A new playground

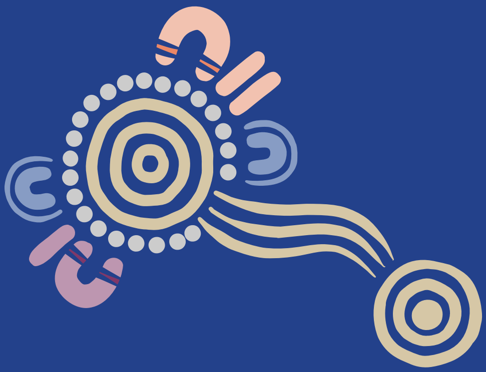
The digital lives of young people with disability

Aussie Kids Online

December 2023

Australian Government

eSafetyCommissioner



Acknowledgement of Country

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. We would specifically like to thank Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants with disability for sharing their lived experience.

Acknowledgements

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

eSafety also acknowledges the generous contribution of Georgia Ferrari and Emily Unity from Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA) who conducted a language review of the final report.

Finally, eSafety acknowledges the helpful contribution of our academic collaborator, Professor Katie Ellis at Curtin University.

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 informed by evidence
- 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

Like many young people in Australia, those with disability spend much of their life in the digital realm, going online to explore their world, to play games and to keep in touch with friends and family. The internet is a great equaliser for people with disability, with users unencumbered by the structural barriers encountered in the physical world. Further, by going online, young people with disability are able to engage with others in an environment where they have more control over how they represent themselves; a place where they are not viewed in terms of their disability unless they want to be. It's not surprising, then, that many young people with disability feel more confident online than in the physical world and spend more time on the internet than the national average.

However, research indicates that young people with disability may be especially vulnerable to online harms. Young people with intellectual or cognitive impairment, for example, may have a different understanding of social boundaries online or may place too much trust in the strangers they meet while on the internet. These challenges may, in turn, create a greater risk of exposure to online scams, cyberbullying, harassment or grooming by predators (eSafety Commissioner 2020).

For parents and caregivers of young people with disability, the benefits and risks of the digital environment create the paradox of wanting their children to reap the benefits of engaging online, while simultaneously understanding the need to limit their child's exposure to perceived and actual online threats. However, limiting exposure to the digital environment can also create risks, including that the young person may miss out on social interaction or may not have access to valuable online supports such as Kids Helpline.

This report, the third in a series that uses the 2021 Aussie Kids Online dataset, compares the experiences and attitudes of young people with disability aged 8–17, and their parents or caregivers, with those of the wider Australian population. Close attention is paid to gauging the impact of young people's online experiences, measuring their perception of the internet, understanding the benefits of going online for young people with disability and identifying their reactions to negative online incidents in the past 12 months.

Where sample size allows, the experiences of **younger children with disability** (aged 8–13 years) are compared with those of **teens with disability** (aged 14–17 years) to explore the different ways these two cohorts participate online.

Findings from this research will inform eSafety's online safety programs for Australians with disability, including future resources and programs to be developed by and with people with disability. The research also aims to contribute to the international evidence base on children's internet use and is eSafety's third publication as a member of Global Kids Online.

Key findings

Our survey found that, for many children with disability, the internet forms a virtual playground, one in which they can play games with others, have fun and just hang out with friends old and new. For teens with disability, the internet also provides crucial information on physical, sexual and mental health, and is a place to gather emotional support and to seek social interaction with like-minded peers. As such, many young people with disability have taken to the internet with enthusiasm, feeling a greater level of self-confidence while in the digital world than offline and spending more time online than the national average of children and young people.

However, the digital environment is not without risk, with the survey finding that young people with disability are more vulnerable to negative online experiences than Australian young people overall. Many young people with disability possess a level of digital literacy that enables them to respond to these experiences quickly and effectively, though the impact of negative online experiences can be profound.

Parents and caregivers of young people play a key role in building both their child's confidence online and their resilience to negative experiences. The survey found that parents and caregivers of young people with disability are closely engaged with their child's internet use and online experiences, with the majority employing mediation strategies, including technology, to help limit their child's exposure to potential risk.

Benefits of the online environment for young people with disability

Going online expands the social and cultural circles of young people with disability

- One in 4 young people with disability reported making new friends or contacts on the internet each week, compared with the national average of 1 in 5.
- Just over 1 in 4 (27%) young people with disability used the internet to connect with people from a different background, compared with 23% of Australian children overall.

Young people with disability feel they can be more like themselves online

- Seven in 10 young people with disability (69%) said they find it easier to be themselves online than when they are with people face-to-face, compared with the national average of 6 in 10 (59%).
- Almost half of young people with disability reported discussing private topics more often online than in person (48%, compared with the national average of 39%).

The online environment enables young people with disability to play with others, to exchange ideas, and to share their hobbies and creativity

- Young people with disability were more likely to play games with others online than the national average (62%, compared with 56%).
- Thirty-six per cent of young people with disability shared interests and hobbies with others online (compared with the national average of 31%).
- Forty-five per cent of teens said that ‘talking to people who like the same things’ is one of the best things about the internet, compared with the national average of 39%.

The internet is an important source of health information and emotional support for young people with disability

- One in 5 young people with disability (20%) had gone online in the past week in search of information on physical health, which is higher than the national average of 17%.
- Among teens with disability, 18% looked for sexual health information online – a rate significantly higher than the national average of 13% in this cohort.

Young people with disability spend more of their leisure time online than the national average

- On weekdays, 42% of young people with disability spent 3–5 hours a day online (compared with the national average of 36%).
- On weekends, 42% of young people with disability spent 6 or more hours a day online (compared with the national average of 32%).

Navigating online risks

Time online can cause challenges in the daily lives of young people with disability

- Sixty-one per cent of young people with disability reported that the time they were spending online had had a negative impact on their lives, compared with the national average of 55%.
- Seventy per cent of young people with disability said they had experienced conflicts with loved ones over the amount of time they spent online, compared with the national average of 63%.

Young people with disability (especially teens) are more likely to have encountered online abuse

- Almost 6 in 10 young people with disability (59%) reported they had been treated in a hurtful or nasty way in the past 12 months, compared with the national average of 45%.

- One in 6 young people with disability (16%) were subjected to regular online abuse (weekly or more often), compared with 9% of Australian children overall.
- Almost 1 in 4 teens with disability had been threatened with physical harm while online (24%, compared with the national average of 16%) or had been the subject of hate speech (23%, compared with the national average of 14%).

Young people with disability are more likely to recognise that they have treated someone in a hurtful or nasty way online

- Over a third of young people with disability (34%) indicated that they had treated someone in a hurtful or nasty way online, compared with the national average of 26%.
- Thirty per cent of young people with disability indicated that they had reacted to hurtful treatment online by retaliating online, compared with the national average of 25%.

Teens with disability are more likely to have been exposed to potentially harmful online content

- Almost three-quarters of teens with disability had been exposed to at least one kind of potentially harmful content (72%, compared with the national average of 62%).
- Teens with disability were, on average, much more likely to have been exposed to every major type of potentially harmful online content mentioned in the survey, including gore, graphic violence, and ways to self-harm or take their own life.

Teens with disability are more likely to have been exposed to sexual material online, and to have received requests for sexual information and images of themselves

- Just over three-quarters of teens with disability had seen sexual images online (77%, compared with the national average of 71%), and over half had received a sexual message (56%, compared with the national average of 47%).

- Teens with disability were also more likely to have been asked for sexual information (26%, compared with the national average of 18%) or sexual images of themselves (15%, compared with the national average of 11%).

Hurtful online experiences can have a profound impact on young people with disability

- After their most recent hurtful online experience, young people with disability were more likely than the national average to have felt sad (64%, compared with 57%) or angry (56%, compared with 44%).
- Hurtful online experiences have a strong effect on the self-esteem of young people with disability, with 47% saying they didn't feel good about themselves (compared with the national average of 40%) and almost 1 in 3 indicating that their mental health had been affected (29%, compared with the national average of 18%).
- Almost half of young people with disability reported that their sense of social connection had suffered, with many saying they felt left out or that they had lost some of their friends (40%, compared with the national average of 35%).

Responses to negative online experiences

Young people with disability respond proactively to negative experiences

- Young people with disability were more likely to have unfriended (71%) or blocked (70%) online user accounts in response to a negative online experience, compared with the national average of 64% and 64%, respectively.
- Over 7 in 10 young people with disability informed their parents or caregiver of their negative online experience (72%, compared with the national average of 67%).

Perceptions of the internet by young people with disability

'If the internet were an animal, which animal would it be?'

- Many young people with disability characterised the internet as a large predatory animal, emphasising its size, power and potentially dangerous nature. Others chose a more familiar domestic animal such as a cat, puppy or rabbit.
- Young people with disability typically had a paradoxical perception of the internet, highlighting its positive attributes such as intelligence and speed, while acknowledging online risks and potential harms.

Digital parenting of young people with disability

Parents and caregivers of young people with disability are more likely to recall being told by their child of hurtful online experiences

- Sixty-one per cent of parents or caregivers whose child with disability had been treated in a hurtful or nasty way online could recall their child's experience (well above the national average of 51%).
- Recall of their child's experience of hate speech was found to be comparatively high among parents of young people with disability (73%, compared with the national average of 64%).

Parents and caregivers of young people with disability have greater recall of their child's encounter with potentially harmful online content

- Almost three-quarters (72%) of parents and caregivers of young people with disability could recall their child's encounter with potentially harmful online content, compared with the national average of 62%.

Parents and caregivers of teens with disability are more likely to be aware of their child's exposure to online sexual material

- Parents and caregivers of teens with disability were more likely to recall being informed of their child's exposure to sexual content online (54%, compared with the national average of 44%).

Parental mediation practices

Almost all parents and caregivers of children with disability use education and positive encouragement to guide their child online

- Ninety-five per cent of parents and caregivers of young people with disability had, in the last year, talked to their child about using the internet safely, explained why some content is appropriate or inappropriate (92%) and encouraged their child to use the internet safely (91%). These figures are in line with the national average.

Most parents and caregivers of young people with disability set clear rules and use digital control tools to guide their child's online activity

- Parents and caregivers of young people with disability were found to be less likely than the national average to restrict their child's access to fun activities such as online games (50%, compared with 56%) and media viewing platforms such as YouTube (42%, compared with 46%).

- Fifty-eight per cent of parents and caregivers of young people with disability had set rules about the length of time their child spends online, which is consistent with the national average (59%).

- Eighty-two per cent of younger children with disability exceeded the time limits set by their parents or caregivers, higher than the national average of 77%.

- The use of digital control tools by parents and caregivers of young people with disability is consistent with the national average (76%, compared with 74%).

Methodology

In 2021, eSafety commissioned research to explore the opportunities and risks that the internet presents for all Australian children, including young people living with disability.

The research was conducted from July to September 2021 and comprised a national online survey of over 3,500 young people aged 8–17, along with their parents or caregivers. The survey was an adaptation of the Global Kids Online questionnaire[1] and was conducted in two parts:

- an initial 10-minute parent/caregiver survey, where parents and caregivers 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/caregiver), 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 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.

The survey asked parent and caregiver respondents the following questions about their child:

> ***Does your child aged X have any of the following difficulties?*** and
>
> ***Has your child aged X had this [difficulty] for 6 months or longer?***

For the purposes of this research, the 'young person with disability' sample is defined as young people in the survey whose parents/caregivers responded positively to both of these questions. The limitations of using this definition, and its associated assumptions, are outlined in the next section.

Throughout this report, we use person-first language to describe participants in order to reflect their right to identities beyond their disability. We acknowledge that some young people with disability use identity-first language and that both are valid and meaningful forms of self-identification. As we don't know how individual survey participants self-identify, we cannot follow best practice of using the terms they use for themselves.

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1. Global Kids Online, *Tools for Researchers*.

A total of n=972 young people who had experienced disability for 6 months or more, and their parent or caregiver (n=972), completed the online survey (Table 1). Among the young people with disability sample are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (n=67), those who speak a language other than English at home (n=180), those who identify as LGBTIQ+ (n=73), those who are from a low socio-economic background (n=322) and those who live outside of a capital city (n=347). Many of these demographic features overlap in individual participants, with intersecting identities an important consideration.

One child and one parent or caregiver per household completed the survey. Only those young people aged 14–17 years were asked if they identified as LGBTIQ+.

Table 1: Youth survey respondents – young people with disability sample: Key demographics

	Number of young people with disability (aged 8–17)	**% of young people with disability (n=972)**
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	67	7
Speak a language other than English at home	180	19
Identify as LGBTIQ+ (aged 14–17 only)	73	18
Low socio-economic background	322	33
Live outside a capital city	347	36
Girls	424	44
Boys	531	55
My gender isn’t listed	13	1
Aged 8–13	562	58
Aged 14–17	410	42
TOTAL DISABILITY SAMPLE	**972**	**100**

Significance testing was applied at a 95% confidence interval to compare the relevant sub-groups (i.e. young people with disability compared with the Australian child cohort) in the quantitative analysis.

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

The full methodology report for the Aussie Kids Online research series is available on the eSafety website: **Mind the Gap Methodology Report - Aussie Kids Online - FINAL.pdf (eSafety.gov.au)**

Young people with disability sample by disability

Parents and caregivers were asked to provide information on any challenges or barriers their child was experiencing, placing them within five different categories. Respondents were able to select multiple categories, with the most commonly chosen being learning disability, mental ill-health and behaviours of concern (Table 2).

Table 2: Breakdown of young people with disability sample, by disability

	Number of young people in sample (n=972)	% of young people with disability in sample (n=972)	% of total sample (n=3,590)
Learning disability	438	45	13
Mental ill-health	390	40	12
Behaviours of concern	353	36	10
Other disability	100	10	3
Physical disability	55	6	2
Physical illness	70	7	2
Physical disability	55	6	2

Question S6: Does your child aged X have any of the following difficulties? And Question S7: Has your child aged X had this for 6 months or longer? Base: Total sample: (n=3,590).

