% in 2024) and doing something dangerous because of something they saw online (9%, cf. 7% in 2024; 5% in 2022).

Deep-dive: Online spending in games and apps

A rising number of children report spending large sums of money in games or apps. This is particularly driven by vulnerable children: 13% of vulnerable children report spending large sums of money in games or apps.

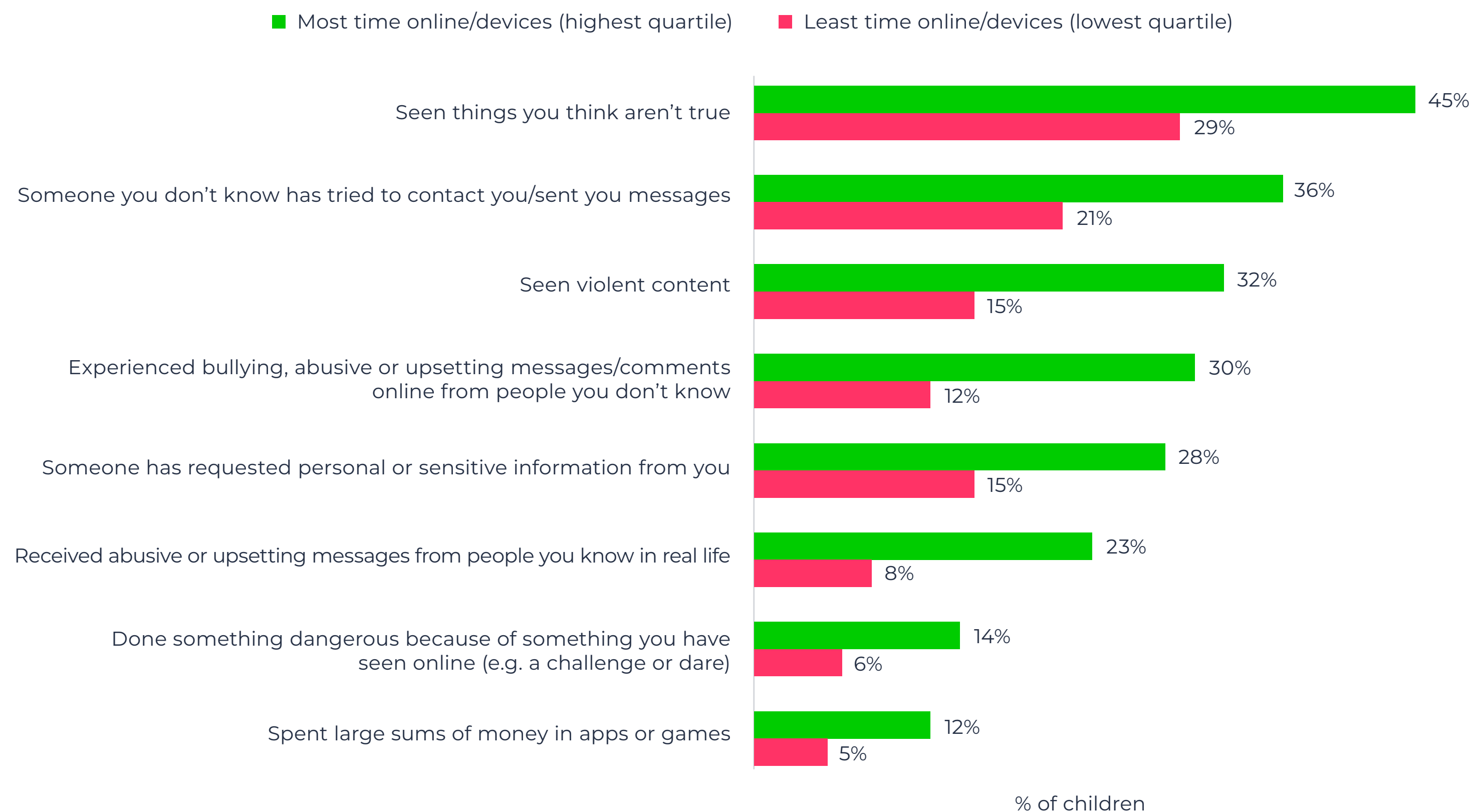
This rise is reflected in parents' concerns, with 49% of parents reporting they are worried about their child spending money online. This is a particular concern for parents of vulnerable children, who are more likely to report their child spends money in apps or on games without realising, compared to parents of children without these vulnerabilities (47% cf. 23%).

While this research does not establish the precise drivers of the increase, the trend sits within a broader digital environment

where persuasive design features can shape children's financial behaviours. Features such as in-game currencies, bundled currency packages and time-limited offers can make spending feel less visible, more urgent or more socially expected, lowering the barriers to repeat or impulsive purchases. In this context, the rise in children reporting large in-app or in-game spending may reflect the cumulative impact of these design dynamics.^{iv} This is especially true for vulnerable children who are more likely to game and who can struggle with the skills and knowledge needed to manage in-app or in-game spending.^v



Figure 11. Time online correlates with higher rates of harm: Experiences of harm among the users who spend the most and least amount of time online



Q51. Have you had any of the following experiences online?
 Highest quartile of time spent online (359); Lowest quartile of time spent online (335)

Time online correlates with higher rates of harm

As outlined in Section 2, we can categorise children into quartiles based on time spent online. Among those who spend the most amount of time online or on their devices (the top quartile of users), 80% have experienced online harm, compared to 52% of lowest quartile users.

Looking across the specific harms this year, the gaps are striking. Those in the highest-use group are much more likely to see violent content (32% cf. 15% in the lowest-use group), be contacted by a stranger (36% cf. 21%), experience bullying, abusive or upsetting messages from strangers (30% cf. 12%) or receive abusive messages from people they know (23% cf. 8%).

