



Parenting
in the digital age

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eSafetyresearch

Under Section 15 of the Enhancing Online Safety Act 2015, the eSafety Commissioner (eSafety) has the following research functions, to:

- support, encourage, conduct and evaluate research about online safety for Australians
- collect, analyse, interpret and disseminate information relating to online safety
- publish reports and papers about online safety for Australians.

eSafety's research program is underpinned by four key themes including:

1. tracking trends
2. supporting the development of eSafety resources and programs
3. inter-agency and international co-operation
4. program and resource evaluation.

This research fits under themes 1, 2 and 3.

Data sources

Data in this report is drawn from eSafety's 2018 parental survey. This survey comprised a random sample of 3,520 parents in Australia of children aged 2–17. It collected information about the online safety experiences of one child as reported by a parent. Parental approaches to online safety were also explored. The survey data covered the 12 months to July 2018.

For detailed information about the survey sample design please see the Methodology section of this report. Limited desk research was also conducted to provide additional information for the report where relevant.

Other research about young people

eSafety has published a range of other research reports and infographics drawing on data from the 2018 parental survey. These include the summary report — Parenting and pornography: findings from Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom published in December 2018, and infographics all published in the same month:

- Supervising pre-schoolers online
- Connected homes and technology usage
- Managing screen time.

Research published by eSafety is available online at esafety.gov.au/about-the-office/research-library

For research enquiries please contact research@esafety.gov.au

Acknowledgement

Thanks to Neil Melhuish and Dr Edgar Pacheco from NetSafe New Zealand and David Wright from the UK Safer Internet Centre for their valuable and constructive suggestions during the planning and development of the survey on which this research is based.

Key findings

Almost all parents (94%) regard their child's online safety as being important. However, the related attitudes, behaviours and needs of parents differ.

- Parents had a number of concerns about their child being online. The three most common concerns cited were: exposure to inappropriate content other than pornography (38%), contact with strangers (37%) and being bullied online (34%). This is largely unchanged from 2016 with the exception of 'excessive use' no longer being in the top responses.
- This study identifies two main online safety parenting styles:
 1. restrictive — where parents attempt to control access and set rules about their children using the internet
 2. open — where parents attempt to provide guidance and advice to their children when they use the internet.
- Parents of 2 to 5-year olds tended to favour being restrictive whereas those with 6 to 17-year olds preferred an open parenting style. Parents of 2 to 5-year olds, for example, were 24% more likely to identify with a restrictive parenting style while parents of 6 to 17-year olds were 35% more likely to identify with a more open style.
- Parents did not report being very confident about their ability to deal with certain negative online experiences:
 - Only 46% felt confident to deal with cyberbullying that their child might face (33% were not; 21% neither agreed or disagreed)
 - Another 46% knew where to go to get help in relation to their child's online safety issues (33% did not; 21% neither agreed or disagreed)
 - 46% of parents felt confident to deal with online threats that their child could face (32% were not; 21% neither agreed or disagreed).
- 28% of parents reported being aware of their child having a negative online experience in the last 12 months. This increased significantly in line with the age of the child. Among parents of 13 to 17-year olds, awareness increased to 37%. There was no difference in awareness of negative experiences based on the child's gender.
- Of parents aware that their child had a negative online experience, nearly 66% reported finding out about the experience from their child, 19% finding out themselves and 6% from their child's school or teacher.
- Parents identified that a classmate (31%) or a friend (22%) was responsible for their child's negative online experience while a further 28% indicated that a stranger was responsible.
- In terms of frequency, 55% of parents identified their child's negative online experience was a once off, 28% reported it had occurred multiple times but had now stopped while 12% identified that the issue was ongoing.

- The majority of parents dealt with negative online experiences themselves, rather than using formal channels. Most parents engaged in protective actions such as increased monitoring or requesting that the child block or unfriend the person responsible (62%).
- 30% of parents whose child had a negative online experience went on to report to either social media companies, the police, eSafety or other organisations. The use of formal reporting channels was highest for parents of 6 to 7-year olds (37%).
- Parents of girls were more likely to engage in multiple actions when dealing with a negative online experience than parents of boys.
- 75% of parents having to deal with their child's negative online experience reported that the issue had stopped permanently, while 25% remained concerned that the issue would start again.
- Most parents did not actively seek out online safety information with only 36% searching for, or receiving, online safety information over the previous 12 months. This was up from the 27% recorded in the 2016 parent survey.
- Of the parents searching for, or receiving, online safety information, their child's school was the most reported source of online safety information (56%), followed by family, friends or other parents (36%), Google searches (30%) and a government organisation (30%) — unchanged in order from 2016.
- 95% of parents agreed that they need additional online safety information, with the most popular topics being:
 1. ways to maintain their child's privacy online (40%)
 2. how to protect their child from approaches from strangers (35%)
 3. the signs and symptoms of a child experiencing negative incidents (30%).

In 2016, the top three online safety information needs of parents were identified as dealing with negative online incidents, online stranger danger and dealing with images going viral.

Introduction

Previous research undertaken by eSafety into the digital lives of young people in Australia found that parents are an important source of support when things go wrong online (Office of the eSafety Commissioner, 2018), with 55% of young people who have experienced something negative online reporting that they had confided in their parents (Office of the eSafety Commissioner, 2018).

To better understand these exchanges, eSafety commissioned a national survey of parents in July 2018. The survey fulfils the need for up to date, robust national data and explores, among other things, the ways in which parents become aware of, and respond to, the online issues faced by their children. Stemming from that survey, the current report attempts to answer the following questions:

- What do parents see are the main perceived risks of their children using the internet?
- How aware are parents of their children's negative online experiences?
- What attitudes to the internet do parents exhibit and agree most with?
- How do parents react to their children's negative online experience?
- How proactive are parents in seeking information?
- Where do parents go for online safety information?
- What are parents' online safety information needs?

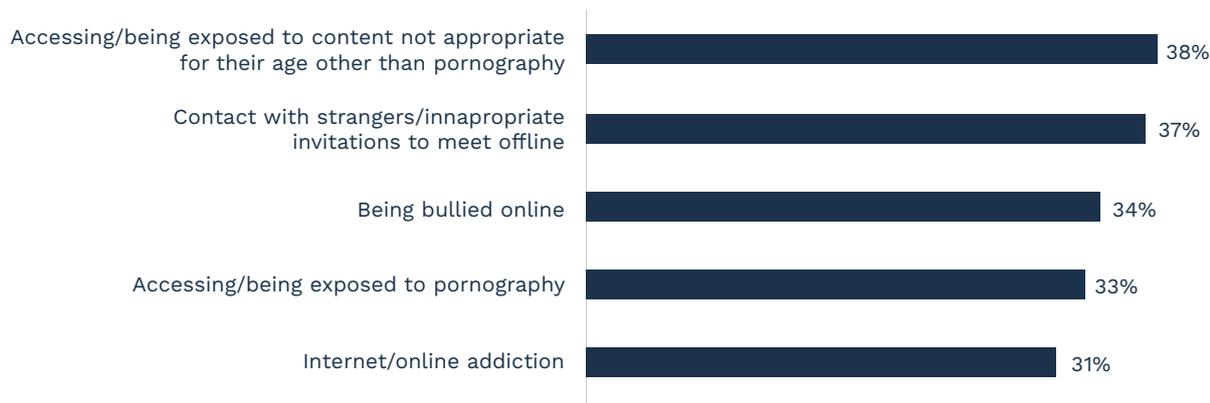
The views of parents

Concerns associated with children going online

The internet provides children with a wide range of opportunities for social connection, self-expression, learning and entertainment. This is reflected in the overwhelming uptake of internet services by Australian families. The eSafety parent survey showed that 96% of Australian parents have some sort of internet connection in their home. At the same time, there is also a recognition by parents that the online world poses a range of risks.

As part of the survey, parents were asked to rank their top five concerns about their child accessing the internet. Figure 1 highlights these concerns for parents of children 2 to 17 years. Small differences aside, accessing or being exposed to content that was not appropriate for their age (other than pornography) was parents' most cited concern (38%), followed by contact with strangers or inappropriate invitations to meet offline (38% and 37% respectively). Being bullied online was highlighted by 34% of parents. These results were consistent with the 2016 parent survey, except that 'excessive use' which featured in the top three previously (Office of the eSafety Commissioner, 2016).

Figure 1: Parental concerns with their children accessing the internet



Base: Parents of children aged 2 – 17, n=3384

These online concerns were not prioritised uniformly by parents with children of differing ages. Reflecting the challenges faced by children as they establish and expand their online footprint, parents of school-aged children¹ saw contact by strangers and being bullied online as the first and third most concerning online risk. In comparison, these were ranked as the fifth and seventh most relevant risk for parents of preschool children² — for these parents, their greatest concerns centered on the potential for exposure to inappropriate content. Table 1 highlights the respective top 5 concerns among the two groups of parents.

Table 1: Concerns ranked by parents of preschool vs school-aged children

	Parents of preschool children (2-5)	%		Parents of school aged children (6-17)	%
1st	Accessing/being exposed to other content not appropriate for their age	39	1st	Contact with strangers/inappropriate invitations to meet offline	40
2nd	Internet/online addiction	34	2nd	Accessing/being exposed to other content not appropriate for their age	37
3rd	Accessing/being exposed to pornography addiction	30	3rd	Being bullied online	37
4th	Accessing/being exposed to violent content	30	4th	Accessing/being exposed to pornography	37
5th	Contact with strangers/inappropriate invitations to meet offline	24	5th	Accessing/being exposed to violent content	33

Base: Parents of preschool children aged 2–5, n = 710 and parents of children aged 6–17, n= 2799

¹ Aged between 6 and 17 years

² Aged between 2 and 5 years

³ Response options were: strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree or disagree, agree, and strongly disagree

Online parenting attitudes

Parents have a range of attitudes, and choose varying approaches, to their children’s online safety. As part of the survey, eSafety gauged parents’ level of agreement with 17 statements on this topic. These were expressed in a 5-point Likert scale format that ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree³. Table 2 shows the list of statements and combines responses into three broad groupings.

