Cool, beautiful, strange and scary:

The online experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their parents and caregivers

Aussie Kids Online

March 2023

Australian Government | eSafetyCommissioner

eSafety acknowledges all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples for their continuing care of everything Country encompasses — land, waters and community. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and to Elders past, present and future.

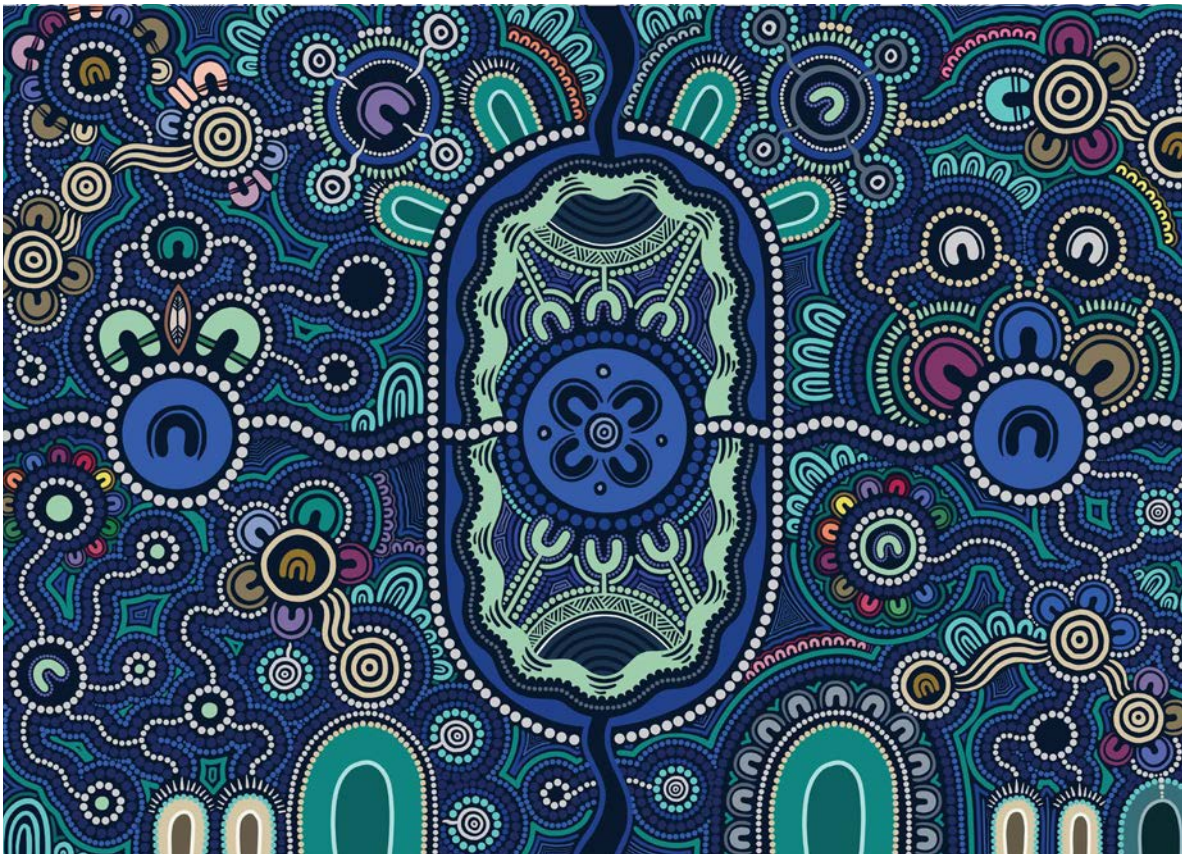
Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the children, parents and caregivers who participated in this research and gave their time to contribute to a greater understanding of young people's online risks and opportunities.

The title of this report was inspired by the response of a 17-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girl from Melbourne to the question: 'If the internet was an animal, what animal would it be?'

'It would be a chimera because it's kind of strange and scary at times – especially if you don't know what you're doing – but it's also pretty cool and beautiful.'

Professor Bronwyn Carlson and Madi Day of Macquarie University's Department of Indigenous Studies made an important contribution to the analysis of the survey data, providing input into several interpretive sections of this report and situating the findings of this research within the context of existing knowledge about the digital engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.



We would also like to give special thanks to Amy Allerton, a Gumbaynggirr, Bundjalung and Gamilaroi artist, who designed the First Nations artwork used throughout this report. Amy has used a combination of traditional and interpretive symbolism in a contemporary art style to represent young people and the journeys that shape their lives. These designs have been taken from a larger artwork, *Strong People, Safe Spaces,* which visually depicts different groups in our community and eSafety's role in supporting them to be safe online.

The eSafety research program

The eSafety Commissioner (eSafety) helps Australians to have safer and more positive experiences online.

The eSafety research program supports, encourages, conducts and evaluates research about online safety for Australians. We do this so that:

- our programs, and policy and regulatory functions, are evidence-informed
- robust, citizen-centred evidence on the prevalence and impact of online harms is available to stakeholders
- the evidence base on what works to prevent and remediate online harms continues to grow.

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

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

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About this report

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia, the internet can be a place of entertainment, work and learning, as well as a means of cultural connection and expressing their identity (Rice et al. 2016; Carlson & Kennedy 2021). At the same time, online environments can be sites of racist abuse and colonial violence (Kennedy 2020; Carlson 2019; Carlson & Day 2022; Day & Carlson 2022). Both the benefits and harms of internet use are particularly acute for children and young people.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families navigate similar challenges to the wider Australian population when it comes to internet use. However, as a highly innovative and digitally active group who are also targeted by online harm and violence, their specific experiences merit closer investigation. Expanding our knowledge of the way Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people use the internet will enable the development of culturally responsive approaches to preventing and remediating online harms while potentially amplifying the benefits of being online (Carlson & Frazer 2018a; Carlson & Day 2021).

In 2021, eSafety commissioned research to explore the opportunities and risks that the internet presents for children in Australia.

The findings establish Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to be highly engaged in the digital environment, enabling them to keep in touch with friends and relatives near and far. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children use the internet to expand their social and cultural networks, to share creative output, and to learn about and discuss the issues facing the world around them. The internet is also a crucial source of health information and emotional support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, providing resources when circumstance limits access to in-person services (Carlson & Frazer 2022).

However, while the digital environment can provide a wealth of positive experiences to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, it is not without risk. The research finds that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are more likely to have been exposed to a range of potentially harmful experiences, including hate speech, which can negatively impact their mental health, schoolwork, and other aspects of their social and emotional lives. Our research also uncovered that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have the digital literacy to identify harmful online behaviour, and the awareness to proactively employ an array of effective actions in response.

The findings in this report reveal that parents and caregivers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are highly engaged in digital parenting practices. They are more likely to be aware of their child being exposed to negative material and hate speech online than parents and caregivers of Australian children overall. Our research also shows that parents and caregivers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children actively foster their child's internet activity, doing online activities together and encouraging them to learn and explore online.

Findings from this research will inform eSafety's ongoing online safety programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities, including future resources and programs to be developed by and with, and tailored to, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities. This research also aims to contribute to the international evidence base on children's internet use and is eSafety's second publication as a member of Global Kids Online.

Where sample size allows, this report compares the online experiences of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children surveyed with those of the entire sample of Australian children, which in this report is referred to as the 'national average', or 'Australian children overall'.

Comparison descriptors such as 'more likely' or 'higher' are used in connection with statistically significant data only, unless otherwise noted. Statistical difference is also noted by the use of arrows in figures or tables.

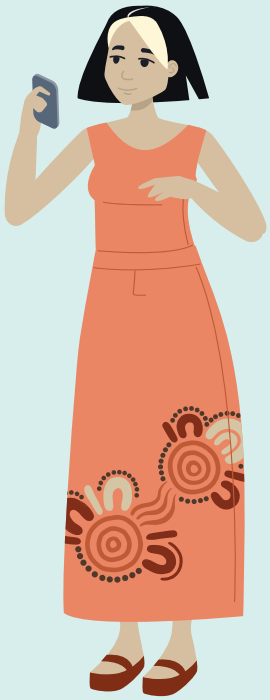
Key findings

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have a high level of digital engagement, with creative expression, civic participation and information searches all important uses of the online environment. While the internet creates opportunities to connect with like-minded peers and to make new friends regardless of location, it may also create a greater risk of negative and/or harmful experiences online.

This report finds that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are more likely than the wider Australian population to have negative experiences online, such as being the target of hate speech and cyberbullying. However, these same children are relatively proactive and knowledgeable about the actions they can take to reduce harm. Parents and caregivers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are closely engaged with their child's internet use and are highly likely to explore strategies for safer internet use with their child.

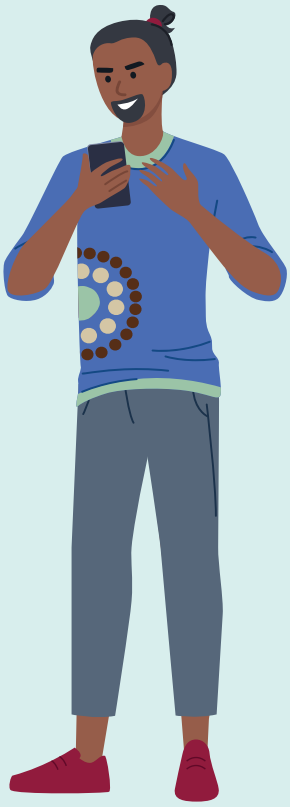
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's online activities and experiences

- **The internet is an important meeting place for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children**, who are much more likely to make new friends or contacts online than the national average (37% compared with 20% overall).
- **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are more likely to use the internet to connect with people with a background different from theirs,** with 39% reporting that they do so weekly or more often, compared with the national average of 23% of children overall.
- **Playing games is a common online activity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.** Almost three-quarters (73% compared with 61% overall) played online games alone, while 66% played with others (compared with 56% overall).
- **The internet is a key platform for cultural expression among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children**, who are more likely than the national average to post online their own video or music content (37% compared with 19% overall), or story or blog content (35% compared with 16% overall).
- **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children use the internet to make sense of the world around them.** There is a much higher level of online civic engagement among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children compared to the national average. Almost one-third (30%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children discussed social and political problems online weekly or more often – at least double the national average of 13%. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were also more likely to access news online (42% compared to 31% overall).



Key findings

- **The internet is a crucial source of health information for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children**. Around 1 in 3 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (35%) regularly use the internet to find information about issues of physical health (compared with 17% overall), sexual health (asked only of children aged 14–17 – 40% compared with 13%) and mental health (31% compared with 13%), and for emotional support (33% compared with 13% overall).



Negative experiences and online risks

- **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are much more likely to be treated in a hurtful or nasty way online** than the national average (68% compared with 45% overall).
- **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are almost three times more likely to have experienced online hate speech than the national average**. Around 3 in 10 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (29%) have had offensive things said to them because of their race, ethnicity, gender, nationality, sexual orientation, religion, age or disability, compared to the national average of 1 in 10 (11%).
- **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are more likely to have been in contact with someone they first met online** (69% compared with 55% national average), including meeting them face-to-face (37% compared with 12% national average). In turn, this may increase their risk of negative online experiences, including bullying, inappropriate use of photos by someone else and sexual victimisation.
- **Most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people (aged 14-17) have been exposed to potentially harmful online material** such as violent images or sexual content (76%).
- **Negative online experiences can have a profound impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children**, including impaired mental health (31%), perceived reputation damage (27%) and lower grades at school (23%).

Responses to negative online experiences

- **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are proactive and knowledgeable in responding to negative experiences online,** including telling friends or parents about the experience (67%), pursuing best-practice online safety responses such as unfriending or blocking the perpetrator (67%), and/or closing their social media or gaming account (37%).
- **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have developed strong digital literacy and the self-efficacy to confidently navigate negative experiences online.**
- **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children show comparatively high levels of self-reflection and responsibility for their behaviour online.** They are just as likely to tell their parents/caregivers when they have treated someone in a hurtful or nasty way online as they are to disclose when they have been on the receiving end of such behaviour.

Perceptions of the internet

- **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children typically have a somewhat conflicted view of the internet**, with many acknowledging the benefits of going online while remaining wary of its size and the risks associated with the online environment.
- **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are more likely to characterise the internet as being slow.** This may be driven by socio-economic or geographic location factors and would benefit from further research.

Digital parenting/caregiving of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

- **Parents/caregivers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are aware of their child's negative experiences online** to a similar extent as other Australian parents (55% compared with 51%).
- **They are especially aware of their child's encounters online with hate speech** (80% awareness compared with 64%) **and with security issues** such as identity fraud or malware infections (92% compared with 72%).
- **Many parents and caregivers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are aware of their child's contact with people they have met online** (69% contact, 54% awareness) and of their face-to-face meetings (37% meetings, 50% awareness) with someone they met online.
- **Awareness of their child's exposure to negative material online is higher among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents/caregivers than among parents/caregivers of Australian children overall** (82% compared with 62%).
- **Almost all parents/caregivers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children engage in a range of enabling, restrictive and technical mediation practices in relation to their children's online activities.** The parents of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were found to be more likely than the Australian average to instruct their child on ways to use the internet safely, to employ technical measures such as blocking software, and to regularly monitor their child's online activities.

Methodology

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

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

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

The online survey was an adaptation of the Global Kids Online questionnaire. This survey was submitted as part of the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) approval process, with ethics approval obtained on 6 July 2021 from the Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, ID 5390.

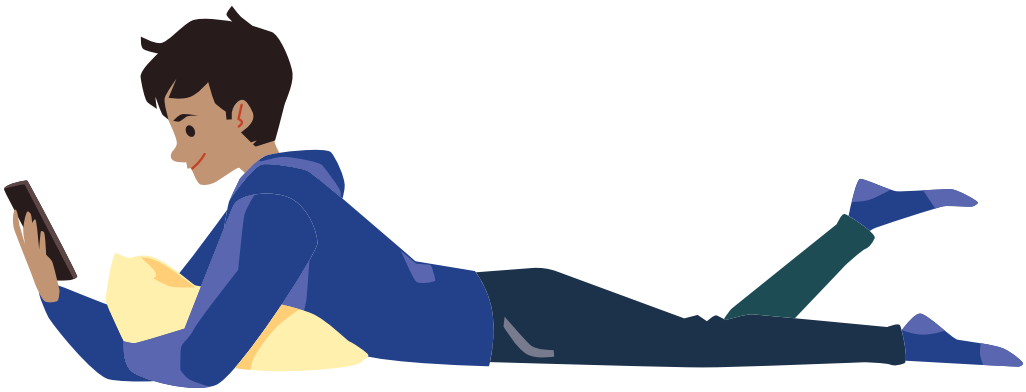
A total of n=223 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their parent or caregiver (n=223) completed the online survey. This sample included children with disability (n=72), those who are multilingual and speak their own languages as well as English (n=24), those who identify as LGBT (n=27), those who are from a low socio-economic background (n=83) and those who live outside of a capital city (n=84). Many of these demographic features, some of which are targeted by online violence, overlap in individual participants. One child and one parent or caregiver per household completed the survey. Only those participants aged 14–17 were asked if they identified as LGBT.

Significance testing was applied at a 95% confidence interval to compare the relevant sub-groups (e.g. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children compared with the Australian child cohort) in the quantitative analysis. Due to the small sample sizes of some of the sub-groups explored in this report, the margin of error for some comparisons is quite high. For example, as shown in Table 1, the sample of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teens aged 14–17 is relatively small (n=72), with a margin of error of +/-11.5 percentage points (at a prevalence of 50%). Clearly, more care needs to be taken in interpreting these results, and this is noted where relevant throughout the report. Also see the appendix for further details about the margin of error for specific sample sizes in this report.

Table 1: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survey respondents: Key demographics

	Number of children/ young people (n)	% of child/ young person sample aged 8–17
Disability	72	32
Speak a language other than English at home	24	11
Identify as LGBT (aged 14–17)	27	12
Low socio-economic background	83	72
Live outside a capital city	84	38
Girls	126	57
Boys	96	43
Gender: prefer not to say	1	1
Aged 8–13	151	68
Aged 14–17	72	32
TOTAL SAMPLE SIZE	**223**	**100**

The full methodology report for the Aussie Kids Online research series is available on the eSafety website: https://www.esafety.gov.au/research/mind-gap



Limitations

This research has several limitations. The survey questionnaire that underpins this report was developed for the general population and was not specifically adapted for use in the Australian context by, or with, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academics and community members. This may have had an impact on data collection and, consequently, on the findings and analysis provided in the report.

In addition, the findings presented in the report refer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as a single entity. This term does not reflect the diversity of Australia's First Nations peoples, nor the cultural and geographic differences that exist between Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders. eSafety acknowledges that Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders possess distinct cultural qualities, needs and challenges, and that there is significant scope for a more targeted study in the future.

eSafety is committed to working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academics and community members to ensure that the next iteration of this survey can capture Indigenous-centred data about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their parents and caregivers. We gratefully acknowledge the generous guidance of Professor Bronwyn Carlson and Madi Day from Macquarie University on these matters.

Areas where details or context are lacking are noted in the body of the report.