This builds on from findings in our previous report, *Connected and Conflicted*, where we found that experiences of online harm increased as children spent more time browsing on social media.^{vi} We also found that children who use social media more actively (such as posting or commenting frequently) are more likely to experience harm compared to 'passive' users who only browse or scroll.

This year, we again find that those who are 'active' on social media (i.e. who post and comment frequently) are more likely to have had a negative experience. For example, they are more likely to have received abusive or upsetting messages from people they do not know (32% cf. 20% of those who only comment or react, and 16% who only browse or scroll). They are also more likely to do something dangerous because of something they have seen online (21% cf. 8% of those who only comment or react, and 6% who only browse or scroll).

As children spend more time online and, crucially, use the internet in a more active way, it follows that they may experience more of the benefits such as connection, creativity and inspiration, but they also heighten the risk of experiencing harm online.

Older children have more harmful experiences

As children get older, they are more likely to experience harm online. 72% of children aged 13-16 have experienced harm online, compared to 63% of children aged 9-12. Where we see the biggest differences emerge are in relation to seeing violent content (26% cf. 20%). Parents data also shows differences with parents of older children reporting their child has seen explicit sexual content or nudity (15% cf. 11% of parents of 9-12 year olds) and seen content promoting self-harm or suicide (14% cf. 8%) at higher rates.

This may be because they use digital spaces more, with older children being the most likely to be in the highest quartile of users compared to their younger peers (32% of 13-16-year-olds cf. 19% of 9-12-year-olds). However, older children are also engaging in more spaces including in more interactive and less regulated environments, like forums and chatrooms (68% cf. 55% of 9-12-year-olds) – which is likely contributing to these higher rates of harm.^{vii} They also use online spaces in more active ways (76% cf. 61% of 9-12-year-olds) which, as discussed above, also contributes to increased rates of harm.

Where we see younger children more at risk of harm is in relation to engaging in dangerous behaviour after seeing something online (11% cf. 8%). This may reflect developmental differences: younger children are still building the critical thinking and contextual understanding needed to interpret online content safely.

While older children may encounter more harmful material overall, younger children may be more likely to act on what they see. This highlights why it is so important we support children to develop media literacy from a young age, alongside broader skills that help them assess risk and respond appropriately online.^{viii}

Gendered experiences online

Girls and boys continue to experience similar rates of harm online; however, some types of harm are more pronounced for boys and others more common among girls. Girls are more likely to see content that promotes unrealistic body types (27% cf. 20% of boys). Conversely, boys are twice as likely to say they have seen explicit sexual content or nudity (16% cf. 8% of girls).

One key difference between boys and girls is how harmful content online impacts them. Girls are much more likely than boys to report finding certain content upsetting, including:

- Explicit content or nudity (50% cf. 26% of boys)
- Violent content (67% cf. 53% of boys)
- Racist, homophobic or sexist content (67% cf. 43% of boys)

These findings reflect previous Internet Matters' research which also finds that girls are more likely to feel distress after encountering content that promotes unrealistic body types (51% cf. 34% of boys) or after coming across sexual content (49% cf. 36%).^{ix}

These patterns highlight the nuanced ways the online world is experienced differently by boys and girls. For girls, exposure to explicit, violent or discriminatory content – particularly where it intersects with gendered pressures, body image expectations and misogynistic harassment – may carry a greater emotional weight, intensifying its impact for girls.

In contrast, boys' lower reported distress may reflect the normalisation of harmful online content rather than a lack of impact. Exposure to explicit content, for example, is increasingly common from a young age^x with significant proportions of children – particularly boys – encountering such material. Ofcom finds that 8% of children (aged 8-14) had visited an online pornography site or app, with boys aged 13-14 the most likely viewers (20%).^{xi} Regular exposure to age-inappropriate material may be contributing to its normalisation among boys, potentially dulling their emotional responses to such harm in comparison to girls.

These differences in boys' and girls' emotional responses may also help explain differences in how safe young people feel online. Boys are more likely to perceive the online world as 'very safe' for them (20% cf. 14% of girls), suggesting that their lower levels of distress may contribute to a more positive perception of the online world.



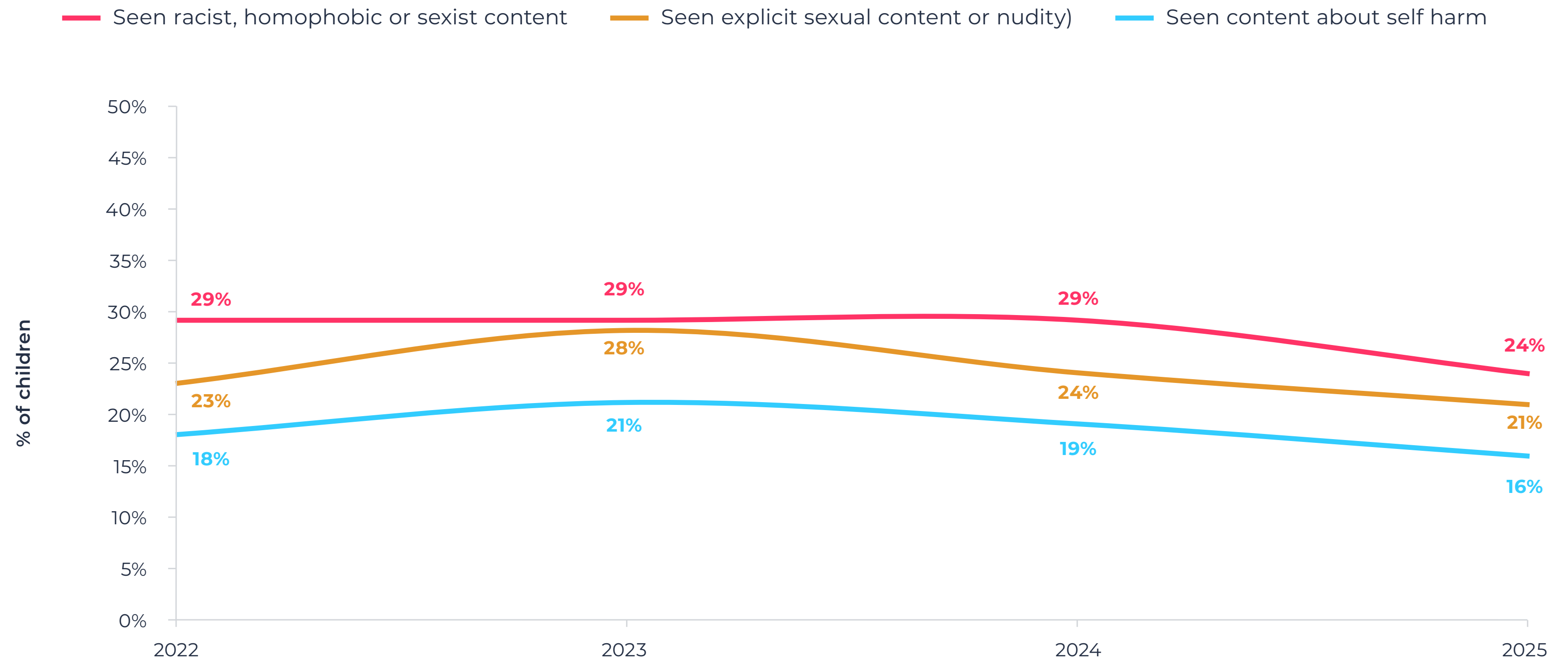
Some harms are in decline – the Online Safety Act in action?