Table 2: Parents degree of agreement/disagreement toward statements about online safety

	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree
My child’s online safety is important to me	2%	4%	94%
I set clear rules for my child about internet use	6%	13%	81%
I feel confident in using digital devices such as smartphones	7%	13%	80%
I take an active role in monitoring what my child does online	8%	14%	78%
I speak to my child about being respectful to others online	8%	15%	77%
Parental controls are important to how I limit my child’s exposure to inappropriate content such as pornography	9%	15%	76%
I listen to my child’s online social problems if they have any*	5%	19%	76%
I limit the amount of time my child spends online	11%	16%	74%
I trust my child to act appropriately online in relation to how they behave and the content that they access	10%	17%	73%
I talk to my child regularly about online risks and what to do	13%	18%	69%
I use age guidelines in relation to my child’s use of social media apps and games	11%	20%	69%
I understand how to use the safety features on social media, apps and games	28%	21%	51%
I show my child how to use safety features when online	24%	25%	51%
I feel confident to deal with cyberbullying that my child could face	32%	21%	46%
I feel confident to deal with the online threats (e.g. contact with strangers) that my child could face	33%	21%	46%
I would know where to go to get help in relation to online safety issues affecting my child	33%	21%	46%
I am concerned about unsupervised access of the internet at my child’s school/preschool/day care	45%	21%	34%

*Not asked of parents of preschool children. Base: Parents of children 6–17, n=2,799 and parents of children 2-17, no = 3,384

As Table 2 shows, parents almost universally agreed that their child's online safety was important to them (94%). Consistent with these sentiments, the overwhelming majority of parents expressed agreement about:

- setting clear rules for their child's internet use (81%)
- taking an active role in monitoring what their child does online (78%)
- using parental controls to limit their child's exposure to inappropriate content (76%).

Parents showed less confidence about possible actions for dealing with the online issues their child might face.

While most felt confident using digital devices such as smartphones (80%), 5 in 10 or fewer:

- understood how to use safety features on social media apps and games (51%)
- were confident to deal with any cyberbullying that their child might face (46%)
- knew where to go to get help for their child's online safety issues (46%)
- felt confident to deal with the online threats that their child could face (46%).

Along with already mentioned parenting approaches, parents also agreed that they trusted their child when it came to acting appropriately online (73%) and were unconcerned about their child's unsupervised internet access at school (34%).

Further insight into online parenting attitudes

The attitudes to online parenting can be combined into 3 scales: restrictive parenting, open parenting and confidence in dealing with online issues⁴. These scales were created separately for parents of 2 to 5 year olds and those with 6 to 17 year olds, as they did not all respond to the same statements. Higher scores reflect stronger agreement with a particular parenting style or represent greater confidence in dealing with their child's online issues⁵. Figures 3a and 3b highlight the descriptive statistics for each scale, showing mean scores as well as the possible minimum and maximum scores for each scale.

⁴ Restrictive and open parenting scales were named in reflection of previous research on parental mediation of internet access e.g. Rodriguez-de-Dios, van Oosten, & Igartua, 2018). The actual scale components however were not. Comparisons with previous findings in this report should thus be considered as tentative as they don't measure the exact same constructs.

⁵ See Methodology for full list of scale items

Figure 3(a): Parental scales for school-aged children (ages 6 to 17)

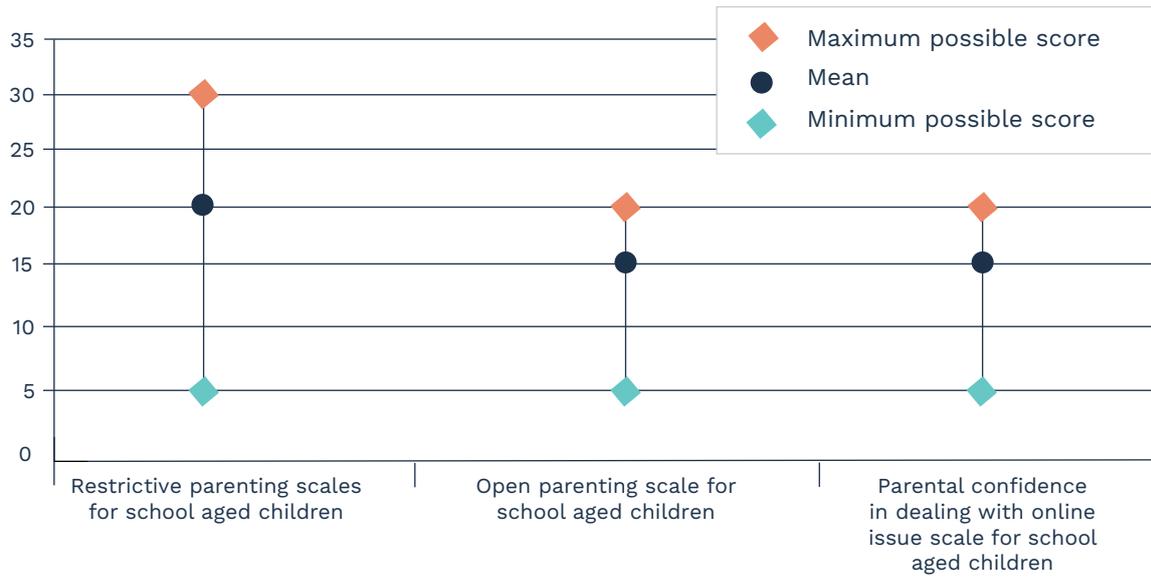
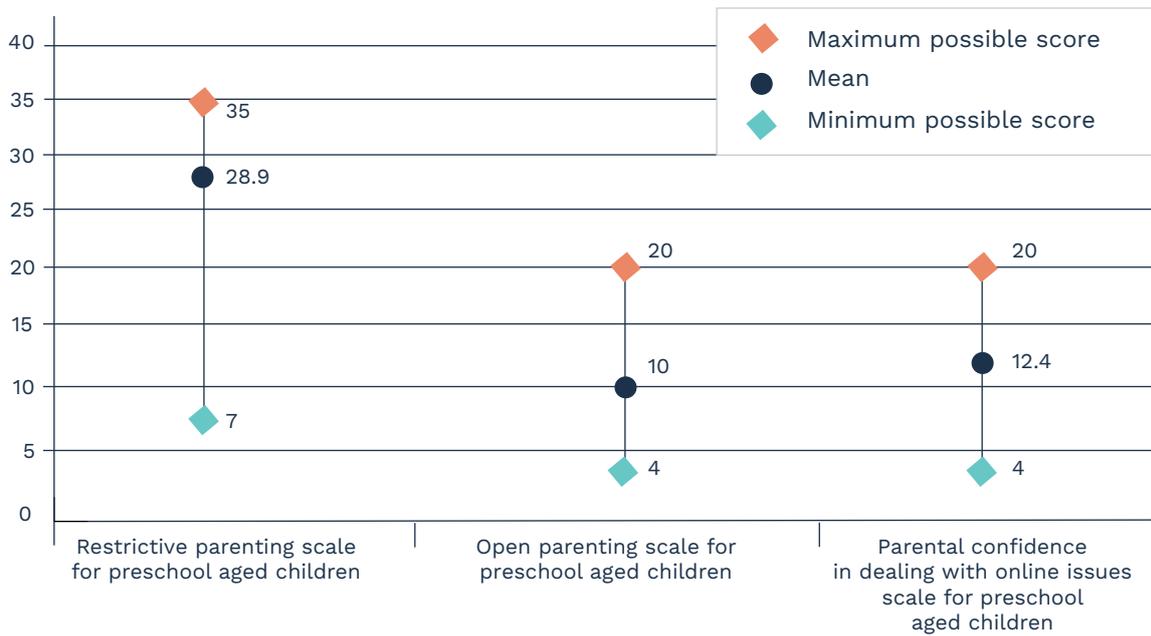


Figure 3(b): Parental scales for preschool-aged children (ages 2 to 5)



Converted to their percentage mean scores, Table 4 shows that among parents of 6 to 17-year olds, an open parenting style was preferred over a restrictive one.

Table 4: Mean scale scores for parents of school-aged children

Scale	Mean scale score
Restrictive parenting scale for school aged children	51%
Open parenting scale for school aged children	61%

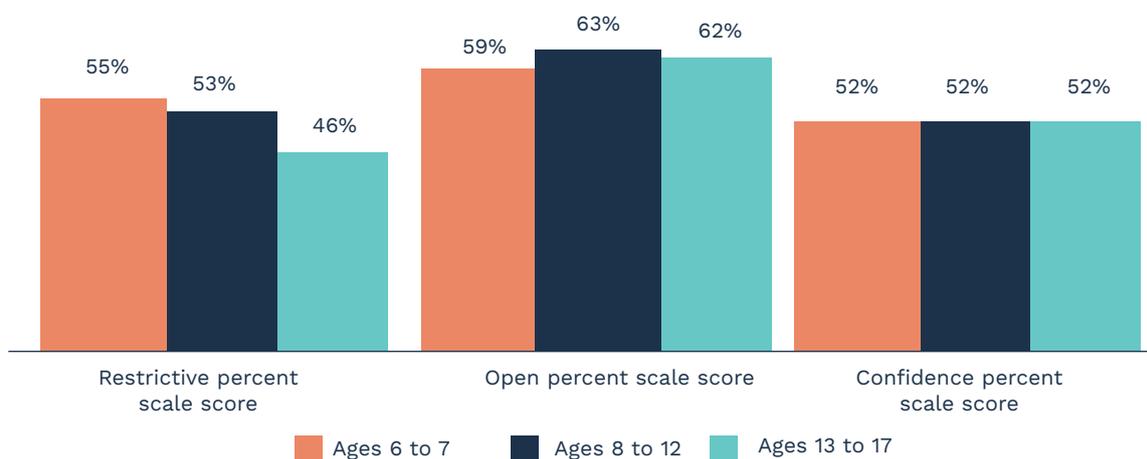
The reverse was true among parents of 2 to 5-year olds. Table 5 shows that parents of preschool aged children were more likely to prefer a restrictive parenting style.