Limitations

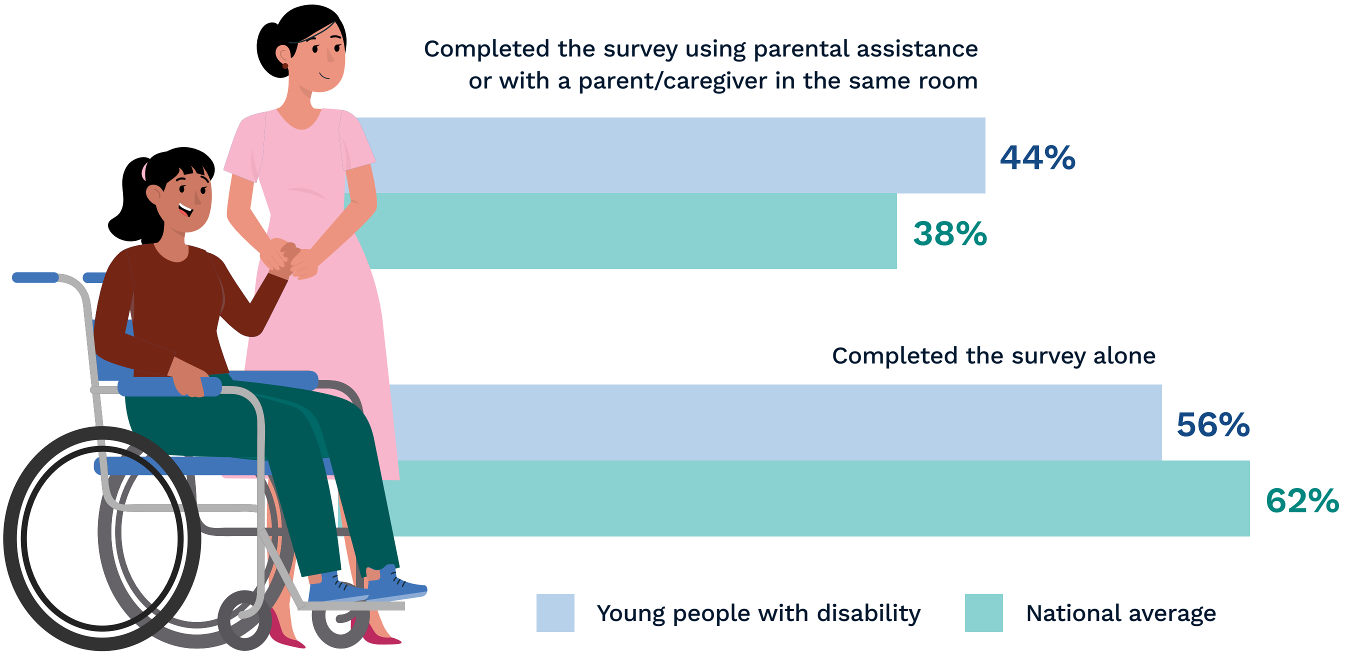
During the period this survey was conducted, several of Australia's major cities were locked down to mitigate the spread of the COVID-19 virus. While research into the long-term impact of these restrictions is ongoing, early studies indicate that the social distancing introduced during the pandemic had a detrimental effect on the mental health of young people, particularly after repeated periods of lockdown in Sydney and Melbourne. Rates of anxiety and depression among children increased, with demand for support services such as Kids Helpline and at paediatric emergency departments increasing markedly (Batchelor et al. 2021; Cheek et al. 2020). The composition of the young people with disability sample is therefore likely in part a reflection of the extraordinary conditions experienced during the pandemic, with a resulting skew towards the experience of those with psycho-social disability, rather than, or in addition to, physical disability.

Further, while every effort was made to accurately measure disability prevalence among the sample, responses to questions regarding disability are chiefly a measure of the perception of families and caregivers of their child's experience and are not restricted to those who have received an official diagnosis. As a result, there is no way to gauge the level of impact, restriction or limitation the child may have experienced as a result of disability.

It is also likely that the survey won't have been equally inclusive of every young person with a disability, with the sample limited to those whose parents or caregivers were able to access and complete an online survey during the field period. Further, psycho-social factors among young people experiencing mental ill-health, such as mental health literacy and mental health stigma, could have affected a child's willingness to disclose to a parent or caregiver that they were experiencing a tough time.

The top-level analysis provided in this report is therefore a reflection of the 'average' experience of young people whose parents or caregivers recognised that their child was living with disability at the time the survey was conducted. In addition, the demographic composition of the young people with disability sample is to be used as indicative of the survey group only and is not representative of the wider population of young Australians with disability.

Teens with disability were more likely than the national average to have completed the survey using parental assistance or with a parent/caregiver in the same room (44%, compared with the national average of 38%). While the majority of respondents with disability aged 14–17 completed the survey unassisted and alone (56%, compared with the national average of 62%), the presence of a parental figure nearby may have influenced responses to questions regarding potentially stigmatised activities such as bullying perpetration or activities of a sexual nature.



Finally, the survey questions regarding disability were prepared without direct input from people with a lived experience of disability and of the barriers young people with disability face in their daily lives. eSafety acknowledges that the parental questions pertaining to disability, and those looking into the attitudes and online experiences of children with disability in particular, would have benefited from expert input. eSafety is committed to working with members of the disability community to ensure that the next iteration of the survey can more accurately capture the experiences of young people with disability and their parents or caregivers.

Positionality statement

eSafety understands the impact of researchers' intersecting experiences of power and marginalisation on our research and analysis. The team who conducted this research included cisgender women of Asian or European heritage, and the report was written by cisgender women of European heritage, including those who have lived experience of parenting a young person with disability. Identities represented in the eSafety research team include queer women and women with disability. Our team has expertise in quantitative and qualitative methodologies, online harms and safety, and the lived experiences of children and young people.

The benefits of the online environment for young people with disability

For young people with disability, the internet provides an environment in which they can hang out, connecting with peers and expanding their social networks well beyond their immediate surrounds. For those feeling isolated or bored, going online offers connection and fun, with virtual worlds waiting to be explored whether alone or with others. Adolescents, in particular, have been found to benefit strongly from the social supports to be gained by connecting with others online (Fuxman et al. 2019). On a more practical level, the internet provides young people with disability the means to learn about themselves and the world around them, and to share hobbies, opinions and experiences with others.

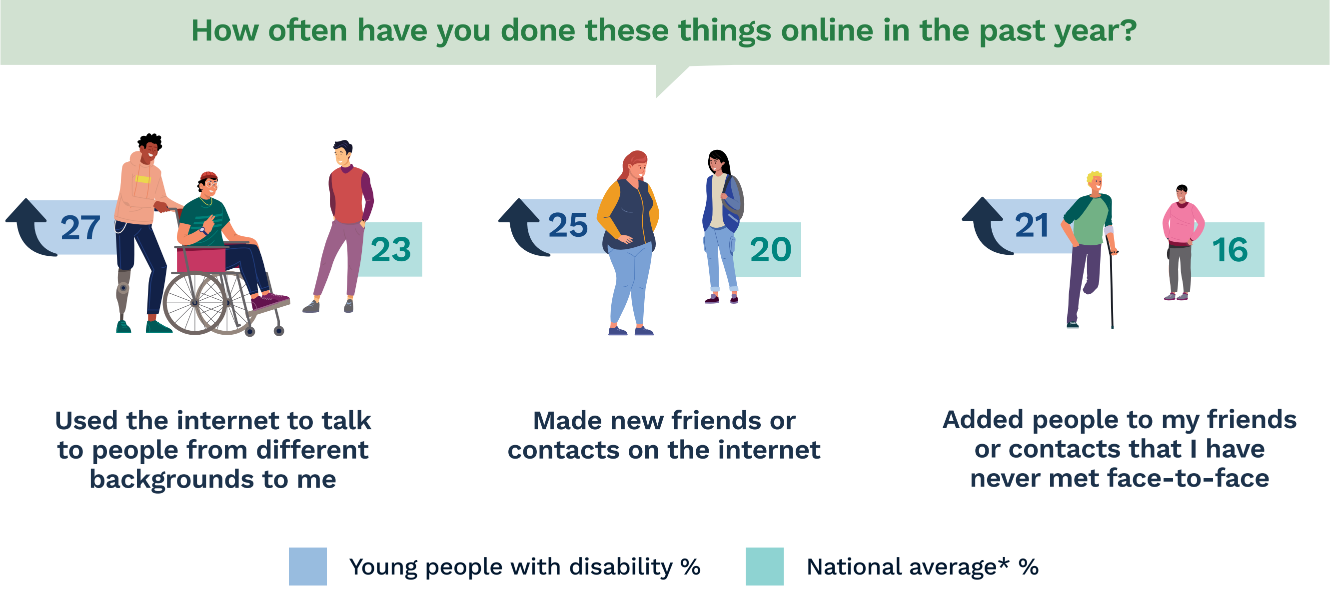
Going online expands the social and cultural circles of young people with disability

Environmental, institutional and attitudinal barriers can make it difficult for young people with disability to take part in face-to-face social situations that others take for granted. With comparatively easy access, the internet provides young people with disability the opportunity to participate in social circles that could otherwise be out of reach.

The survey found that young people with disability were more likely to make new friends or contacts online than Australian children overall. As shown in Figure 1, a quarter of young people with disability reported having made new friends or contacts on the internet each week, compared with the national average of a fifth. Young people with disability were also more likely to add people to their contacts list whom they had never met face-to-face (21%, compared with 16%).

Young people with disability are more likely to draw their online friends from a range of diverse backgrounds, with 27% having used the internet to connect with people from a different background than their own, compared with 23% of Australian young people overall.

Figure 1: Use of the internet by young people with disability to meet and talk to others – comparison with the national average for Australian young people (% weekly or more often)



**Average among Australian young people aged 8–17.*
Question C1. How often have you done these things online in the past year?
Bases: Young people with disability (8–17 years) (n=972); Australian young people (8–17 years) (n=3,590).
Note: Arrows denote results with a statistically significant difference.

Social media sites are important spaces for young people with disability (especially teens) to hang out

Social media sites are key gathering places for young people with disability, enabling them to meet and interact with others or to watch others doing so. Research has found social media to have additional benefits for people with lived experience of disability more generally, enabling them to control and drive the messaging around what is important to them (Haller 2010; Ellis & Kent 2016). Further, the social support that can be accessed via social media has been shown to have a positive effect on the wellbeing of young people with social anxiety and depression, providing access to social connection and a sense of community that may not be readily available or accessible offline (Morahan-Martin & Schumacher 2003).

The survey found that over half of young people with disability visited a social media site weekly or more often (53%), while 4 in 10 accessed social media daily (42%) (see Figure 2). While these figures are consistent with the Australian average, the data showed that young people with disability were more likely to maintain an almost constant presence in social media, with just under 1 in 10 having accessed social media 'almost all the time' (9%, compared with the national average of 6%).

Figure 2: Use of the internet by young people with disability to access social media – comparison with the national average, by age group (% weekly or more often)

Online activity	Children (8–13 years)		Teens (14–17 years)		Total young people (8–17 years)	
	With disability (%)	National average (%)	With disability (%)	National average (%)	With disability (%)	National average (%)
Visited a social networking site – weekly or more often	30	32	85 ⬆	82	53	51
Visited a social networking site – daily	20	19	71 ⬆	67	42	37
Visited a social media site – almost all the time	4 ⬆	2	15 ⬆	12	9 ⬆	6

**Average among Australian young people aged 8–17.*
Question C1. How often have you done these things online in the past year?
Bases: Children with disability (8–13 years) (n=562); Teens with disability (14–17 years) (n=410); Total young people with disability (8–17 years) (n=972); National average: Children (8–13 years) (n=2,241); Teens (14–17 years) (n=1,349); Total young people (8–17 years) (n=3,590).
Note: Arrows denote results with a statistically significant difference.

The benefits of the online environment for young people with disability

Research into online communication among teens with mental health difficulties, for example, has found that adolescents isolated by their condition may be able to overcome feelings of solitude by establishing a friendship network online (Fuxman et al. 2019). Other studies emphasise the value of online networks in fostering an exchange of information among young people sharing lived and living experiences, breaking down barriers regarding therapies or treatments, and providing support if and when needed (Sweet et al. 2019). The comparative importance of social networking in the lives of teens with disability is highlighted by the age group analysis, showing that 7 in 10 teens with disability aged 14–17 accessed a social networking site daily, compared with 2 in 10 children with disability aged 8–13.

Figure 3 shows that young people with disability (especially teens) typically have a greater presence across a wider range of social networking applications, compared with Australian young people overall. Teens with disability were most likely to use communication-sharing apps such as Facebook and Messenger, emphasising the value of social media as a point of connection for older children. Of the six most popular social media platforms, five were more likely to have been used by young people with disability than the national average.

Age-related restrictions are likely to be a factor in social media adoption patterns, with Meta (Facebook and Instagram) profiles limited to those with parental permission or aged 13 and over. Survey results shown in Figure 3 indicate that, despite these restrictions, 18% of children with disability aged 12 and under had a Facebook profile, consistent with the national average (19%).

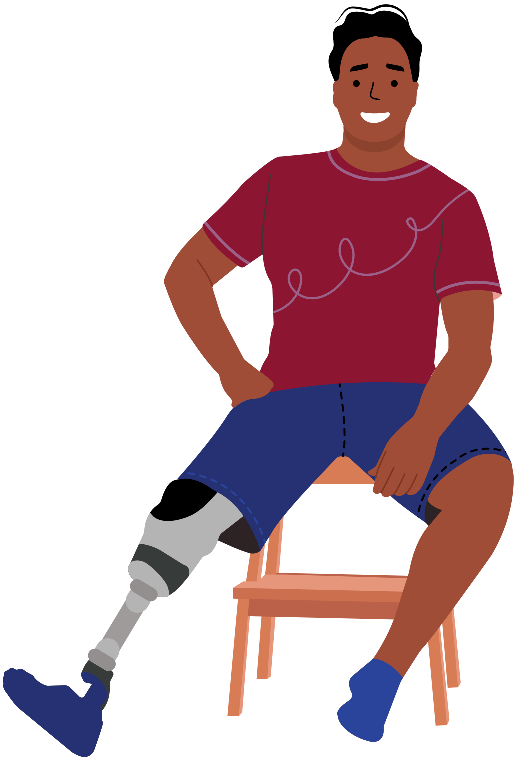


Figure 3: Social media use by young people with disability (children and teens) – compared with the national average

Social media site	Children (8–13 years)		Teens (14–17 years)		Total young people (8–17 years)	
	With disability (%)	National average (%)	With disability (%)	National average (%)	With disability (%)	National average (%)
YouTube	42 ↑	38	68 ↑	63	53 ↑	47
Facebook Messenger	33	31	64 ↑	55	46 ↑	40
TikTok	25	26	60 ↑	55	40 ↑	36
Snapchat	22	22	67 ↑	63	41 ↑	37
Facebook	20 (18)	21 (19)	69 ↑	61	40 ↑	36
Instagram	19 (15)	22 (17)	77	74	43	41

**National average is the calculated average in each respective age cohort.*
Note: Facebook and Instagram don't permit profiles for children aged 12 years and under.
Current adoption rates for those aged 12 and under are shown in parentheses.
Question D2. Which social networking or gaming sites or apps do you have your own profile for?
This means you have your own login for it.
Bases: Young people with disability (8–17 years) (n=972); Australian young people (8–17 years) (n=3,590).
Note: Arrows denote results with a statistically significant difference.