In the past year, we have seen some positive shifts in experiences of certain online harms. For instance, 21% of children say they have seen explicit sexual content or nudity this year down from 28% in 2023. Similarly, seeing hate speech content (24% cf. 29% in 2024) and content about self-harm (16% cf. 21% in 2023) have also fallen.

These harms align with the categories of content that the Online Safety Act and its subsequent Children's Codes seek to address. If the Act is operating effectively, we would expect to see reporting of these harms, and others, decrease over time.

Despite some encouraging signs, the broader picture remains unchanged: too many children are being exposed to harm online. Reducing these risks, particularly for vulnerable children, must remain a central priority – alongside supporting children to regulate their time online.

Figure 12. Some harms in decline: Reductions in harms experienced by children since 2024



Q51. Have you had any of the following experiences online?
All respondents (Wave 2: 1,138; Wave 3: 1,001; Wave 4: 1,054; Wave 5: 1,270)

Section 4: Parenting in a digital world: *Parents and children are navigating online safety together*

Rising concern about the impact of online spaces and connected technology on children's wellbeing has sparked public debate over children's access to digital technology and social media. Amid this, more parents are implementing parental controls and becoming more aware of their children's online lives.

Parents are using tools and controls to manage their children's online lives

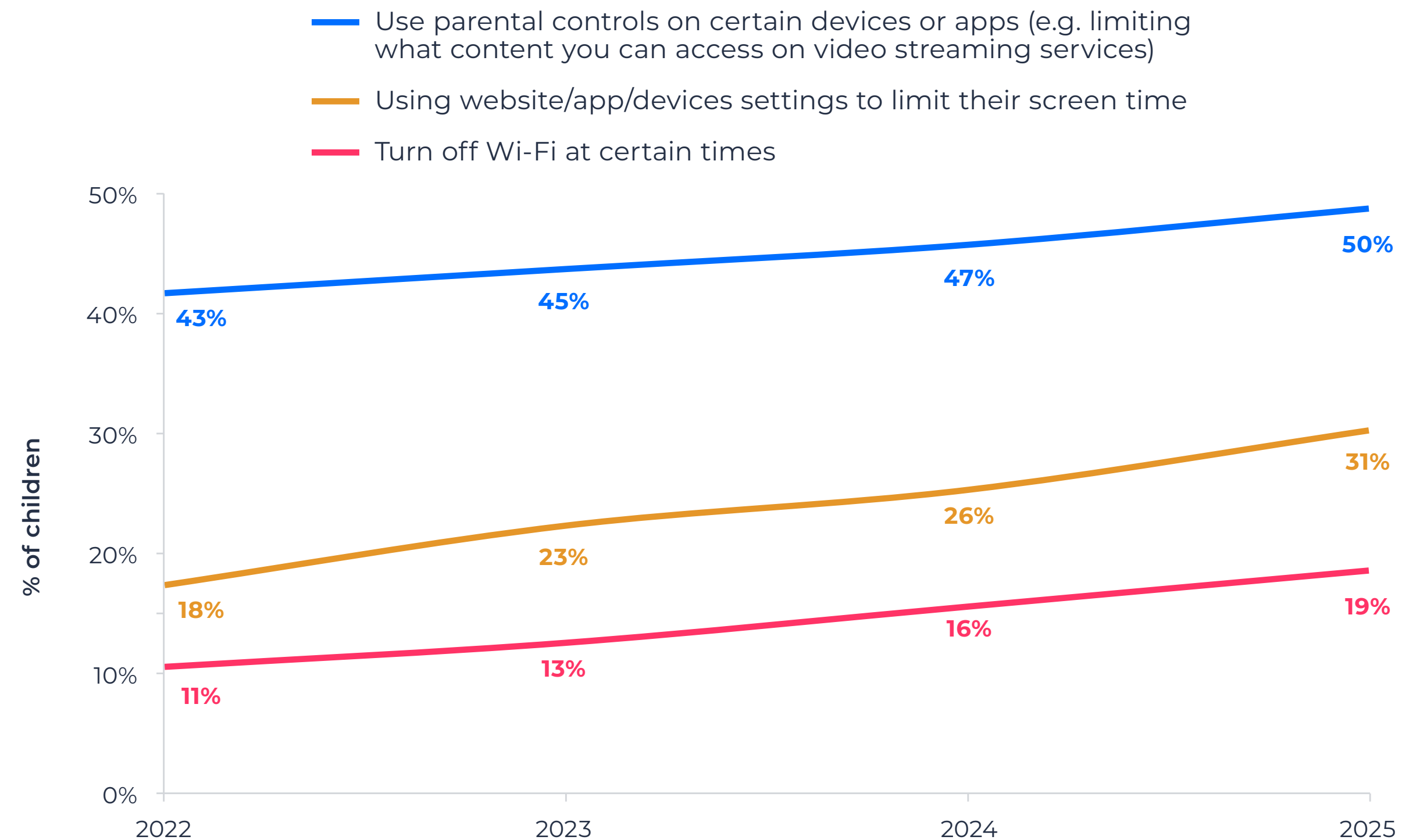
This year, parents report increased use of parental controls on certain devices or apps, with 50% now using these controls, up from 43% three years ago. Parents are also more

