

Connected, curious, cautious:

Children's engagement
in the digital world



June 2026



Acknowledgement of Country

eSafety acknowledges all First Nations people for their continuing care of everything Country encompasses – land, waters and community. We pay our respects to First Nations people and to Elders past and present.

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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, policies and regulatory functions are evidence-informed
- robust, person-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](https://esafety.gov.au/research)

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About this report

Children today are digital natives, having grown up in a world where access to the internet and online services is commonplace. Over the past decade, social media, in particular, has come to play an integral role in the lives of children across the world. Social media, and digital platforms more broadly, offers children a space to connect with friends and family, explore and express their creativity and identity, play and be entertained, and learn more about the world around them. At the same time, these digital platforms can expose children to a variety of risks. Many online activities carry the potential for negative experiences, including exposure to harmful content or conduct, as well as possible adverse effects of spending excessive time online. Supporting children to safely navigate these risks and avoid harm has become a significant global challenge.

In response to this challenge, the Australian Parliament passed the Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Bill 2024 in November 2024. Under the legislation, which came into effect on 10 December 2025, age-restricted social media platforms must take reasonable steps to prevent Australian children under 16 from creating or holding accounts. These age restrictions aim to protect under-16s, during a formative stage of their development, from the pressures and risks they can be exposed to while logged into social media accounts.

Shortly after the legislation was passed, between December 2024 and February 2025, eSafety conducted the ‘Keeping Kids Safe Online’ survey. The survey captured the online experiences of over 3,000 children in Australia aged 10 to 17 years and their parents and caregivers. As Australia implements and evaluates the age restrictions, this cross-sectional, point-in-time study provides a timely and valuable contribution to the national evidence base.

Connected, curious, cautious is part of a series that draws on data from the ‘Keeping Kids Safe Online’ survey. It begins with a snapshot of children’s participation in the digital environment, including their use of various online platforms and services, as well as new and emerging digital technologies. It then explores the benefits that the online world offers children, including the perceived positive impacts of being online and the types of information children seek. Finally, it describes potentially risky behaviours that children engage in, as well as their knowledge and use of resources and strategies for staying safe.

Overall, the study found that while most children benefit from being online – by using digital spaces to connect, learn and express themselves – many children also engage in behaviours that may increase their exposure to harm. Patterns of online participation varied by age

and gender, with older teens and trans and gender-diverse children engaging more frequently and taking more risks. Encouragingly, most children also reported using proactive strategies to stay safe online, such as limiting their interactions to known individuals and keeping their personal information private.

The findings also highlight the role of parents and caregivers in shaping children’s online safety. We found that when parents or caregivers foster open conversations about online experiences, children are more likely to seek their support after a negative or uncomfortable incident. However, parent–child discussions about online safety tend to focus less on sensitive or emerging issues such as sexual extortion or the misuse of artificial intelligence (AI). Parents and caregivers were also more likely to have talked to girls about a range of online safety topics, suggesting that some children, particularly boys, may be missing out on important guidance. In addition, the incidence of parent-instigated discussions about online safety often decreased as children grew older. The findings highlight the importance of inclusive, age-appropriate support that engages all children and ensures that sensitive topics are not overlooked, as well as the critical role of proactive parenting in helping children to navigate the digital world safely. Although the age restrictions are targeted at the social media accounts of children under 16, parents and caregivers still play a vital role in supporting their children’s online safety.

The findings from the survey will inform eSafety’s online safety programs and resources for children and their parents and caregivers. The findings also highlight which children are more likely to have gained benefits from social media as well as those who are more likely to take risks online and thus may require more targeted support. The results also enhance our understanding of the development of digital skills and practices as children age, and of changes in risk-taking behaviours, which may help to inform education and resources that support children to stay safe online. Finally, the findings shed light on digital parenting practices that may help support children’s online safety and reduce risk-taking behaviours, while also identifying opportunities to strengthen digital parenting practices as children age.

The report concludes with a discussion of how children engaged with the digital world in the year prior to the implementation of the age restrictions and highlights the importance of continuing to support all children to engage safely and confidently online, even with the age restrictions now in effect.



Key findings



Nearly all children aged 10 to 17 use social media or communication platforms, and many do so frequently. Almost all children in our study had at some point used a social media platform (96%) or an app or platform for chatting, messaging, calling or video calling someone (95%). More than 3 in 4 children (77%) reported using social media daily or more often, and over half (52%) were using other communication platforms this often. In addition, around 2 in 3 children (65%) had their own social media profile or account.