Positionality statement

eSafety understands the impact of researchers' intersecting experiences of power and marginalisation on our research and analysis. The team that authored this report is made up of cis-gender women of European and Asian heritage. Identities represented in the team include queer women and those with disability. Our team has expertise in quantitative and qualitative methodologies, online harms and safety, and the lived experiences of young people and parents.

Children's online lives

The survey found Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to be confident participants in the digital environment, using the internet to discover more about the world around them, to meet others and to stay informed about a range of issues important to them. While negative online experiences are a common risk for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, the survey revealed a high level of digital literacy that enables effective responses to internet harms.

Online activities and experiences

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are part of vast and complex communities and kinship systems across the continent that are maintained and navigated both online and offline.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children use the internet to make new friends and to communicate with diverse people online

The internet is an important social forum for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, enabling them to connect with friends and to meet new people from backgrounds different from their own.

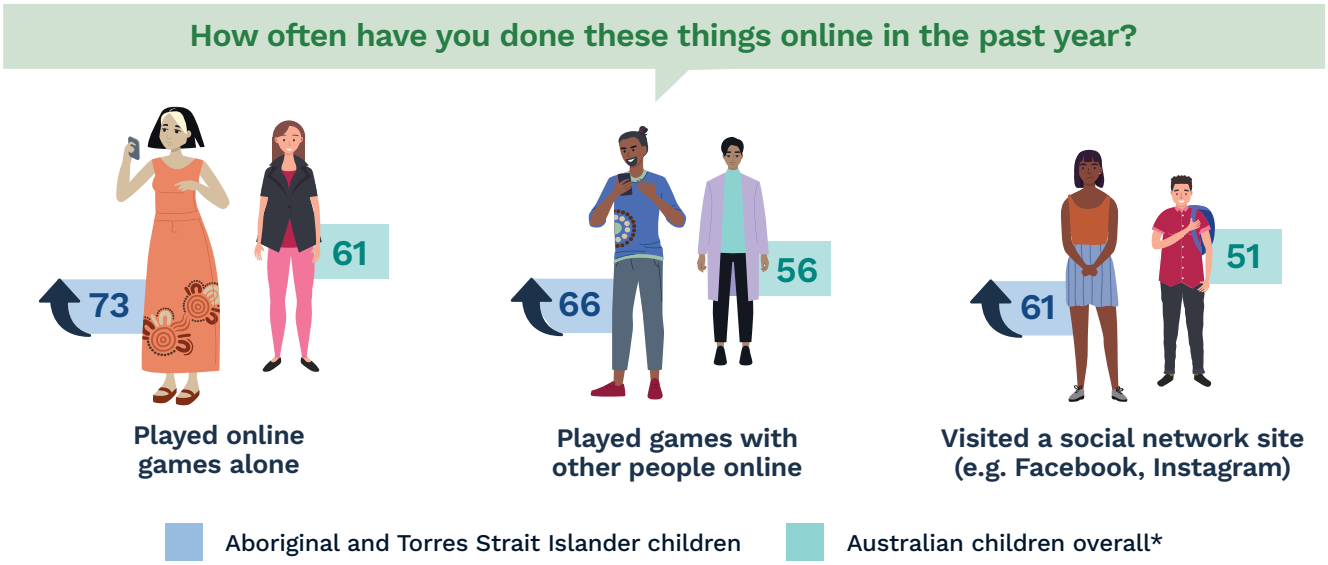
As shown in Figure 1, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are more likely than the national average to make new friends or contacts online (37% compared with 20% overall), and twice as likely to add people they have never met to their friends or contacts (34% compared with 16% overall). Four in 10 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have used the internet at least weekly to talk to people from backgrounds different from their own.

Figure 1: Use of the internet by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to meet and talk to others – comparison with Australian children overall (% weekly or more often)

**Average among Australian children aged 8–17.*
Question C1. How often have you done these things online in the past year?
Bases: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (n=223); Australian children aged 8–17 (n=3,590).
Note: Upward arrows ↑ denote results significantly higher, and downward arrows ↓ denote results significantly lower, than comparable sub-groups at a 95% confidence interval.

Common online platforms for social interaction by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children include social media, used by 61% at least weekly, compared with 51% of the average Australian child cohort (Figure 2). This is consistent with existing research which suggests that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of many generations are active on social media where they develop, maintain and sometimes locate kinship relations online (Carlson & Frazer 2018b; Carlson & Frazer 2021).

Figure 2: Use of the internet for social media and gaming by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children – comparison with Australian children overall (% weekly or more often)



**Average among Australian children aged 8–17.*
Question C1. How often have you done these things online in the past year?
Bases: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (n=223); Australian children aged 8–17 (n=3,590).
Note: Upward arrows denote results significantly higher, and downward arrows denote results significantly lower, than comparable sub-groups at a 95% confidence interval.

The majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children also play games online, either alone (73% compared with 61% national average) or with others (66% compared with 56%).

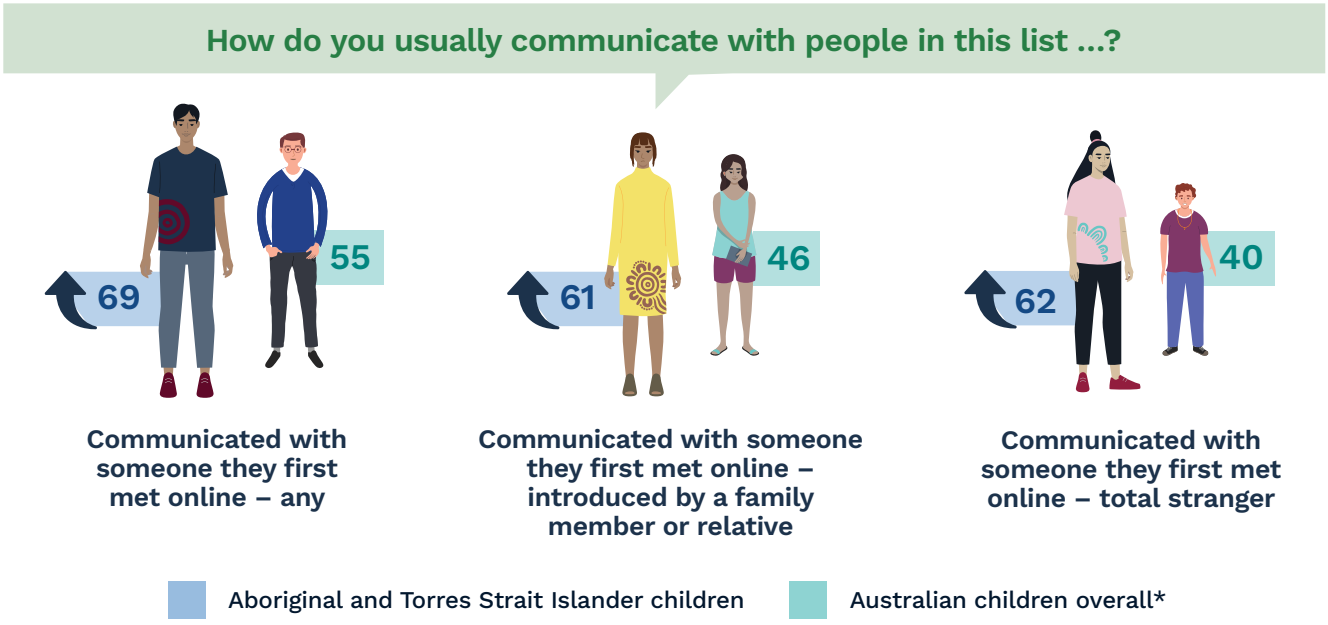
Higher rates of social media use and online gaming among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children may facilitate making new friends and communicating with diverse people online, as both provide opportunities to interact with new and different kinds of people. This points to both positive opportunities and risks for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children: social media creates beneficial opportunities to connect with like-minded peers and to make new friends, while also presenting a greater risk of negative and/or harmful experiences online.

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children stay in contact with people they first met online

Our research found that 7 in 10 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (69%) have communicated with someone they first met online, compared with the national average of just over half (55%) (Figure 3). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are also significantly more likely to be in contact with someone they met online who was known to family or a relative (61% compared with 46% of Australian children overall). This underscores the importance to Indigenous life of maintaining contact with extended relations and fellow Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Carlson & Frazer 2021).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are also more likely to maintain contact with someone completely unknown to them prior to meeting online (62% compared with 40% overall), highlighting the role of the internet as a meeting place for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Figure 3: Contact by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children with someone they first met online – comparison with Australian children overall (% in the past year)

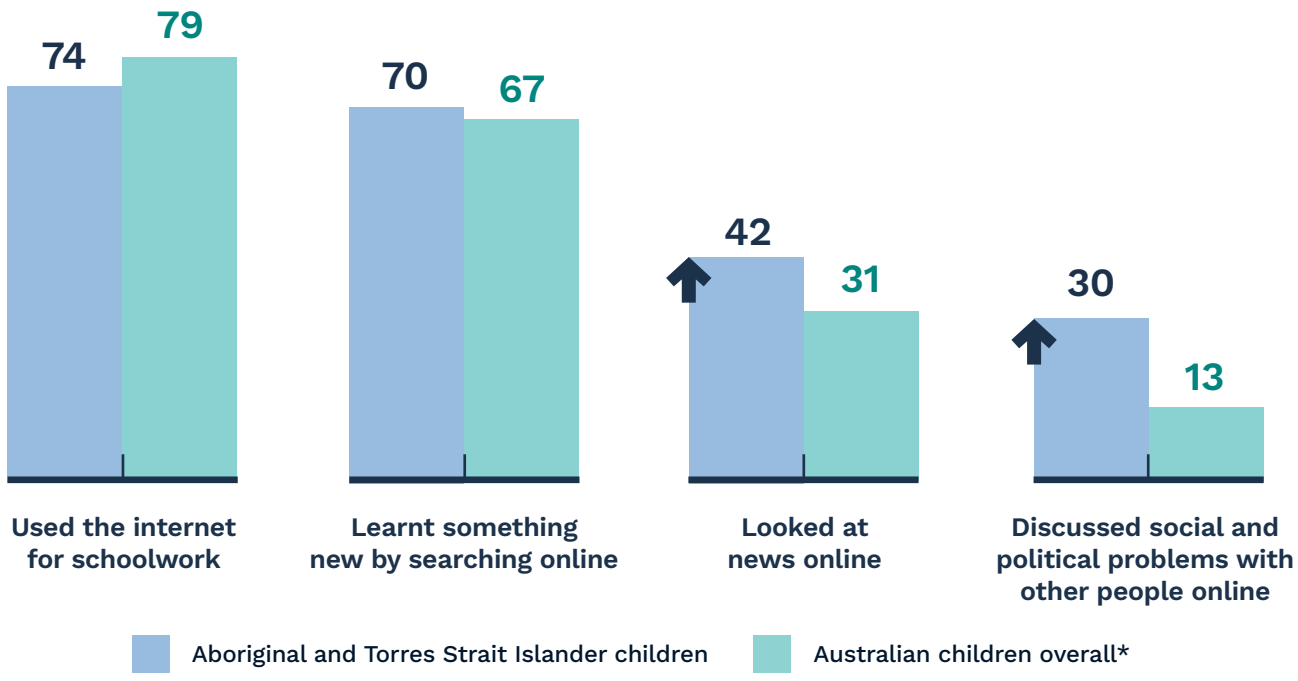


**Average among Australian children aged 8–17.*
Question D1. How do you usually communicate with people in this list (someone you first met online who was a contact of a friend or family member; someone who is under 18 who you met online and had no other connection with your life; someone who is 18 or older who you met online and had no other connection with your life)?
Bases: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 8–17 (n=223); Australian children (n=3,367).
Note: Upward arrows denote results significantly higher, and downward arrows denote results significantly lower, than comparable sub-groups at a 95% confidence interval.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are highly engaged in social and political discussions and in looking at news online

We know from prior research that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities use social media to access relevant news and as an important avenue for political activism (Carlson & Frazer 2016; Carlson & Frazer 2018b; Kennedy 2020). As shown in Figure 4, the survey findings suggest that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are more than twice as likely to discuss social and political problems online at least weekly than the national average (30% compared with 13%). They were also more likely than Australian children overall to look at news online, weekly or more often (42% compared with 31%).

Figure 4: Use of the internet by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children for learning and for civic participation – comparison with Australian children overall (% weekly or more often)



**Average among Australian children aged 8–17.*
Question C1. How often have you done these things online in the past year?
Bases: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 8–17 (n=223); Australian children aged 8–17 (n=3,590).
Note: Upward arrows ↑ denote results significantly higher, and downward arrows ↓ denote results significantly lower, than comparable sub-groups at a 95% confidence interval.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children go online for schoolwork and to learn new things

As shown in Figure 4, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are as likely to learn something new online (70% compared with 67%) and to use the internet for schoolwork (74% compared with 79% overall) as Australian children more generally. However, previous research indicates that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are more likely to access the internet via mobile devices (Kral 2011; Watson 2013; Rennie 2018; Rennie et al. 2019), which, with their small screens and keyboards, may not be suitable for schoolwork, especially in the senior years of high school.

The internet is a vital source of health information and emotional support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

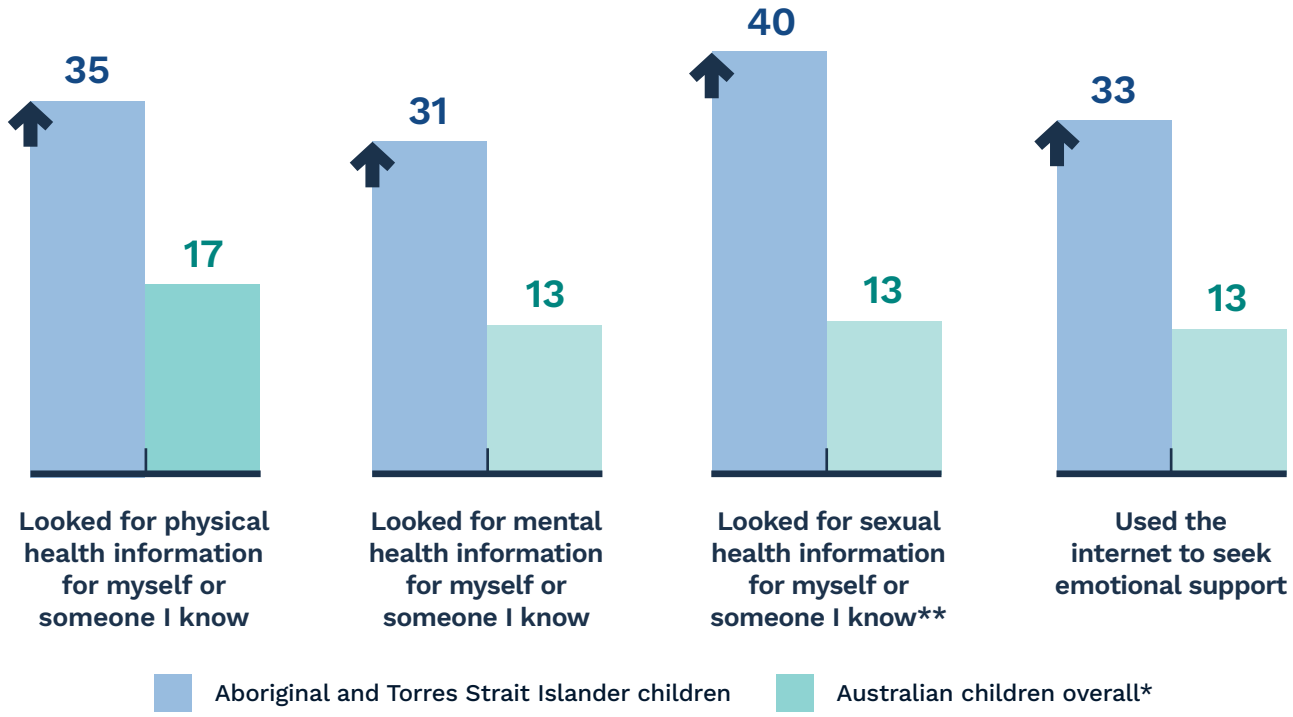
The accessibility of the internet has transformed the relationship between help-seekers and the forms of support they require. Online services and information sources have been found to be especially important for Australia's young people (Tiller et al. 2020). The digital environment enables Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to seek help when there might otherwise be barriers such as racism and discrimination (Carlson & Frazer 2022).

As shown in Figure 5, around a third of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children seek information online relating to physical (35%) or mental (31%) health, more than double the national average of 17% and 13%, respectively. Among children aged 14–17, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders were found to be much more likely to look online for sexual health information than the national average for the same cohort (40% compared with 13%).

While this result may be reflective of the higher incidence of physical and mental health conditions among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (AIHW 2018; Azzopardi et al. 2018), it could also demonstrate enhanced levels of adaptability and resourcefulness to access online services that may not be locally available (Rennie et al. 2019; Carlson & Frazer 2021).

The internet's role as an important source of help for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children is further demonstrated in the area of emotional support. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are much more likely to seek emotional support online (33%) than the national average (13%). Typically, these online emotional supports include social media, friends, and support services such as Beyond Blue or Headspace.