Table 5: Mean scale scores for parents of preschool-aged children

Scale	Mean scale score
Restrictive parenting scale for preschool aged children	83%
Open parenting scale for preschool aged children	45%

The trend toward more restrictive parenting of younger children was also seen when breaking down responses of parents with children between the ages of 6 to 17 into those parents with children aged 6 to 7, 8 to 12 and 13 to 17-year olds respectively. As Figure 2 shows, agreement with restrictive parenting statements went from a low of 46% for parents of 13 to 17-year olds to a high of 55% for those with 6 to 7-year olds.

Figure 2: Scale scores for parents of school-aged children



The importance of a child’s age in terms of the parenting style used has also been seen in previous research on the mediation of children’s access to digital devices and the internet. Age, especially as a proxy for a child’s maturity and self-control, has been found to be strongly related to restrictive mediation of the internet — the younger, and therefore the less mature the child, the more restrictive mediation a parent is likely to engage in (Chen & Chng, 2015). Other factors, such as the age and gender of the parent and child have been associated less consistently with identified parenting styles (Lee, 2012).

Differences in online parenting styles and confidence

There was little difference in parenting style preference or confidence level between mothers and fathers and those who had boys or girls. There were also few discernible differences when it came to the education, socio-economic, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) status or the geographical location of parents (i.e. whether parents lived in a region or a capital city). However, the child's age was found to be relevant when looking at parenting styles:

- **Restrictive parenting** — When grouped into parents of 6 to 7, 8 to 12 and 13 to 17-year olds, findings showed that parents significantly preferred this parenting style if their child was in the youngest age group. In line with this, parents of 13 to 17-year olds were significantly less restrictive than parents with a younger child. Those with a child between the ages of 8 to 12 were in turn more restrictive than those with a teenager (13 to 17), and less restrictive than those with a child between the ages of 6 and 7.
- **Open parenting** — Grouped in the same age groups, small but statistically significant differences were found with parents of 8 to 12-year olds. They were more likely than parents of both 6 to 7-year olds and those with 13 to 17-year olds to agree with this parenting style. Parents of 6 to 7-year olds were, instead, significantly less likely than parents with a child in those older age groups to favour it. It would therefore seem that preference for this type of parenting style peaks during a child's tween years before dropping off as they get older.
- **Confidence in dealing with child's online issues** (refer to Figure 2) — Unlike parenting styles, a child's age was not found to be of relevance to parental confidence. However, research around parental self-efficacy points to confidence being dependent in part on prior experience (Bandura, 1997). As the next section shows, parents were asked about whether they were aware of their child having experienced something negative online. Parents were therefore grouped into those that were and were not aware of something negative happening to their child. Expecting more aware parents to display greater confidence, the results instead showed that they were less confident than their non-aware counterparts with a small but statistically significant difference between the two groups.

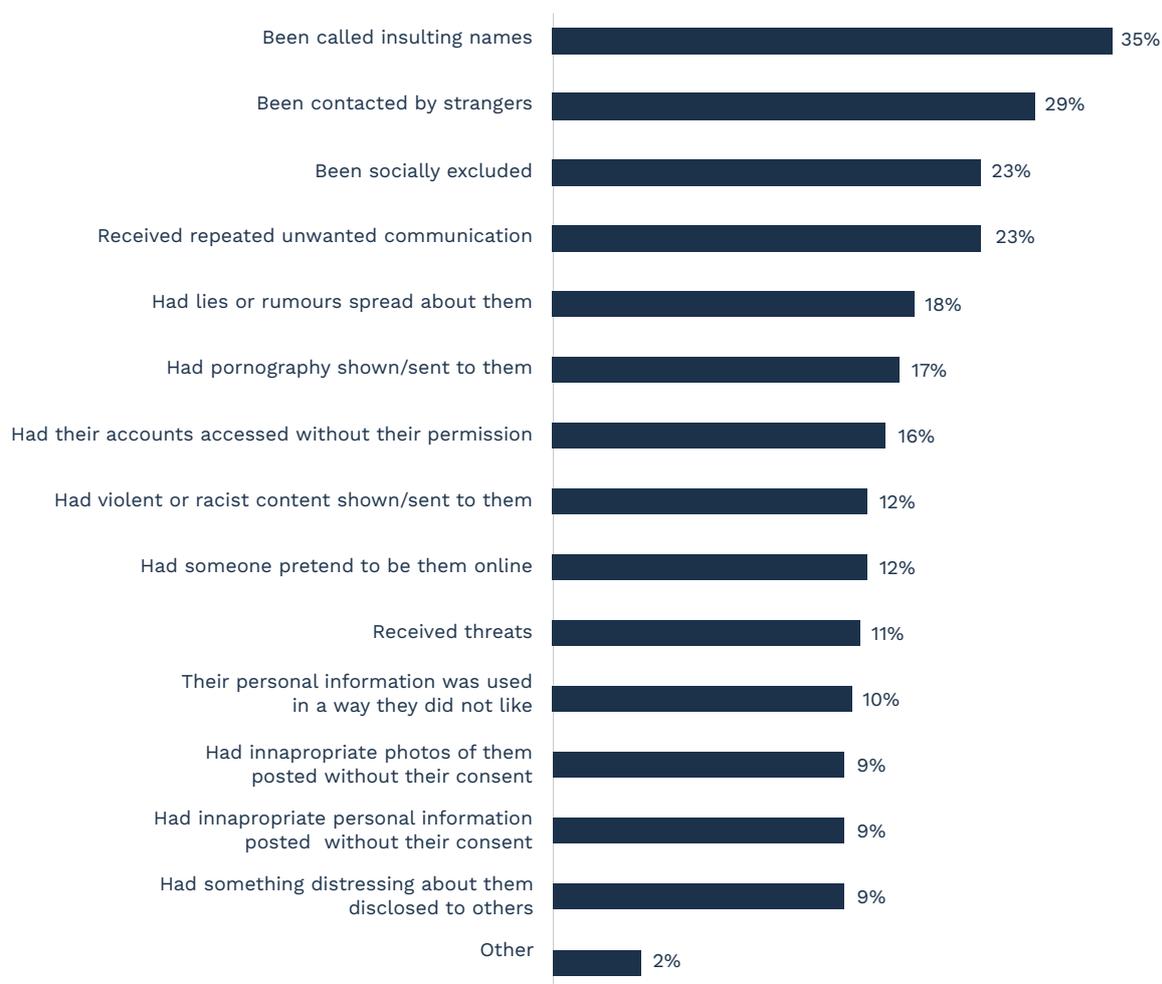


Awareness of a child's negative online experiences

One of the major reasons for undertaking this survey of parents was the knowledge that young people placed a significant onus on their parents to help deal with their negative online experiences. eSafety's 2018 report Youth and Digital Dangers — State of Play (hereafter 'Youth and Digital Dangers report') found, for example, that 55% of young people between 8 and 17 who had a negative online experience in the 12 months to June 2017 had told their parents about it (Office of the eSafety Commissioner, 2018).

Therefore, as part of this survey parents were asked whether they were aware of something negative happening to their child online as well as the type of negative online experience. Approximately 28% of parents reported being aware that their child had a negative online experience in the 12 months to July 2018. Figure 3 outlines the type of negative online experience as reported by this group of parents. For these parents, the three most common experiences included their child being called insulting names (35%); being contacted by strangers (29%) and experiencing social exclusion (23%).

Figure 3: Parental awareness of their child's negative online experiences

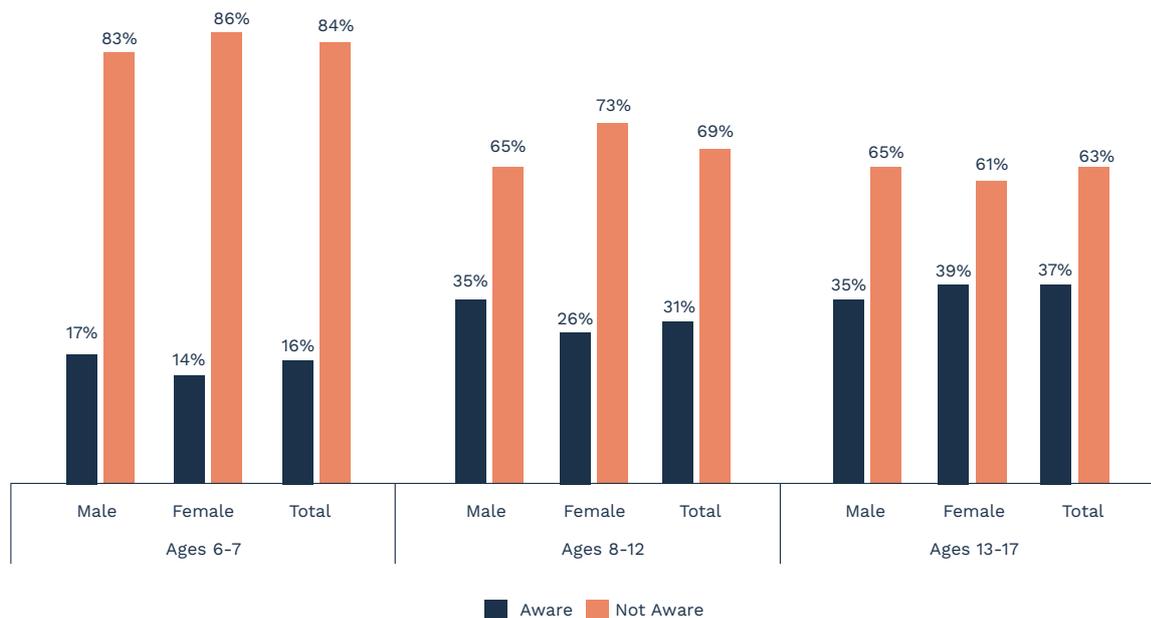


Base: Parents of children 6–17 who had a negative online experience, n=750

To further understand what shapes awareness, we tried to see if preferred parenting style and confidence in dealing with negative online issues better predicted which parents were more aware of their child’s negative online experiences. Results from logistic regression analysis (Hosmer & Lemeshow, 2000) found that neither parenting style nor confidence level made parents more aware of their child’s negative online experiences.