likely to use website, app or device settings to limit their children's screen time (31%, cf. 18% in 2022) and turn off the Wi-Fi at certain times (19% cf. 11% in 2022).

In light of the difficulties parents and children report regarding screen time and its effects on children's wellbeing, it is perhaps unsurprising that the number of parents using these tools has risen significantly in the past three years.

Children's data largely echoes parents', with 48% of children reporting their parent uses parental controls (cf. 39% in 2022). Furthermore, 32% of children tell us their parent uses time-limit settings on their devices (cf. 20% in 2022) and 22% reporting that their parents turn off Wi-Fi at certain times (cf. 14% in 2022)

Figure 13. Parents are using tools and controls to manage their children's online lives:
Parents' use of parental controls and technical tools



Q20. Do you do any of the following things to manage what your <age> year old <son/daughter> does on their devices/online?
All respondents (Wave 2: 1,138; Wave 3: 1,001; Wave 4: 1,054; Wave 5: 1,270)

Children are becoming more open with their parents about their online lives

Alongside using parental controls, parents are having more conversations with children about their online activity. Three-fifths of children (61%) now say they are very open with their parents about their online lives, up from 56% in 2024 and 51% in 2023. This trend can be seen across all age groups, with significant increases since 2023 for children aged 9-10 (71% cf. 63%) and children aged 15-16 (56% cf. 42%).

Furthermore, three-quarters (75%) of children now talk to their parents about content that worries or upsets them. More children also say that their parents know much more about their online activity than in previous years. For instance, 33% of children say their parents know everything, compared to 24% in 2022. These trends suggest that parents are responding to their rising concern by engaging more with what their children are doing online.

Talking openly supports safer and happier online experiences

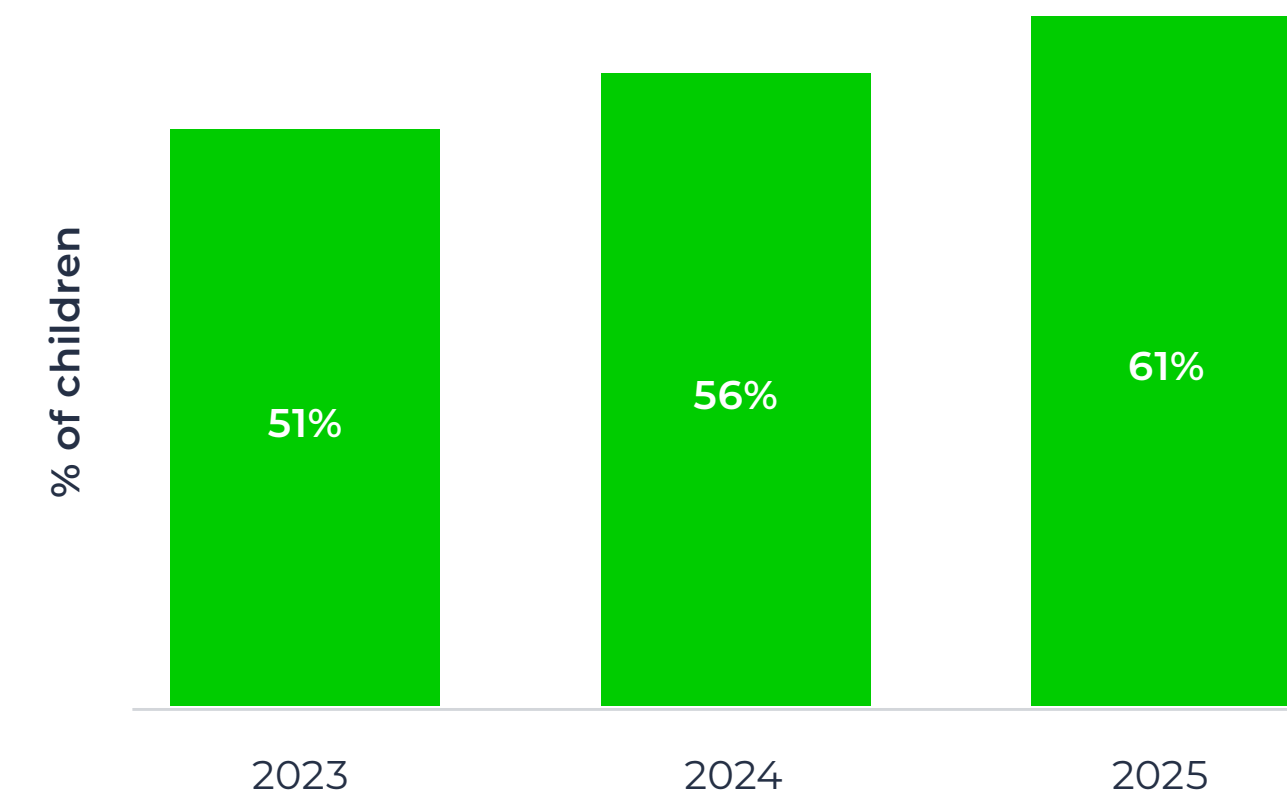
Although parents cannot single-handedly change children's overall digital wellbeing, setting boundaries and fostering open communication are an important part of online safety and can make a meaningful difference to their online experiences.