Figure 5: Use of the internet by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to look for health information and to seek emotional support – comparison with Australian children overall (% weekly or more often)



**Average among Australian children aged 8–17.*
***Asked only of those aged 14–17 (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children n=72; Australian children n=1,349).*
Question C1. How often have you done these things online in the past year?
Bases: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (n=223); Australian children aged 8–17 (n=3,590).
Note: Upward arrows ↑ denote results significantly higher, and downward arrows ↓ denote results significantly lower, than comparable sub-groups at a 95% confidence interval.

The internet provides Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children with an important outlet for creativity

Existing research tells us that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people use online platforms in innovative and creative ways (Carlson & Frazer 2018b), sharing videos and stories that express who they are as young Indigenous people (Kral 2011; Rice et al. 2016; Carlson & Frazer 2021). Our survey's findings confirm that from an early age, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people use online spaces creatively, with many producing and distributing original content (Figure 6). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are almost twice as likely as the wider Australian cohort to post online their own video or music (37% compared with 19%), and story or blog content (35% compared with 16%), weekly or more often. Future research could further explore the kinds of original stories, music and video content that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are posting online and provide insight into their use of online platforms to foster creative pursuits.

Watching user-generated video clips on platforms such as YouTube is universally popular among Australian children, with almost 9 out of 10 doing it on a weekly basis or more often. Additional research in this area could establish the extent to which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are viewing and/or sharing each other's content.

Figure 6: Use of the internet for posting or watching user-generated/creative content by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children – comparison with national average (% weekly or more often)

**Average among Australian children aged 8–17.*
Question C1. How often have you done these things online in the past year?
Bases: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (n=223); Australian children aged 8–17 (n=3,590).
Note: Upward arrows denote results significantly higher, and downward arrows denote results significantly lower, than comparable sub-groups at a 95% confidence interval.

Potential risks and harmful online experiences

While the internet provides Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children with social opportunities such as making friends with age peers and playing games online, it also places them at greater risk of online and offline harm.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are more likely than the average Australian child to communicate with people they know only online

Not all online interactions with new people are safe for children and some can lead to activities that carry potential safety risks. Communicating with online-only contacts has been associated internationally with higher risk of exposure to hate speech (Harriman et al. 2020; Savoia et al. 2021), bullying and harassment (Savoia et al. 2021), inappropriate use of photos by someone else (Savoia et al. 2021), and online sexual victimisation (De Santisteban & Gámez-Guadix 2018).

As shown in Figure 7, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are three times more likely than the national average to send a photo or video of themselves to someone they have never met face-to-face (33% compared with 11%), or to send personal information such as their full name, address or phone number to someone they have never met face-to-face (25% compared with 8%). Further, almost 4 in 10 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (37%) have met someone face-to-face after first meeting online, compared to the national average of 12%.

While a small sample size (n=82) precludes extensive analysis of this behaviour, preliminary findings indicate that children made up a significant majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's face-to-face contacts where there was no prior family connection. This is consistent with Australian children overall.

As noted on page 19, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities frequently use social media as a meeting place to enable ongoing cultural and family connection, with parents and relatives using the internet to introduce new contacts to their children. Further, the level of risk in meeting strangers online may be mitigated by the digital strategies of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents, to be detailed later in this report. As detailed later, (see Figure 26 on page 61), our survey data indicates that parents and caregivers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are, on average, more likely than the national average to monitor their child's online activities regularly, checking their social media profile (52% compared with 39% overall) and additions to friends or groups (57% compared with 42%), at least weekly or more often.

Nevertheless, the data also suggests that there is an ongoing need to ensure that all Australian children, including those from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, are aware of the risks inherent in meeting new, previously unknown internet contacts face-to-face. eSafety continues to work with teachers, parents and children nationwide to spread information about staying safe online.

Figure 7: Contact with a stranger online by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children – comparison with national average (weekly or more often)

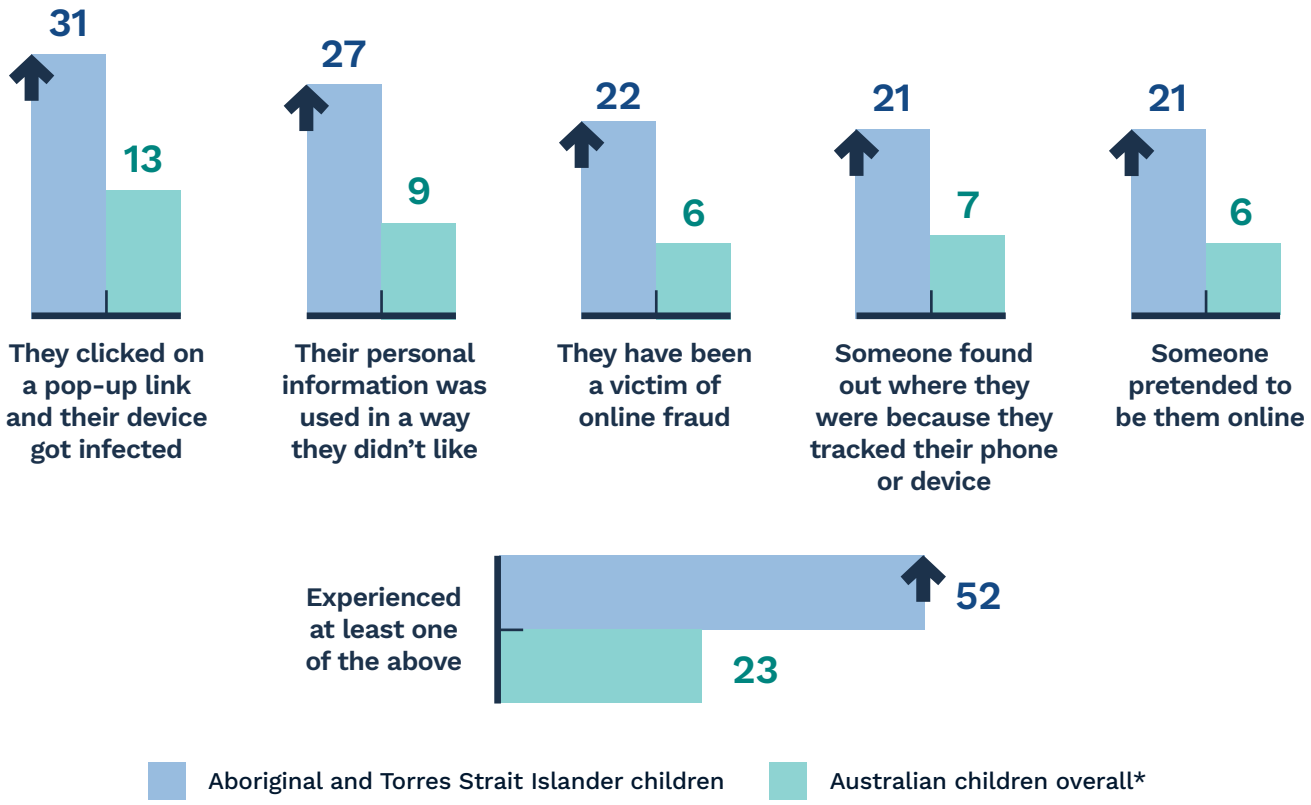
**Average among Australian children aged 8–17.*
Question G1. In the past year, have you met anyone face-to-face that you first met online?
Question C1. How often have you done these things online in the past year?
Bases: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (n=223); Australian children aged 8–17 (n=3,590).
Note: Upward arrows denote results significantly higher, and downward arrows denote results significantly lower, than comparable sub-groups at a 95% confidence interval.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are more likely to have detected experiences of compromised online security

More than half of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children surveyed (52%) reported having had their online security compromised in some way, a rate that is double the national average (Figure 8). Specifically, the survey found that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are significantly more likely to have experienced online fraud (22% compared with the national average of 6%) and are more than three times as likely to be impersonated online (21% compared with 6%). Further, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were found to be three times more likely than the national average to have discovered that their personal information had been misused (27% compared with 9%), or to have their location tracked online (21% compared with 7%).

These figures may indicate a higher level of digital literacy among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children – knowledge that enables them to detect security issues more effectively after they have happened. It could also indicate that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are more likely to be targeted by online perpetrators in these areas or that, as a cohort, they need greater access to education and training in order to avoid security risks while online. Additional research in this area will shed light on online security awareness among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Figure 8: Experiences of compromised security by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children – comparison with national average



**Average among Australian children aged 8–17.*
Question I4. Have any of these things happened to you online in the last year?
Bases: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 8–17 (n=223); Australian children aged 8–17 (n=3,590).
Note: Upward arrows ↑ denote results significantly higher, and downward arrows ↓ denote results significantly lower, than comparable sub-groups at a 95% confidence interval.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children can identify bullying behaviour online

Online bullying among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people has been intimately tied to experiences of racism and colonialism, with clear negative outcomes for those who perpetrate, and those who experience, harmful behaviour online (Carlson & Frazer 2018a).

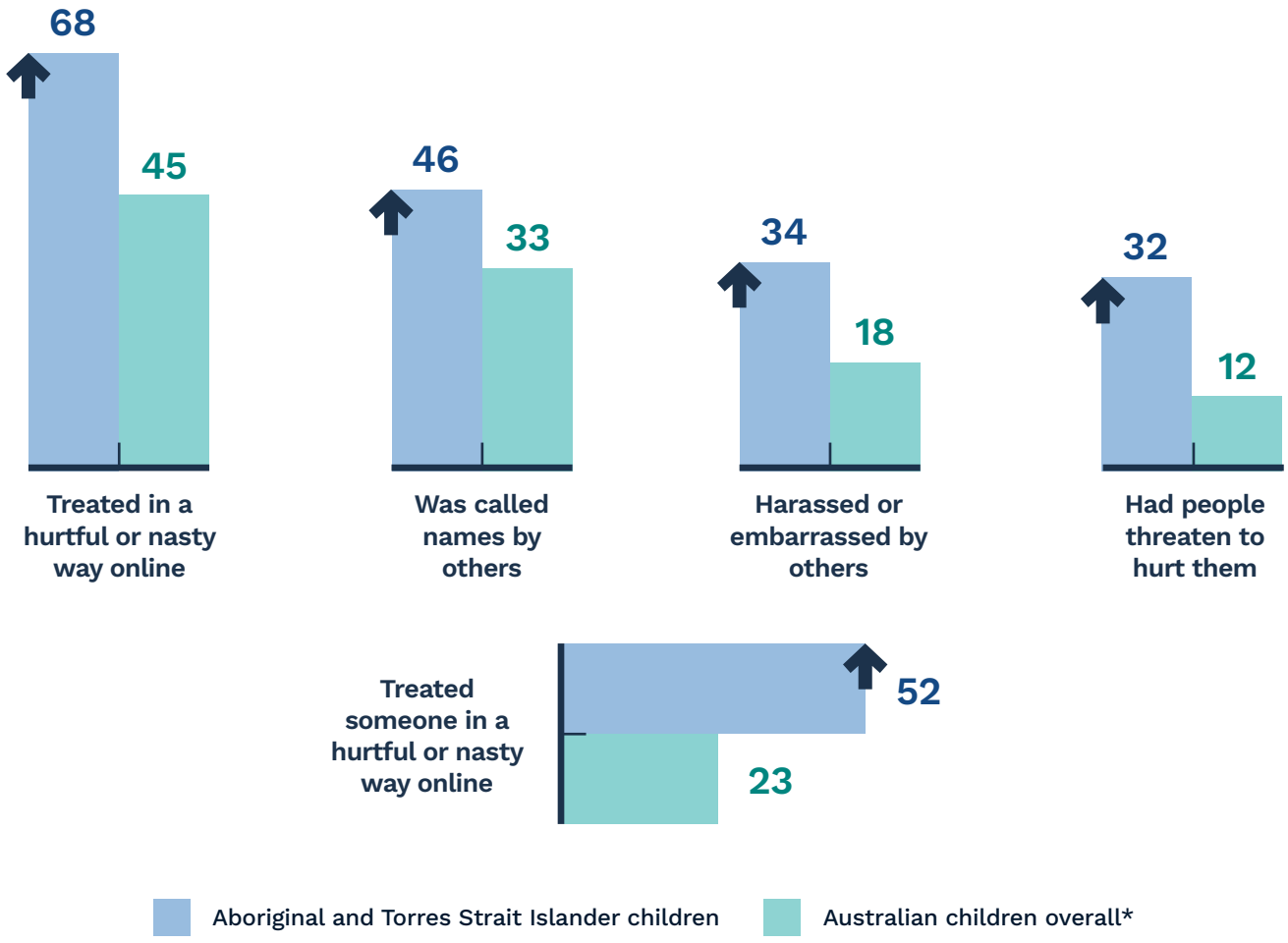
Our survey identified that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are more likely to have experienced hurtful communication online over the past year, whether as the recipient or the perpetrator (Figure 9). More than two-thirds of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (68%) reported being treated in a hurtful or nasty way online, compared to 45% of Australian children more generally. Specifically, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were shown to be significantly more likely to be called names (46% compared with 33%), harassed or embarrassed (34% compared with 18%) or physically threatened (32% compared with 12%).

International evidence supports a link between bullying victimisation and bullying perpetration among school-aged children (Nie et al. 2021; Walters 2021), a pattern observed in the survey findings. Of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who had been treated in a hurtful or nasty way online, 71% said they had treated someone in the same way. Almost half of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children surveyed admitted to having treated someone badly online, significantly higher than the national average (49% compared with 26%).

However, these findings don't necessarily indicate that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are instigating bullying at higher rates. Rather, they may demonstrate that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are more likely than the wider population to identify harmful behaviour in others and in themselves, and to be more open to reflecting upon their own actions. Further, much of the hurtful treatment of others may be defensive; many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people report being accused of and punished for harmful behaviour when they are reacting or responding to racist comments and messages online (Carlson & Frazer 2021).

Given that much of the existing research focuses on Caucasian participants in urban locations (Carlson & Frazer 2018a: 12), there remains a need for more research about the distinctions between these experiences among Australia's diverse social and cultural groups.

Figure 9: Experienced or perpetrated bullying behaviour by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children – comparison with Australian children overall (% past 12 months)



**Average among Australian children aged 8–17.*
Question I3. In the past year, how often, if ever, has anyone treated you in a hurtful or nasty way online? Question I3a. In the past year, how often, if ever, have you treated anyone in a hurtful or nasty way online? Question I4. Have any of these things happened to you online in the last year?
Bases: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (n=223); Australian children aged 8–17 (n=3,590).
Note: Upward arrows ↑ denote results significantly higher, and downward arrows ↓ denote results significantly lower, than comparable sub-groups at a 95% confidence interval.

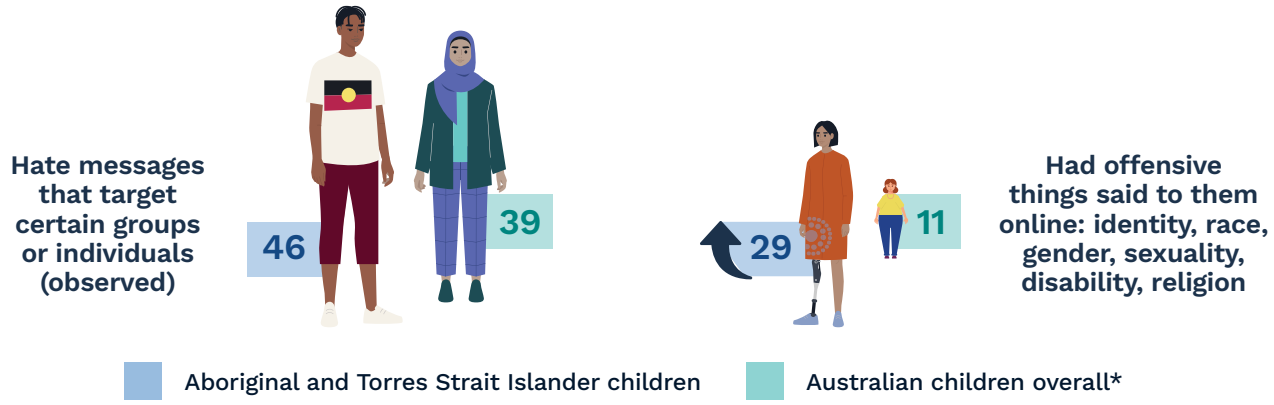
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children experience online hate speech and discrimination

Our survey found that almost a third (29%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children had experienced hate speech while online in the last year, significantly higher than the national average of 11% (Figure 10). This disparity is consistent with experiences of racism, both offline and online, among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (Hall et al. 2020; Rice et al. 2016; Carlson & Frazer 2018a; Tiller et al. 2021).

Although the online environment affords users some level of anonymity, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children interact in online spaces as cultured subjects (Carlson & Frazer 2018b). That is, they openly identify and interact with others as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Almost half (46%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have observed hate messages targeting groups or individuals in the past year, a reminder that the online environment can be hostile to marginalised populations. Discrimination against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is rooted not in one kind of bias but is part of the overarching framework of colonialism. This means that non-Indigenous people may target Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in many ways, including attacking their gender, race, sexuality and disability, but primarily target them because they are Indigenous peoples (Day & Carlson 2022).