When it came to findings based on parental group membership, the 2018 Youth and Digital Dangers report indicated that parents of younger children and girls would be more aware of something negative happening online because those children would be more reliant on their parents (Office of the eSafety Commissioner, 2018). Figure 4 explores parental awareness further by the age and gender of their child.

Figure 4: Parents awareness of their child’s negative online experiences by age and gender of child



Base: Parents of children 6–17 who had a negative online experience, n=750

Contrary to indications from previous eSafety research (Office of the eSafety Commissioner, 2018), Figure 4 shows that parents were significantly more aware of negative experiences occurring in older children. It would seem that despite younger children’s heavier reliance on their parents, the greater number of negative experiences for older children also brings greater parental awareness. Figure 4 also shows that up to the age of 12 parents were more aware of boys’ negative experiences, although these gender-based differences were not statistically significant.

Not included in Figure 4 are comparisons based on a parent’s CALD status or gender. The 2018 Youth and Digital Dangers report highlighted that Australian children from a CALD background were less likely to report a negative online experience to their parents (Office of the eSafety Commissioner, 2018). In addition, a number of previous studies have focussed on a mother’s online parenting experience because they were said to be more involved in their child’s online lives (Symons, Ponnet, Walrave, & Heirman, 2017).

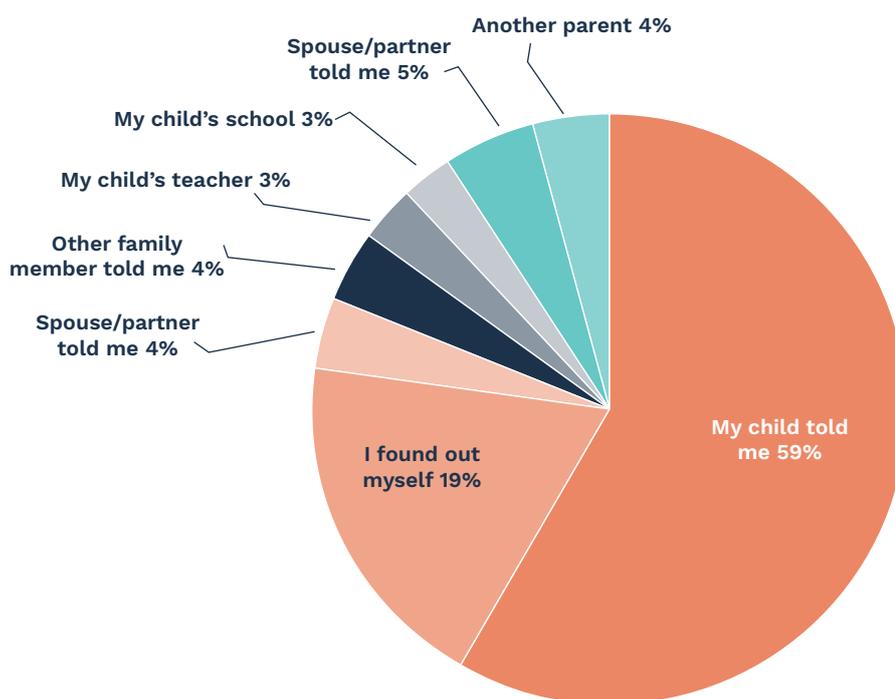
Both these indications were not supported by parental experience gathered as part of this survey. When it came to CALD parents, they were shown to be significantly more aware of their child’s negative online experiences than those from a non-CALD background (39% vs 24% for non-CALD parents).

It was also the case that when compared to mothers, fathers were not any less aware when it came to their child’s negative online experiences. In fact, dads reported being significantly more aware of a negative online experience than mums (33% vs 27%). Therefore, on current evidence, it would seem that both parents’ experiences are important when it comes to studying their children’s exposure to the online world (Symons, Ponnet, Walrave, & Heirman, 2017).

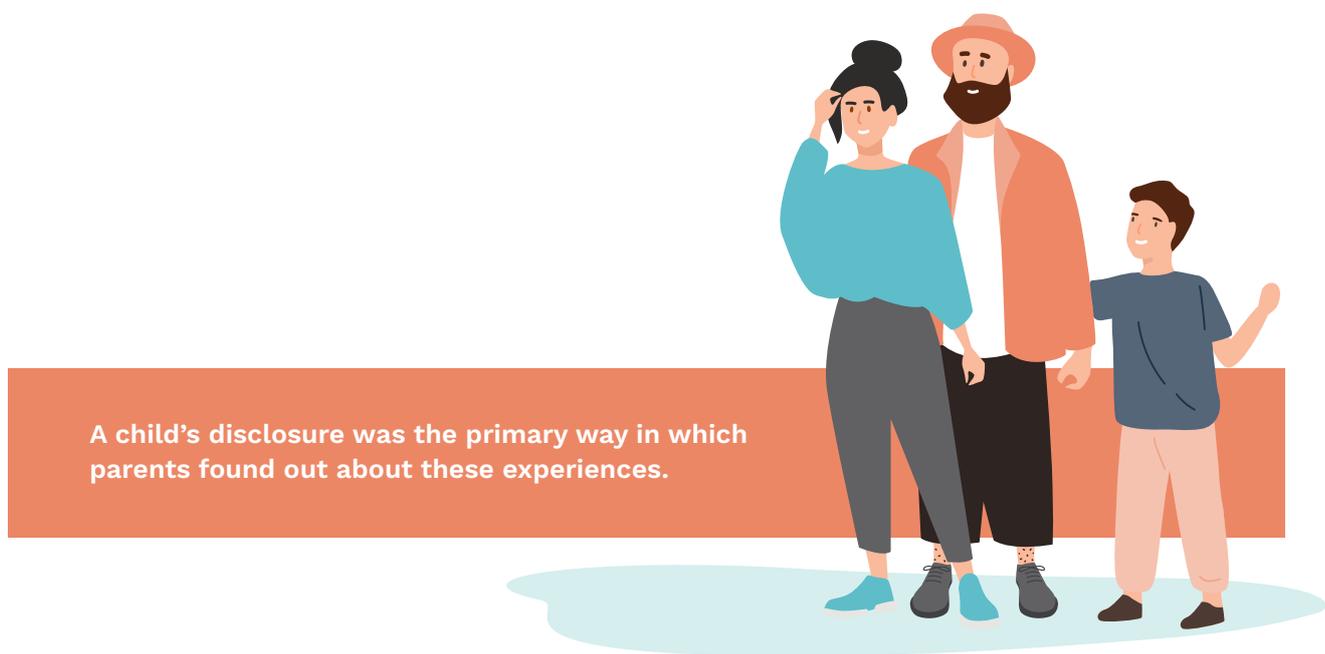
Discovery methods for a child's negative online experiences

While the survey reaffirmed the importance of the parent-child relationship in dealing with a child's negative online experiences, it also found that a child's disclosure was the primary way in which parents found out about these experiences. As shown by Figure 5 this was the case for around two out of three parents. The next most common way parents found out about their child's online experience was on their own (19%) or through their spouse or partner (4%).

Figure 5: Discovery methods in relation to their child's negative online experiences

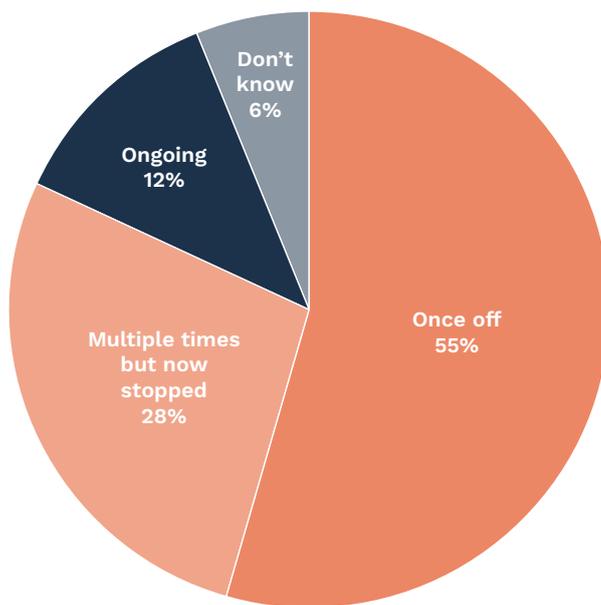


Base: Parents of children 6–17 who had a negative online experience (online panel only), n=688