The internet is a place where many young people with disability go to have fun

For many young people with disability, the online world can be somewhere they can enjoy themselves, connect with loved ones and learn more about themselves and the world around them. Research indicates that social media platforms and digital gaming environments such as Minecraft and Roblox can act as proxy playgrounds, offering participants access to socialisation and play (Ringland 2023). This can be particularly important to young people whose access to face-to-face playgrounds is limited by disability.

The benefits of the online environment for young people with disability

When asked to nominate the three best things about the internet, 79% of young people with disability nominated ‘having fun’ (in line with the national average), well above ‘finding out new things’ (53%) and ‘spending time with friends and family’ (44%) (see Figure 4). Among teens with disability, the value of the internet as a means for social connection is strongly indicated, with 45% having nominated ‘talking to people who like the same things as me’, almost double the figure seen among younger children with disability (24%) and significantly higher than the national average for the 14–17 age group (39%).

Figure 4: Answers given by young people with disability to the question, ‘What are the best three things about the internet?’, by age and disability status – comparison with the national average (%)

Online activity	Children (8–13 years)		Teens (14–17 years)		Total young people (8–17 years)	
	With disability (%)	National average (%)	With disability (%)	National average (%)	With disability (%)	National average (%)
Having fun	82	81	75	72	**79**	**78**
Finding out new things	56 ↓	60	49 ↓	56	**53** ↓	**59**
Spending time with friends and family	40 ↓	44	49	50	**44**	**46**
Talking to people who like the same things as me	24	22	45 ↑	39	**33** ↑	**28**
Creating content and sharing with others	20	23	29	26	**24**	**24**

**Average among Australian young people aged 8–17.*
Question B5. What are the three best things about using the internet?
Bases: Children with disability: 8–13 years (n=562); Teens with disability (14–17 years) (n=410);
Total young people with disability (8–17 years) (n=972); National average: Children (8–13 years) (n=2,241); Teens (14–17 years) (n=1,349); Total young people (8–17 years) (n=3,590).
Note: Arrows denote results with a statistically significant difference.

As seen in the section on social media, young people with disability participate in a range of online leisure activities, including watching video content on TikTok and YouTube. The data in Figure 5 shows that 9 in 10 young people with disability watched video clips at least once a week (90%), a proportion higher than the national average of 87%. Young people with disability were also shown to be more likely to play games online, with 69% having played solo (compared with the national average of 61%), while 62% had played with others (compared with the national average of 56%).

Figure 5: Use of the internet by young people with disability for leisure activities – comparison with the national average (% weekly or more often)

**Average among Australian young people aged 8–17.*
Question C1. How often have you done these things online in the past year?
Bases: Young people with disability (8–17 years) (n=972); Australian young people (8–17 years) (n=3,590).
Note: Arrows denote results with a statistically significant difference.

For young people with disability, the accessibility of many online games allows them to participate fully in a space where they may not face the same, or any, barriers to taking part. Among children aged 8–13, gaming platforms Minecraft and Roblox dominate online gaming use, with participation significantly higher among young people with disability than the national average (Figure 6). Importantly, young people with disability can customise their environment in games such as Minecraft and Roblox, giving them control over creating accessible spaces.

The capacity to chat with fellow participants while playing online games assists in creating the digital equivalent of a sports or playground social interaction, an environment that may not always be safe, comfortable or accessible to young people with disability in the physical world (Ringland 2023). This reinforces the value of virtual worlds as a proxy playground for young people with disability, one in which they can grow, thrive and play (Ringland 2023).

Figure 6: Online games use by young people with disability (children and teens) – comparison with the national average (%)

Game	Children (8–13 years)		Teens (14–17 years)		Total young people (8–17 years)	
	With disability (%)	National average (%)	With disability (%)	National average (%)	With disability (%)	National average (%)
Minecraft	54 ↑	42	44 ↑	37	50 ↑	40
Roblox	45 ↑	38	26 ↑	22	37 ↑	32

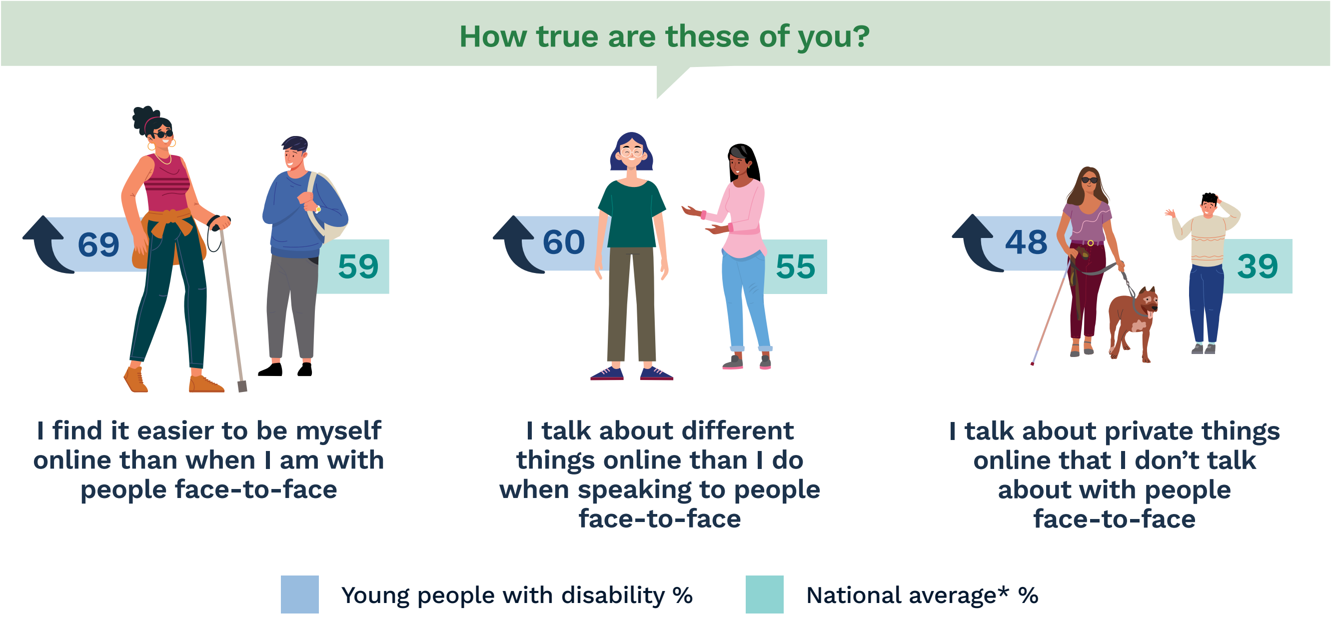
**National average is the calculated average in each respective age cohort.*
Question D2. Which social networking or gaming sites or apps do you have your own profile for? This means you have your own login for it.
Bases: Young people with disability (8–17 years) (n=972); Australian young people (8–17 years) (n=3,590).
Note: Arrows denote results with a statistically significant difference.

However, despite their level of participation in the digital world, young people with disability may still be excluded from some online games whose interfaces assume the user is able to move buttons or controllers rapidly (Ellis et al. 2023). Further, representation of people with disability remains comparatively rare in online gaming worlds, triggering calls for the gaming industry to embrace greater diversity. While growing activism by gamers with disability has seen some improvement in accessibility and inclusion in online games (Ellis et al. 2023), there continues to be much scope for improvement to ensure that all young people with disability can participate in the games they wish to play.

In the online world, young people with disability are more likely to feel they can be themselves and express who they are

One of the drivers of the strong online presence of young people with disability is likely the greater feeling of self-confidence offered by the digital environment (Guinta 2018). The data shown in Figure 7 reveals that over two-thirds of young people with disability found it easier to be themselves online than when they were with people face-to-face (69%, compared with the national average of 59%). Young people with disability also reported higher rates of discussing different topics online compared with those they explored in person, with almost half (47%) saying they talk about private things online that they don't talk about in person.

Figure 7: Responses of 'mostly or very true' given by young people with disability to statements about online confidence – comparison with the national average (%)



*Average among Australian young people aged 8–17.
Question D4. How true are these of you? Mostly or very true.
Bases: Young people with disability (8–17 years) (n=972); Australian young people (8–17 years) (n=3,590).
Note: Arrows denote results with a statistically significant difference.

The online environment enables young people with disability to exchange ideas and share their hobbies and creativity

With the higher level of confidence enabled by the digital environment, young people with disability are more likely to discuss complex topics such as politics and social issues, and to share their experiences through creative content. This allows young people with disability to share their perspectives and lived experiences, thereby amplifying underrepresented voices and creating a stronger sense of community. Research indicates that online connection gives people with disability an opportunity to control and drive the messages around their experiences, providing a platform for empowerment (Haller 2010). Figure 8 shows that young people with disability were more likely to have discussed political and social problems with others online (16%), compared with the national average (13%).

The data also reveals that young people with disability were more likely than the national average to share online video or music content they have created, and to post their own blog or story on the internet. Research has emphasised the value of online content sharing by people with disability in establishing an online identity, and in promoting autonomy, self-esteem and a sense of agency (Chadwick & Fullwood 2018).

Young people with disability were also more likely to have shared their interests and hobbies with people online than the national average (36%, compared with 31%), enabling them to form networks, exchange information and pursue their interests with like-minded people online. This emphasises the role the internet plays as a path to inclusion for young people with disability, an important contributor to wellbeing and self-confidence.

Figure 8: Use of the internet by young people with disability to exchange ideas and share perspectives, experiences and content – comparison with the national average (% weekly or more often)

Online activity	Young people with disability (%)	National average* (%)
Shared my interests or hobbies with other people online	36 ↑	31
Created own video or music and posted it online	21 ↑	19
Posted own blog or story online	18	16
Discussed political or social problems with other people online	16 ↑	13

**Average among Australian young people aged 8–17.*
Question C1. How often have you done these things online in the past year?
Bases: Young people with disability (8–17 years) (n=972); Australian young people (8–17 years) (n=3,590).
Note: Arrows denote results with a statistically significant difference.

The internet is an important source of health information and emotional support for young people with disability

While gaming and content sharing are obvious drawcards for many young people going online, the internet is also invaluable as a source of health information and emotional support for those experiencing disability. Young people with disability were shown to be more likely than the national average to go online for a range of information regarding their physical or mental wellbeing. Figure 9 reveals that 20% of young people with disability sought information about their physical health weekly or more often, higher than the national average of 17%. Among teens with disability, 18% looked for sexual health information online, above the national average of 13%.

Studies have found that the internet can also play a vital role in supporting those needing emotional support, with young people experiencing mental health issues commonly using it to facilitate formal and informal support (Mackenzie et al. 2023; Pretorius et al. 2019). The survey found that 17% of young people with disability sought mental health information – and 16% emotional support – online, compared with the national average of 13% for both. These findings indicate that there is an ongoing need for well-targeted, reliable and accessible health advice, mental health support programs and public education material for young people with disability.

Figure 9: Use of the internet by young people with disability for health information and emotional support – comparison with the national average (% weekly or more often)

Online activity	Young people with disability (%)	National average* (%)
Looked for physical health information for myself or someone else	20 ↑	17
Looked for sexual health information for myself or someone else*	18 ↑	13
Looked for mental health information for myself or someone else	17 ↑	13
Sought emotional support online	16 ↑	13

**Question asked only of those aged 14 years and over.*
Question C1. How often have you done these things online in the past year?
Bases: Young people with disability (8–17 years) (n=972); Australian young people (8–17 years) (n=3,590).
Note: Arrows denote results with a statistically significant difference.

Young people with disability spend more leisure time online than the national average

Our survey found that young people with disability spend more time online than most young people, whether during the week or on the weekend. Figure 10 shows that on weekdays in 2021, 42% of Australian young people with disability spent 3–5 hours online per day for fun/free time, compared with the national average of 36%. On the weekend, however, 42% of young people with disability reported having spent over 6 hours per day online (compared with the national average of 32%), while 15% of young people with disability said they were online for 11 hours or more per day (compared with the national average of 8%). However, spending longer periods online is associated with an increased likelihood of negative and hurtful online experiences (eSafety Commissioner 2021). It may also lead to increased family tension around internet use (Blackwell et al. 2016). These challenges are considered in greater depth in the next section.

Figure 10: Length of time young people with disability spent online for fun/free time on weekdays and weekends – comparison with the national average (% weekly or more often)

Length of time online	Weekdays		Weekends	
	With disability (%)	National average (%)	With disability (%)	National average (%)
Little or no time	2	3	1	1
0.5–2 hours	37 ↓	45	17 ↓	24
3–5 hours	42 ↑	36	40	42
6–8 hours	10	9	24 ↑	20
9–11 hours	4	3	10 ↑	7
More than 11 hours	4	3	8 ↑	5

**Average among Australian young people aged 8–17.*
Questions B3 and B4. About how long do you use the internet on an ordinary weekday (Monday to Friday)/weekend day (Saturday and Sunday) for fun/free time?
Bases: Young people with disability (8–17 years) (n=972); Australian young people (8–17 years) (n=3,590).
Note: Arrows denote results with a statistically significant difference

Navigating online risks

While the digital environment offers young people with disability many positive experiences, spending time online can also expose them to a range of online risks, including abuse, threats and potentially harmful content.