Children who describe themselves as very open with their parents report higher levels of positive emotional experiences online, such as feeling confident (61% cf. to 29% of those not open), or happy online (73% cf. 40%).

In contrast, children who say they are less open with their parents are more likely to have experienced certain online harms. For instance, children who are not open with their parents are more likely to do something dangerous because of something they have seen online (17% cf. 9% of those who are very open), they are also more likely to spend large amounts of money in games or apps (18% cf. 9%). The former is particularly worrying as risky online challenges, often amplified by social media algorithms, evolve rapidly and often slip through moderation, meaning that technical solutions alone cannot reliably prevent children from seeing or being influenced by this content.^{xii} Supporting parents to have these conversations and build an open trusting relationship is central to fostering better outcomes for children.

Although recent attention has centred on the role of legislation and regulation in protecting children online, improving children's digital wellbeing will require more than regulating platforms alone. Children grow up within families, and parents, carers and trusted adults remain fundamental to shaping their digital experiences. Policymakers, industry and civil society must therefore ensure that families are equipped to guide children safely and confidently online.

Figure 14. Children are becoming more open with their parents about their online lives: Percentage of children who are 'very open' with their parents



Q53A. How open, if at all, are you with your parents / guardian about what you do online?
All respondents (Wave 3: 1,001; Wave 4: 1,054; Wave 5: 1,270)





Conclusions

Over the past year, children's online safety and digital wellbeing have continued to dominate headlines, not only in the UK but around the world.^{xiii} This heightened attention makes understanding children's online experiences more relevant than ever. Now in its fifth year, our report highlights the complexities of online life for families. It shows children are continuing to experience unacceptable levels of harm online and struggling to disengage from digital spaces, both of which are negatively affecting their wellbeing.

Banning social media for under-16s has been proposed as one solution to these challenges, however, such an approach raises practical challenges with implementation and risks unintended consequences. It would also be a disservice to young people to simply exclude them from online spaces, especially as they grow up in a digital world where the internet and connected devices play a central role in development, play, and daily life.

Instead of locking children out of online spaces, we must create an environment where they are safe and able to thrive. Pressure is mounting on governments and technology companies to do more, presenting a critical opportunity for progress. Yet the pace of action has been too slow, and many of the challenges and recommendations set out in this report are not new. Harnessing this momentum will require co-ordinated action across government, industry, regulators, schools and families so that everyone who shapes children's digital experiences also plays a role in supporting their online safety and wellbeing.

Government and the regulator must go further

Regulation

In the UK, the Online Safety Act already places a number of obligations on industry to keep children safe online. However, despite this legislation being enacted in 2023, many of its protections only came into force in 2025, including the Protection of Children Codes. While a forthcoming report from Internet Matters will explore the impact of the Act for families, the extent to which these measures are supporting children's digital wellbeing and safety is not yet understood.

Furthermore, this legislation is primarily focused on reducing children's exposure to harmful content and contact.^{xiv} However, children are increasingly struggling to regulate their time online - an issue parents consistently identify as a top concern and one that is negatively impacting children's wellbeing.^{xv} If we are to support children to thrive in a digital world, we cannot just focus on reducing exposure to harmful content. We must also curb addictive design features, such as personalised algorithms, infinite scroll and engagement streaks, to rebalance the impact of digital technology on children's wellbeing. This must be done alongside robust enforcement of the Act by Ofcom (the UK's online safety regulator) and government holding the regulator to account.

In the past year we have also seen how new technologies, in particularly generative AI, can be harmful to children – as well as the inadequacy of current legislation to deal with this technology.^{xvi} According to Internet Matters research, two thirds (64%) of children are regularly engaging with AI chatbots – yet on many popular platforms safeguards are not in place for children to do so safely.^{xvii} Addressing this must be an immediate priority for government.

Media literacy

Regulation is important, but so is media literacy. In a digital environment where new risks continue to emerge and policy responses can take time to develop, children need the skills and understanding to navigate online spaces safely, responsibly and critically.

In the past year, government has made some progress towards improving children and parents' media literacy, announcing a number of initiatives informed by input from civil society and other stakeholders. These include a Media Literacy Action Plan, a campaign to support parents to have conversations with their children about the content they are seeing online, an online safety resource hub for parents, and forthcoming guidance on children's screentime.

The most significant media literacy development this year, however, was in response to the independent school Curriculum and Assessment Review, which placed digital and media literacy at its centre. The government has committed to taking forward a number of the Review's recommendations, including embedding media and digital literacy throughout the curriculum at all key stages. We must now work to ensure these commitments are implemented effectively, which means giving schools the resources, training and guidance needed to deliver high-quality media and digital literacy education.

Industry can do more

Safety-by-design

Industry should not wait for legislation and regulation to catch up before making platforms safer for children. Platforms that are used by children, from social media to AI-powered services, must be built on the principles of safety-by-design. This means considering and addressing children's needs from the outset, not after harm has occurred. It must also go further than just tackling harmful content and contact. At the centre of safety-by-design is ensuring children have access to age-appropriate experiences – including enabling different features and functionalities as children grow and mature – rather than having one design for all users. Central to this is the use of highly effective age assurance (HEAA) to accurately establish users' ages, both to tailor age-appropriate experiences and to uphold minimum age requirements so children cannot access platforms that are not designed for them.

Media literacy-by-design

Technology companies should also take responsibility for supporting children's media literacy by embedding it into the design of their platforms. Media literacy-by-design means including features that actively help users to evaluate, question and contextualise the content they encounter, as well as functionalities that allow users to understand and tailor their experiences. This could include features such as clear labelling of AI-generated or manipulated content in algorithm feeds, content warnings for graphic content or prompts showing users how to change their feed.