Many children are engaging with new and emerging forms of digital technology. Almost 2 in 5 children (38%) had used a virtual reality (VR) headset and 7% had used wearable haptic technologies. In addition, over 2 in 5 children (42%) had ever used generative AI.



The online world provides benefits for almost all children. Most children in our study said being online had helped them to have fun or to relax (72%), or reported benefits that related to their interests, hobbies or creativity (80%) or to their sense of connection with others (69%). A significant proportion also reported benefits to their emotional wellbeing (50%) or to their self-esteem/sense of identity (26%).



The internet is an important source of information for most children, including on personal or sensitive topics. In the 4 weeks prior to the survey, more than 3 in 5 children (63%) had looked online for information about a topic they were interested in. A significant minority had looked online for information relating to things that may be personal or sensitive, such as sex, dating, sexual health or puberty (16%), challenges in their life (14%), or mental health or emotional wellbeing (12%).



Most children reject the idea that being online negatively impacts their wellbeing. Seven in 10 children in our study (71%) said it wasn't true that being online makes them feel bad about themselves. Likewise, around half rejected the idea that the amount of time they spent online stopped them getting enough sleep (51%) or got in the way of their homework or study (47%), and 2 in 5 (42%) didn't feel they were spending too much time online. However, around 1 in 3 did report experiencing each of these negative impacts (29%, 31% and 34%, respectively).



Children are mostly positive about social media and its impact on them, but many find it hard to resist. Over 3 in 4 children who had used social media (78%) said they find it fun, while 2 in 3 (67%) said it helps them to learn or understand things. In addition, just under half (49%) said that social media is meaningful for them. However, a similar proportion acknowledged that they find it hard to resist using social media (49%) or end up using it even when they don't mean to (43%).



More than half of children engage in behaviours online that may increase their risk of exposure to online harm. We found that 55% of children had ever engaged in behaviour that may expose them to greater risk online. For example, 40% of children had ever messaged, texted or talked online with someone they didn't already know 'in real life'¹ (including 13% who had done so with an unknown adult), 5% had ever shared a nude image of themselves with someone they didn't know 'in real life', and 27% had ever shared their real-time location with someone who wasn't a member of their family using a location sharing app. In addition, more than 1 in 10 had at least one public account (12%) or a hidden profile or account they didn't want their parent or caregiver to know about (13%). Plus, almost 1 in 10 teens aged 16 to 17 (7%) had used an online dating app.² One-quarter (25%) said they were 14 or 15 when they first created an online profile and around 1 in 8 (13%) said they were younger.

¹ While we acknowledge that the online world is an integral part of real life, during survey testing, children demonstrated a clearer understanding of the term 'in real life' when used to refer to offline experiences. For clarity and accessibility, we retained this phrasing in the survey.

² Only children aged 16 to 17 were asked about their use of dating apps.



Many (but not all) children and their parents and caregivers regularly talk about online safety.³ Many children (65%) said their parent or caregiver encourages them regularly to tell them if anything happens online that makes them feel uncomfortable or unsafe, while over 1 in 2 said their parent or caregiver talks with them regularly about how to be safer online (56%) or about what they have been doing online (53%). Over 4 in 5 children (83%) had heard something about how to stay safe online from their parent or caregiver.



Children are more likely to tell their parents or caregivers about unsafe or uncomfortable online experiences if parents or caregivers actively encourage this. Among children who said their parents or caregivers regularly ask them to speak up about anything that makes them feel unsafe online, 95% said they would talk to them – compared to 81% of children whose parents didn't regularly encourage them to speak up. Those children who said their parents or caregivers regularly ask them to speak up about anything that makes them feel unsafe online were also more likely to list talking to their parents as an online safety strategy (59% versus 24%).



Children talk with their parents and caregivers about a range of online safety issues, although some more sensitive or emerging topics are less commonly discussed. In the past 12 months, according to the children in our survey, parents and caregivers were most likely to have talked to them about things like how to keep personal information private online (52%) or about the risks of encountering dangerous people online (48%). Fewer children said their parents or caregivers had discussed more sensitive or emerging topics with them in the past 12 months, such as nude image sharing (33%), how generative AI can be used or misused (9%), or sexual extortion (7%).