Time online can cause challenges in the daily lives of young people with disability

Our survey found that many young people with disability acknowledge that the length of time they are spending online is having a negative impact on their lives, with 61% reporting they had experienced problems stemming from time spent online (compared with the national average of 55%). As shown in Figure 11, young people with disability were more likely than the national average to have experienced conflicts with loved ones (70%, compared with 63%), to have gone without eating or sleeping (52%, compared with 41%) and to have seen their grades fall (45%, compared with 38%), because of time spent online. Almost 6 in 10 young people with disability said they had tried to spend less time online and were unable to do so (59%, compared with the national average of 55%).

While these findings raise some concerns about the difficulties of achieving a balanced lifestyle, they may also indicate that young people with disability are more likely than the national average to recognise the impact that long hours spent on the internet can have on their family life. Higher levels of family conflict stemming from internet use are consistent with their parents' or caregivers' more restrictive mediation practices (discussed later in this report). These findings suggest that young people and their families would benefit from online safety support that helps to reduce conflict and empowers them to build skills and digital practices for wellbeing.

Figure 11: Experiences connected to the time young people with disability spent online – comparison with the national average (% past 12 months)

Experience	Young people with disability (%)	National average* (%)
I have experienced conflicts with family or friends because of the time I spent on the internet	70 ↑	63
I think the amount of time I spend on the internet causes problems for me	61 ↑	55
I have tried unsuccessfully to spend less time on the internet	59 ↑	55
I have gone without eating or sleeping because of the time I spent on the internet	52 ↑	41
My grades have dropped because of the time I spent on the internet	45 ↑	38

**Average among Australian young people aged 8–17.*
Question F3: In the past year, how often have these things happened to you?
Bases: Young people with disability (8–17 years) (n=972); Australian young people (8–17 years) (n=3,590).
Note: Arrows denote results with a statistically significant difference.

Young people with disability (especially teens) are more likely to have experienced online abuse

Existing research indicates that Australians with disability experience higher-than-average rates of online abuse (eSafety Commissioner 2022). The structures of online communication, in terms of both platform design and the social conventions of internet users, very rarely provide for the needs of young people with cognitive, intellectual or behavioural disability. This is especially the case when it comes to making the tone of written messages understandable. Indeed, those with cognitive, intellectual or behavioural disability have been found to be especially at risk of nasty experiences for this reason (eSafety Commissioner 2022; Park et al. 2020).

As shown in Figure 12, a high proportion of young people with disability reported having been subjected to online abuse, with almost 6 in 10 saying they had been treated in a hurtful or nasty way online in the last 12 months (59%, compared with the national average of 45%). The survey found that 16% of young people with disability had been subjected to regular online abuse, with incidents occurring at least weekly or more often in the past year (compared with the national average of 9%).

The survey results indicate that young people with disability were more likely to have experienced all the main forms of hurtful treatment included in the survey, regardless of age, compared with the national average. They were more likely to have been called names (45%, compared with 33%), to have been harassed or embarrassed by others (26%, compared with 18%) and to have had lies or rumours spread about them online (25%, compared with 18%). Young people with disability were also more likely to have been threatened with physical harm (18%, compared with 12%) and to have received messages of hate speech (attacking their identity, gender, sexuality, race, religion or disability – 16%, compared with 11%).

Teens with disability were especially likely to have been subjected to online abuse. Seven in 10 reported having been treated in a hurtful or nasty way online (69%, compared with the national average of 54%), while almost half had been called names by others (48%, compared with 38%). More than 1 in 5 had been threatened with physical harm (24%) or had experienced hate speech (23%), well above the average rates for Australian young people.

Research indicates that intersectionality has an amplifying effect on the rates of online abuse among young people with disability (Lund & Ross 2021), though further research into this phenomenon among this section of the community is needed. In acknowledgement of this, the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability has included in its terms of reference ‘the particular situation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) people with disability’ (Gilroy 2022).

Figure 12: Experience of hurtful or nasty treatment among young people with disability – comparison with the national average* (% past 12 months)

Experience	Children (8–13 years)		Teens (14–17 years)		Total young people (8–17 years)	
	With disability (%)	National average (%)	With disability (%)	National average (%)	With disability (%)	National average (%)
They were treated in a hurtful or nasty way online	52 ↑	39	69 ↑	54	59 ↑	45
They were left out by others	44 ↑	33	54 ↑	41	48 ↑	36
They were called names by others	44 ↑	30	48 ↑	38	45 ↑	33
They had nasty or hurtful messages sent to them online	27 ↑	19	38 ↑	28	31 ↑	23
They were harassed or embarrassed by others on the internet	22 ↑	16	33 ↑	22	26 ↑	18
They had lies or rumours spread about them online	17 ↑	13	36 ↑	27	25 ↑	18
They were threatened with physical harm	14 ↑	10	24 ↑	16	18 ↑	12
Nasty or hurtful messages about them were passed around or posted where others could see	12	11	23 ↑	17	16 ↑	13
They experienced hate speech	11 ↑	9	23 ↑	14	16 ↑	11
They had personal information posted about them without agreeing	10 ↑	7	15 ↑	11	12 ↑	9
They had inappropriate private photos posted without them agreeing	6	5	9 ↑	6	7 ↑	6

**National average: Australian young people 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 I4. Have any of these things happened to you in the last year?
Bases: Children with disability (8–13 years) (n=562); Teens with disability (14–17 years) (n=410); Total young people with disability (8–17 years) (n=972); National average: Children (8–13 years) (n=2,241); Teens (14–17 years) (n=1,349); Total young people (8–17 years) (n=3,590).
Note: Arrows denote results with a statistically significant difference to national average in same age group.

Young people with disability are more likely to recognise that they have treated someone else in a hurtful or nasty way online

Recently published research indicates that young people with disability are more likely than the national average to have been involved in incidents of online abuse. As noted in these studies, young people's experiences of ADHD and autism can contribute to challenges in managing frustration and in perspective-taking. In the digital environment, these challenges can result in behaviours that can be associated with a higher likelihood of treating others in ways perceived as hurtful or nasty (Touloupis & Athanasiades 2022; Liu et al. 2021).

Consistent with this research, our survey shows that over a third of young people with disability (34%) recognised that they had treated someone in a hurtful way online in the past 12 months, compared with the national average of 26% (Figure 13). This may indicate a greater willingness by young people with disability to reflect on their actions or a higher understanding of the impact of their behaviour.

A contributing factor to this difference may also be the level of online abuse received by young people with disability from others, which (as noted earlier) is much higher than the national average (59%, compared with 45%). Given that young people with disability were also more likely to respond to online abuse by retaliating online (30%, compared with the national average of 25%), there is a greater likelihood of them having treated others in a similarly hurtful or nasty way.

Figure 13: Young people with disability who treated someone else in a hurtful or nasty way – comparison with the national average (% past 12 months)

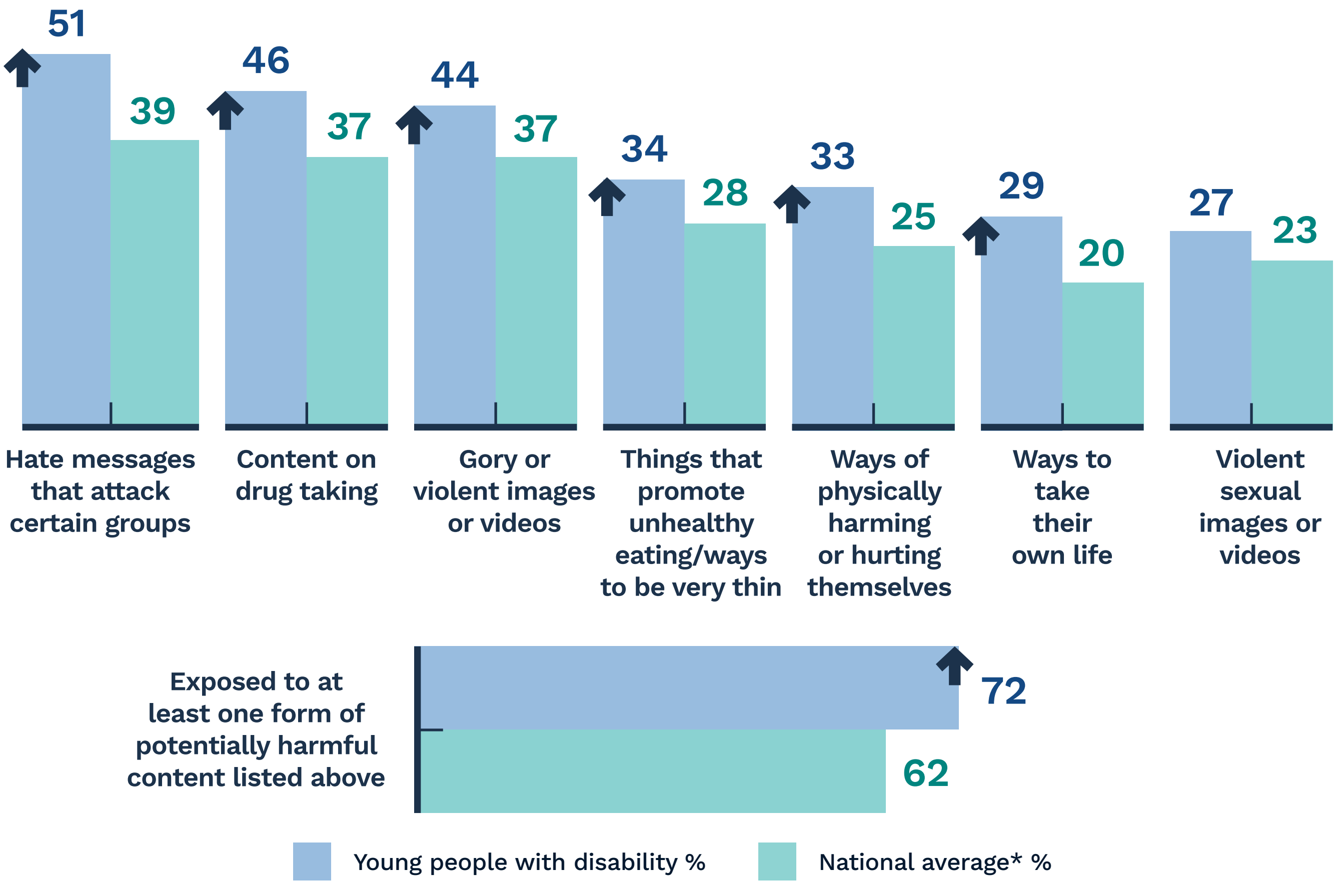
**National average = average among all Australian children aged 8–17.*
Question I3a. In the past year, how often, if ever, have you treated anyone in a hurtful or nasty way online? Question I6. Still thinking about that last time any of these things happened, did you do any of these things afterwards?
Bases: Young people with disability (8–17 years) (n=972); Australian young people (8–17 years) (n=3,590).
Note: Arrows denote results with a statistically significant difference.

Teens with disability are more likely to have been exposed to potentially harmful online content

eSafety's *Mind the Gap* research indicates that over half of Australia's young people aged 14–17 have been exposed to potentially harmful online content, with potential risks to physical and psychological wellbeing associated with that exposure (eSafety Commissioner 2022). Online content showing graphic violence, sexually explicit material and ways to self-harm is accessible to all who use the internet, including young people with disability.

The survey found that almost three-quarters of young people with disability aged 14–17 had been exposed to at least one kind of potentially harmful content (72%, compared with the national average of 62%). As shown in Figure 14, young people with disability were, on average, much more likely to have been exposed to every major type of potentially harmful content included in the survey, and especially to hate messages that attack certain groups (51%), content on drug taking (46%), and gory or violent online images or videos (44%).

Figure 14: Exposure by teens with disability (aged 14–17) to potentially harmful content in the past year – comparison with the national average (% past 12 months)



*National average = average among all Australian children aged 14–17.
Question G4. In the past year, have you seen websites or online discussion where people talk about or show any of these things?
Bases: Teens with disability (14–17 years) (n=410); Australian teens (14–17 years) (n=1,349).
Note: Arrows denote results with a statistically significant difference.

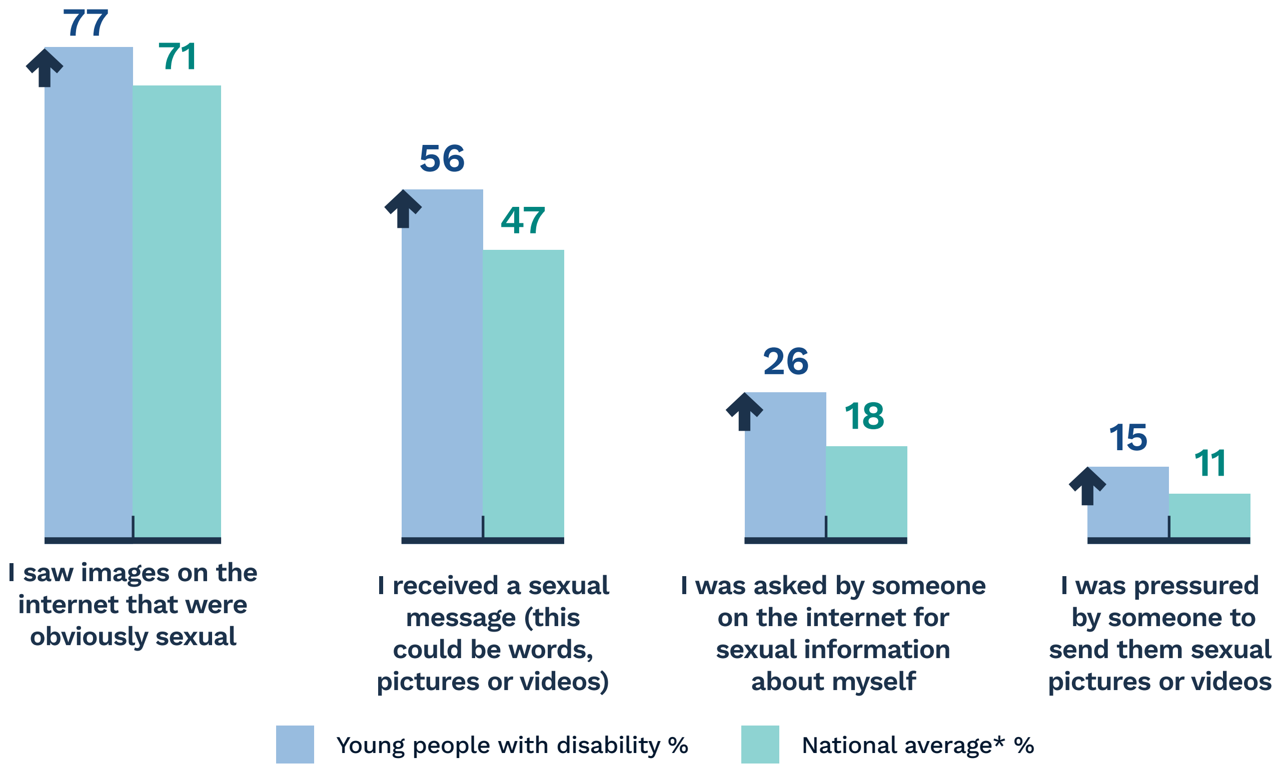
Teens with disability are more likely to have encountered sexual material online and to have received requests for sexual information and images

Recent studies have found that exposure to sexual content is almost unavoidable among young people who use social media (Lewis et al. 2018), a finding supported by our survey data. However, young people with disability were shown to be even more likely to have encountered sexual content and sex-themed communication compared with the national average. It is possible that young people with disability may consider sexual material online to be a resource that fills gaps in their sex and relationships education, and therefore may view it more often. Internationally, many barriers to young people with disability accessing comprehensive sex and relationships education have been identified (McDaniels & Fleming 2016; Michielsen & Brockschmidt 2021). More research is needed on the degree to which Australian sex and relationships education meets the needs of young people with disability, and on encounters with sexual material online by young people with disability.