Parents will always play a central role

Recent years have shown that parents want more support to keep their children safe online. Our research also shows parents are central to positive wellbeing outcomes and are who children turn to for online safety advice and when something goes wrong.^{xviii} While industry, government and regulators can and must do more, they cannot replace the central role parents play in children's online lives. At the same time, many parents themselves are grappling with the fast-evolving online world, learning and adapting alongside their children.^{xix}

To support parents, Internet Matters provides hundreds of practical step-by-step guides, resources and articles. At internetmatters.org, parents can access trusted information tailored to their child's age, interests and needs – including resources for parents of vulnerable children – to help keep their child safe and well online. We also have specific [guidance to help parents balance children's screentime](#) as well as [support to shape a healthy digital diet](#).

We are continually listening to parents and evolving our support to reflect the challenges they are facing.



Appendix 1. How index scores were calculated

The participants were asked to rate the importance or truth of statements about their technology use, their feelings about their technology use, and some questions about their household and family dynamics. Each statement has been assigned to one of the four dimensions of wellbeing and designated as relating to either the positive or negative effects of digital technology on children. The overall Index and the scores for each dimension are based on these answers.

How scores were developed for each positive and negative dimension

Each of the eight groupings (four dimensions with a positive and negative group) is represented by between three and eight survey items (please see Appendix 2 for details on all items used).

- Each item was scored out of three based on the strength of an individual response. For example, someone reporting that they do something 'all the time' scored higher than someone who reported that they did something 'occasionally'.
- For each dimension, the scores for related items were averaged (taking the arithmetic mean), providing a maximum score of three and a minimum of zero.

- The arithmetic mean of every respondent's dimension score provides our total scores, which in turn provide our baseline scores for the whole Index.
- Children's items created the children's Index and matched parents' items created the parents' Index.

The positive and negative aspects of all the dimensions were separated in the following way:

Developmental wellbeing:

- Positive items focus on whether children have been able to use digital tools to their advantage, enabling them to discover, learn and develop.
- Negative items focus on the extent to which children appear to be experiencing a lack of control over how they use digital technology, where it generates behaviour that has no obvious benefit or pay-off for the child.

Emotional wellbeing:

- Positive items focus on the positive influence digital technology can have on how children feel about themselves and the positive emotions it elicits.
- Negative items focus on the negative emotional reactions or experiences that the use of digital technology can produce in children.

Physical wellbeing:

- Positive items focus on the use of digital technology to facilitate physical activity by enabling children to learn and develop their knowledge and skills.
- Negative items focus on the opportunity costs and negative consequences that the overuse of digital technology can have on physical health and activity, such as preventing children from engaging in sports/exercise or impacting their sleep.

Social wellbeing:

- Positive items focus on the role that digital technology can play in enabling children to remain connected to others or form new, valuable connections, particularly in circumstances where this might otherwise not be possible or feasible.
- Negative items focus on the negative consequences that can arise from social interaction online.

Considerations in reviewing Index scores

While this framework is useful to categorise the ways in which children's wellbeing has developed since last year, there are, of course, many overlaps between these dimensions. In reality, children's wellbeing cannot be isolated to only one specific dimension. For example, a child might become more active and see an increase

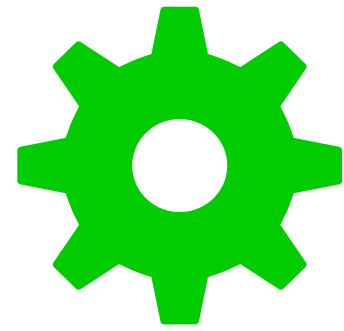
in their physical wellbeing, and this, in turn, may also bring about an improvement in their mental health and an increase in their emotional wellbeing.

Similarly, it is also impossible to measure causality between the shifts in dimension scores: greater physical activity could be both the cause or result of better mental health, and as such, an increase in physical wellbeing could be both the cause and result of an increase in emotional wellbeing. The Index aims, therefore, to quantify children's digital wellbeing, while also acknowledging the nuances that occur across these different dimensions.

Appendix 2. Index Dimensions and items

The Index is based on four key dimensions identified in the Children and families' wellbeing in a digital world report by Dr Diane Levine and team at the University of Leicester. The items that are included under each dimension were developed, refined, and selected for inclusion based on:

- The original definition of each dimension from the University of Leicester report.
- The qualitative research findings in earlier waves explored how these issues manifest and appear in the real lives of children across the UK.
- The testing of different survey question items during this previous qualitative research to establish which were better at tapping into these real-world experiences.



How digital technology impacts developmental wellbeing

Developmental wellbeing: realisation of cognitive capabilities and achievement of educational potential; managing financial responsibilities that come with maturation; personal growth.

To develop well in a digital world, you can benefit from: opportunities for learning new skills and developing a sense of wonder; opportunities to develop thinking, collaboration, organisation and problem-solving skills; opportunities to bring together content to offer to others; access to new information and online learning including gaining qualifications; exposure to alternative opinions, world-views and examples of mature rational discussion; secure understanding of how data are used; and the digital skills, confidence and competence for everyday tasks and roles in daily life (including work, homework, household administration and financial management). For some, technology can even provide an income stream, for example through the safe monetisation of digital platforms.

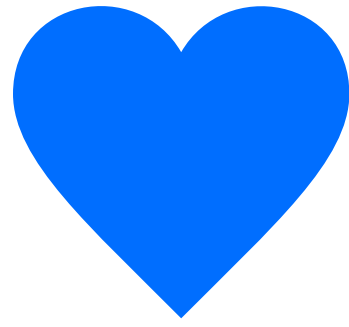
You will need to manage the risks from: exposure to disinformation; fake news; fallacies and conspiracy theories; living in an echo-chamber; wasting or missing opportunities to learn; seeing examples of unhelpful and irrational thinking; cybersecurity challenges such as managing personal data online; and challenges to financial wellbeing - such as exposure to the varied and subtle ways that online games take money from players, sometimes in tiny but repeated payments.