Although there is clearly a need for more research in this space, especially as it pertains to children, existing research suggests that online hate speech has few boundaries, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples targeted across a range of different platforms and using a range of strategies (Carlson & Frazer 2021; Carlson & Day 2021). However, other research indicates a level of resilience has developed among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, with a program of innovative and conscientious strategies to promote self-care and facilitate community support online (Kennedy 2020: 1).

Figure 10: Experience of hate speech online among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children – comparison with Australian children overall (% past 12 months)

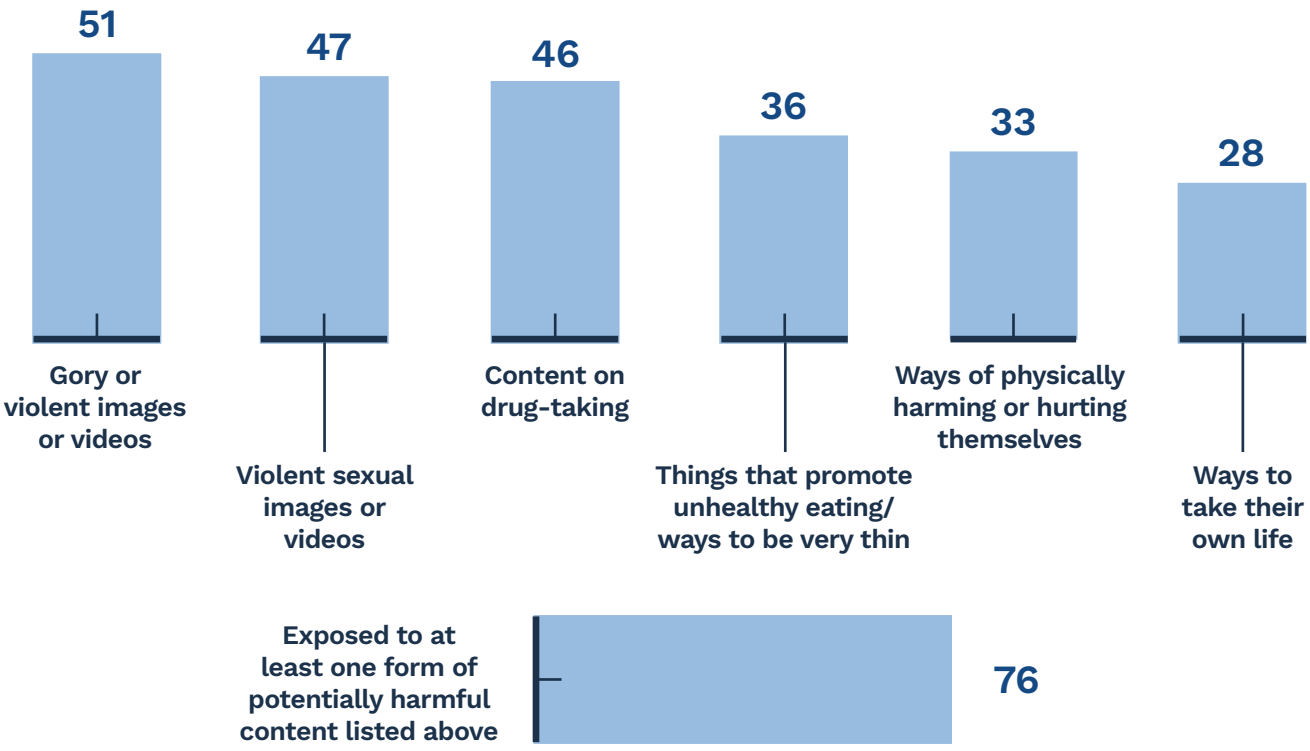


**Average among Australian children aged 8–17.*
Question I4. Have any of these things happened to you in the last year (hate messages attacking me because of my religion, nationality, gender, disability, sexuality or something else)? Question G4. In the past year, have you seen websites or online discussion where people talk about or show any of these things?
Bases: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (n=223); Australian children aged 8–17 (n=3,590).
Note: Upward arrows denote results significantly higher, and downward arrows denote results significantly lower, than comparable sub-groups at a 95% confidence interval.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teens report being exposed to harmful online material

As detailed in eSafety's *Mind the Gap* report (2022), the majority of young Australians aged 14–17 have been exposed to a range of potentially harmful content, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teens are no different. The survey found that more than three-quarters (76%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people aged 14–17 had also been exposed to negative online material (Figure 11), most commonly sites with images or video of extreme violence or gore (51%), hate messaging (46%), drug-taking (46%) and violent sexual content (47%). This is a similar pattern to that seen among teens across the wider Australian population.

Figure 11: Exposure to potentially harmful online material among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people aged 14–17 (% in past 12 months)



Question G4. In the past year, have you seen websites or online discussion where people talk about or show any of these things?
Base: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people aged 14–17 (n=72).
Note: Small sample size (n=72). Extensive comparison with the national average is not possible due to the high margin of error. See appendix for details about margin of error.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teens report being exposed to sexual material online and receiving sexual messages

Recent studies have found that exposure to sexual content is almost unavoidable among young people who use social media (Lewis et al. 2019), a finding backed up by our survey data. At least 7 in 10 young Australians have seen sexual images on the internet and almost half had received a sexual message (words, pictures and videos) in the past year.

While a small sample size limits extensive comparison with the national average, the survey findings do suggest that the majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders aged 14–17 have been exposed to sexual images online (81% – see Figure 12), and most had received a sexual message online (63%).

More than a quarter (26%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders aged 14–17 had been pressured by someone online for an intimate photo or video.

Figure 12: Exposure to sexual content among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people aged 14–17 (% in past 12 months)

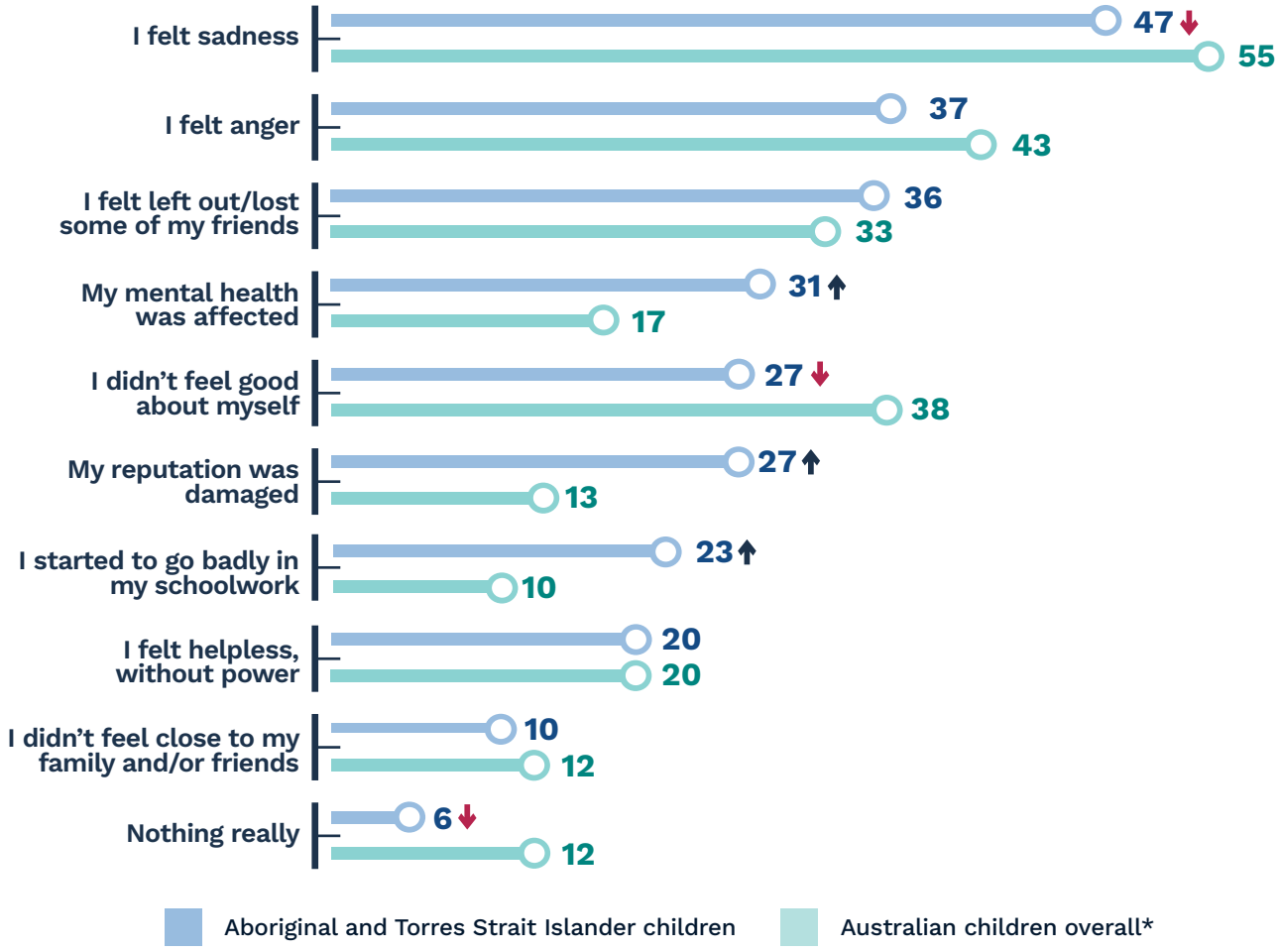
Question G3. In the past year, how often have you seen sexual images online? Question H1. In the past year, how often have you received sexual messages online? This could be words, pictures or videos. Question H2. In the past year, have any of these things happened to you online?
Base: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people aged 14–17 (n=72).
Note: Small sample size (n=72). Extensive comparison with the national average is not possible due to the high margin of error. See appendix for details about margin of error.

Negative online experiences can impact mental health, reputation and schoolwork for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

Negative online experiences can have a profound impact on any child, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children navigate an often-hostile online environment amid social pressures and a complex cultural and historical context (Carlson & Frazer 2018b). Research indicates that online reputation harm can have a particularly detrimental impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, triggering poor mental health, social isolation, self-harm and suicide (Carlson et al. 2015). Shame has also been shown to significantly impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' mental health (Vicary & Westerman 2004; Carlson & Day 2020) and has been directly linked to intergenerational trauma and ongoing impacts of colonial and racial violence. At the same time, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' relationships in their extended networks and families are integral to their social and emotional wellbeing (Vicary & Westerman 2004).

The survey found that after having a negative online experience, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children most commonly felt sad (47%), angry (37%), or left out/in danger of losing friends (36%) (see Figure 13). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are more than twice as likely as the national average to report that their mental health was affected by a negative experience online (31% compared with 17%). Similarly, the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who experienced reputation damage due to online experiences was double the national average (27% compared with 13%). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were also twice as likely to experience negative impacts on their schoolwork (23% compared with 10%).

Figure 13: Consequences of most recent negative online experience among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children – comparison with Australian children overall



**Average among Australian children aged 8–17.*
Question I5. Thinking about the last time any of these things happened to you, did any of the following things happen?
Bases: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who had had a negative online experience (n=177); Australian children aged 8–17 who had had a negative online experience (n=2,051).
Note: Upward arrows ↑ denote results significantly higher, and downward arrows ↓ denote results significantly lower, than comparable sub-groups at a 95% confidence interval.

Responses to negative online experiences

Nearly all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children respond proactively to a negative online experience

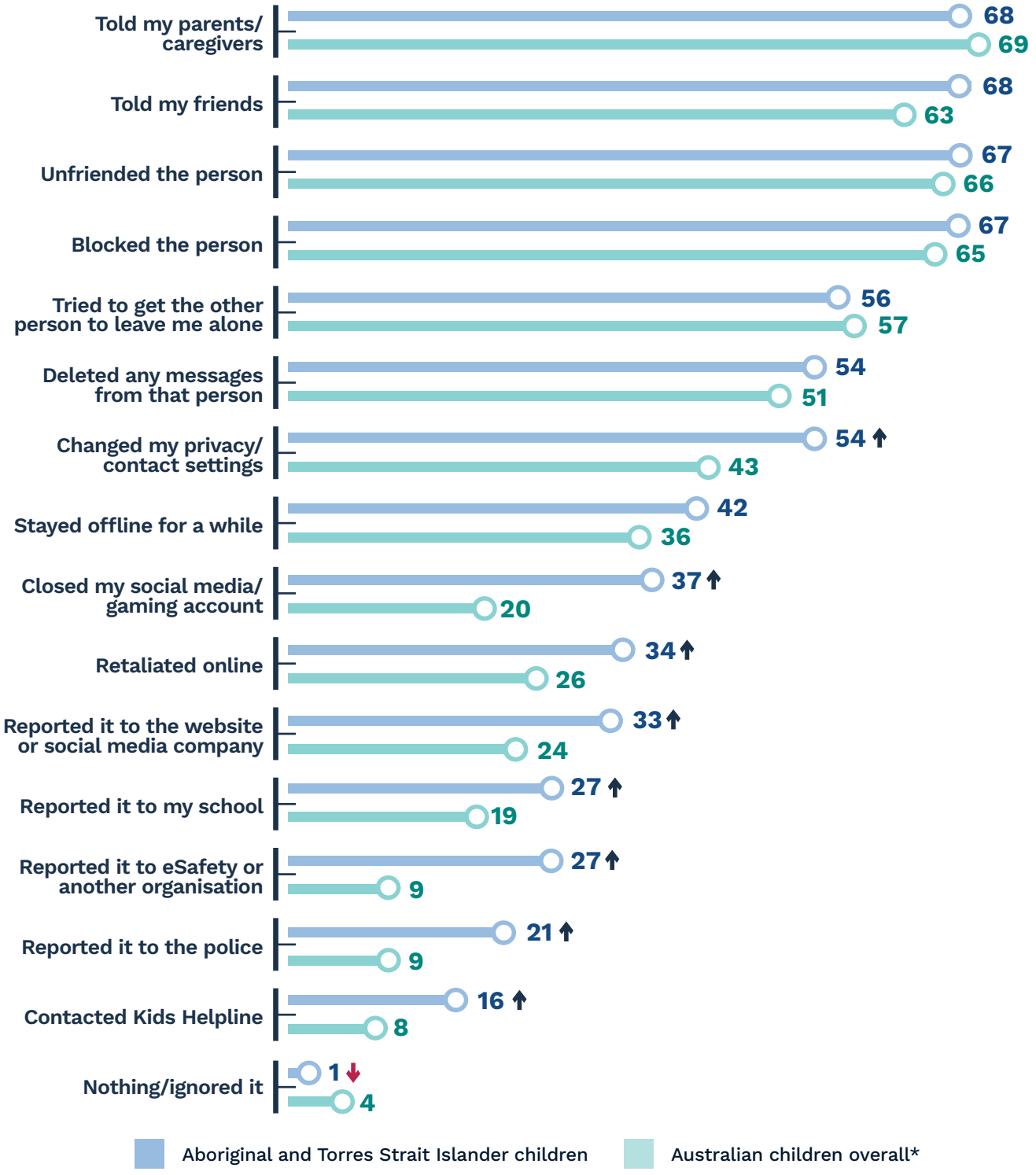
The survey found that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children responded to negative online experiences using a broad suite of actions, from informing those close to them, to changing their privacy settings and reporting the experience to authorities.

It is well documented that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are more likely than the national average to seek help from informal and relational sources such as their friends, family and broader kinship relationships (Carlson & Frazer 2022). Consistent with this, over two-thirds (68%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children said they had reported negative online experiences to their parents/caregivers or friends (see Figure 14), a move reflected in the high-level parental awareness detailed later in this report.

The findings suggest that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are well-informed and proactive in their response to negative experiences, with the digital literacy and self-efficacy to confidently navigate these experiences. From an early age, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are significantly more likely to take action in response to negative online experiences than the national average (98% compared with 94%), rather than to ignore them. These actions include using a range of best-practice strategies – specifically, changing their privacy or contact settings (54% compared with 43%), closing their social media or gaming account (37% compared with 20%), or reporting the issue to the police (21% compared with 9%), site authority (33% compared with 24%) or eSafety (27% compared with 9%).

Responding to a negative experience by retaliating online was also found to be higher among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (34% compared to the 26% national average). This is likely a reflection of the higher rates of hate speech and online violence directed towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Figure 14: Action taken by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children after the most recent negative online experience – comparison with Australian children overall



**Average among Australian children aged 8–17.*
Question I4. Have any of these things happened to you in the last year (hate messages attacking me because of my religion, nationality, gender, disability, sexuality or something else)?
Question i6. Still thinking about that last time any of these things happened, did you do any of these things afterwards?
Bases: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who had had a negative online experience (n=177); Australian children aged 8–17 who had had a negative online experience (n=2,051)..
Note: Upward arrows ↑ denote results significantly higher, and downward arrows ↓ denote results significantly lower, than comparable sub-groups at a 95% confidence interval.

Children's perceptions of the internet

Like the wider Australian population, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have varied and sometimes paradoxical perceptions of the internet, acknowledging its benefits while also recognising its potential risks.

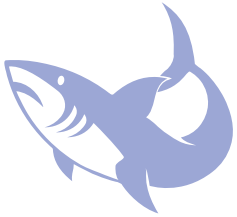
'If the internet was an animal, what animal would it be?'