The data in Figure 15 reveals that over three-quarters of teens with disability had seen sexual images on the internet (77%, compared with the national average of 71%) and over half had received a sexual message (words, pictures and videos) in the past year (56%, compared with 47%).

Teens with disability are also more likely to be asked for sexual information or images of themselves. One in 4 teens with disability had been asked for sexual information about themselves (26%, compared with the national average of 18%), while 15% had been pressured to send sexual pictures or videos of themselves, compared with the national average of 11%.

Figure 15: Exposure to sexual material in the past year by teens with disability (aged 14–17) – comparison with the national average (% past 12 months)



**National average = average among all Australian children aged 14–17.*
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: Teens with disability (14–17 years) (n=410); Australian teens (14–17 years) (n=1,349).
Note: Arrows denote results with a statistically significant difference.

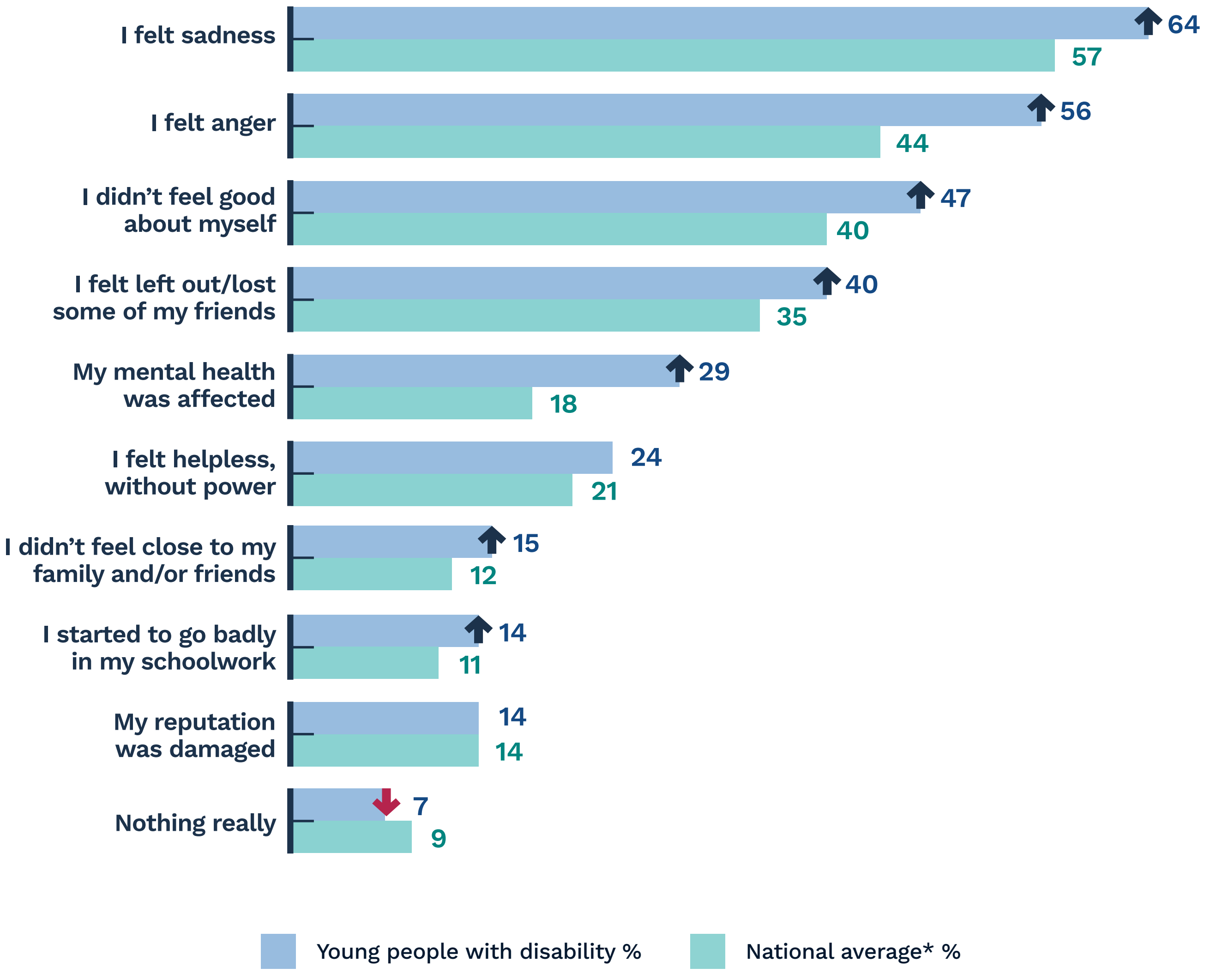
Online abuse can have a profound impact on young people with disability

As established above, online spaces play a crucial role in facilitating social connections among young people with disability by removing or reducing some of the barriers that young people with disability may encounter when socialising face-to-face. For this reason, hurtful online experiences can be especially harmful for this cohort, with potential repercussions for friendships, family and mental health.

After their most recent hurtful online experience, young people with disability were more likely than the national average to have felt sad (64%, compared with 57% – see Figure 16) or angry (56%, compared with 44%), or to have not felt good about themselves (47%, compared with 40%). Almost half of the young people surveyed reported that their sense of social connection had suffered, with many saying they felt left out or that they had lost some of their friends (40%, compared with the national average of 35%).

The survey found that almost 1 in 3 young people with disability had experienced mental health issues because of their latest hurtful online experience, which was significantly higher than the national average (29%, compared with 18%). This may reflect (at least in part) the greater role that online spaces play in the social connections of young people with disability and the longer amounts of time young people with disability spend in the online world.

Figure 16: Consequences of the most recent hurtful or nasty online experience among young people with disability – comparison with the national average (% past 12 months)



**National average = average among all Australian children aged 8–17.*
Question I4. Have any of these things happened to you online in the last year?
Question I5. Thinking about the last time any of these things happened to you, did any of the following things happen?
Bases: Young people with disability (8–17 years) who had had a hurtful or nasty online experience (n=572);
Australian young people (8–17 years) who had had a hurtful or nasty online experience (n=1,613).

Responses to negative online experiences

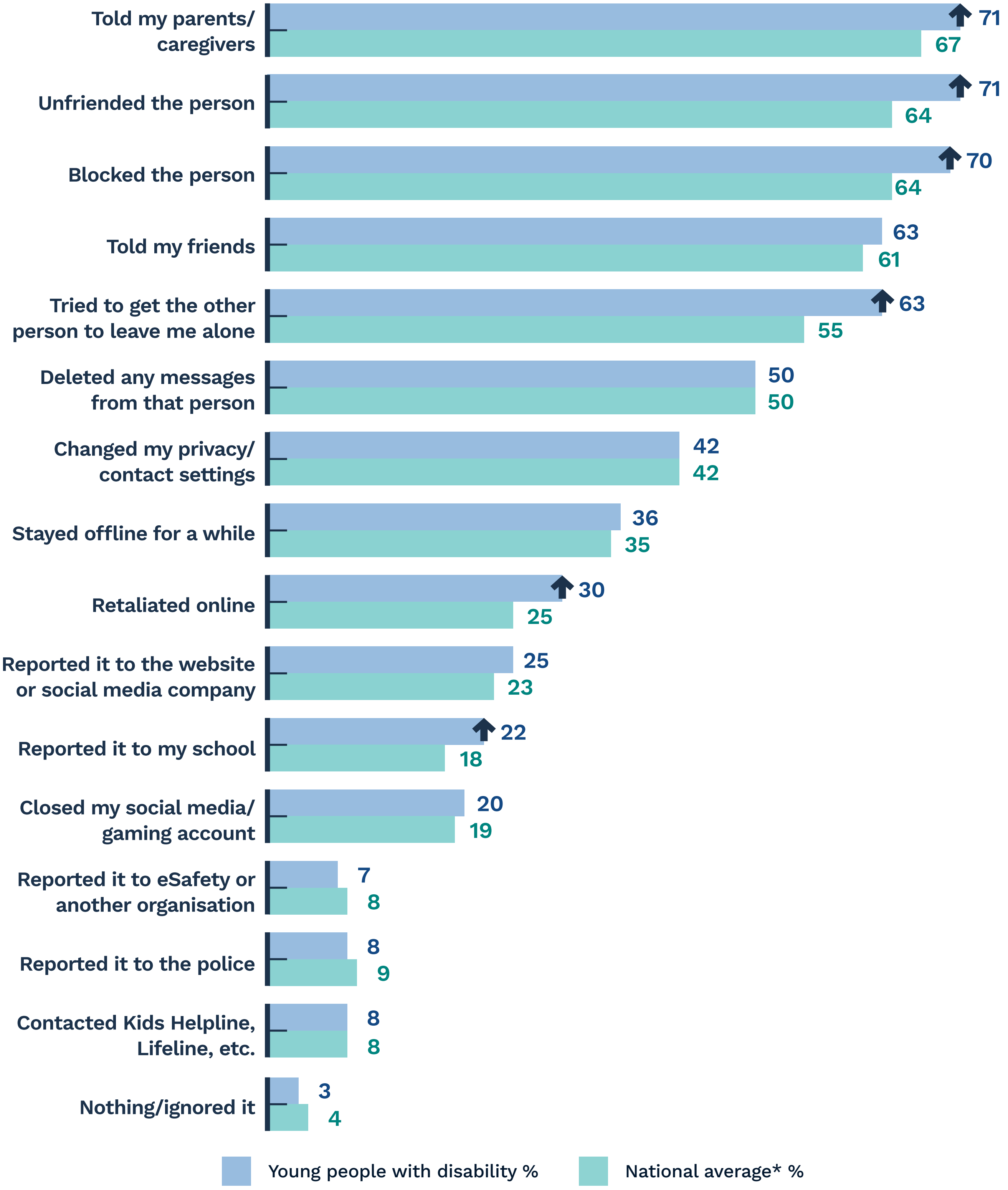
Young people with disability respond proactively to negative online experiences

The survey found that young people with disability responded to negative online experiences using a range of actions, most commonly telling family and friends and using technical solutions to try to avoid encountering the same harm again (Figure 17). More than 7 in 10 young people with disability who had had a negative online experience informed their parents or caregiver (71%), a proportion higher than the national average of 67%.

The survey also found that young people with disability were more likely than the national average to take additional steps in response to a negative online experience. More than 7 in 10 unfriended (71%) or blocked the person from contacting them (70%), compared with 64% of young Australians overall. As noted above, young people with disability were also more likely to retaliate online after a negative online experience, with almost a third doing so (30%, compared with an average of 25% of young Australians overall).

The response of young people with disability to negative online experiences is also likely to vary based on their individual lived experience of disability. While it's not possible to disaggregate the current sample by disability type, previous eSafety research found that young people with intellectual disability employ different response strategies, with a higher tendency to shut down their use of social media (eSafety Commissioner 2020). This points to a need for research that looks further into the digital experiences of young people and how their responses to online risk differ according to disability type.

Figure 17: Action taken by young people with disability after their most recent negative online experience – comparison with the national average (% past 12 months)



**Average among Australians aged 8–17.*
Question I6. Still thinking about that last time any of these things happened, did you do any of these things afterwards?
Bases: Young people with disability (8–17 years) who had had a negative online experience in the past year (n=667); Australian young people (8–17 years) who had had a negative online experience in the past year (n=2,050).
Note: Arrows denote results with a statistically significant difference. Where there are no arrows, the survey found no statistically significant difference between the response levels of young people with disability and the national average.

Perceptions of the internet by young people with disability

While young people with disability recognise the opportunities provided by the online world, most have a balanced perception of the internet, acknowledging both its benefits and its potential harms.

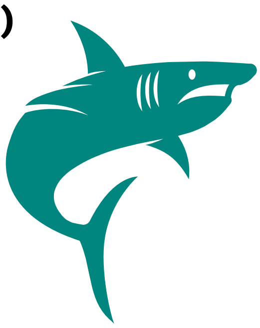
‘If the internet were an animal, what animal would it be?’

We asked young people, ‘If the internet were an animal, what animal would it be?’ to capture what they think about the internet. The answers provided by young people with disability reveal that they perceive the internet as something that is dangerous like a predator, familiar like a pet, and vast (perhaps in terms both of its presence and content). As indicated in the word cloud shown in Figure 18, young people with disability were most likely to describe the internet as:

A predatory animal (31%)

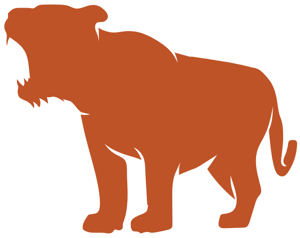
‘Shark. They are powerful, strong and it has its good and bad traits. Sharks explore and are curious but then they are strong and can attack like the internet.’