From *Children and families' wellbeing in a digital world*, University of Leicester

Items included in the Index for developmental wellbeing

+ or -	Children	Parents
Positive	Technology and being online has been important for me being more independent and being able to do things by myself	Technology and being online has been important for my child having more independence (e.g., because they can be contacted and are able to use their phone to get to places etc.)
	Technology and being online has been important for getting ideas for what I would like to do in the future (e.g., as a job)	Technology and being online has been important for my child thinking and planning for the future (e.g., what they would like to do after they leave school)
	Technology and being online has been important for me learning about things that no-one would teach me about in real life [13+ in year 1]	Technology and being online has been important for my child being able to learn about things no one would teach them in real life [added last year]
	Technology and being online has been important for helping me revise / learn things for school	Technology and being online has been important for my child being able to engage with schoolwork and other educational opportunities
	Technology and being online has been important for being able to find new hobbies or things I am interested in	My child benefits a lot from being able to look things up online that they are interested in
	I'm able to use the internet to earn money from some of the things I do online (e.g., website design, playing video games, sponsorship or payments from brands to promote things online/on social media) [15+ in year 1]	Technology and being online has been important for my child making money by using specific digital skills (e.g., website design, playing video games, sponsorship or payments from brands to promote things online/on social media) [15+ in year 1]
	I understand what personal information I should and shouldn't share online [added last year]	My child fully understands what personal information they should and shouldn't share online
		Technology and being online has been important for my child being able to learn new skills

+ or -	Children	Parents
Negative	I keep playing the same games or watching the same TV shows/films even when I'm not enjoying it	My child spends a lot of time re-watching the same TV shows or re-playing the same games that they've seen or played before over and over again
	I run out of things to see on social media so scroll through the same things again [13+ in year 1]	My child spends a lot of time scrolling through the same things on social media [added last year]
	I quite easily spend money online without realising e.g., buying apps and spending money in games	My child spends money in apps or on games without realising
	I don't feel like I can control how much time I spend online	My child is not able to control how much time they spend online [added last year]
	I see something I don't like online or on social media, but don't know what to do about it	My child struggles to work out whether the information they are exposed to online / on social media is true



How digital technology impacts emotional wellbeing

Emotional wellbeing: healthy emotional development; ability to cope with stress and setbacks; spiritual development; development of thoughtful values and a positive outlook; space and opportunities to flourish; life purpose; autonomy; feeling successful.

To be well in a digital world, you can benefit from: opportunities for creativity and self-expression, for example online curation of links to hobbies; opportunities to be authentic, for self-validation and building self-worth; information about methods of self-regulation such as timed meditation practice apps; channels that let us articulate our emotions and validate our experiences, for example special interest groups on social media; exposure to positive role models; harmless strategies for distraction and management of emotional pain; opportunities to engage in joyful and enjoyable activities such as developing or operating in gameworlds.

You will need to manage the risks from: addiction; low self-worth; increased emotional distress; destructive behaviours or beliefs such as self-harm or radicalisation; shaming and isolation; 'doom-scrolling' (continual scrolling through negative news); unrealistic comparisons against impossible standards; exposure to harmful content such as extreme pornography; exposure to 'persuasive design' and a desire for constant, instant self-gratification.

From *Children and families' wellbeing in a digital world*, University of Leicester

Items included in the Index for emotional wellbeing

+ or -	Children	Parents
Positive	Spending time online makes me feel happy [13+ in year 1]	Being online makes my child happy [added last year]
	Being online has let me find people I admire and look up to [13+ in year 1]	Being online has enabled my child to find positive role models
	Being online has helped me to feel more comfortable with being 'me' [13+ in year 1]	Being online has helped my child to feel more comfortable with themselves [added last year]
	I create things I'm proud of online or using technology (e.g., games or computer programmes)	My child creates things they are proud of online or using technology (e.g., in games or with computer programmes) [added last year]
	I see things or people online that inspire me to try new things	Technology and being online has allowed my child to see things or people that inspire them to try new things [added last year]
	Being online has helped me learn more about people with different experiences to mine, which I wouldn't have come across otherwise [added last year]	Online platforms/resources have allowed my child to learn about and empathise with people who have different experiences to them, which they wouldn't have otherwise had exposure to
	I'm able to be myself online or on social media [13+ in year 1]	Digital devices/ being online has allowed my child to discover and pursue interests/hobbies that make them happy

+ or -	Children	Parents
Negative	I worry a lot about what other people think of me online (e.g., on social media)	My child worries a lot about how others perceive them online (especially social media)
	I see people online/on social media who make me feel sad because I'm not like them	My child compares themselves to people they see online/on social media in a way that I think is unhealthy
	I get more easily upset/angry when online or playing video games than when doing other things	My child gets more easily upset/angry when online or playing video games than when doing other things
	I post or say things online that I regret later	My child posts or says things online that they later regret [added last year]
	I get upset if something I post online/on social media does not get many likes or nice/positive comments	My child gets upset because something online or social media does not get the response they wanted it to (e.g., not enough 'likes', or interpreted the wrong way)
	I see things online that worry or upset me	My child sees things online that worry or upset them
	I worry about saying something wrong online/on social media	My child's online activity exposes them to content that encourages or supports unhealthy body image (e.g., extreme weight loss or muscle gain)



How digital technology impacts physical wellbeing

Physical wellbeing: achievement and maintenance of healthy thriving; development of physical capabilities; using technology in physical safety; access/lack of access to supportive or accessibility technologies.