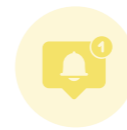


Most children report positive experiences during conversations with their parents or caregivers about sensitive online safety topics, although a significant minority still express discomfort or negative feelings. Nine in 10 children (90%) said they understood what was being said during/after their most recent conversation with a parent or caregiver, and 8 in 10 felt they could ask questions (83%) and found the discussion useful (82%). However, a notable minority experienced discomfort or worry: 22% felt uncomfortable or embarrassed; 17% felt worried after the conversation; and 15% thought their parent or caregiver felt uncomfortable or embarrassed.

³ Regularly* was defined as once a month or more.



Children use a range of proactive strategies to help them stay safe online. Almost all children surveyed (93%) said they use at least one strategy or behaviour to try to stay safe online. For example, over 7 in 10 (71%) said they only interact with people they already know 'in real life', while over 3 in 5 (63%) seek advice or permission from their parent or caregiver in certain situations – 37% before downloading apps or creating new accounts, 25% before adding new friends or followers, and 47% when something happens online that makes them feel uncomfortable or worried.



Online experiences and engagement differ by gender. We found that trans and gender-diverse children experience more benefits from being online, compared with girls and boys, and are more frequent users of social media. They also report engaging in more risky online behaviours and are more likely to hide aspects of their identity for safety. Girls also reported more positive experiences than boys, though the differences were smaller. Trans and gender-diverse children were also more likely to engage in behaviours that increase their risk of online harm. Boys showed similar patterns, but to a lesser extent. Girls tended to take more online safety precautions than boys, and a higher proportion of girls than boys discussed various online safety topics with their parents.



As children get older, they report more online benefits; however, they are also more likely to engage in risky behaviours, to use fewer safety strategies, and to talk less with their parents about their online activities. Older children and teens reported increasing benefits from being online as they aged, such as feeling connected and supported. However, this also came with greater challenges. As age increased, so too did the frequency of social media use, difficulty in managing that use, negative impacts, and engagement in potentially risky behaviours. Despite their higher engagement, older teens (aged 16 to 17) were less likely to use online safety strategies than younger teens (aged 13 to 15) and children (aged 10 to 12). They also spoke less often with their parents about their online activities. When they did, these conversations were more likely to involve complex or sensitive topics.

Detailed analysis of findings by age and gender is provided throughout this report.

Methodology

This research draws on data from eSafety’s ‘Keeping Kids Safe Online’ study.

The research aimed to build on our understanding of the online experiences of children in Australia and to provide an updated evidence base to inform the development of online safety resources for children and their parents and caregivers. To achieve these aims, we surveyed a nationally representative sample of almost 3,500 children in Australia aged 10 to 17 years and their parents and caregivers about their online activities and experiences.

Online survey

A total of 3,454 children aged 10 to 17 years and their parent or caregiver took part in the survey. This sample included children with disability or diagnosis ($n=974$), children from non-English speaking backgrounds ($n=742$), Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children ($n=318$), sexually diverse teens (aged 13 to 17)⁴ ($n=169$), and trans and gender-diverse children ($n=83$).

The survey was conducted between December 2024 and February 2025. We note that this was shortly after the Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Bill 2024 passed through the Australian Parliament in November 2024 and the Act took effect on 10 December 2025.

The survey had three components: a 15-minute parent/caregiver survey, a 20-minute child core survey, and a 10-minute child recontact survey. Informed consent to participate in all components of the study was sought from both parents/caregivers and children. The research was submitted to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) ethics committee. Ethics approval was received on 18 June 2024.

The core survey included questions about children’s online participation and experiences, including perceived benefits of being online, potentially risky online activities, and strategies used to stay safe online. For further details on the survey methodology, including questions asked in the parent/caregiver survey and recontact survey, see the [methodology report](#).

⁴Some questions and specific response options were only shown to children aged 13 to 17 – for example, where cognitive testing indicated that younger children may not understand the questions/options, or where they related to more complex concepts such as sexuality. Where applicable, this is indicated in footnotes or in the base descriptions accompanying figures and tables.



Data analysis

Apparent differences between subgroups of children who participated in the survey – such as between girls, boys and trans and gender-diverse children – were tested for statistical significance using Q Research Software and were reported on only when the difference was statistically significant.

We note that the sample size for trans and gender-diverse children is relatively small ($n=83$ for questions asked of all participants, and fewer for questions asked of a subgroup of participants). This means that relatively large percentage point differences need to be observed in order to be statistically significant. As such, an absence of statistically significant differences in the data doesn't necessarily mean there are no differences in the population. This should be considered when interpreting the findings presented throughout this report. Further details on the limitations of this research are provided in the [methodology report](#).