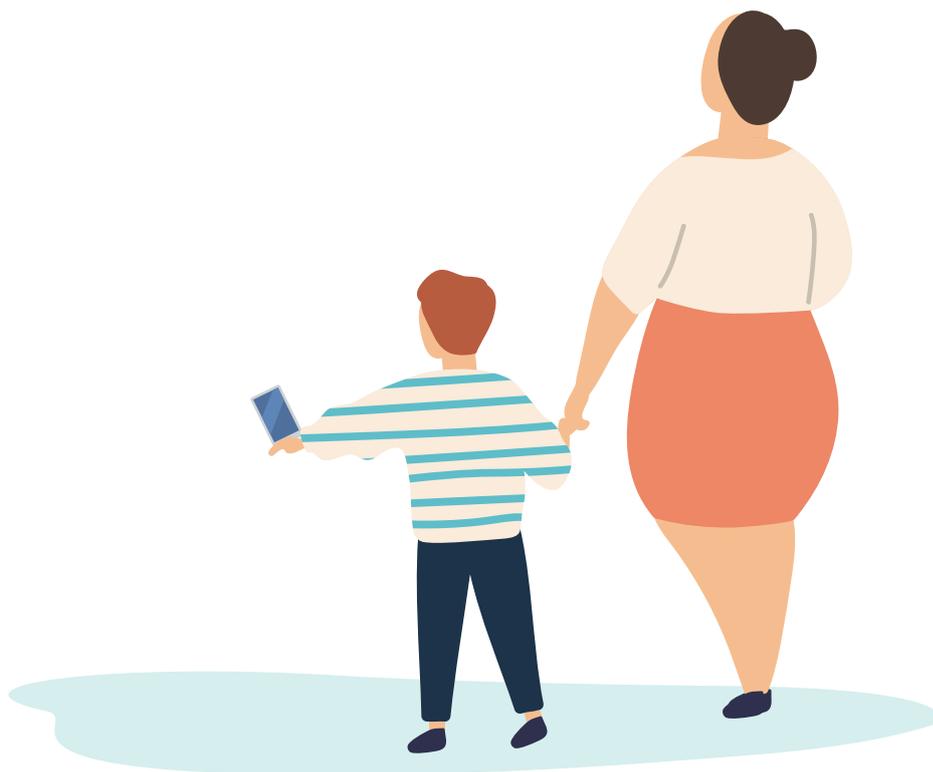


Parents also reported that their child's negative online experiences were not an ongoing concern for them. As Figure 6 highlights, 55% of parents thought that the experience was a once off, 28% reported multiple occurrences and 12% reported the issue was ongoing. Moreover, parents were asked if their child's online issue had stopped permanently with 75% of these parents reporting this had been the case and 25% expressing concern that the issue would start again.

Figure 6: Parental perception of the frequency of their child's negative online experiences



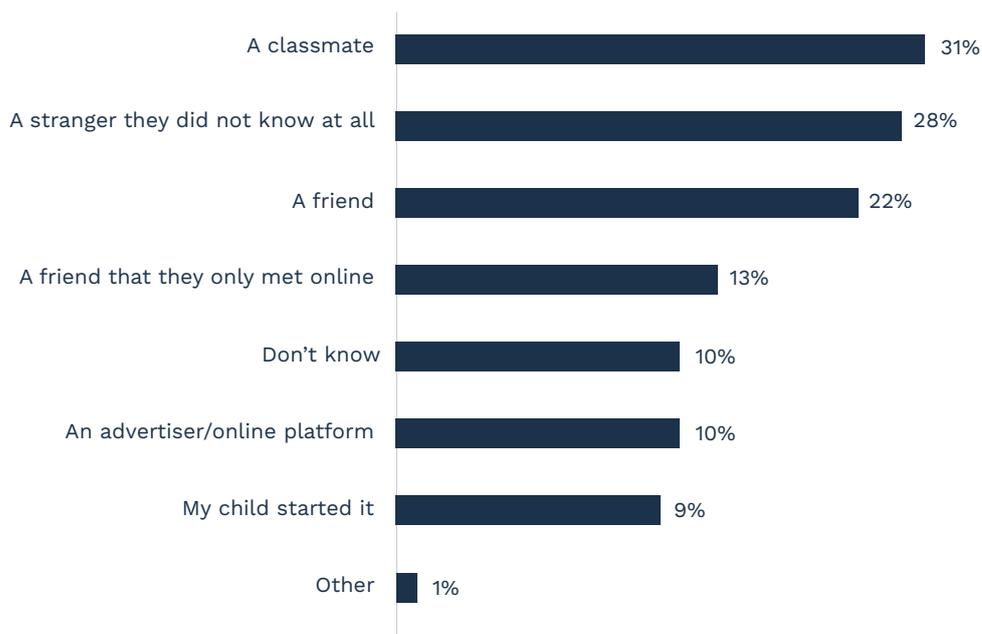
Base: Parents of children 6–17 who had a negative online experience (online panel only), n=688



Responsibility for a child's negative online experiences

Parents highlighted that the child's school environment was relevant when it came to them experiencing something negative online. As Figure 7 highlights, 31% of parents felt that it had been perpetrated by a classmate, followed by a stranger that they did not know at all (28%) or a friend (22%).

Figure 7: Parental perception of responsibility for a child's negative online experience



Base: Parents of children 6–17 who had a negative online experience (online panel only), n=688

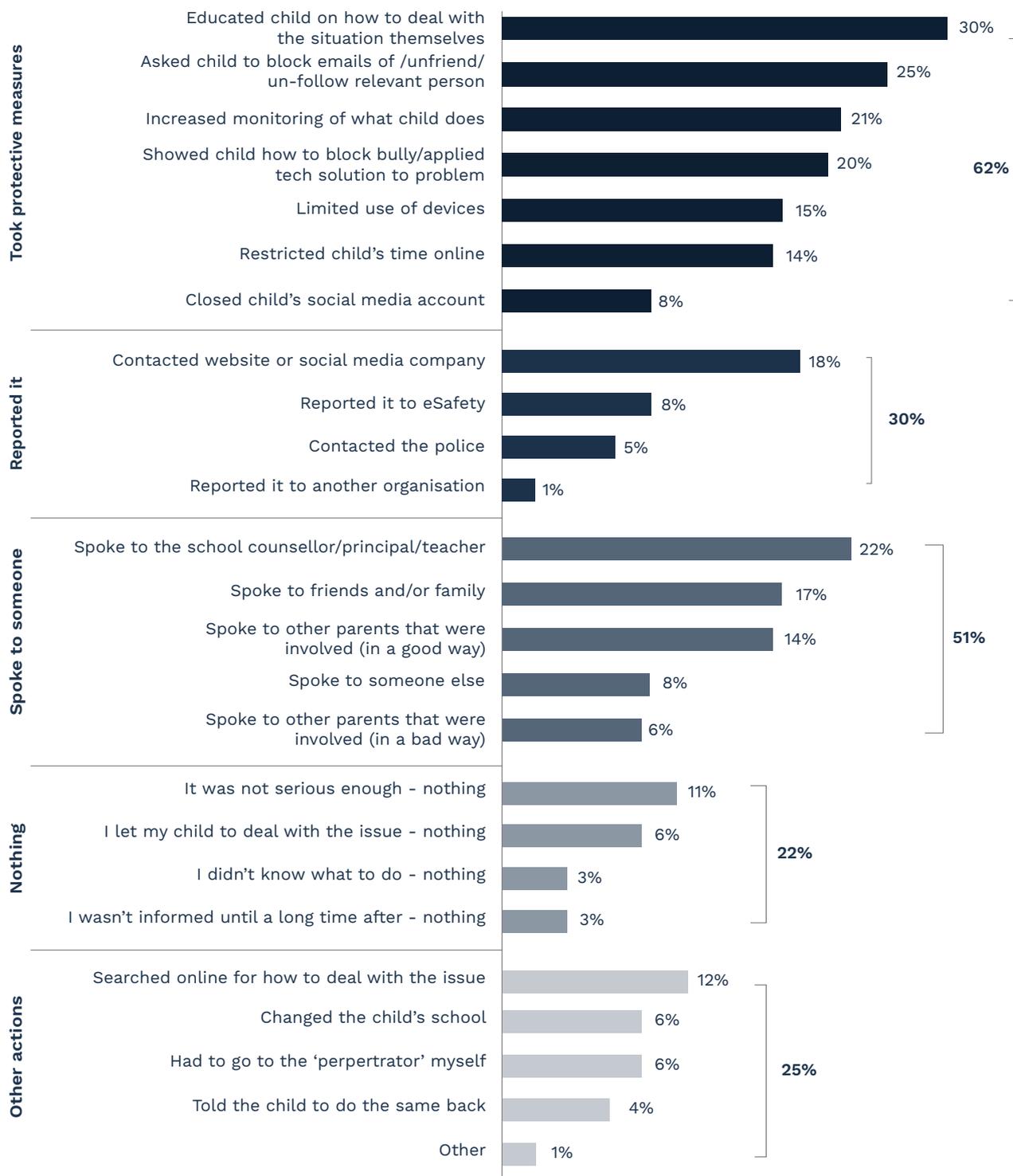


Dealing with a child's negative online experiences

Previous research about online parenting approaches has suggested that parents turn to restrictive parenting styles after a child's negative online experience (Duerager & Livingstone, 2012). Our own survey goes a little way toward confirming this. As Figure 8 shows, parents who were aware of their child's negative online experience were more likely to respond by carrying out protective actions more than anything else (62%). The majority of parents (51%) also spoke to someone about what happened, with staff in the child's school those most commonly consulted. In addition, about 30% of parents chose to report what happened to either a social media company, eSafety, the police or another organisation. Only a minority of parents chose to do nothing (22%) when confronted with their child's negative experience.



Figure 8: How parents deal with their child’s negative online experiences



Base: Parents of children 6–17 who had a negative online experience (online panel only), n=688

While highlighting the range of actions parents took after finding out about their child’s negative online experiences, we can also see that parents reported behaving quite differently depending on the age and gender of their child. Grouping together parents’ activities as highlighted in Figure 8 into five approaches – ‘Nothing’; ‘Spoke to someone’; ‘Reported it’; ‘Took protective measures’; ‘Other actions’, Table 6 shows the percentage of parents who took each of these actions broken down by their child’s age and gender. Table 6 consistently shows that parents of girls are more likely to take action than parents that have boys. This is particularly noted for parents with an older child.

Table 6: How parents deal with their child’s negative online experiences by age and gender of child

	Ages 6 to 7			Ages 8 to 12			Ages 13 to 17		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Did nothing	18%	25%	21%	18%	16%	17%	36%	17%	26%
Spoke to someone	41%	48%	45%	52%	55%	53%	45%	56%	51%
Reported it⁶	36%	37%	37%	29%	36%	32%	18%	31%	25%
Took protective measures	62%	64%	63%	57%	72%	64%	51%	69%	61%
Other actions⁷	38%	31%	37%	23%	24%	23%	18%	25%	22%

Note: Parents able to select multiple responses as a child might have had more than one negative online experience during the reporting period. Base: Parents of children 6–17 who had a negative online experience (online panel only), n=688

The propensity to take action among parents of girls was especially noticeable when choosing to ‘report it’ or to take ‘protective measures’. By the time girls reach the 13 to 17 age group, their parents are nearly twice as likely as those of boys to make a report. Similarly, parents of girls between 8 to 12 and 13 to 17 were 25% and 34% more likely to take protective measures than those with boys in the same age range.