To be well in a digital world, you can benefit from: opportunity to maintain a healthy balance between sedentary and active behaviours; to develop new physical skills; opportunities to participate in mobile digital activities; access to supportive or assistive technologies for those with chronic disabilities, for example reading pens or visual search engines, or ‘adaptive switches’ designed to help people independently activate switch enabled devices such as smartphones; information about healthy lifestyle choices; shared or learned activities for wellbeing (sports, exercise, relaxation).

You will need to manage the risks from: losing opportunities of doing healthy and joyful activity in favour of sedentary or shut-in lifestyles, sometimes called ‘displacement’; sleep disruption; exposure to problematic temptations impacting physical health and wellbeing; exposure to potentially damaging content promoting unhealthy behaviours towards food or exercise or negative impact on nutrition; impact on self-ideation and body confidence.

From *Children and families’ wellbeing in a digital world*, University of Leicester

Items included in the Index for physical wellbeing

+ or -	Children	Parents
Positive	I use the internet to learn new skills at a sport or physical activity	Technology and being online has been important for my child being able to learn skills or pick up tips for improving a sport or exercise activity they do (e.g., by watching videos on YouTube or reading about sports online)
	I use my phone to arrange to meet up to play sports or do activities outside	Technology and being online has been important for my child arranging to meet up and play sports or do outdoor activities [added last year]
	I use apps, websites and devices to help me stay healthy	My child uses apps, websites, or devices to help them stay healthy [added last year]
	I use apps or websites to find out about new sports or exercises I want to try out (e.g., seeing people doing a sport on social media) [added last year]	Technology and being online has been important for my child finding out about new sports or exercises they want to try out (e.g., seeing people doing a sport on social media)

+ or -	Children	Parents
Negative	I stopped playing a sport or doing exercise because I want to play video games, watch TV or be on social media	My child has stopped doing sports or exercise because they are too busy on their phone, computer, TV or games console
	I stay up late on my phone, playing games or watching TV (e.g. into the early hours of the morning once everyone else has gone to bed)	My child spends time on their phone, computer or games console which negatively affects their sleep patterns
	I spend a lot of time online which affects my physical health (e.g. makes me tired or unable to concentrate, affects my eyesight or posture) [added last year]	Spending a lot of time online affects my child's physical health (e.g., strains their eyes, makes them tired or unable to concentrate, affects their posture) [added last year]



How digital technology impacts social wellbeing

Social wellbeing: participation in wider communities including schools, clubs or societies; being an active citizen; ability to work with others; healthy interaction with online communities; maintenance of positive and sustainable online personae; managing the risks of grooming and exploitation; development and maintenance of good relations with significant people both online and offline; communication with people we know.

To be well in a digital world, you can benefit from: relationships with significant others who bring care and support, opportunities to both keep apart, and integrate online and offline relationships and the knowledge of when to do this; opportunities for shared experiences and building of new positive relationships; maintaining existing relationships; healthy and open communications; opportunities to help and support others; mentoring and being a mentor; access to community of 'people like me' (for example through digital activism or peer support groups); ability to move between communities; healthy interaction with unknown people or in public forums; positive reinforcement from community participation; maintenance of a non-destructive and age appropriate online presence; opportunities to be an active citizen.

You will need to manage the risks of: experiencing and exhibiting bullying behaviour, grooming and other forms of exploitation; forming and/or being unable to escape from destructive relationships; becoming cut off from family and friends; withdrawal and alienation; lack of communication or loneliness; unhealthy comparison with others; fear of missing out; participation in communities that are intrinsically harmful, abusive or antisocial participation styles; a digital footprint with negative consequences for the future; isolation from social interaction in digitally-mediated and physical life; exposure to racism and other forms of discrimination; development of antisocial behaviours and alienation from broader society (such as radicalisation).

From *Children and families' wellbeing in a digital world*, University of Leicester

Items included in the Index for social wellbeing

+ or -	Children	Parents
Positive	Technology and being online helps me to stay in close contact with my friends	Technology and being online helps my child stay in contact and maintain meaningful relationships with people who are important to them
	Technology and being online helps me to stay in contact with friends or family I wouldn't be able to otherwise (e.g., friends who live far away)	The internet and digital devices (e.g., smartphone) has helped my child to stay in contact with people they otherwise wouldn't have been able to do (e.g., relatives or friends who live far away)
	Technology and being online helps me meet people who become good friends	Technology and being online helps my child meet people who have become important friends
	Digital devices/being online lets me feel like part of a group [15+ in year 1]	Digital devices/being online has enabled my child to feel part of a group that they otherwise wouldn't have
	Technology and being online helps me find groups or communities that can offer me friendship and support [added last year]	Technology and being online helps my child find groups or communities that can offer friendship and support
	Technology and being online helps me participate in activities and events that are important to me [added last year]	Technology and being online helps my child to participate in activities and moments/events that are important to them

+ or -	Children	Parents
Negative	I have upsetting experiences interacting with other people online (e.g., bullying)	My child has had negative experiences interacting with other people online (e.g., bullying)
	Spending time online makes me feel lonely [added last year]	Spending time online makes my child feel lonely [added last year]
	I turn down opportunities to meet with friends so I can stay in on my phone, computer, or games console [added last year]	My child turns down opportunities to meet with friends so they can stay in on their phone, computer or games console
	I feel upset or uncomfortable because I see people being mean or unpleasant to each other online [added last year]	My child gets upset or uncomfortable because s/he sees people being mean or unpleasant to each other online [added last year]
	I avoid using certain apps, websites or games because of the way people act or talk to each other on them [added last year]	My child avoids using certain apps, websites or games because of the way people act or talk to each other on them [added last year]
	[Impact of] Someone you don't know has tried to contact you/sent you messages [added last year]	[Impact of] being contacted by a stranger online [added last year]
	If I miss out on things that are happening on social media among my friends, I get upset	We often find it difficult to get our child(ren) out of the house because they want to stay in and play video games, stream and watch TV programmes or be on their phone

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