As noted previously, the survey was conducted shortly after the social media age restrictions passed through the Australian Parliament in November 2024. During this period, the legislation received significant media attention and generated considerable public discussion and debate, which may have influenced participants' survey responses. For instance, parents may have had heightened awareness of or concerns about children's online safety, while children may have been more likely to under-report harmful experiences on social media and emphasise its positive aspects. Further details on the limitations of this research are provided in the methodology report.

Percentages in tables and figures may not sum to 100% due to rounding or to question formats that allowed multiple answers to be given. Tables and figures may not include response options such as 'prefer not to answer', 'don't know', 'another reason' or 'none of these' – for example, if the incidence is low.

Free-text questions were coded thematically using Q Research Software and peer reviewed by a second person in the research team.

Positionality statement

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

Children's online participation

Access to the internet is essentially universal among children, with many children engaging in the online world in various digital spaces. As the digital world continues to evolve and new and emerging forms of online engagement become available, it is important to understand how children are engaging with and participating in these online spaces. This section of the report explores children's engagement with social media and communication platforms, online gaming, dating apps, virtual reality, haptic technology and generative AI.



Nearly all children use social media

We found that over 9 in 10 children surveyed (96%) had ever used a social media platform.⁵ Children in our study had used a wide variety of social media platforms, the most popular being YouTube (77%), TikTok (61%), Instagram (55%), Snapchat (52%) and Facebook (49%), as shown in Table 1. In addition, 36% had used YouTube Kids.⁶

Table 1: Lifetime use of social media platforms (%)

	Total
Any social media platform	96
YouTube	77
TikTok	61
Instagram	55
Snapchat	52
Facebook	49
Pinterest	22
Reddit (like r/gaming)	13
Steam	12
X (Twitter)	11
Twitch	11
Another social media platform or app	9
BeReal	7
Threads	6
OnlyFans*	1
'YouTube Kids'	36
Base: Children aged 10 –17	3,454

Q: This question is just about social media. There will be more questions later about other apps, like the ones you might have used to message or call people. Which, if any, social media platforms or apps have you ever used? This could be at home, at a friend's house, or anywhere else you go online.

Note: **OnlyFans' only shown to older teens (aged 16 to 17).

⁵ Platforms considered to be social media for the purpose of this survey were: BeReal, Facebook, Instagram, OnlyFans, Pinterest, Reddit, Snapchat, Steam, Threads, TikTok, Twitch, X (Twitter), YouTube, 'another social media platform or app'.

⁶ The survey included YouTube Kids, to help children differentiate between YouTube and YouTube Kids. While it is included in Table 1 and Table 2 for reference, YouTube Kids is not considered in any further analysis.

There are gender and age differences in the social media platforms children use

A similar proportion of girls (97%), boys (96%) and trans and gender-diverse children⁷ (100%) had ever used social media. However, as shown in Table 2, there were gender differences in the social media platforms children had used.

For example:

- Girls were more likely than boys to have used TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat, Pinterest or BeReal.
- Boys were more likely than girls to have used Reddit, Steam or Twitch.
- Trans and gender-diverse children were more likely than girls and boys to have used Pinterest, Reddit, Steam, X (Twitter), Twitch or OnlyFans.

We also found that while teens (aged 13 to 17) were more likely than younger children (aged 10 to 12) to have ever used a social media platform (99% versus 93%), a large majority of younger children had still engaged with social media.

The high rate of social media use among younger children was driven in large part by their use of YouTube (73%). However, almost half (45%) had used TikTok, and around 1 in 3 had used Snapchat (33%), Facebook (32%) or Instagram (30%).

In contrast, teens were more likely to have used a broader range of platforms. As shown in Table 2, teens were more likely to have used most social media platforms included in the survey, indicating more diverse engagement compared with younger children.

In addition, older teens (aged 16 to 17) were more likely than younger teens (aged 13 to 15) to have used most social media platforms captured in the survey, apart from YouTube and Steam, which were just as likely to be used by younger teens.

⁷ As noted in the methodology, the small sample size for trans and gender-diverse children (n=83) should be considered when interpreting the findings presented throughout this report.