Considering the age of children, the only statistically significant differences in how parents reacted were among parents choosing to do ‘nothing’, ‘report it’ or undertake ‘other actions’. Table 6 shows that parents with a child between 13 to 17 years were significantly more likely to do nothing. The opposite was true for parents of 8 to 12-year olds. This parent group was significantly less likely to do nothing than other parents. Parents with a child in the 6 to 7 age group significantly preferred reporting or taking other actions when compared to parents with an older child.

Not included in Table 6 were differences observed among fathers and mothers as well as parents from a CALD background. When comparing the actions of parents, fathers were more likely to do nothing (27% vs 18% for mother) and less likely to take protective measures (58% vs 66% for mothers). CALD parents were instead more likely to undertake ‘other actions’ (31% vs 22% non CALD), ‘report it’ (37% vs 26% non CALD), and ‘speak to someone’ (58% vs 46% non CALD). However, they were also less likely to ‘take protective measures’ when compared to their non-CALD counterparts (58% vs 64%).

⁶ Includes: contacted website or social media company; reported it to the eSafety Commissioner; contacted the police; reported it to another organisation.

⁷ Includes: searched online for how to deal with the issue; changed the child’s school; had a go at the ‘perpetrator’ myself; told the child to do the same back; other.

Online safety information needs

The relatively low overall awareness that parents demonstrated about their child’s negative online experiences is matched by a low number of parents who reported having searched for or received any information about how to keep their child safe online. Only around 36% of parents reported searching for or receiving this type of information in the past 12 months. This statistic has remained relatively unchanged since the first eSafety survey of parents in 2016 which found that 27% of parents with a child aged 8 to 17 had either searched for or received online safety information (Office of the eSafety Commissioner, 2016). As Table 7 shows, there was little variability in parents obtaining this type of information.

Table 7: Parents searching for or receiving online safety information

Ages 2 to 5			Ages 6 to 7			Ages 8 to 12			Ages 13 to 17		
Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
34%	34%	34%	35%	31%	33%	40%	39%	40%	35%	34%	34%

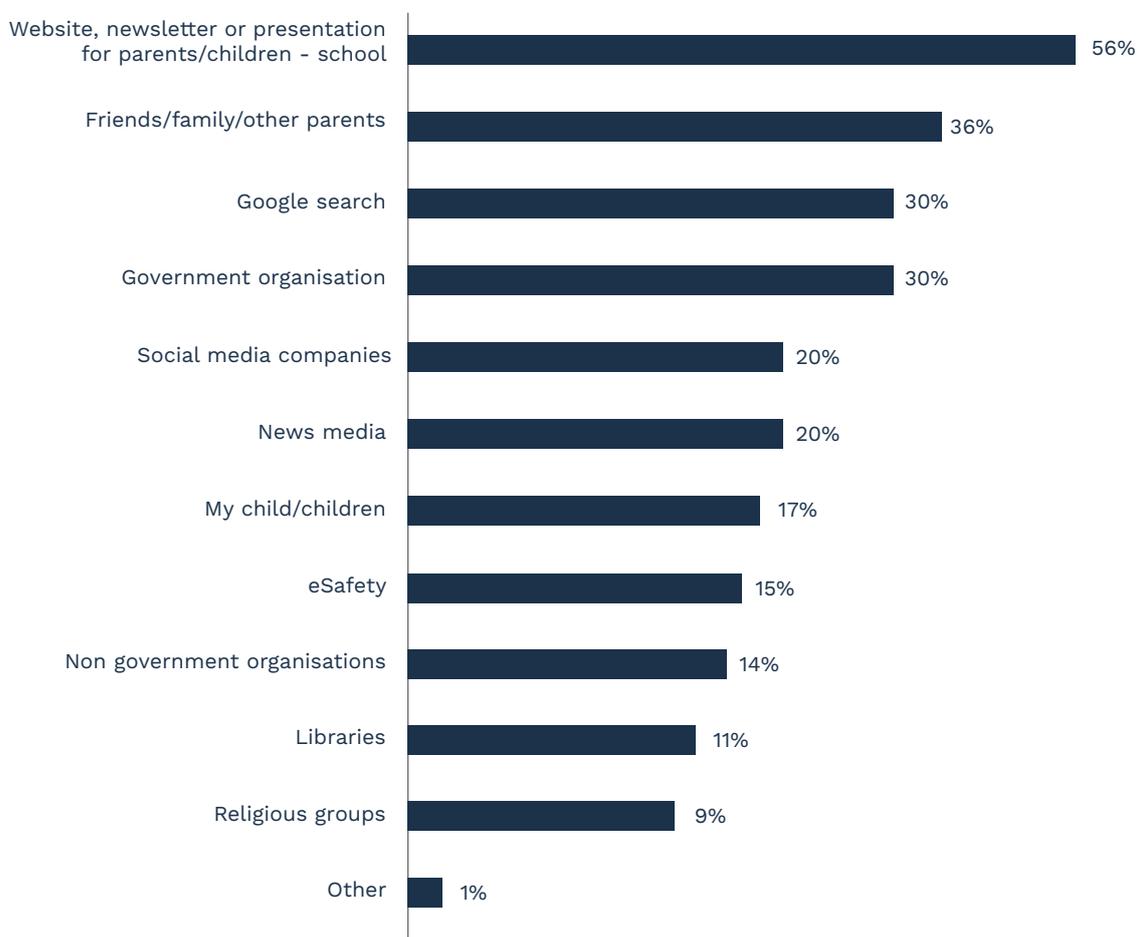
Base: Parents of children 2–17 (online panel only), n = 2,950



Only parents with a child between the ages of 8 to 12 were significantly more likely to search for or receive any information (40% vs 36% of all parents) and there was almost no difference among parents when the gender of the child was considered. Parents from a CALD background were significantly more likely to receive or seek this type of information than their non-CALD counterparts (45% vs 32%).

For those who did receive online safety information, Figure 9 shows that the most common source was through their child’s school including the websites, newsletters and presentations that they host and produce (56%). Parents also relied on family and friends, government organisations and Google searches for information and advice. Between 30 to 36% of parents reported seeking information from those sources in the past year. These sources remained unchanged from the 2016 eSafety parent survey (Office of the eSafety Commissioner, 2016).

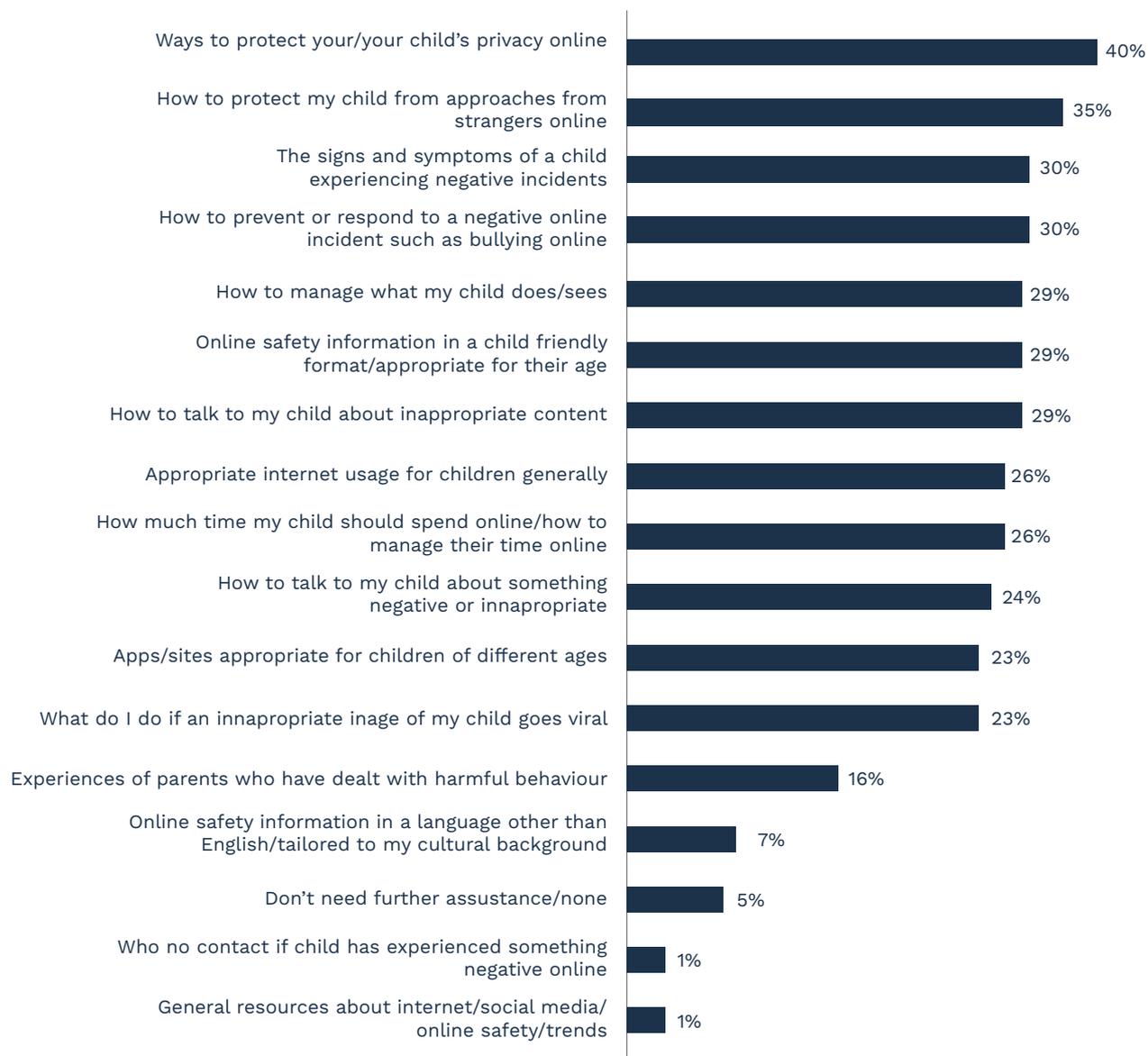
Figure 9: Parental sources of information about how to keep their children safe online



Base: Parents of children 2–17 that search or received online safety information (online panel only), n=1,052

It was also the case that almost all respondents agreed that they needed additional information on online safety. As Figure 10 shows, only a small minority of parents (5%) felt that they did not need further assistance. Most commonly, parents wanted more information on ways to protect a child’s privacy and from being approached by strangers online (40% and 35% respectively).