(Girl, 13, QLD, capital city)



‘Lion. Because it hunts its prey like cyber bullies. But is also really clever.’

(Girl, 13, VIC, capital city)



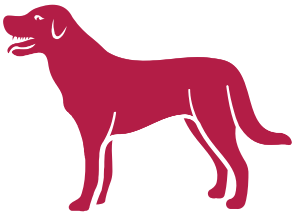
A domestic animal (14%)

‘I think the internet would be a cat, probably because the internet can be warm and welcoming and cute but tear you to shreds the moment you’re part of a minority or your opinion doesn’t line up with someone else’s.’

(Girl, 16, VIC, capital city)

‘A dog, because they can make you feel comfortable and scared depending on the breed.’

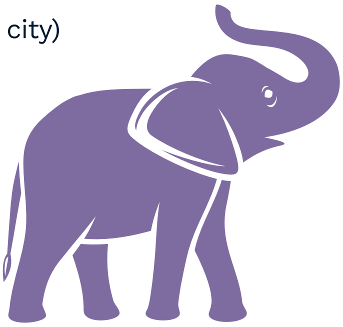
(Girl, 16, QLD, capital city)



A large animal (9%)

‘An elephant … LARGE and wise, with a good memory.’

(Boy, 12, QLD, regional)



‘It would be a blue whale because it is massive and moves all around the world.’

(Boy, 8, QLD, capital city)

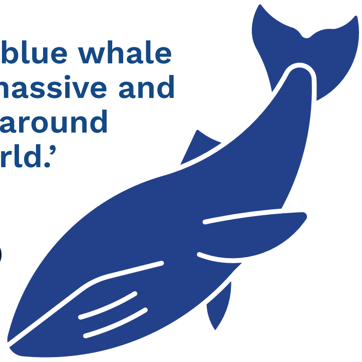


Figure 18: Word cloud of animals chosen by young people with disability in response to the question, ‘If the internet were an animal, what animal would it be?’

Question L4: If the internet were an animal, what animal would it be?
Base: Young people with disability (8–17 years) (n=927).
Note: Some entries corrected for spelling.

Young people with disability view the internet as both potentially useful and potentially harmful

The responses of young people with disability to the question, ‘If the internet were an animal, what animal would it be?’ showed no prevailing sentiment towards the internet (see Figure 19 for a selection of responses). Almost a third of their responses point to a positive perception of the internet (29%), while just over a quarter had a negative perception (26%). Just over 1 in 5 expressed a mixed view of the internet (22%), and the same proportion (22%) had perceived it in neutral terms.[2] The main themes expressed in young people’s rationales for their animal choice (shown in Figure 20) were *fast, slow, smart* and *dangerous*, reflecting the contrasting range of experiences young people can have online.

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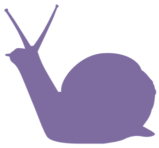
2. A term was regarded as neutral when the adjective used was neither good nor bad, such as ‘big’ or ‘complex’.

Figure 19: Selected animal choices and rationales by young people with disability

‘A large spider. Won’t bother you if you ignore it but will attack you if you interfere in the wrong way.’

(Gender not listed, 16, QLD, capital city)

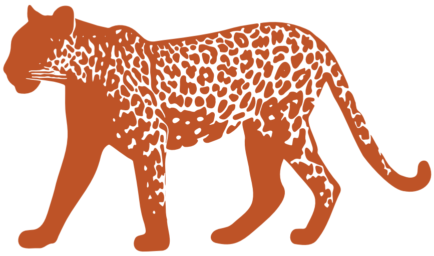


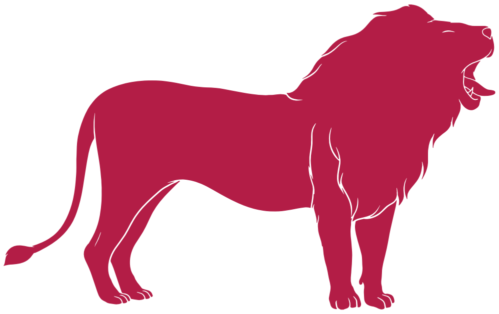
‘It is a snail because it is very slow (and the internet can be slow sometimes) and it takes up a lot of people’s time.’

(Girl, 15, WA, capital city)

‘It would be a leopard. Leopards have many spots and [are] very fast, as the internet is very diverse and quickly changing.’

(Boy, 17, QLD, capital city)



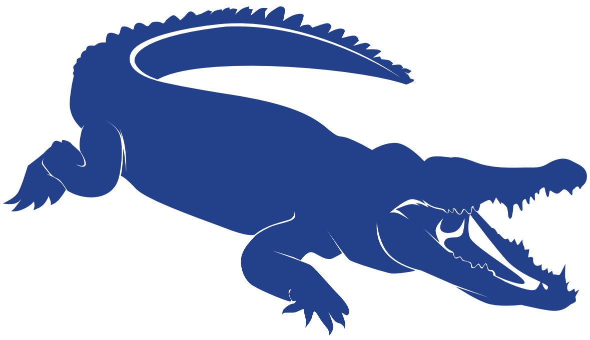


‘A lion, because a lion is king and ruler of the jungle just like the internet and technology rule the human world.’

(Boy, 9, SA, capital city)

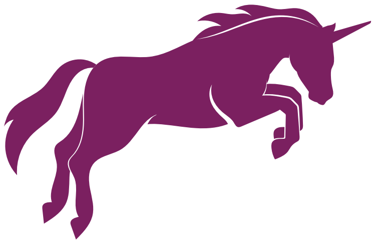
‘Fox, as it’s sly in the ways it infiltrates our lives and hurts us. Can be cute too.’

(Boy, 10, NSW, capital city)



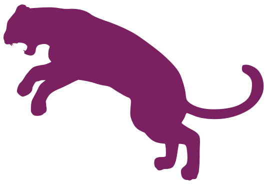
‘Crocodile, as it can pounce on you and eat you without you realising something is wrong.’

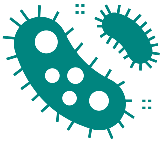
(Girl, 16, TAS, capital city)



‘Either a unicorn full of magic and comfort or something predatory like a cougar. It can be the most helpful thing and the most scary.’

(Girl, 17, SA, regional)





‘It would be a bacteria or small animal we can’t see. It’s very complex and we aren’t sure how it works fully.’

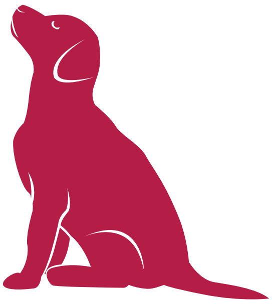
(Prefer not to say, 17, QLD, capital city)

‘It’s a chameleon, as it can easily change and adapt to fit its surroundings. It’s sneaky and it’s cool.’

(Girl, 17, VIC, capital city)

‘It would be a loyal dog. It agrees with me all the time.’

(Boy, 8, SA, capital city)



‘A centipede because it has many legs, each one representing how the internet branches off in many directions. It also consists of many sections of body that work together to keep the centipede moving as does the internet consist of many different sections that run together to keep the online world moving.’

(Girl, 9, QLD, regional)

‘A panda. Looks cuddly and welcoming but can be unpredictable and dangerous.’

(Boy, 12, TAS, capital city)

‘A peacock because it is interesting and confusing.’

(Girl, 11, VIC, capital city)

Question L4: If the internet were an animal, what animal would it be?
Base: Young people with disability (8–17 years) (n=927).

Perceptions of the internet by young people with disability

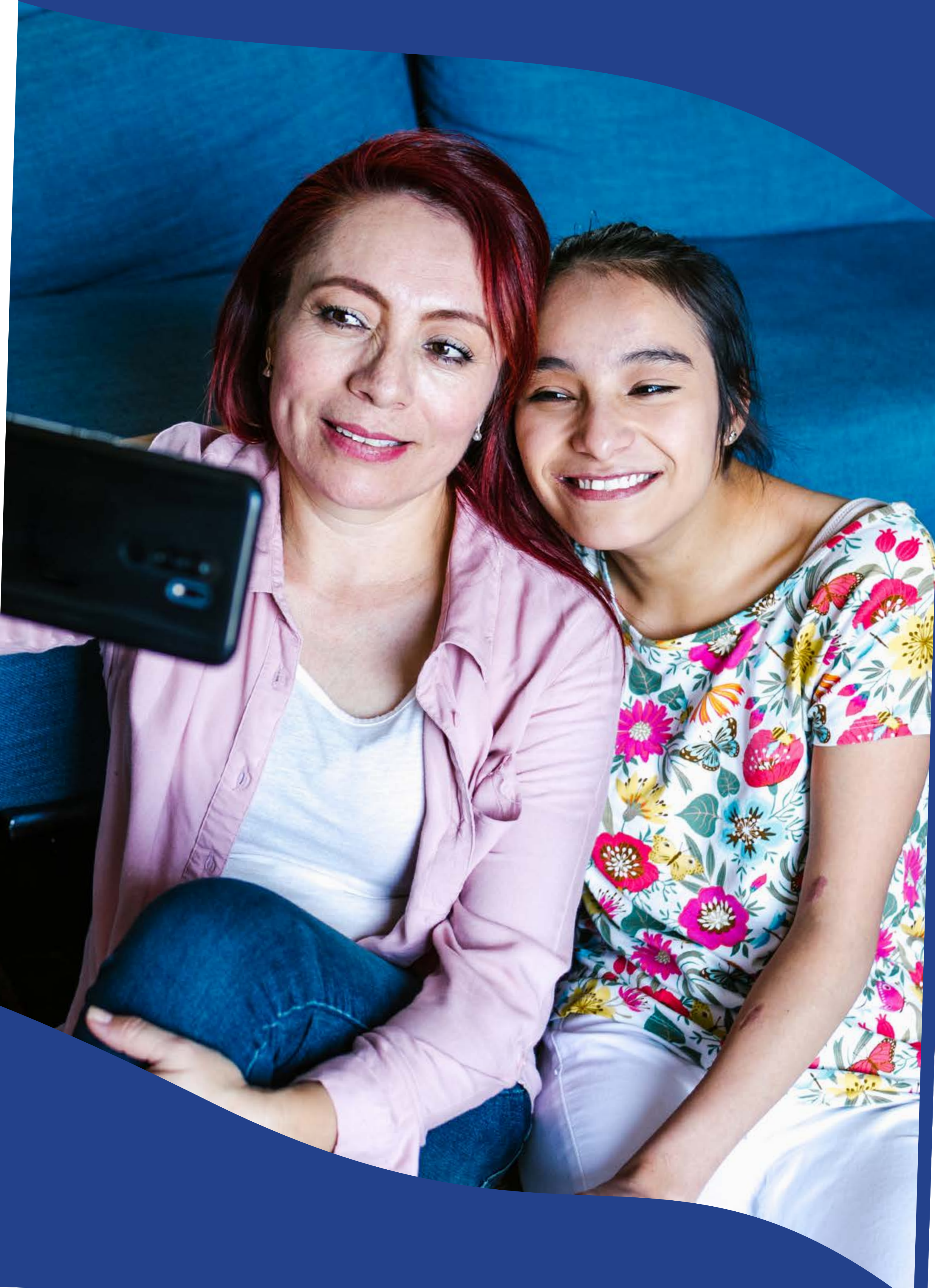
Young people with disability view the internet as both fast (like a leopard) and slow (like a snail), which may indicate that some of their positive, negative and mixed attitudes to the internet come from good and/or bad experiences with connectivity. In light of our finding that young people with disability are high-volume users of the internet, having a fast connection is likely experienced as positive, especially when gaming. Likewise, a slow connection may mean longer wait times for connecting with friends or entertainment or for sharing creative content, causing frustration.

Figure 20: Word cloud of themes in responses by young people with disability to the question, ‘If the internet were an animal, which animal would it be?’

Question L4: If the internet were an animal, what animal would it be?
Base: Young people with disability (8–17 years) (n=927).
Note: Some entries corrected for spelling.

Young people's positive perceptions of the internet may be centred around its usefulness in their lives. We have learnt that the internet is a valuable source of health information and emotional support for this cohort. This may account for the common view among young people with disability that the internet is smart and able to provide information they want and need.

Young people with disability may have negative views of the internet based on the harmful content they encounter at higher rates, and the more frequent negative interactions they have with others online. Many described the internet as dangerous (like a crocodile), perhaps suggesting that they feel other people and experiences on the internet can harm them. This perception likely stems from the previously highlighted vulnerabilities of this cohort to online harm and hurtful experiences.



Digital parenting of young people with disability

Encouraging children to explore the online environment while minimising their exposure to potential harms is a challenge for all parents or caregivers. While many young people with disability are adept at navigating the digital world independently, others may require additional assistance to ensure they have a safe and enjoyable online experience. Establishing a dialogue with a young person about their online experiences is an important facet of online safety and digital parenting. As discussed earlier in the report, the majority of young people with disability discuss negative online experiences with their parents/caregivers, especially in their younger years. This helps young people to make sense of their experience and to find the right support if more is needed. The survey plotted each young person's experience of hurtful or negative incidents online against the level of parental awareness of those experiences. Similar rates of child experiences and parental recall are taken to indicate a greater level of communication about online safety matters and a higher level of understanding among parents or caregivers of the potential impact of negative online experiences.

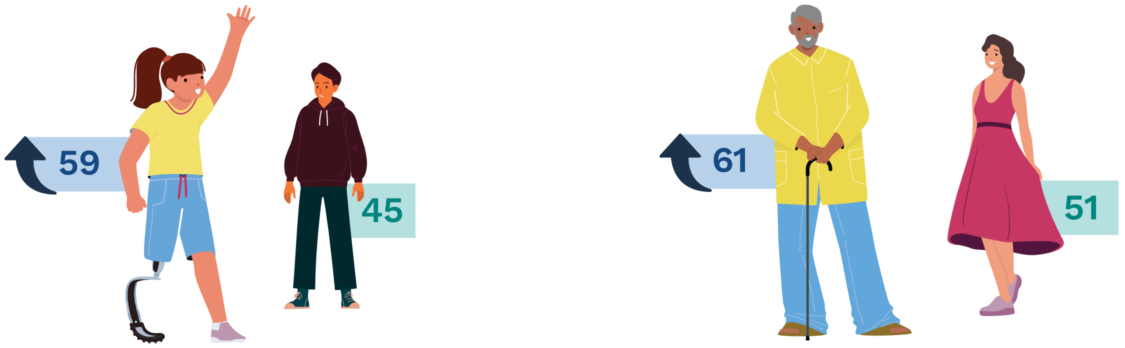
Parents/caregivers of young people with disability are more likely to recall being told by their child of hurtful online experiences

The survey results indicate that children with disability and their parents or caregivers are, on average, more communicative about their negative online experiences than Australian children overall (Figure 21). 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.