Table 2: Lifetime use of social media platforms, by gender and age (%)

	Child gender			Child age		
	Boys	Girls	Trans & gender diverse	10–12 (younger children)	13–15 (younger teens)	16–17 (older teens)
Any social media platform	96	97	100	93	99	99
YouTube	78	75	82	73	78	79
TikTok	56	65	65	45	67	75
Instagram	51	60	61	30	64	83
Snapchat	47	57	55	33	60	72
Facebook	48	50	58	32	52	72
Pinterest	11	33	46	15	25	32
Reddit (like r/gaming)	14	10	35	7	14	19
Steam	17	7	28	7	15	17
X (Twitter)	12	10	21	5	11	21
Twitch	14	6	28	5	12	16
Another social media platform or app	9	8	18	9	10	8
BeReal	4	11	7	3	8	13
Threads	5	6	8	3	6	10
OnlyFans*	1	<1	6	–	–	3
'YouTube Kids'	32	41	18	59	29	11
Base: Children aged 10–17	1,739	1,632	83	1,332	1,297	825

Q: This question is just about social media. There will be more questions later about other apps, like the ones you might have used to message or call people. Which, if any, social media platforms or apps have you ever used? This could be at home, at a friend's house, or anywhere else you go online.

Note: **OnlyFans* only shown to older teens (aged 16 to 17). Different colour shading indicates that differences are statistically significant within subgroup. White shading indicates that differences are not statistically significant.

*As noted in the methodology, the small sample size for trans and gender-diverse children should be considered when interpreting the findings presented throughout this report (n=83).

Children are currently using a range of social media platforms

We asked children which social media platforms they had used in the 4 weeks prior to the survey. As shown in Table 3:

- most (62%) had used YouTube
- almost half (48%) had used TikTok
- over 2 in 5 (44%) had used Instagram
- more than 2 in 5 (42%) had used Snapchat
- over 1 in 3 (35%) had used Facebook.

Table 3: Use of social media platforms in the past 4 weeks (%)

	Total
YouTube	62
TikTok	48
Instagram	44
Snapchat	42
Facebook	35
Pinterest	11
Reddit (like r/gaming)	6
Steam	6
Another social media platform or app	6
X (Twitter)	5
Twitch	4
BeReal	2
Threads	2
OnlyFans*	<1
Base: Children aged 10–17	3,454

Q: In the past 4 weeks, which social media platforms or apps have you used? You can choose more than one answer.

Note: **OnlyFans* only shown to older teens (aged 16 to 17).

We found a similar pattern of gender and age differences in the platforms children used in the 4 weeks prior to the survey (see Table 4).

Table 4: Use of social media platforms in the past 4 weeks, by gender and age (%)

	Child gender			Child age		
	Boys	Girls	Trans & gender diverse	10–12 (younger children)	13–15 (younger teens)	16–17 (older teens)
YouTube	67	58	71	63	63	60
TikTok	44	52	49	31	57	63
Instagram	40	48	49	19	51	73
Snapchat	38	47	41	21	51	63
Facebook	33	36	34	21	37	52
Pinterest	4	17	24	7	11	14
Reddit (like r/gaming)	7	4	14	3	7	10
Steam	9	3	15	4	8	9
Another social media platform or app	6	5	12	7	6	4
X (Twitter)	6	4	15	2	5	11
Twitch	6	2	15	3	5	6
BeReal	1	3	0	1	2	3
Threads	2	2	5	1	2	3
OnlyFans*	<1	<1	2	–	–	<1
Base: Children aged 10–17	1,739	1,632	83	1,332	1,297	825

Q: In the past 4 weeks, which social media platforms or apps have you used? You can choose more than one answer.

Note: *'OnlyFans' only shown to older teens (aged 16 to 17). Different colour shading indicates that differences are statistically significant within subgroup. White shading indicates that differences are not statistically significant.

Most children use social media every day

We asked children how often they usually use social media platforms. As shown in Table 5, we found that most children surveyed (77%) said they use social media **daily or more often**.

More specifically:

- 13% use social media every few minutes
- 21% use social media once or twice an hour
- 30% use social media a few times a day (but not every hour)
- 13% use social media once or twice a day.

About 1 in 8 children (13%) said they use social media a few times a week, while 5% said they use it about once a week or less.