Figure 10: Additional information required by parents to keep their child safe online



Base: Parents of children 2–17, n=3,384

Split into parents of preschool and school-aged children, the types of additional information parents sought broadly mirrors their concerns about their child being online. While parents of both preschool and school-aged children prioritised the need for information on ways to protect their online privacy, Table 8 shows that those with preschool children also preferred information that allows them to judge the appropriateness of online content and to control their child’s exposure to it. Parents with an older child instead sought information that would help them deal with the consequences of their expanding digital footprints such as unwanted approaches from strangers and ways to respond to negative online incidents. Table 8 ranks the type of additional information being sought by these two groups of parents.

Table 8: Addition information required by parents by age of their child

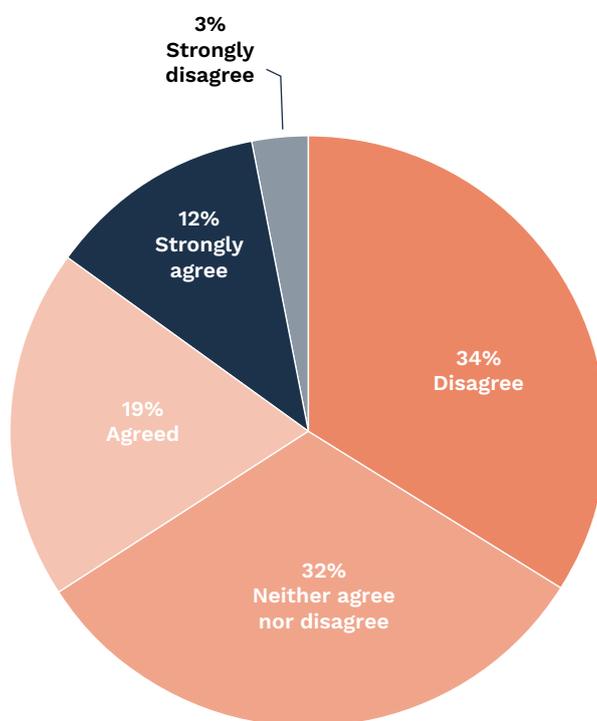
	Parents of preschool children (aged 2–5)	%		Parents of school-aged children (aged 6–17)	%
1st	Ways to protect your child’s privacy online	38%	1st	Ways to protect your child’s privacy online	40%
2nd	Apps sites appropriate for children of different ages	32%	2nd	How to protect my child from approaches from strangers online	36%
3rd	How to manage what my child does/sees	32%	3rd	How to prevent or respond to a negative online incident such as bullying online	31%
4th	Online safety information in a child friendly format/appropriate for their age	31%	4th	The signs and symptoms of a child experiencing negative incidents	30%
5th	The signs and symptoms of a child experiencing negative incidents	31%	5th	How to talk to a child about inappropriate content	30%

Base: Parents of preschool children aged 2–5, n = 710 and parents of children aged 6–17, n = 2,799

Children’s online safety beyond parental responsibility

The preceding sections of this report have shown that parents are not overly confident when dealing with online issues their child might face; they have low levels of awareness about their child’s negative experiences; and feel in need of additional information in order to help keep them safe online. Important as this is, it shows that the end user (or their parents) cannot be solely responsible for their online wellbeing if society’s aim is to make the internet a safer place for people to explore. To this end, the survey asked Australian parents to respond to the statement ‘technology companies are doing enough to build safety features into their services and products.’ Figure 11 highlights these responses.

Figure 11: Parents’ views: Are technology companies doing enough to build safety features into their products and services?



Note: Parents were asked to record their level of agreement or disagreement with the statement, ‘Technology companies are doing enough to build safety features into their services and products.’
 Base: Parents of children aged 2–17, n = 3,520

While a minority of parents (32%) struggled to provide an opinion on the issue, a significant proportion of respondents thought that these companies were not doing enough. More than 46% of parents either agreed or strongly agreed that in fact these companies needed to do more compared to 22% who thought that enough was being done. Irrespective of these opinions, parents were also given the opportunity to rank the type of features that they would like to see technology companies incorporate in their products and services. As Table 9 shows, parents are noticeably consistent in what they see as important for their children when they go online. Mirroring already expressed concerns and additional information sources that they would find most useful, parents prefer features embedded in digital products that maintain a user’s privacy and restrict access to content based on its age appropriateness. Table 9 highlights the list of the five most important online safety features according to parents.

Table 9: Top five most important online safety features for Australian parents

Rank	Online safety feature	Percentage
1st	Ensuring that the highest privacy settings are in place by default	68%
2nd	Better measures to restrict access to digital content for appropriate ages	62%
3rd	Registration process that prevents users from accessing services that are not targeted at their age range	53%
4th	Automatic flagging of inappropriate language and behavior to allow users to reflect on what they are about to post	52%
5th	Features that limit who has access to a user's posts.	51%

Base: Parents of children 2 -17 (online panel only), n= 3,068



Conclusion

This research focuses on parents' experiences raising children in a world steeped in online activity and connection. It confirms the pivotal role parents play in keeping their children safe online and highlights their very real concerns about their capacity to deal with online safety issues. The research provides insight into how parents assess and react to their children's experiences and the information they find most useful in guiding children through their experiences online.

The findings show that both parents' concerns about their child being online and their additional information requirements revolve around the need to maintain privacy — as well as the need to protect them from unwanted approaches from strangers.

It also shows that online parenting approaches and attitudes vary, based on the age of the child in their care. Those with an older child are more likely to favour a more open parenting style while parents with a younger child are more restrictive. Parents display a general lack of confidence about having to deal with their child's negative online experiences though their confidence levels are not dependent on awareness of their child's negative online experience.

Parents display low levels of awareness about their own child's negative online experiences. Parents with an older child or those from a CALD background report knowing about their child's negative online experiences in greater numbers than those with a younger child and non-CALD parents.

The findings also reflect on the centrality of the parent-child relationship: the most common way for parents to find out about their child's negative online experiences was by being told by them. In turn, parents reported being quite responsive after finding out — especially those with girls, as opposed to boys.

Interestingly, the findings highlight that despite its perceived importance, parents are not proactive when it comes to seeking and receiving online safety information. Only a minority were found to have done so with this peaking among parents with a child between the ages of 8 to 12. Also, parents from a CALD background were more likely than their non-CALD counterparts to have received or looked for this type of information. This shows that eSafety, and other online safety-focused organisations, face the challenge of ensuring that parents can access appropriate online safety information easily when they need. This valuable information needs to both increase parents' online safety capabilities, as well as boosting their confidence levels.

Methodology

Procedures

A nationally representative sample of n=3,068 Australian parents of 2-17 year olds (aged 18+ themselves) was taken from three online survey panels. The online survey was 20 minutes long. A secondary, nationally representative sample (n=452) completed a shorter 15-minute survey by telephone, which included key metrics only. In each case, parents were asked to think about one randomly selected child within their household when responding to survey questions.

Sample

The sample design was the same for both online and CATI samples (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing), with consideration of the age band of parents, parents' educational attainment, socio-economic status (based on SEIFA deciles), labour force status, CALD, and location (metropolitan vs regional) — population statistics were based on ABS data relating to parents of 2-17 year olds. The data was weighted by age of parent, education level of parent, SES, CALD and region (metropolitan and regional).



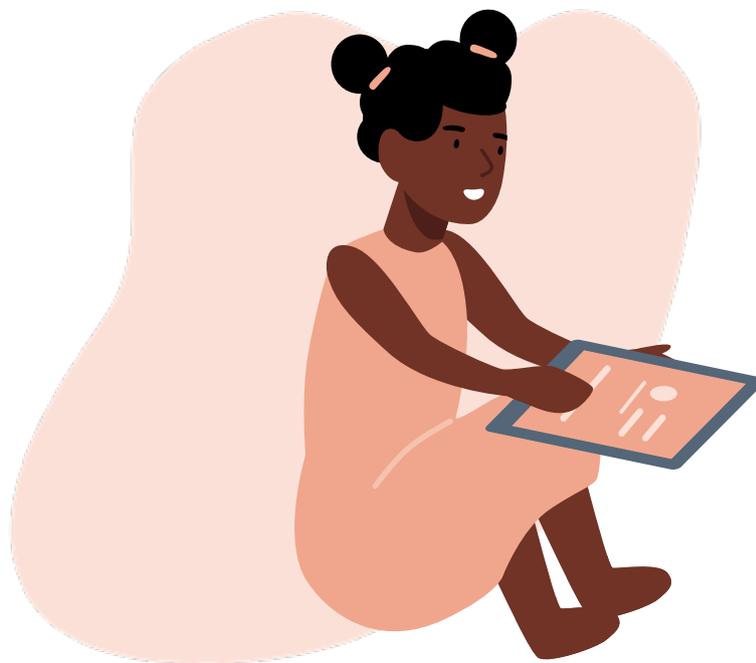
Table 10: Online and CATI sample representative sample

		Online		CATI	
Gender	Male	1,217	38%	204	43%
	Female	1,832	62%	248	57%
Age band	18-24	42	2%	5	2%
	25-29	170	7%	17	6%
	30-34	494	19%	49	13%
	35-39	640	20%	98	22%
	40-44	681	21%	125	27%
	45-49	714	21%	102	21%
	50-54	165	5%	35	7%
	55-59	94	3%	12	2%
	60-64	43	1%	5	1%
	65+	25	1%	4	1%
Education (highest)	Year 12 or below	528	24%	84	27%
	TAFE/ Technical	390	14%	39	9%
	Cert. or Diploma	627	21%	96	22%
	Uni. Degree or higher	1,507	40%	231	41%
SES	High	1,269	26%	168	22%
	Med	1,315	42%	188	38%
	Low	484	32%	96	40%
State	NSW	864	29%	146	32%
	VIC	761	24%	104	23%
	ACT	83	2%	7	1%
	QLD	661	22%	116	26%
	NT	25	1%	3	1%
	WA	301	8%	37	6%
	SA	267	10%	33	10%
	TAS	106	4%	6	2%
Location	Metro	2,188	63%	296	56%
	Regional	880	37%	156	44%
CALD	Yes	643	29%	95	26%
	No	2,425	71%	357	74%
Total		3,068		452	

In addition, specific sample sizes were obtained for children in particular age bands: achieved sample sizes are shown in Table 11.