In order to test their perceptions, children were asked to identify what the internet would be if it were an animal.[1] These insights are consistent with themes in internet research which speak of the ubiquitous nature of the internet and the potential dangers and benefits that it offers (Carlson & Frazer 2021). As indicated in the word cloud shown in Figure 15, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children most frequently described the internet as:

A predatory animal

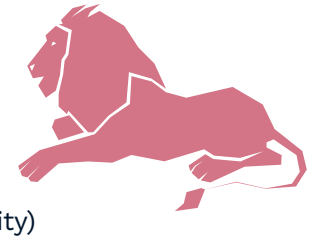
'Shark because some things can be dangerous.'

(Boy, 10, QLD, regional)



'Lion ... so powerful.'

(Girl, 10, VIC, non-capital city)



A domestic animal

'Cat – friends one minute but has claws the next.'

(Girl, 10, VIC, capital city)

'Dog – varied, fun, overwhelming, supportive.'

(Girl, 15, QLD, regional)

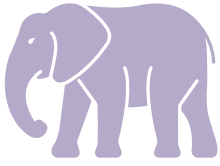
Or a large animal

'Giraffe. Because it's big.'

(Girl, 8, NSW, regional)

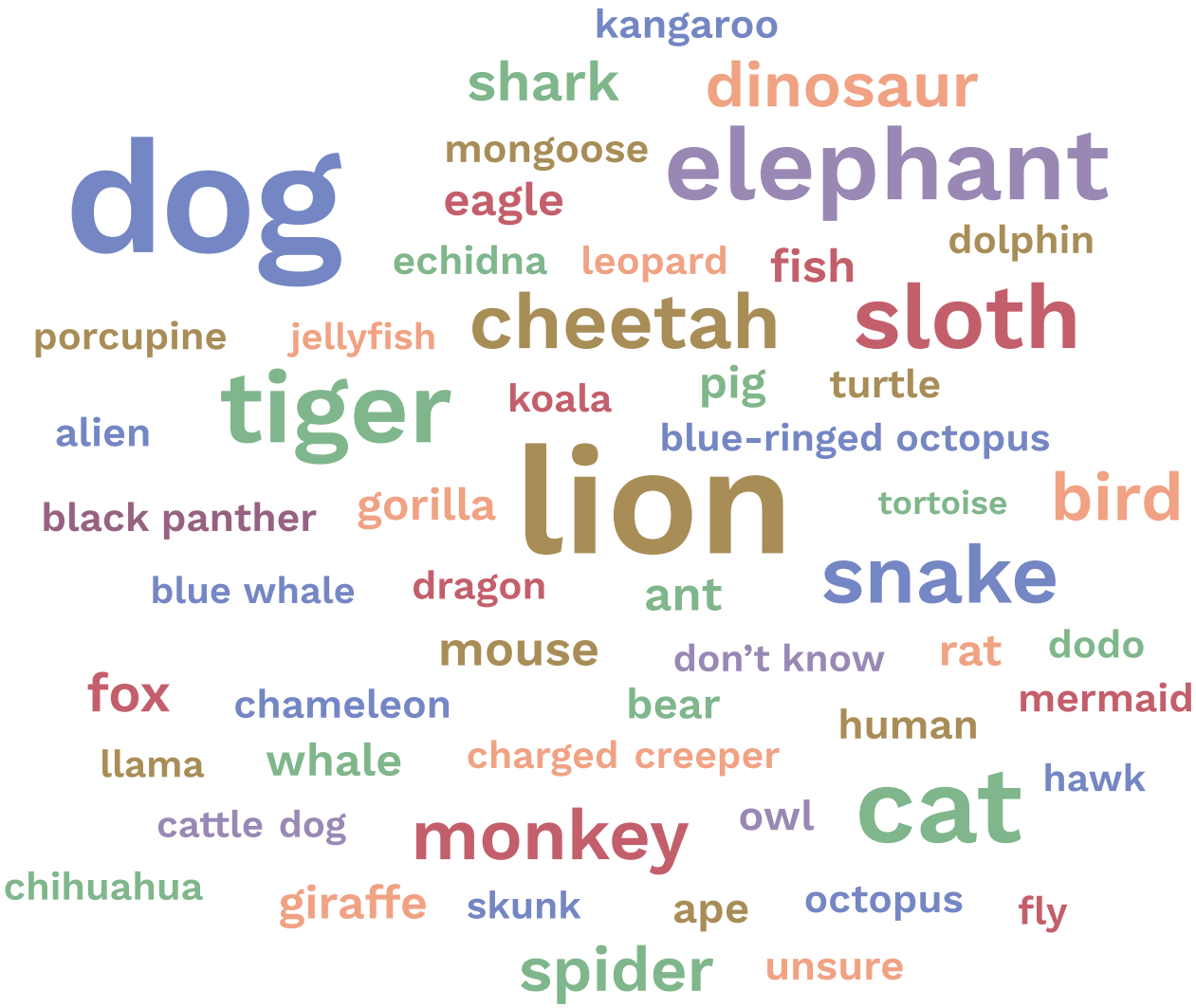
'... an elephant because the internet is huge.'

(Boy, 8, QLD, capital city)



1. An adaptation of the Global Kids Online questionnaire.

Figure 15: Word cloud of animals chosen in response to the survey question 'If the internet was an animal, what animal would it be?'



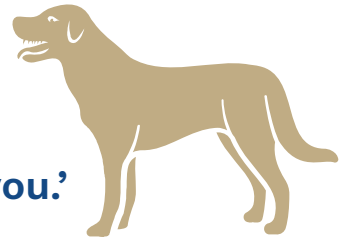
Question L4: If the internet was an animal, what animal would it be?
Base: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (n=223).
Note: Some responses edited for spelling. The size of the word relates to its frequency among responses.

The children's explanations for their chosen animal (provided in Figure 16) are indicative of their perception of the internet as something both potentially harmful and potentially useful and positive.

Figure 16: Selected animal choices and rationales by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

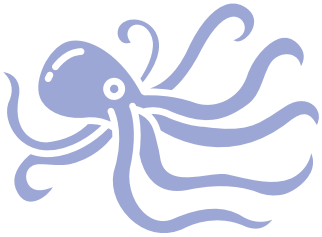
'Dogs can be really nice and make you feel good but if they aren't trained properly, they can be nasty and hurt you.'

(Girl, 17, NSW, capital city)



'Human – it is destructive and cruel.'

('My gender is not listed', 17, QLD, capital city)



'Blue-ringed octopus. Why? Because it's poisonous yet pretty, and unpredictable.'

(Girl, 8, NSW, regional)

'It would be a mermaid. Because it's an exciting and magic place but you also have to be careful because you don't know everything about it.'

(Girl, 10, QLD, capital city)

'It would be a dragon. Cause you don't know what to expect and something horrible could be lurking.'

(Girl, 14, NSW, regional)

'Tiger because it can be dangerous but is fun to look at.'

(Boy, 17, NSW, regional)

'A dolphin because they're smart and have a good memory.'

(Girl, 12, QLD, regional)

‘Sloth, because most of the time it is ridiculously slow.’

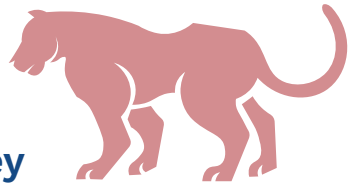
(Boy, 11, NSW, regional)

‘A spider because there’s so many different arms/ways to explore and it’s kinda scary in a way about how open and easy it is.’

(Boy, 9, QLD, regional)

‘It would be a chimera because it’s kind of strange and scary at times – especially if you don’t know what you’re doing – but it’s also pretty cool and beautiful.’

(Girl, 17, VIC, capital city)



‘A cougar because they are fast and the internet is fast.’

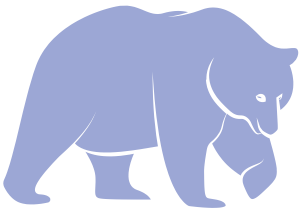
(Boy, 15, VIC, capital city)

‘An owl runs better at night. Owls symbolise wisdom and knowledge which the internet allows you to have access to.’

(Girl, 12, NSW, capital city)

‘A snail cause it’s always slow.’

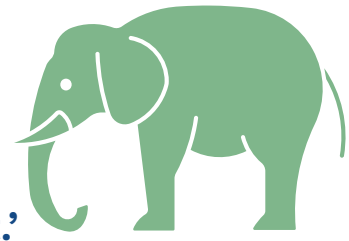
(Girl, 13, ACT, regional)



‘A bear – nice and cuddly but it will bite my head off if I’m not careful.’

(Girl, 17, VIC, capital city)

‘I think the internet would be an elephant if it was an animal because it has got massive information in it.’

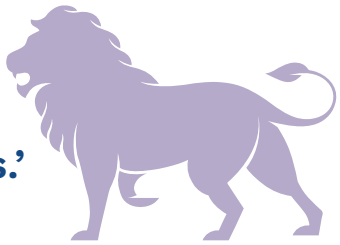


(Boy, 8, NSW, capital city)

‘Snake. Suspicious and never know when it’s going to strike.’

(Girl, 17, NSW, capital city)

‘Lion. It can be vicious but also a magnificent way of connecting with others.’

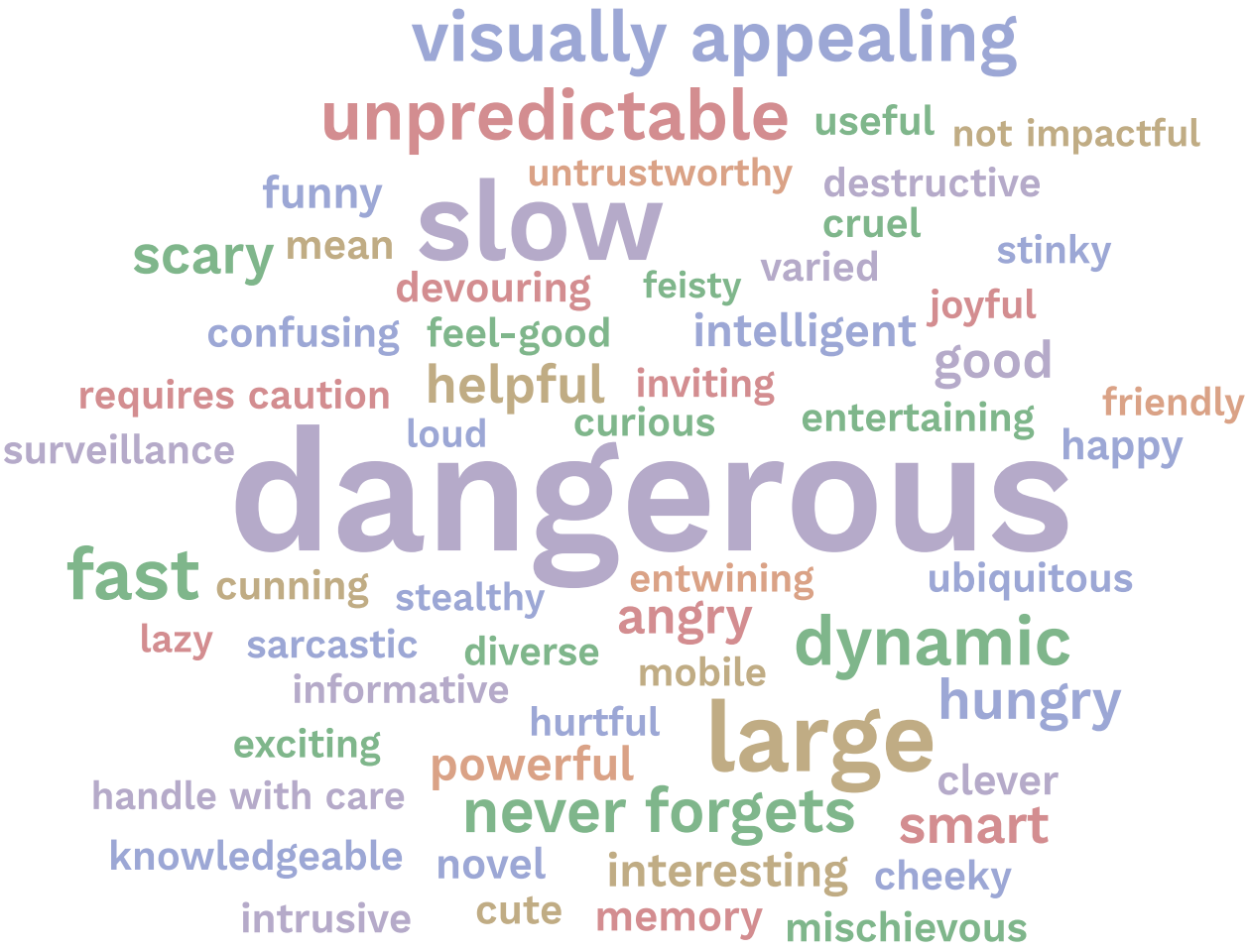


(Girl, 15, VIC, regional)

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are wary of the internet

Given their exposure to negative experiences online, it's not surprising that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are, on average, more wary of the internet than the wider Australian child population. Among the main themes expressed in the children's responses were a negative perception of the internet (33% compared with 12% of Australian children more generally), noting that many considered it dangerous, untrustworthy and potentially violent. This was reflected in their likening of the internet to predator animals such as lions, or to poisonous creatures such as spiders. The word cloud in Figure 17 demonstrates that negative perceptions of the internet are especially common among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, with the most frequently used descriptor overall being 'dangerous', followed by 'slow' and 'unpredictable'.

Figure 17: Word cloud of themes in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's responses to the survey question 'If the internet was an animal, which animal would it be?'



Question L4: If the internet was an animal, what animal would it be?
Base: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (n=223).
Note: Some entries corrected for spelling. The size of the word relates to its frequency among responses.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children perceive the internet as being slow

A prominent theme among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children was the speed of the internet, and specifically as something that is slow. As Figure 15 shows, many children selected animals renowned for their sluggishness, such as turtles and sloths, while 'slow' were a common reason given for animal choice, shown in Figure 17. References to slow internet connection speed was markedly more common among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants (8%) compared with the national average (less than 3%). Given that parents and caregivers of 37% of participants identified with lower socio-economic backgrounds, this could be reflective of the ongoing digital divide in Australia (ABS 2018; ACMA 2021). Research undertaken for the Australian Digital Inclusion Index (2021) indicates that affordability of access equipment and broadband services remains a critical barrier to the adoption of high-speed broadband among low-income households.

Geographic location might also be a compounding factor in this differing perception of internet speed, with a greater proportion of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children living in regional and remote areas (38%) compared with the national average of 30%. The city/regional digital divide in Australia continues to be an issue; a 2022 report by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission confirmed that fixed-line broadband services in regional areas remain slower on average than those found in urban locations, and that internet performance of fixed wireless services (most commonly located in regional areas) falls during peak usage times – between 7.00 and 11.00 pm – when children are most likely to be online.

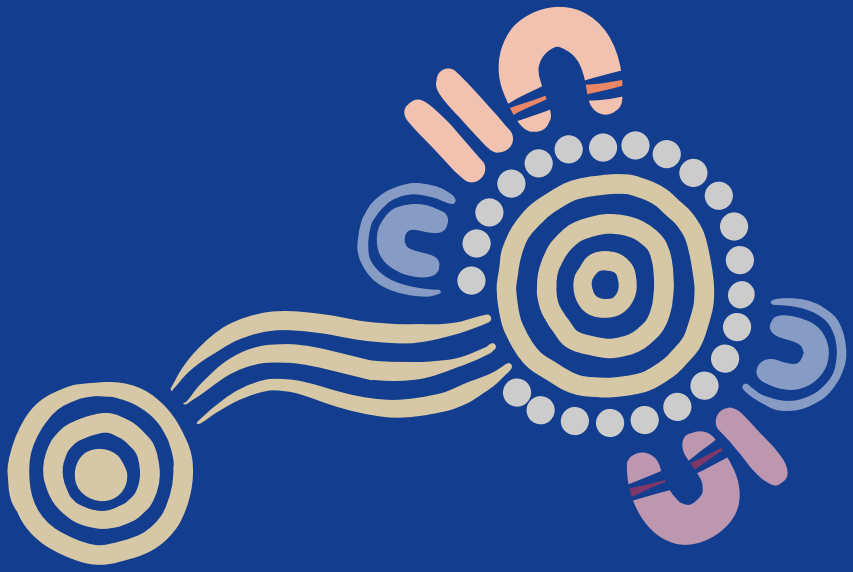
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children also view the internet in a positive way

Figure 17 also shows that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children also view the internet in a positive way with the descriptors 'interesting' and 'fast' featuring prominently in their responses. One in four (24%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children expressed positive sentiments about the internet, indicating, via their animal choice, that it could be smart, helpful and friendly. The perception of the internet as something familiar and friendly, such as a cat or a dog, may be driven by the high rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people using the internet for creative expression and entertainment. Their view of the internet as smart, like a whale or an elephant, may reflect the extent to which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children use the internet as a source for information on physical and mental health, along with services that offer emotional support. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children recognise the power of the internet, comparing it with predators such as lions and cheetahs. The notion of the internet as powerful echoes our finding that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children use the internet for civic engagement at very high rates.