Recall of their child's negative experiences was higher among parents/caregivers of children with disability. Six in 10 parents/caregivers whose child with disability had been treated in a hurtful or nasty way online could recall their child's experience (61%), a level well above the national average of 51%. This may be indicative of the level of impact these online experiences had on the children, enhancing their parent's/caregiver's recall of the event when asked.

Nevertheless, the survey showed that 39% of parents/caregivers of young people with disability could not recall their child's nasty or hurtful experience. This level was consistent between parents/caregivers of both teens and younger children with disability, suggesting there is scope for increasing awareness of the impact of negative online experiences.

Figure 21: Hurtful or nasty treatment online (young person's reported experience and parent's/caregiver's awareness) – comparison with the national average (% past 12 months)



Young people who had been treated in a hurtful or nasty way online in the past 12 months

Parents/caregivers who were aware that their child had been treated in a hurtful or nasty way online

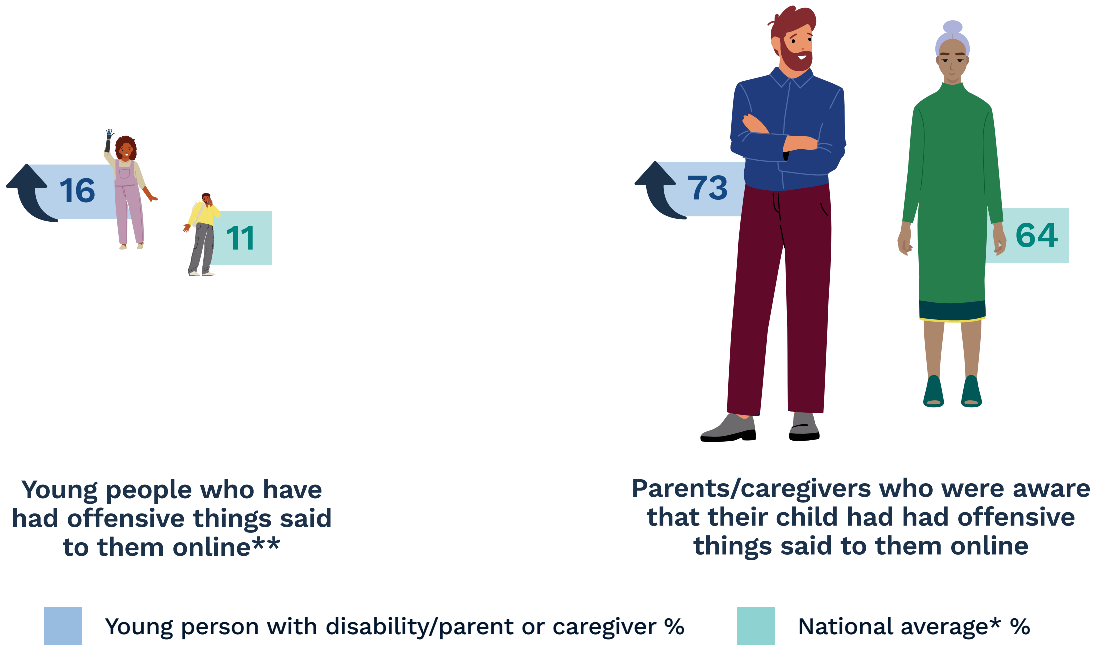
🟦 Young person with disability/parent or caregiver %   🟩 National average* %

**Average among young people aged 8–17, or parents/caregivers of a young person 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 X 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: Young people with disability (8–17 years) (n=972); Parents/caregivers of young people with disability who were treated in a hurtful or nasty way online (n=572); National average: Young people (8–17 years) (n=3,590); Parents/caregivers of a young person who was treated in a hurtful or nasty way online (n=1,613).
Note: Arrows denote results with a statistically significant difference.

Parents/caregivers of young people with disability are especially aware of their child's online experiences of hate speech

As discussed earlier in the report, approximately 1 in 6 young people with disability (16%) have had offensive things said to them online, attacking their Indigeneity, gender, race, sexuality and/or disability (Figure 22). The survey found that parental awareness of these experiences was comparatively high (73%, compared with the national average of 64%). This is likely associated with an understanding among parents and caregivers of the prevalence of hate speech and the impacts that it can have on young people with disability.

Figure 22: Exposure to hate speech online (young person's reported experience and parent's/caregiver's awareness) – comparison with the national average (% past 12 months)



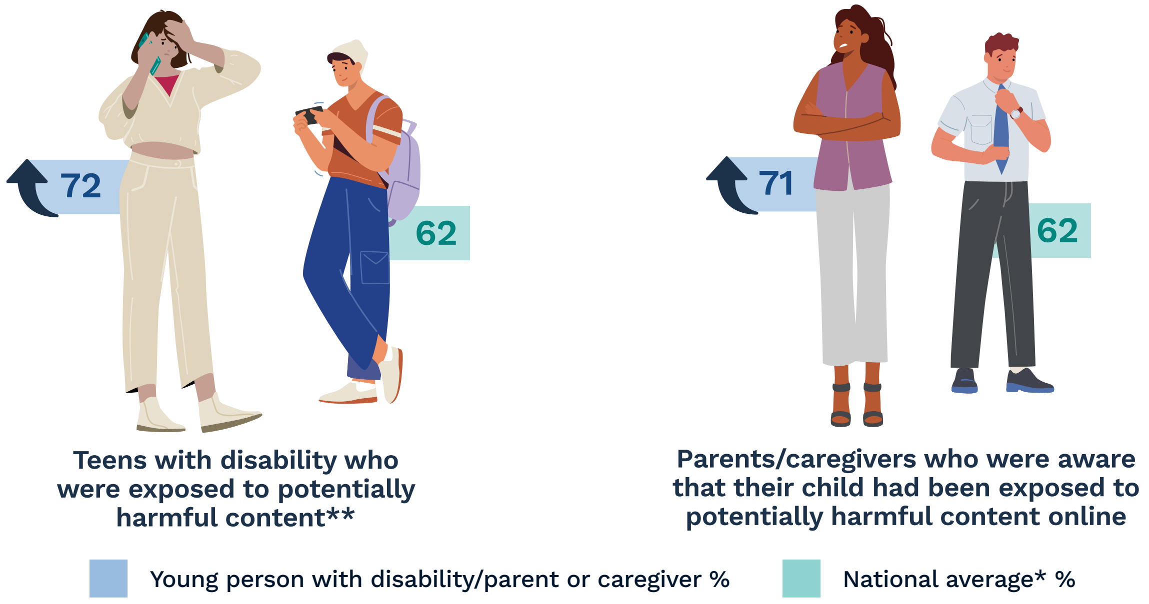
**Average among young people aged 8–17, or parents/caregivers of a young person aged 8–17.*
***Because of their race, ethnicity, gender, nationality, sexual orientation, religion, age or disability.*
Question S15. As far as you are aware, in the past year, have any of these things happened to your child aged X online?
Question I4. Have any of these things happened to you online in the last year?
Bases: Young people with disability (8–17 years) (n=972); Parents/caregivers of a young person with disability who had offensive things said to them online (n=157); National average: Young people (8–17 years) (n=3,590); Parents/caregivers of a young person who had offensive things said to them online (n=391).

Parents/caregivers of teens with disability are more likely to recall their child’s exposure to potentially harmful online content

As described earlier, young people with disability are more likely to have been exposed to potentially harmful online content (72%, compared with the national average of 62% – see Figure 23). However, the willingness of young people to share these experiences with their parents/caregivers can be inhibited by a range of factors, including embarrassment or sensitivity about stigmatised content, or fear of punishment (eSafety Commissioner 2021). Anxiety about having internet access reduced or restricted may also play a part in the decision-making process.

Parents/caregivers of young people with disability were more likely than the national average to recall their child’s encounter with potentially harmful online content (71%, compared with 62%). This suggests that young people with disability may be more open to sharing these experiences than other teens, or that there is possibly a greater awareness among parents/caregivers of young people with disability of the potential damage such content can inflict.

Figure 23: Exposure to potentially harmful content (teen’s reported experience and parent’s/caregiver’s awareness) – comparison with the national average (% past 12 months)



**Average among teens aged 14–17, or parents/caregivers of a teen aged 14–17.*
***Potentially harmful content includes hate messages that attack certain groups, sexual violence, gore, information on self-harm and ways to take their own life, and images of illicit drug taking.*
Question G4. In the past year, have you seen websites or online discussions where people talk about or show any of these things? Question S16. As far as you are aware, in the past year, has your child seen a website or an online discussion where people talk about or show any of these things?
Bases: Teens with disability (14–17 years) (n=410); Parents/caregivers of young people with disability who had been exposed to potentially harmful online content (n=294); National average: Teens (14–17 years) (n=1,349); Parents/caregivers of a teen who had been exposed to potentially harmful content online (n=1,281).
Note: Arrows denote results with a statistically significant difference.

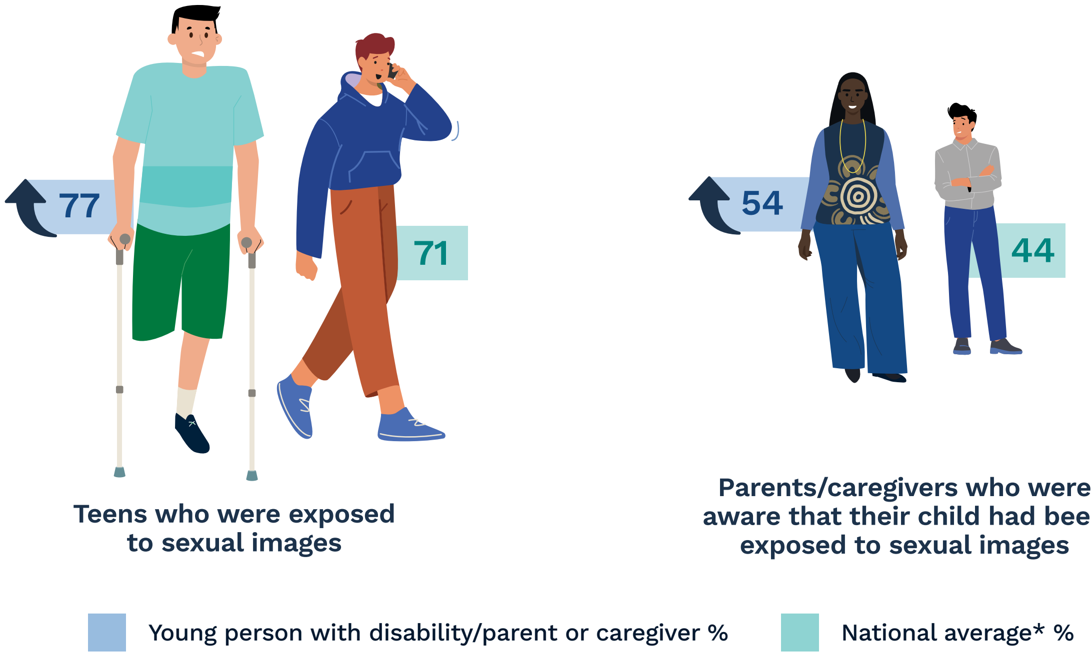
Parents/caregivers of young people with disability are, on average, more likely to recall their child's encounter with online sexual material

As shown in Figure 24, the survey found that, on average, teens with disability were more likely to have encountered sexual images (77%, compared with the national average of 71%), though they were no more likely than the national average to share their experience with their parent/caregiver (63%, compared with 61%).

It is possible that teens with disability encounter sexual images online at a higher rate due to the scarcity of other available sources of information about sex, sexuality and pleasure. Stigma and discriminatory beliefs about young people with disability and sexuality may both limit their access to resources and be a barrier to sharing unwanted encounters with sexual material with their parents/caregivers.

Parents/caregivers of teens with disability were more likely than the national average to recall their child's encounter with sexual online content (54%, compared with 44%), perhaps indicating a higher level of engagement concerning their child's online experiences.

Figure 24: Exposure to sexual images (teen's reported experience and parent's/caregiver's awareness) – comparison with the national average (% past 12 months)



Teens who were exposed to sexual images

Parents/caregivers who were aware that their child had been exposed to sexual images

**Average among Australian teens aged 14–17, or parents/caregivers of a teen aged 14–17.*
Question S18. As far as you are aware, in the past year, have any of these things happened to your child aged X online?
Question G3. Frequency of seeing sexual images online in past year?
Bases: Teens with disability (14–17 years) (n=410); Parents/caregivers of teens with disability who had seen sexual images online in the past year (n=314); National average: Teens (14–17 years) (n=1,349); Parents/caregivers of a teen who had seen sexual images on the internet in the past year (n=966).
Note: Arrows denote results with a statistically significant difference.

Parental mediation practices

As shown in the *Mind the Gap* report (eSafety Commissioner 2022), most parents/caregivers in Australia engage in a variety of mediation techniques to maximise the safety and wellbeing of their children while they are online.

Our research examined three types of parental mediation practices:

- **'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.

Almost all parents and caregivers of children with disability use education and encouragement to guide their child online

The survey found that parents of young people with disability were as likely to employ enabling mediation strategies as the national average (see Figure 25). Nearly all parents/caregivers of young people with disability had, in the past year, talked to their child about using the internet safely (95%), explained why some content is appropriate or inappropriate (92%) and suggested ways to use the internet safely (94%). Young people with disability reported that their parents had delivered online safety information (81%) and suggested steps to take if something has upset them online (83%) – figures that are in line with the national average.