Table 11: Sample sizes for required child age bands

		Online	CATI
Child age band	Band 1 (2-3)	306	52
	Band 2 (4-5)	309	54
	Band 3 (6-7)	818	104
	Band 4 (8-12)	827	120
	Band 5 (13-17)	808	122
Total		3,068	452



Measures

For school age children (ages 13 to 17):

Restrictive parenting scale — a five-item restrictive parenting scale was developed with respondents needing to express their degree of agreement on a five-point Likert scale ranging from ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘strongly agree’.

Open parenting scale — a four-item open parenting scale was developed with respondents needing to express their degree of agreement on a five-point Likert scale ranging from ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘strongly agree’.

Confidence dealing with child’s online issues scale — a four-item confidence scale was developed with respondents needing to express their degree of agreement on a five-point Likert scale ranging from ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘strongly agree’.

All scale items are provided in Table 12 along with their factor loadings. There was no missing data.

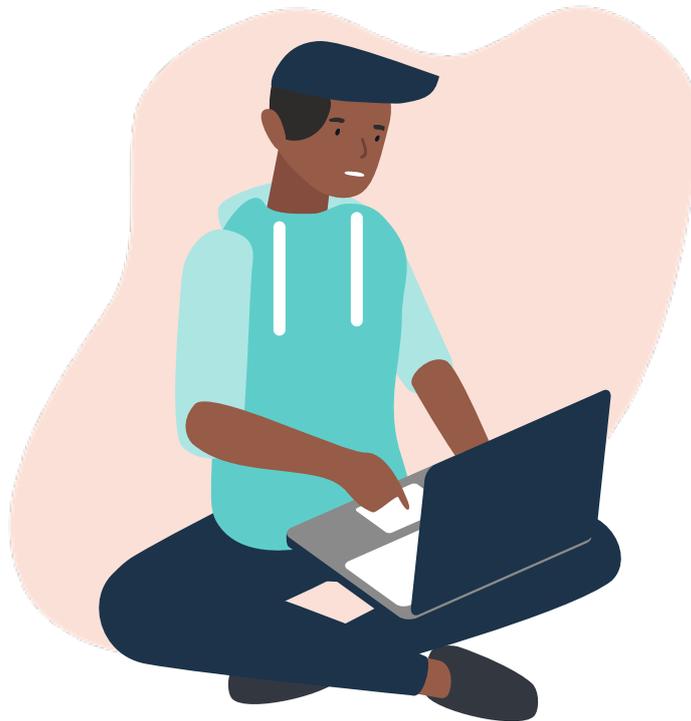


Table 12: Online parenting scales for school age children

	Factor		
	1	2	3
Restrictive parent (Cumulative variance explained 30.191%) ($\alpha = .797$)			
I take an active role in monitoring what my child does online	.759		.386
I limit the amount of time my child spends online	.690		
I set clear rules for my child about internet use	.667		
I use age guidelines in relation to my child's use of social media, apps and games	.641		.468
Parental controls are important to how I limit my child's exposure to inappropriate content such as pornography	.554		.347
Confidence dealing with child's online issues (Cumulative variance explained 47.714%) ($\alpha = .784$)			
I feel confident to deal with the online threats in terms of contact with strangers my child could face		.763	
I feel confident to deal with cyberbullying that my child could face		.731	
I would know where to get help in relation to online safety issues affecting my child		.638	
I understand how to use the safety features on social media, apps and games		.632	
Open parent (Cumulative variance explained 57.671%) ($\alpha = .715$)			
I talk to my child regularly about online risks and what to do	.328		.774
I speak to my child about being respectful to others online			.717
I show my child how to use safety features when online	.390		.537
I listen to my child's online social problems, if they have any	.322		.465

Note: Factor loading < .3 are suppressed

For pre-school age children (ages 2 to 5):

Restrictive parenting scale for pre-school age children — a 7-item restrictive parenting scale was developed with respondents needing to express their degree of agreement on a five-point Likert scale ranging from ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘strongly agree’.

Open parenting scale for pre-school age children — a 4-item open parenting scale was developed with respondents needing to express their degree of agreement on a five-point Likert scale ranging from ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘strongly agree’.

Confidence dealing with child’s online issues scale for pre-school aged children — a 4-item confidence scale was developed with respondents needing to express their degree of agreement on a five-point Likert scale ranging from ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘strongly agree’.

All scale items are provided in Table 13 along with their factor loadings. There was no missing data.



Table 13: Online parenting scales for pre-school aged children

	Factor loading		
	1	2	3
Restrictive parent (Cumulative variance explained 25.569%) ($\alpha = .797$)			
I take an active role in monitoring what my child does online	.687		
My child's online safety is important to me	.639		
I set clear rules for my child about internet use	.611		.436
Parental controls are important to how I limit my child's exposure to inappropriate content such as pornography	.610		.334
I use age guidelines in relation to my child's use of social media, apps and games	.577		.334
I limit the amount of time my child spends online	.554		
I feel confident in using digital devices such as smartphones	.501		
Confidence dealing with child's online issues (Cumulative variance explained 43.702%) ($\alpha = .799$)			
I feel confident to deal with the online threats in terms of contact with strangers my child could face		.755	
I feel confident to deal with cyberbullying that my child could face		.718	
I understand how to use the safety features on social media, apps and games		.638	
I would know where to get help in relation to online safety issues affecting my child		.670	
Open parent (Cumulative variance explained 54.316%) ($\alpha = .754$)			
I talk to my child regularly about online risks and what to do			.797
I speak to my child about being respectful to others online	.301		.703
I show my child how to use safety features when online			.694
I trust my child to act appropriately online — in relation to how they behave and the content they access			.454

Note: Factor loading < .3 are suppressed

Data analyses

Data analysis was carried out using SPSS v24. Descriptive analysis of the data formed a large part of this report and was carried out in order to report on frequencies around key survey indicators and sub sample groups such as parents of pre-school and school aged children.

Analysis using inferential statistical methods emphasised reporting results that differed in a statistically significant way among key subsample groups and effect sizes where relevant. Key methods used to do this centred around the use of contingency tables as well as t-tests (Pallant, 2010). Additional methods used included exploratory factor analysis (EFA) (Pett, Lackey, & Sullivan, 2003), analysis of variance and logistic regression (Pallant, 2010) (Hosmer & Lemeshow, 2000).

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Appendix A:

Supplementary data – CALD and location status of parents

The two tables below include the top indicators that make up the report proper and highlight differences among CALD and non-CALD parents (Table 1) as well as parents living in either a regional area as opposed to a capital city (Table 2).

Table 1: Supplementary tables by CALD status of parents

INDICATOR		CALD	NON CALD
Top 5 parental concerns	Internet/online addiction	34%*	30%
	Accessing/being exposed to other content not appropriate for their age	30%	40%*
	Being bullied online	29%	36%*
	Accessing/being exposed to pornography	29%	34%*
	Accessing/being exposed to violent content	26%	26%
Awareness of child's negative online experience in the 12 months to July 2018	Aware	39%*	24%
	Not aware	61%	75%*
Actions taken after child's negative online experience	Did nothing	24%	21%
	Other action	31%*	22%
	Reported it	38%*	26%
	Spoke to someone	58%*	46%
	Took protective measures	58%	65%
Sought or received online safety information for their child	Yes	45%*	32%
	No	55%	68%*
Top 5 additional information required by parents	Ways to protect your/your child's privacy online	36%	41%*
	How to protect my child from approaches from strangers online	31%	36%*
	How to talk to my child about inappropriate content	29%	28%
	How to prevent or respond to a negative online incident such as bullying online	29%	30%
	Appropriate internet usage for children generally	28%	25%

* Statistically significant difference.

Table 2: Supplementary tables by location of parents

INDICATOR		CAPITAL	REGIONAL
Top 5 parental concerns	Accessing/being exposed to other content not appropriate for their age	36%	39%
	Contact with strangers/inappropriate invitations to meet offline	36%	39%
	Being bullied online	34%	35%
	Accessing/being exposed to violent content	32%	33%
	Balancing internet use with other areas of life	26%	29%
Awareness of child's negative online experience in the 12 months to July 2018	Aware	28%	29%
	Not aware	72%	71%
Actions taken after child's negative online experience	Did nothing	24%	19%
	Other action	25%	25%
	Reported it	31%	28%
	Spoke to someone	50%	50%
	Took protective measures	61%	65%
Sought or received online safety information for their child	Yes	38%*	32%
	No	62%	68%*
Top 5 additional information required by parents	Ways to protect your/your child's privacy online	39%	42%
	How to protect my child from approaches from strangers online	35%	35%
	Online safety information in a child friendly format/ appropriate for their age	28%	29%
	How to manage what my child does/sees	29%	29%
	How to talk to my child about inappropriate content	29%	29%

* Statistically significant difference.