Digital parenting and caregiving

Parent and caregiver awareness of risk and negative experiences online

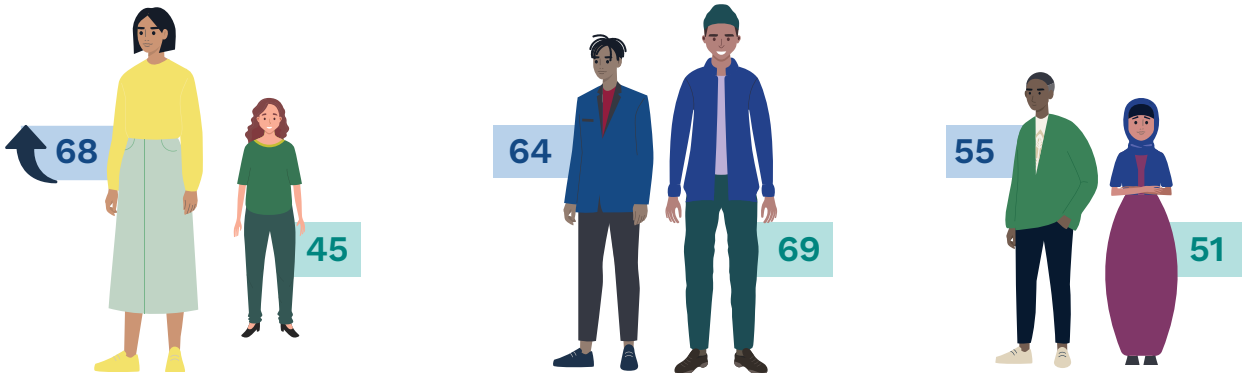
eSafety's *Mind the Gap* report (2022) found that while most Australian children tell their parents/caregivers about hurtful or nasty experiences online, many parents have little recall of their child's experiences. The survey plotted child experience of hurtful or negative incidents online, and whether they told their parent/caregiver, against the level of parental awareness of those experiences. Results indicate that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their parents/caregivers are, on average, more communicative about their online activities compared with the national average. This points to a strong sense of trust and safety between parents/caregivers and their children, with space created for open and honest conversations about their online experiences. This kind of connection has been attributed in previous studies to Indigenous styles of parenting and caregiving (Atkinson & Swain 1999).



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children use the internet to make new friends and to communicate with diverse people online

As outlined previously, close to 7 in 10 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (68%) have been treated in a hurtful or nasty way online, and most of them (64%) told their parents/caregivers about this experience (Figure 18), providing parents with the opportunity to offer guidance and support. More than half of parents/caregivers (55%) whose child had been treated in this way were aware of it.

Figure 18: Being treated in a hurtful or nasty way online (child's reported experience and parent's/caregiver's awareness) – comparison with national average



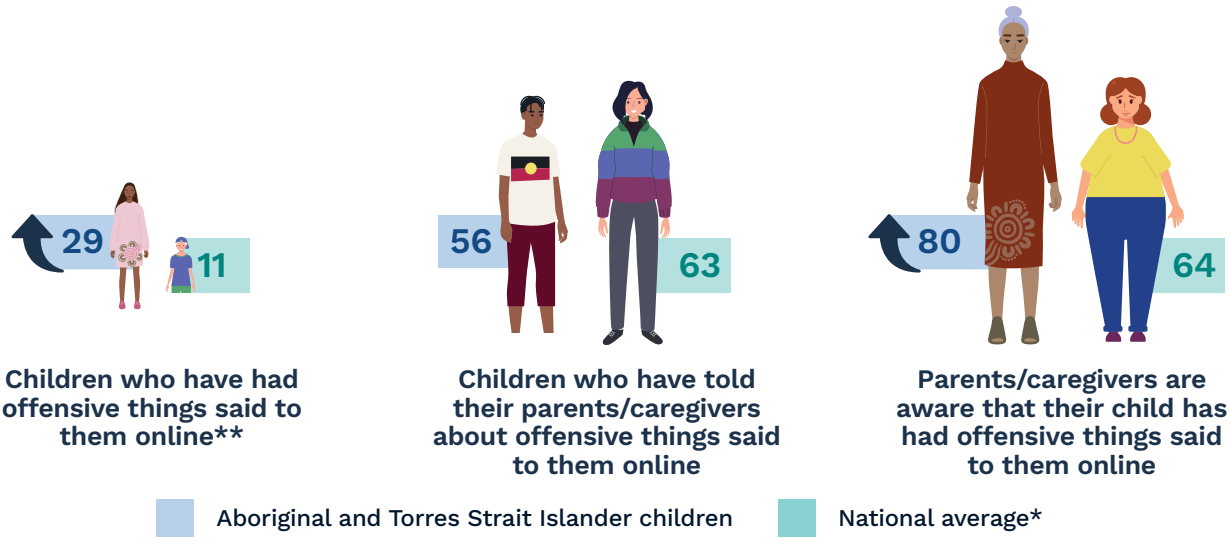
**Average among Australian children aged 8–17.*
Question S15. As far as you are aware, in the past year, have any of these things happened to your child aged <INSERT SELECTED AGE> online? Question I3. In the past year, how often, if ever, has anyone treated you in a hurtful or nasty way online? Question I6. Still thinking about that last time any of these things happened, did you do any of these things afterwards? Bases: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (n=223); Parents of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who were treated in a hurtful or nasty way online (n=152); Australian children (n=3,590); Parents of Australian children who were treated in a hurtful or nasty way online (n=1,613).
Note: Upward arrows denote results significantly higher, and downward arrows denote results significantly lower, than comparable sub-groups at a 95% confidence interval.

Parents/caregivers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are especially aware of their child's online experiences of hate speech

As discussed earlier in the report, around 3 in 10 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (29%) have had offensive things said to them online, attacking their indigeneity, gender, race, sexuality and/or disability (Figure 19).

Just over half of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (56%) reported hate speech experiences to their parents/caregivers, who also show a particularly high awareness of their child's experience of online hate speech (80%). This level of awareness – significantly higher than the national average of 64% – may be grounded in intergenerational racial trauma. A parent/caregiver who has experienced hate speech themselves (whether on- or offline) is very likely to attach significance to (and therefore remember) instances of hate speech reported by their children.

Figure 19: Exposure to hate speech online (child's reported experience and parent's/caregiver's awareness) – comparison with national average



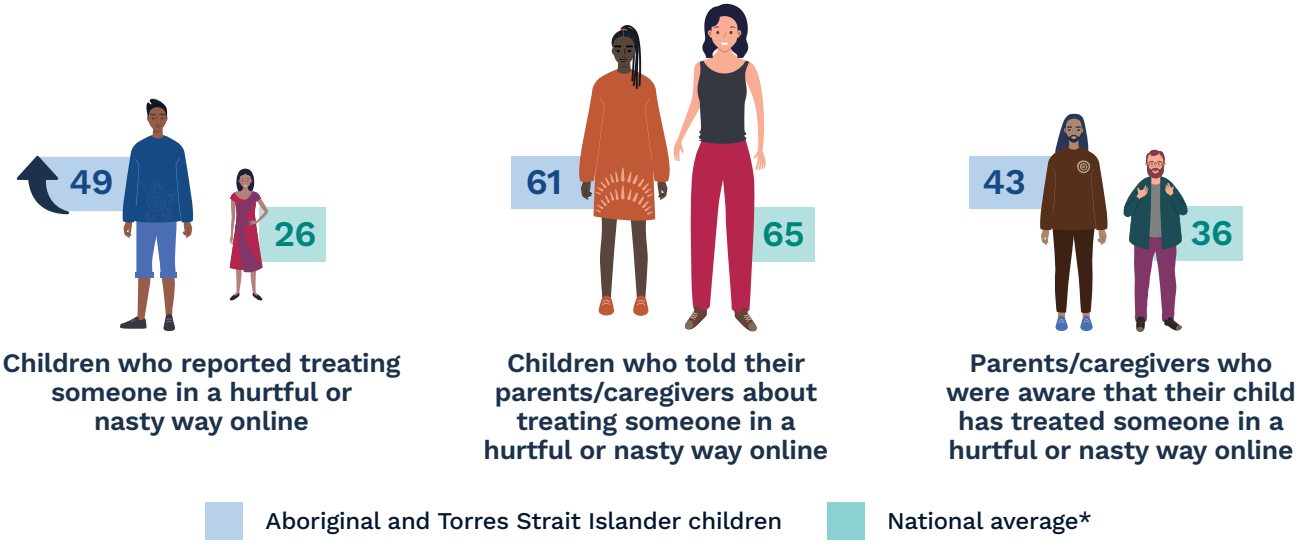
**Average among Australian children aged 8–17. **Because of their race, ethnicity, gender, nationality, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability. Question S15. As far as you are aware, in the past year, have any of these things happened to your child aged <INSERT SELECTED AGE> online? Question I4. Have any of these things happened to you online in the last year? Question I6. Still thinking about that last time any of these things happened, did you do any of these things afterwards? Bases: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (n=223); Parents/caregivers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who had had offensive things said to them online (n=64) (note small sample size); Australian children (n=3,590); Parents of Australian children who had treated someone in a hurtful or nasty way online (n=391).*

Note: Upward arrows denote results significantly higher, and downward arrows denote results significantly lower, than comparable sub-groups at a 95% confidence interval.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children tell their parents/caregivers when they have treated someone in a hurtful or nasty way online

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children show high reflexivity and ownership of their behaviour online. Survey results reveal that they are just as likely to tell their parents/caregivers when they have treated someone in a hurtful or nasty way online as they are to disclose when they have been on the receiving end of such behaviour (Figure 20).
Six in 10 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (61%) have told their parents/caregivers they had treated someone in a hurtful or nasty way online. Almost half of the parents/caregivers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who had been hurtful or nasty in the online environment were aware of their children's nasty behaviour online (43%).

Figure 20: Hurtful or nasty treatment online (child's reported experience and parent's/caregiver's awareness) – comparison with national average

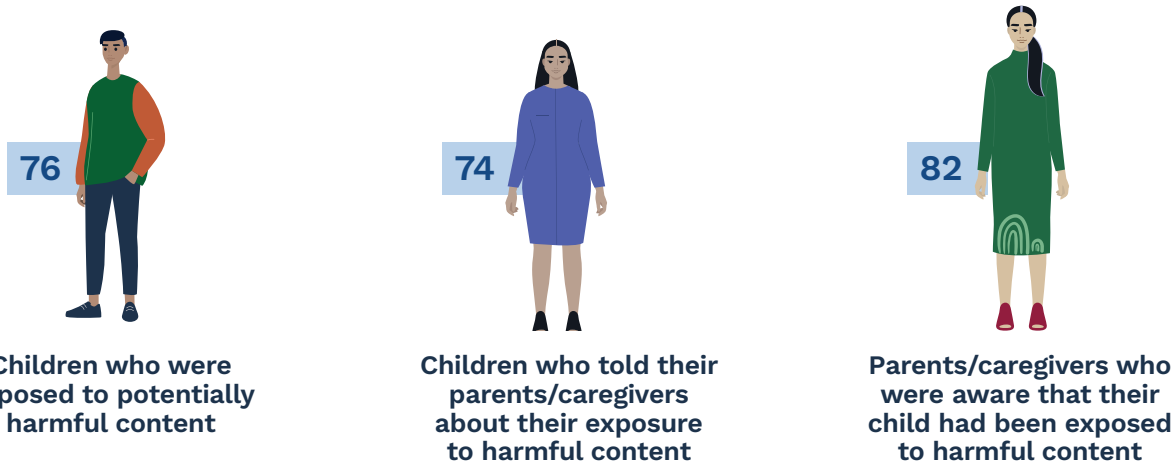


**Average among Australian children aged 8–17.*
Question S15. As far as you are aware, in the past year, have any of these things happened to your child aged <INSERT SELECTED AGE> online? Question I3a. In the past year, how often, if ever, have you treated anyone in a hurtful or nasty way online? Question I6. Still thinking about that last time any of these things happened, did you do any of these things afterwards?
Bases: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (n=223); Parents/caregivers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who treated someone in a hurtful or nasty way online (n=110); Australian children (n=3,590); Parents of Australian children who treated someone in a hurtful or nasty way online (n=919).
Note: Upward arrows ↑ denote results significantly higher, and downward arrows ↓ denote results significantly lower, than comparable sub-groups at a 95% confidence interval.

Most parents/caregivers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 14–17 are aware of their child's exposure to potentially harmful online material

Although the sample size is small (n=55) (and therefore requiring further research), the survey findings suggest that the great majority of parents/caregivers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are strongly aware of their child's exposure to potentially harmful online material (82%). This high level of awareness might be driven by the parent's practice of regularly monitoring their child's internet activity (see Figure 21), and/or the strong lines of communication, which saw 74% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who had been exposed to offensive content inform their parent/caregiver.

Figure 21: Exposure to potentially harmful content in the last year (reported experience among children aged 14–17 and parent's/caregiver's awareness)

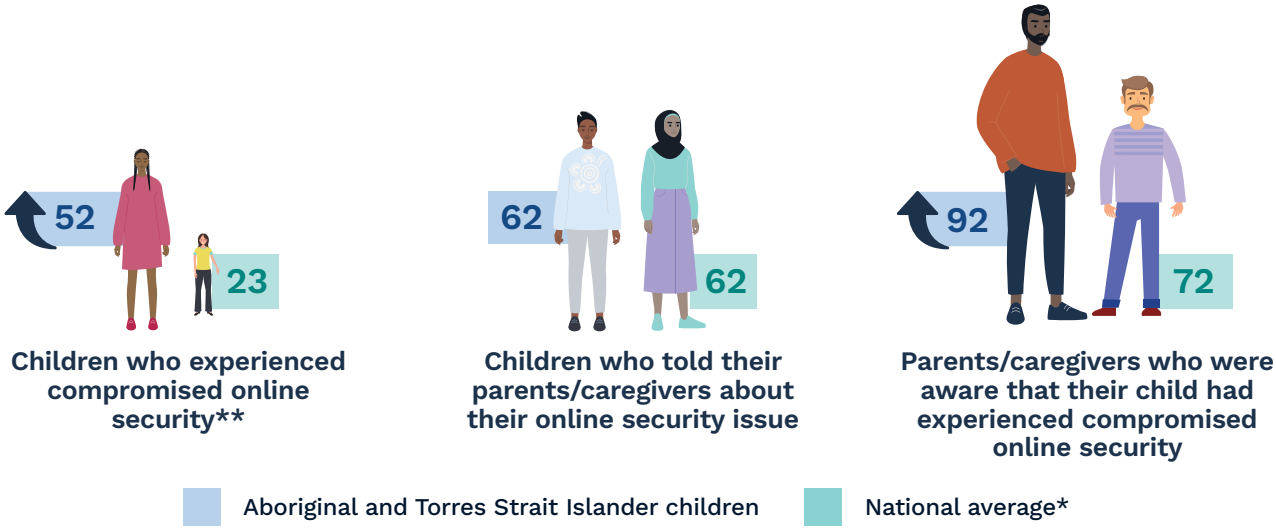


Question S16. As far as you are aware, in the past year, have any of these things happened to your child aged <INSERT SELECTED AGE> online? Question G4. In the past year, have you seen websites or online discussions where people talk about or show any of these? Question I6. Still thinking about that last time any of these things happened, did you do any of these things afterwards?
Bases: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 14–17 (n=72); Parents/caregivers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who had been exposed to harmful content in the previous year (n=55).
Note: Small sample size (n=72). Extensive comparison with the national average is not possible due to the high margin of error. See appendix for details about margin of error.

Parents/caregivers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have a higher awareness than average of their children's experience of compromised online security

The survey data indicates that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are as likely as the national average to report online security compromises to their parents (Figure 22). However, awareness levels among parents of affected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are significantly higher than those of the wider Australian community. This may be due to the higher rates of internet monitoring undertaken by the parents/caregivers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (see Figure 26 on page 61). Another factor could be a greater level of skill and confidence among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents in using digital technology to navigate and communicate in the online world.