Figure 25: Enabling mediation (parent's/caregiver's use of enabling strategy and their child's awareness) – comparison with the national average (% past 12 months)

Strategy	Parent or caregiver/ young person perspective	Young people with disability (%)	National average* (%)
Talk to them about what to do if something bothers or upsets them online	Parent/caregiver	95	94
	Young person	83	83
Suggest ways to use the internet safely	Parent/caregiver	94	93
	Young person	81	81
Explain why some websites are appropriate or inappropriate	Parent/caregiver	92	92
	Young person	82	81
Encourage them to explore and learn things on the internet	Parent/caregiver	91	90
	Young person	70	69
Do online activities with them**	Parent/caregiver	88	89
	Young person	70	71

**Average among Australian young people aged 8–17, or parents/caregivers of a young person 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 X used the internet? Question K1. Have your parents, friends or teachers done any of the following?
Bases: Young people with disability (8–17 years) (n=972); Parents/caregivers of a young person with disability (n=972); National average: Young people (8–17 years) (n=3,590); Parents/caregivers of a young person (n=3,590).
Note: The survey found no statistically significant difference between the response levels of young people with disability or their parent/caregiver, and the national average.

Parents and caregivers of young people with disability are less likely to restrict their child's access to gaming and media viewing platforms

Our survey results indicate that while many parents/caregivers of young people with disability apply some form of restriction to their child's online activities, they are generally less likely to do so than the national average, especially in connection with play-centred activities. As shown in Figure 26, when compared to the national average, parents/caregivers of young people with disability were less likely to restrict access to video clips such as YouTube (42%, compared with the national average of 46%), online film or music content such as Netflix and Spotify (37%, compared with 41%) and virtual worlds such as Minecraft or Roblox (50%, compared with 56%). This may indicate that parents/caregivers of young people with a disability acknowledge the benefits of online play to their child's wellbeing. The data could also point to a lower awareness of the risks associated with online gaming, indicating that further research into this area is desirable.

Social networking activities attracted the highest levels of restrictive mediation. Over 6 in 10 parents/caregivers of young people with disability restricted their child's access to social media sites (63%, in line with the national average of 65%) and their use of social media video communications services (64%, compared with the national average of 66%).

Young people with disability appear to have a fair understanding of the platforms to which parental rules apply. As the data in Figure 26 reveals, there was a small difference between the proportion of parents/caregivers who have restricted their child's access to each platform and their child's awareness of that restriction. This suggests that while many parents/caregivers of young people with disability have an open dialogue with their children about their online activities, there is scope for ongoing improvement across the population as a whole. These results further emphasise the importance of communication and partnership between parents and young people with disability regarding online access and safety.

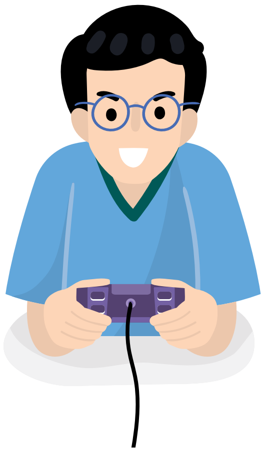


Figure 26: Parent's/caregiver's restriction of their child's access to online activity: Child is not allowed to do activity, or is allowed but with permission or supervision – comparison with the national average (% past 12 months)

Online activity	Parent or caregiver/ young person perspective	Young people with disability (%)	National average* (%)
Listen to or watch music or films (e.g. on Spotify, Netflix)	Parent/caregiver	37 ↓	41
	Young person	35 ↓	39
Watch video clips (e.g. on YouTube)	Parent/caregiver	42 ↓	46
	Young person	39 ↓	44
Spend time in a virtual world (e.g. Roblox, Minecraft)	Parent/caregiver	50 ↓	56
	Young person	48 ↓	54
Visit a social networking site (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat)	Parent/caregiver	63	65
	Young person	59	61
Use a web or phone camera (e.g. for FaceTime or Facebook Messenger)	Parent/caregiver	64 ↓	66
	Young person	60	62

**Average among Australian young people aged 8–17, or parents/caregivers of a young person aged 8–17.*
Question S10. Do you allow your child aged X 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: Young people with disability (8–17 years) (n=972); Parents/caregivers of a young person with disability (n=972); National average: Young people (8–17 years) (n=3,590); Parents/caregivers of a young person (n=3,590).
Note: Arrows denote results with a statistically significant difference..

Most parents and caregivers of young people with disability set rules about the amount of time their child spends online

Like most Australian parents/caregivers, those of young people with disability set rules around when their child can go online and for how long (at 58%, this is consistent with the national average of 59% – see Figure 27). Young people (with and without disability) were far more likely to report that their parents/caregivers set rules about their time online than were the parents/caregivers themselves, possibly indicating young people's sensitivity to any rule that might reduce their internet usage, such as rules relating to bedtimes or scheduled homework sessions.

Figure 27: Parent's/caregiver's setting rules about their child's internet use (parent's/caregiver's setting rules and young person's awareness) – comparison with the national average (% past 12 months)

Strategy	Parent or caregiver/ young person perspective	Young people with disability (%)	National average* (%)
Rules about when your child is allowed to go online, and for how long	Parent/caregiver	58	59
	Young person	83	85

**Average among Australian young people aged 8–17, or parents/caregivers of a young person 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: Young people with disability (8–17 years) (n=972); Parents/caregivers of young people with disability (n=972); National average: Young people (8–17 years) (n=3,590); Parents/caregivers of a young person (n=3,590).
Note: Where there are no arrows, the survey found no statistically significant difference between the response levels of young people with disability or their parent/caregiver, and the national average.

While most parents/caregivers set rules to limit their child's time online, the survey results indicate that many young people regard these restrictions as onerous and find ways to get around them. As shown in Figure 28, 80% of young people with disability reported that they had spent more time on the internet than their parents/caregivers had allowed them to, compared with the national average of 76%. A large proportion of young people with disability reported that they had hidden their internet use from their parents in the past 12 months (50%, compared with the national average of 45%). Children with disability (aged 8–13) were less likely than teens (aged 14–17) to have hidden the length of time they spend online from their parents/caregivers (46%, compared with 55% among teens with disability), a trend that is consistent with the national average. As noted earlier, the length of time spent online by young people with disability is a source of conflict for many families, underscoring the importance of maintaining an ongoing and open dialogue between parents/caregivers and young people regarding technology use.

Figure 28: Young people and parental/caregiver internet rule adherence, by age – comparison with the national average (% past 12 months)

Statement	Children (8–13 years)		Teens (14–17 years)		Total young people (8–17 years)	
	With disability (%)	National average (%)	With disability (%)	National average (%)	With disability (%)	National average (%)
I have spent more time on the internet than my parents/caregiver allowed me to	82 ↑	77	77	75	80 ↑	76
I had to hide my internet use from my parents/caregiver	46 ↑	41	55	50	50 ↑	45

**Average among Australian young people in each age cohort.*
Question F3. In the past year, how often have these things happened to you?
Bases: Children with disability (8–13 years) (n=562); Teens with disability (14–17 years) (n=410); Total young people with disability (8–17 years) (n=972); National average: Children (8–13 years) (n=2,241); Teens (14–17 years) (n=1,349); Total young people (8–17 years) (n=3,590).
Note: Arrows denote results with a statistically significant difference. Where there are no arrows, the survey found no statistically significant difference between the response levels of young people with disability or their parent/caregiver, and the national average.

Parents/caregivers of young people with disability use a range of digital control tools to restrict their child's internet activity

The survey found that parents/caregivers of young people with disability were just as likely to apply technical mediation strategies as the national average, with 76% stating they have used a digital control tool, compared with the Australian average of 74% (see Figure 29). Website-filtering software was the most commonly used technology (46%, compared with the national average of 43%), followed by in-app purchase alerts (37%, compared with 36%) and spam or junk mail filters (33%, compared with 31%). One-third of parents/caregivers used software to keep track of the websites or apps their children visit (33%, compared with the national average of 30%). Only 13% of parents/caregivers of children with disability used software to limit the time their child spent online (compared with the national average of 11%).

Figure 29: Mediation strategies used by parents/caregivers to control or limit their child's internet use – comparison with the national average (% past 12 months)

Digital control tool	**Parent/caregiver of young person with disability (%)**	**National average* (%)**
Parental controls or other means of blocking or filtering some types of websites	46	43
Parental controls that alert you when your child wants to buy content (in-app purchases)	37	36
Software to prevent spam or junk mail and viruses	33	31
Parental controls or other means of keeping track of the websites or apps your child visits	33	30
Parental controls that filter the apps your child can download	32	31
Ad-blocking software	19	17
Software that limits the people your child can be in touch with through voice calls/messages	17	16
A service or contract that limits the time your child spends on the internet	13	11
USED ANY DIGITAL CONTROL TOOL	**76**	**74**

**Average among Australian young people aged 8–17, or parents/caregivers of a young person aged 8–17.*
Question S11. Do you use any of the following?
Bases: Young people with disability (8–17 years) (n=972); Parents/caregivers of a young person with disability (n=972); National average: Young people (8–17 years) (n=3,590); Parents/caregivers of a young person (n=3,590).
Note: Where there are no arrows, the survey found no statistically significant difference between the response levels of young people with disability or their parent/caregiver, and the national average.

Conclusion

The digital realm offers an abundance of opportunities for young people with disability. For younger children with disability, the online world is an alternative playground where they can play games, hang out and make friends. For teens, it expands into a space where they can more readily exchange ideas, share interests and connect with others.

The online space is empowering young people with disability, amplifying their voice and, for many, enabling them to be a more authentic version of themselves.

Our research has shown that going online provides young people with disability an important outlet to express their thoughts and creativity, and the opportunity to meet others who share their interests. To that end, young people with disability have been found to be highly active participants in the social media space, with many holding accounts across multiple platforms, strengthening their online presence. Social media apps and accessible gaming platforms further enable users to exchange thoughts and express themselves, fostering feelings of self-worth and confidence. By connecting with others and sharing their experiences, individuals with disability can benefit from the sense of community and support that social media provides. It follows that we found many young people with disability feel they can be more themselves online and are more comfortable discussing certain issues in the digital world than offline.

Our findings reveal that the online environment provides young people with disability a place to explore ideas creatively and to share their perspective on the world we live in. One in 5 young people with disability have shared an online video or music content they have created, while 1 in 6 have posted their own blog or story on the internet.

The research also indicates the importance of the internet as a source of information on health and wellbeing, with almost 1 in 5 young people with disability accessing it on a regular basis. When in need of additional help, young people with disability were also found to turn to the internet to find emotional support.

Given all the benefits of going online, it's not unexpected that many young people with disability enjoy the digital environment and spend much of their leisure time on the internet. The research shows that young people with disability typically possess a balanced view of the digital world, highlighting its positive aspects while being aware of online risks and potential harms.

Going online can also create issues for young people with disability

Our research indicates that young people with disability experience a higher-than-average rate of hurtful and harmful online encounters.

The research also found that young people with disability are disproportionately targeted by online abuse compared with the average population. Hate speech, name-calling and threats of physical harm are all more likely to be experienced by young people with disability compared with the national average, with potential impacts on their mental health, friendships and self-esteem.

Importantly, many young people with disability were shown to have the skills to respond proactively to online harms. Blocking, unfriending and reporting negative experiences to parents/caregivers, their school or social media platforms are just three of several recommended strategies that are more likely to be employed by young people with disability in response to online abuse than the national average. These findings suggest that most young people with disability possess a high level of digital literacy, likely the product of repeated exposure to negative online experiences and a high level of parental engagement.

Parents/caregivers of young people with disability play an important role in encouraging their children to use safer online practices

The survey results reveal that the parents/caregivers of young people with disability typically take a strong interest in their child's online life, encouraging them to engage with the digital environment while taking steps to limit their exposure to potential online harms. Almost all parents/caregivers were shown to have educated their children on how to use the internet safely and the steps to take when they encounter harms online, information likely to bolster their child's confidence and resilience as they go online. Our survey showed that parents/caregivers of young people with disability were less likely to restrict their children's access to play- and entertainment-centred online activities, suggesting that parents/caregivers of young people with disability acknowledge the benefits of online play for their child's wellbeing. Our research has shown that young people with disability were more likely to relay information regarding potentially harmful incidents than the national average. In turn, parents/caregivers of young people with disability were more likely to recall their child's negative online experiences, pointing to a greater understanding of the potential impact these incidents can have on those with disability. However, 4 in 10 parents were unable to recall their child's experience of online harm, which indicates the value of establishing an open dialogue between parents/caregivers and their children and the importance of ongoing awareness-raising and education in this area.

The survey found that less than half of Australia's parents/caregivers of young people with disability employed digital control tools such as filters that can provide their children with some protection from online risk. While this level of adoption was consistent with the national average, the impact and pervasiveness of online harms among young people with disability suggests the additional value of employing digital control tools to enhance user safety among this cohort. This highlights the importance of raising awareness among parents/caregivers of safer internet strategies they can use to protect their children online.

While our research has highlighted the importance of parental mediation in reducing their child's exposure to online risk, it has also established the value of providing young people with disability with the confidence and skills they need to manage the time they spend online. Young people with disability spend more time than the national average immersed in the online environment, a practice that can lead to household conflict and ongoing challenges to their wellbeing, such as meal skipping and sleep problems. Although the survey found that most parents and caregivers of young people with disability impose time limits on their child's internet use, 8 in 10 young people with disability have reportedly exceeded these time limits.

These findings point to the value of utilising diversified mediation practices, establishing a family conversation around appropriate internet use, and providing age-sensitive guidance (or family tech agreement) for each family member to follow. Further, it demonstrates a need to continue to work with young people to help them develop a sense of empowerment to choose internet practices that enhance their wellbeing.

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Appendix

Aussie Kids Online dataset: Margins of error for young people with disability sample

Cohort	Number of young people	% of young people in sample	Margin of error +/–*	
			Prevalence 10%	Prevalence 50%
With disability aged 8–13	562	62	2.48	4.13
With disability aged 14–17	410	38	2.90	4.84
Young people with disability who had had a negative online experience	572	59	2.46	4.10
Parents/caregivers of teens with disability who had been exposed to harmful content in the past year	294	72	3.43	5.72
Parents/caregivers of a young person with disability who had offensive things said to them online	157	16	4.69	7.82
Parents/caregivers of a teen with disability who had been exposed to sexual content online in the past year	314	77	3.32	5.53

*at 95% confidence interval

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