Figure 22: Experience of compromised online security in the last year (child's reported experience and parent's/caregiver's awareness) – comparison with national average



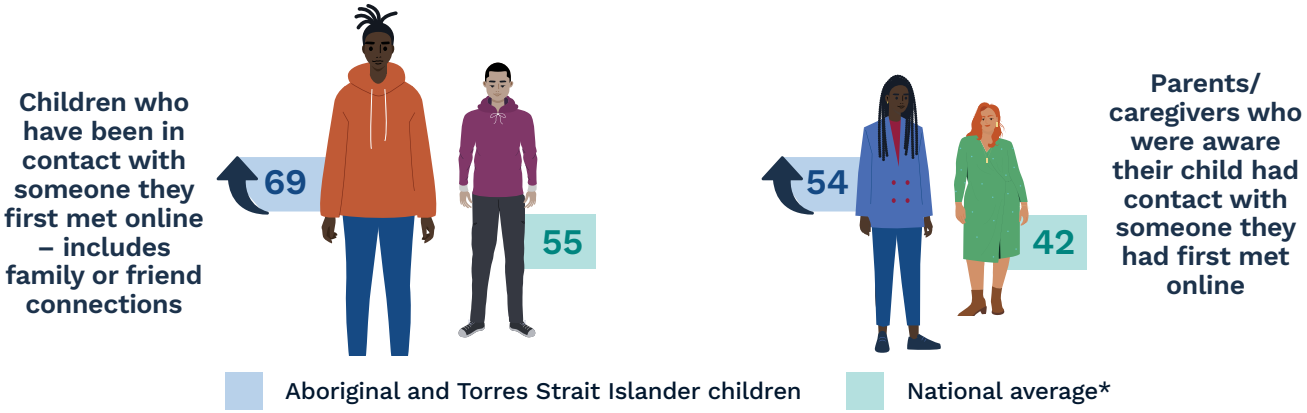
**Average among Australian children aged 8–17. **Compromised online security is defined as having experienced any of the following: clicked on a pop-up link and the device got infected; had personal information posted without them agreeing; someone found out where they were because of device tracking; someone impersonated them online; they have been a victim of online fraud. Question S15. As far as you are aware, in the past year, have any of these things happened to your child aged <INSERT SELECTED AGE> online? Question I4: Have any of these things happened to you online in the last year? Question I6. Still thinking about that last time any of these things happened, did you do any of these things afterwards?*
Bases: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (n=223); Parents/caregivers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who experienced compromised online security (n=115); Australian children (n=3,590); Parents of Australian children who experienced compromised online security (n=842).
Note: Upward arrows ↑ denote results significantly higher, and downward arrows ↓ denote results significantly lower, than comparable sub-groups at a 95% confidence interval.

The majority of parents/caregivers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are aware of their contact with someone they met online

Given the importance of the internet as a meeting place for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, it's not surprising that the majority (54%) of parents/caregivers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were aware that their child had been in contact with someone they met online (Figure 23).

However, the survey results indicate that while Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were much more likely to be in contact with someone they met online than the national average, their parents had roughly the same level of awareness of that meeting as the national average (54% compared with 42%).

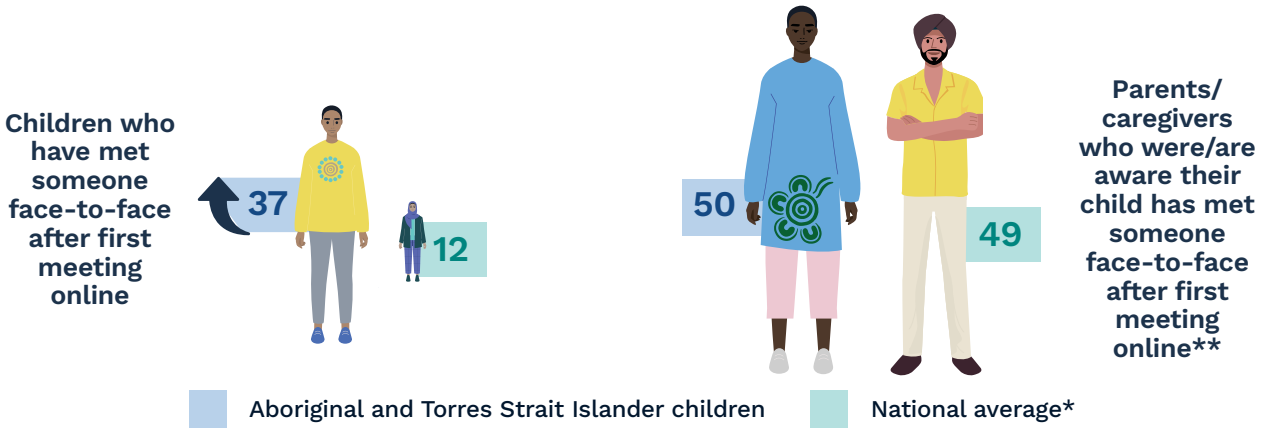
Figure 23: Contact with someone they first met online (child's reported experience and parent's/caregiver's awareness)



**Average among Australian children aged 8–17.*
Question S15. As far as you are aware, in the past year, have any of these things happened to your child aged <INSERT SELECTED AGE> online? Question D1. How do you usually communicate with people in this list (someone you first met online who was a contact of a friend or family member; someone who is under 18 who you met online and had no other connection with your life; someone who is 18 or older who you met online and had no other connection with your life)?
Bases: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (n=223); Parents/caregivers whose Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child had been in contact with someone they met online (n=153); Parents/caregivers whose Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child had been in contact with someone they met online (n=138); Australian children (n=3,590); Parents/caregivers of Australian children who had been in contact with someone they met online (n=1,980).
Note: Upward arrows ↑ denote results significantly higher, and downward arrows ↓ denote results significantly lower, than comparable sub-groups at a 95% confidence interval.

Similarly, there was no difference in the level of awareness among the parents/caregivers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who had met face-to-face with people they had met online and the national average (50% compared with 49%) (Figure 24). While preliminary findings indicate that most of these new acquaintances are also children, the parental awareness level of these encounters suggests an ongoing need for strong messaging about the risks associated with meeting new online-only contacts face-to-face. eSafety continues to work with both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the wider Australian population to raise awareness of safer internet practices for children and parents.

Figure 24: Meeting someone face-to-face after first meeting online, weekly or more often (child's reported experience and parent's/caregiver's awareness) – comparison with national average



**Average among Australian children aged 8–17.*
***Note small base size (n=82).*
Question S15. As far as you are aware, in the past year, have any of these things happened to your child aged <INSERT SELECTED AGE> online? Question G1. In the past year, have you met anyone face-to-face that you first got to know online? Bases: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (n=223); Parents of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who had met someone face-to-face after first meeting online (n=82); Australian children aged 8–17 (n=3,590); Parents/caregivers of Australian children who had met face-to-face with someone they met online (n=435).
Note: Upward arrows denote results significantly higher, and downward arrows denote results significantly lower, than comparable sub-groups at a 95% confidence interval.

Parental mediation practices

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

- **'enabling' mediation**, where parents/caregivers attempt to provide guidance and advice to their children that helps them to go online
- **'restrictive' mediation**, where parents/caregivers attempt to control access and set rules about their children using the internet
- **'technical' mediation**, where parents/caregivers use software or other technology-based tools to control or limit internet use and for monitoring and checking.

The majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents/caregivers reported engaging in a range of enabling, restrictive and technical mediation practices in relation to their children's online activities.

Virtually all parents/caregivers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children use enabling mediation strategies to guide their child online

Nearly all parents/caregivers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in this study talked to their children about ways to use the internet safely (98%), about why some websites are appropriate or inappropriate (98%), and about what to do if something bothered or upset them online (96%) (Table 2).

The majority also said they encouraged their children to explore and learn online (96%), and engaged in online activities together, such as visiting websites, playing games and looking at social media (95%). These figures are significantly higher than the national average.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are less likely to be aware of, and to acknowledge that, their parents/caregivers are using mediating techniques. This could be due to Indigenous parenting and education styles which, instead of didactic instruction, commonly implement observation, imitation and interaction (Borg & Paul 2004).

Table 2: Parent's/caregiver's enabling of child's internet use (parent's/caregiver's use of enabling strategy and child's awareness)

Strategy	Parent or caregiver/ child perspective	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (%)	National average* (%)
Talk to them about what to do if something bothers or upsets them online	Parent	96	94
	Child	70 ↓	83
Suggest ways to use the internet safely	Parent	98 ↑	93
	Child	71 ↓	81
Explain why some websites are appropriate or inappropriate	Parent	98 ↑	92
	Child	69 ↓	81
Encourage them to explore and learn things on the internet**	Parent	96 ↑	90
	Child	58 ↓	69
Do online activities with them**	Parent	95 ↑	89
	Child	63 ↓	71

**Average among Australian children aged 8–17.*
***For example, visiting websites, playing games and looking at social media together.*
Question S8. In the past year, how often did you do these things when your child aged <INSERT SELECTED AGE> used the internet? Question K1. Have your parents, friends or teachers done any of the following?
Bases: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (n=223); Parents/caregivers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (n=223); Australian children aged 8–17 (n=3,590); Parents of Australian children (n=3,590).
Note: Upward arrows ↑ denote results significantly higher, and downward arrows ↓ denote results significantly lower, than comparable sub-groups at a 95% confidence interval.

The majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents/caregivers set rules about their child's internet use

Setting rules about when their child is allowed to go online, and for how long, is common among parents/caregivers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, with the majority (57%) doing this, in line with the Australian average (Table 3). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are less likely to say their parents/caregivers set rules about their internet use than Australian children overall (78% compared with 85% overall), though both child cohorts report much higher levels of online rule-setting than their parents/caregivers report. As shown below, this is a universal trait, possibly suggesting that children are sensitive to any rule that limits their time online, such as rules around their bedtime, while adults consider only those rules specifically referring to the internet as a restriction on their child's online activity.

Table 3: Parent's/caregiver's setting rules about child's internet use (parent's/caregiver's setting rules and child's awareness)

Strategy	Parent or caregiver/ child perspective	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (%)	National average* (%)
Rules about when your child is allowed to go online, and for how long	Parent	57	59
	Child	78 ↓	85

**Average among Australian children aged 8–17.*
Question S11. Do you use any of the following? Question K1. Have your parents, friends or teachers done any of the following?
Bases: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (n=223); Parents/caregivers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (n=223); Australian children aged 8–17 (n=3,590); Parents of Australian children (n=3,590).
Note: Upward arrows ↑ denote results significantly higher, and downward arrows ↓ denote results significantly lower, than comparable sub-groups at a 95% confidence interval.

Supervision of or permission for online activities are common forms of restrictive mediation

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents/caregivers and children tend to agree about the online activities that are allowed to be done any time without supervision or permission. As shown in Table 4, restrictions are set for activities that are more interactive and have greater potential for risk, with lower proportions of parents/caregivers allowing their children to use a web or phone camera (37%) or social media (40%), or to visit a virtual world (47%) unsupervised or without permission, compared to listening to or watching music or films (63%).

Table 4: Restrictive mediation: Child allowed to spend any time online without parental permission or supervision

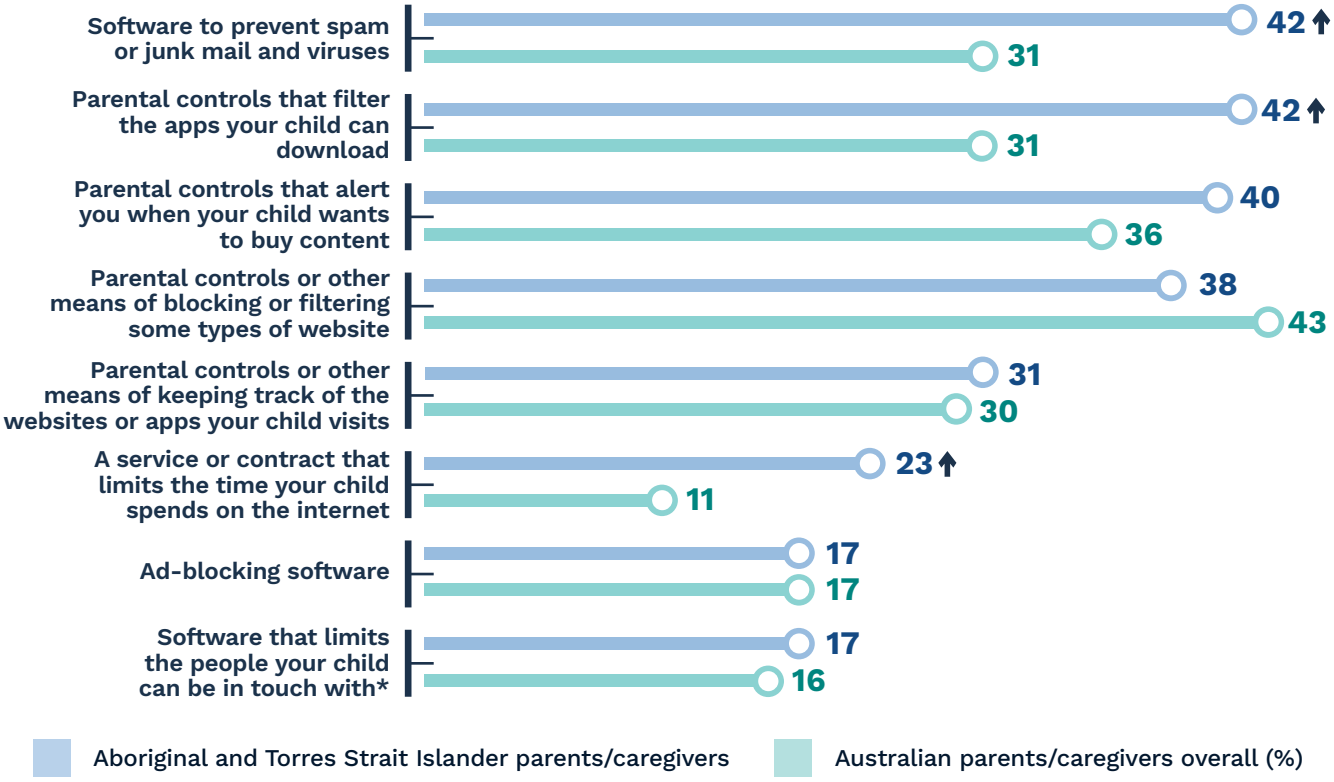
Strategy	Parent or caregiver/ child perspective	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (%)	National average* (%)
Listen to or watch music or films (e.g. Spotify, Netflix)	Parent	63	59
	Child	56	60
Watch video clips (e.g. on YouTube)	Parent	56	54
	Child	55	56
Spend time in a virtual world (e.g. Roblox, Minecraft)	Parent	47	44
	Child	51	45
Visit a social networking site (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat)	Parent	40	35
	Child	44	39
Visit a social networking site (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat)	Parent	37	34
	Child	41	37

**Average among Australian children aged 8–17.*
Question S10. Do you allow your child aged <INSERT SELECTED AGE> to do the following things online and, if so, do they need your permission to do them? Question K2. Which of the following are you allowed to do?
Bases: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (n=223); Parents/caregivers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (n=223); Australian children (n=3,590); Parents of Australian children (n=3,590).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents/caregivers use a range of technical mediation strategies to control or limit their child's internet use

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents/caregivers use digital literacy and technology to mediate their children's internet use (Figure 25). The most commonly used technical controls are virus protection or spam software (42%) and controls on the apps that their child can download (42%), followed by controls that alert them when their child wants to make an in-app purchase (40%) and blocking or filtering some websites (38%).

Figure 25: Mediation strategies used by parents/caregivers to control or limit their child's internet use



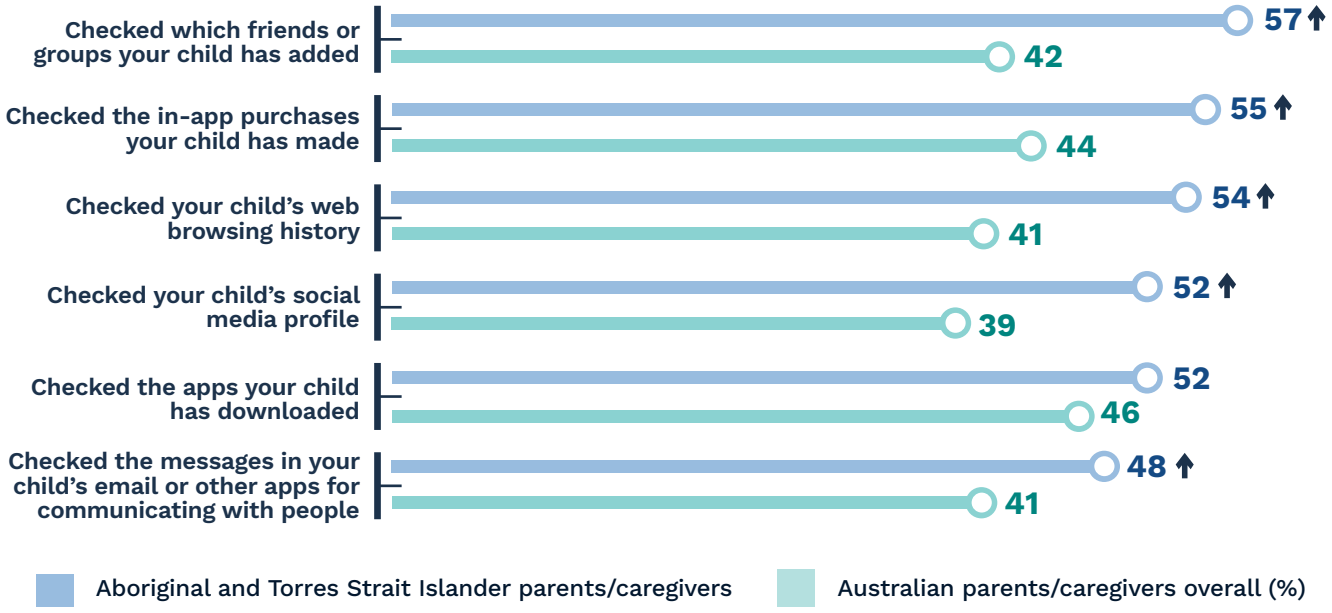
**Through voice calls and messages.*
Question S11. Do you use any of the following?
Bases: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (n=223); Parents/caregivers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (n=223); Australian children aged 8–17 (n=3,590); Parents of Australian children aged 8–17 (n=3,590).
Note: Upward arrows ↑ denote results significantly higher, and downward arrows ↓ denote results significantly lower, than comparable sub-groups at a 95% confidence interval.

The majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents/caregivers set rules about their child's internet use

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and caregivers are more likely to check their child's online activities than the wider Australia population. The majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents/caregivers check which friends or groups their child has added, weekly or more often (57% compared with the national average of 42% – see Figure 26). They also commonly check their child's in-app purchases (55% compared with 44%), browsing history (54% compared with 41%) and social media profile (52% compared with 39%) at least weekly.

The higher rates at which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents/caregivers check their child's online activities could be a contributing factor in their enhanced awareness of children's experiences of online harm and exposure to negative or sexual content online.

Figure 26: Parental checks on child's internet use (% weekly or more often)

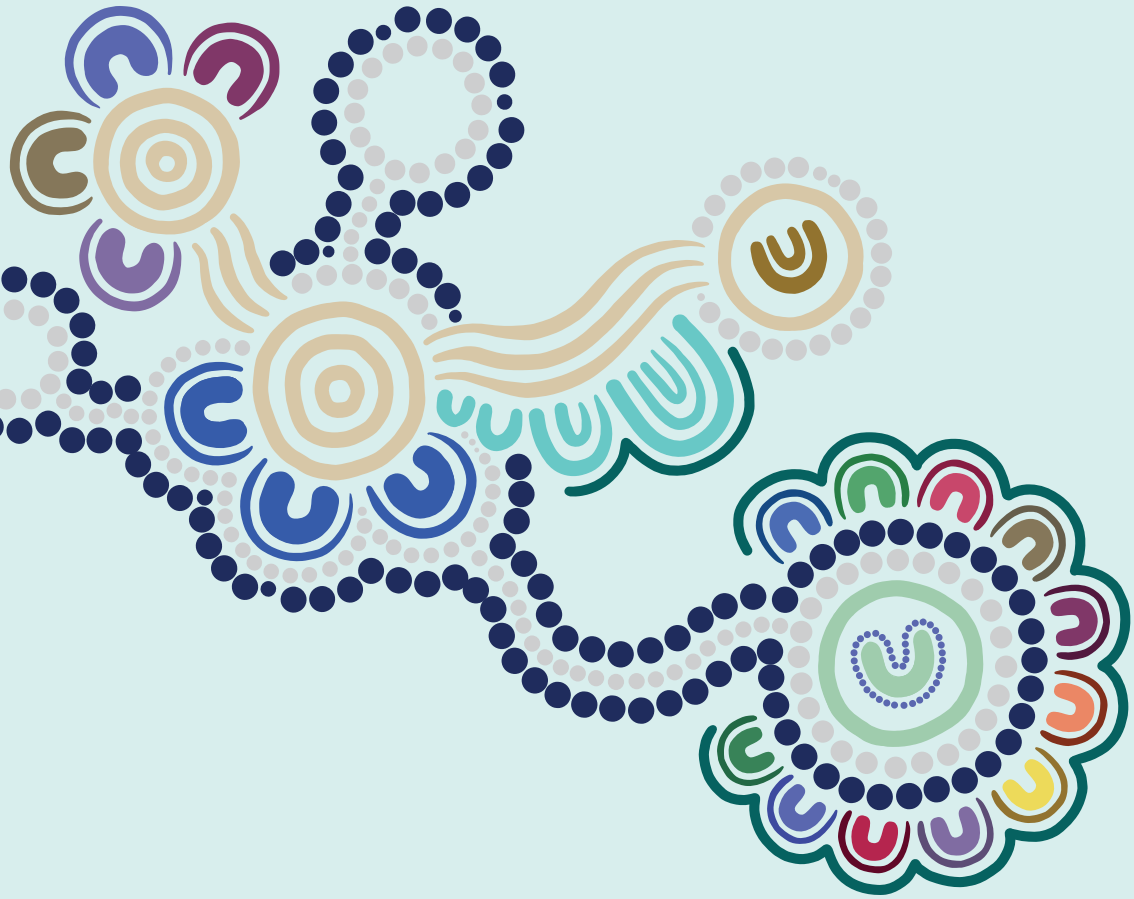


Question S12. Over the last year, how often have you checked the following?
Bases: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (n=223); Parents/caregivers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (n=223); Australian children aged 8–17 (n=3,590); Parents of Australian children aged 8–17 (n=3,590).
Note: Upward arrows ↑ denote results significantly higher, and downward arrows ↓ denote results significantly lower, than comparable sub-groups at a 95% confidence interval.

Conclusion

The internet plays a pivotal role in the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, as a central place for meeting people, as a source of information and as an outlet for creative expression. The survey results presented in this report indicate that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are highly engaged in the digital environment, despite a higher-than-average level of exposure to negative experiences.

The importance of the internet to the social lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children is clear, with our survey results showing that they communicate regularly with others online, connecting over social media and gaming sites. The internet is a place where new connections are made, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children much more likely to make – and to establish ongoing communication with – new contacts online than the wider Australian child cohort. While our findings show that maintaining contact with extended relations and fellow Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is of crucial importance, they also indicate that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are more likely than the national average to communicate with people from diverse backgrounds, broadening their cultural circle.



Conclusion

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are also more likely to use the internet to stay informed about the world around them, accessing online news sites at much higher rates than the wider Australian child cohort. While prior studies established that discussions on social and political problems are common among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, our research indicates that this practice starts early, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children more than twice as likely to discuss social and political problems online, on a weekly basis or more often, than the national average.

The internet is also a critical source of health information for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are significantly more likely to have looked for physical, sexual and mental health information online than the national average, indicating a level of resourcefulness and adaptability to access online services that may not be easily available locally. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are also more likely to use the internet to seek emotional support at rates more than double those of the wider Australian child cohort. This is consistent with previous research which shows that social media often facilitates help-seeking practices among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and points to the importance of maintaining up-to-date, accessible information on Australia's health websites.

The findings also emphasise the importance of online platforms as an outlet for creative expression among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, who were found to be almost twice as likely as the wider Australian cohort to post online their own video or music, and story or blog content. This finding highlights the potential of the internet to be a place to nurture and encourage cultural exchange and awareness among young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

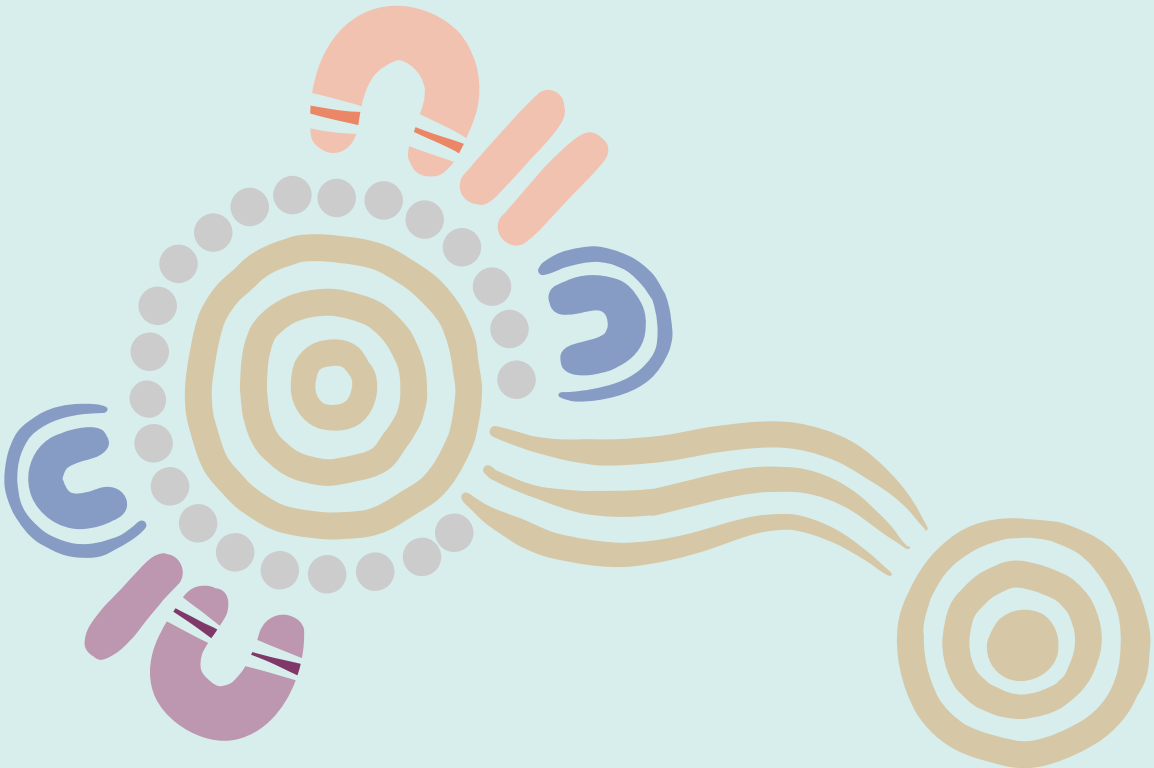
While the internet provides Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children with a wealth of positive experiences, social and cultural connections and valuable information, it can also be home to negative experiences, including hate speech, discrimination and security compromises. The survey results showed that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are significantly more likely to have been exposed to potentially harmful experiences, including hate speech, with impacts to mental health, schoolwork and reputation. However, our research also uncovered that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have the digital literacy to identify harmful online behaviour, and the awareness to proactively employ an effective array of actions in response. These actions include reporting incidents to parents and authorities, and technical responses such as blocking and changing privacy/contact settings.

Nevertheless, the survey showed that negative online experiences continue to have a significant impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were shown to be more likely to retaliate online to hurtful treatment, and to admit that they had treated someone badly online themselves. This may indicate that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are more aware of what constitutes hurtful or harmful behaviour and have a greater tendency for self-reflection and to take responsibility for their online conduct than Australian children overall. They are also more likely to inform their parents/caregivers of these incidents, enabling the flow of support and guidance.

The survey data suggests that parents/caregivers are important contributors to the high level of digital literacy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. The parents/caregivers have been shown to be highly engaged in fostering their child's internet activity, encouraging their child to explore and learn online (96%) and doing online activities together (95%). At the same time, almost all parents/caregivers of young people reported engaging in a range of restrictive and technical mediation practices in relation to their children's online activities. Specifically, they were shown to be more likely than Australians overall to instruct their child on ways to use the internet safely, to employ technical measures such as blocking software and to regularly monitor their child's online activities.

However, the findings also indicate there is an ongoing need for online safety information among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents/caregivers and their children. While the internet is a powerful way to meet people online, it may also present potential risks, especially to children. eSafety continues to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities to increase awareness of online dangers and safer internet practices.

Not surprisingly, the survey revealed that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have conflicting perceptions of the internet and are wary of its potential to cause harm while acknowledging its many benefits to their lives. This cautious enthusiasm will stand Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in good stead as their lives become ever more entwined with the digital environment.



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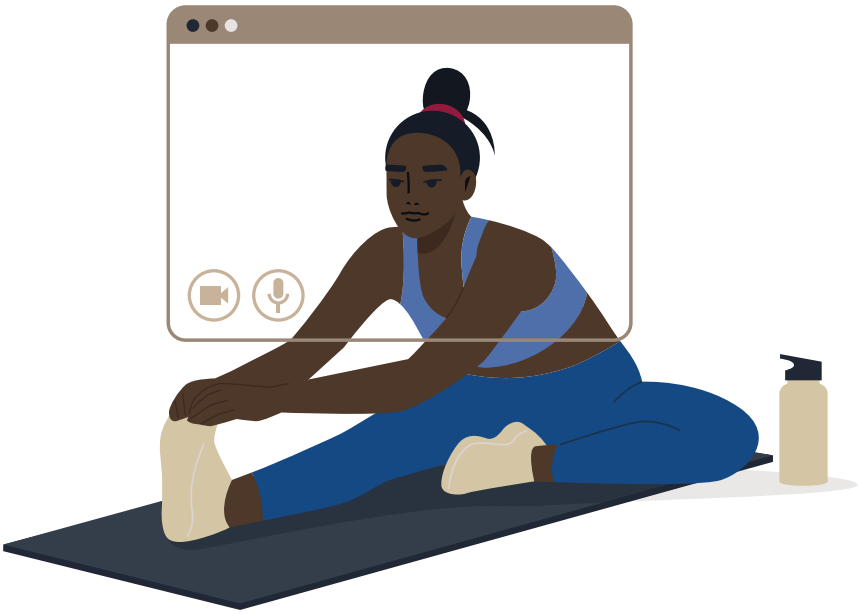
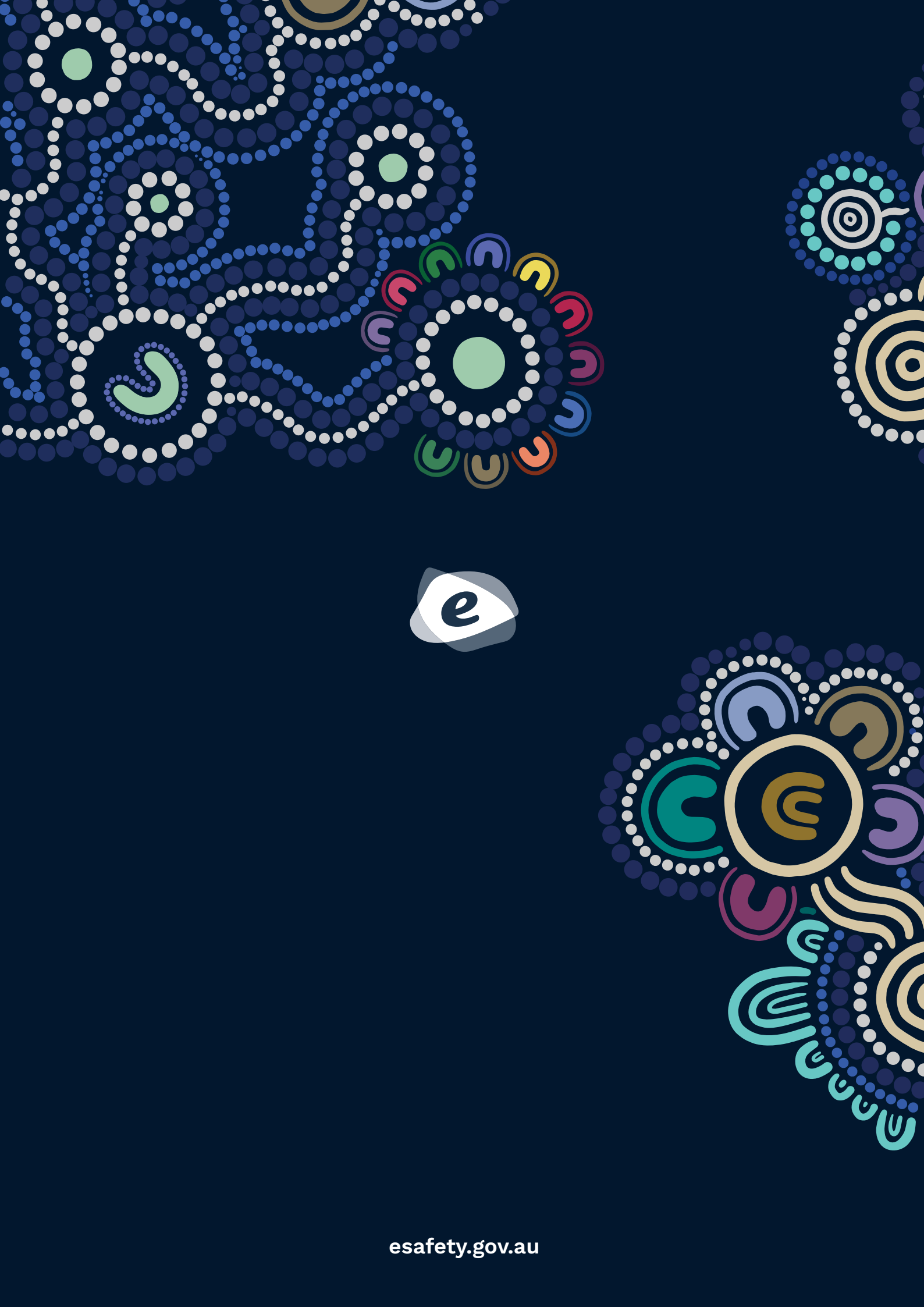
Appendix

Aussie Kids Online dataset: Margins of error for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sample

Cohort	Number of children/ young people	% of child/ young people sample aged 8–17	Margin of error +/–*	
			Prevalence 10%	Prevalence 50%
Aged 8–13	151	68	4.8	8.0
Aged 14–17	72	32	6.9	11.5
Parents/caregivers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who had been exposed to harmful content in the previous year (n=55)	55	25	7.9	13.2
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who had had a negative online experience (n=177)	177	79	4.4	7.4
Total sample	223	100	3.9	6.6

*at 95% confidence level





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