Table 5: Frequency of social media use (%)

	Children who used social media	All children surveyed
Daily or more often	79	77
Every few minutes	13	13
Once or twice an hour	21	21
A few times a day (but not every hour)	31	30
Once or twice a day	14	13
A few times a week (but not every day)	14	13
About once a week or less	5	5
Never – I don't do this at all anymore	1	1
Never used social media	–	3
Base: Children aged 10–17	3,333	3,454

Q: When you're not at school or at work (or sleeping), how often do you usually use any social media?

Teens use social media more frequently than younger children

We found that a similar proportion of girls (77%), boys (76%) and trans and gender-diverse children (86%) reported using social media daily or more often.

However, girls were more likely than boys to report using social media every few minutes. Trans and gender-diverse children were also more likely than girls and boys to report using social media this frequently (see Table 6).

We also found that older teens were more likely than younger teens and younger children to report more frequent use of social media. For example, 92% of older teens reported using social media daily or more often, compared with 83% of younger teens and 62% of younger children.

Table 6: Frequency of social media use, by gender and age (%)

	Child gender			Child age		
	Boys	Girls	Trans & gender diverse	10–12 (younger children)	13–15 (younger teens)	16–17 (older teens)
Daily or more often	76	77	86	62	83	92
Every few minutes	10	15	24	6	15	21
Once or twice an hour	20	21	28	11	23	32
A few times a day (but not every hour)	31	29	21	29	31	29
Once or twice a day	15	12	14	16	14	9
A few times a week (but not every day)	13	13	6	20	11	6
About once a week or less	5	5	6	9	3	1
Never – I don't do this at all anymore	2	1	0	2	1	1
Never used social media	4	3	0	7	1	<1
Base: Children aged 10–17	1,739	1,632	83	1,332	1,297	825

Q: When you're not at school or at work (or sleeping), how often do you usually use any social media?

Note: Different colour shading indicates that differences are statistically significant within subgroup. White shading indicates that differences are not statistically significant.

More than 3 in 5 children actively engage with others on social media every day

We also asked children who had used social media about the activities they usually engage in on these platforms. We found that many children (65% of those who use social media, which equates to 63% of all the children surveyed) were active social media users, contributing to and engaging with others daily or more often, by:

- **receiving or sending messages** from/to individual people – 49%
- receiving or sending messages in a **group chat** – 44%
- **reacting** to other people's posts – 40%
- **commenting** on other people's posts – 27%
- **posting or sharing** photos, videos or other content – 17%
- posting an **update** on their life, activities or interests – 13% (Table 7).

While many children actively contribute to social media, a significant proportion also use these platforms for browsing and information seeking. Over half (53%) said they look at other people's social media posts daily or more often, and almost half (47%) said they actively search for topics of interest with the same frequency.

Table 7: Activities undertaken on social media daily or more often (%)

	Children who used social media	All children surveyed
Actively engage with others on social media	65	63
Receive or send messages from/to individual people*	58	49
Receive or send messages in a group chat*	52	44
React to other people's posts	41	40
Comment on other people's posts	28	27
Post or share photos, videos or other content	17	17
Post an update on their life, activities or interests	13	13
Look at other people's posts	55	53
Search for specific things they are interested in	49	47
Base: Children aged 10–17	3,333	3,454

Q: How often do you usually do the following on social media?

Q: This question is just about messaging using social media platforms or apps. Later, we will ask you about other ways you might message people. How often do you usually use social media platforms or apps?

Note: *Only asked of children who used social media platforms that have integrated messaging functions (i.e. BeReal, Instagram, OnlyFans, Pinterest, Reddit, Snapchat, Steam, TikTok, Twitch, X (Twitter)); base: n=2,889.

Trans and gender-diverse children are particularly likely to actively engage with social media at least once a day

As shown in Table 8, trans and gender-diverse children were more likely than girls and boys to actively engage with others on social media daily or more often (82% versus 61 to 63%) – for example, by commenting, reacting, posting content, and so on.

In addition, trans and gender-diverse children were more likely than girls and boys to frequently use social media to:

- look at other people’s posts
- search for specific things they are interested in.

We also found that girls were more likely than boys to do the following daily or more often:

- comment on other people’s posts
- react to other people’s posts
- look at other people’s posts.

Teens are more likely than younger children to actively engage with social media every day

Teens – in particular, older teens – were more likely than younger children to post, share, comment, react or message on social media daily or more often (71 to 83% versus 41%), as well as to browse and look for information, as shown in Table 8.

Table 8: Activities undertaken on social media daily or more often, by gender and age (%)

	Child gender			Child age		
	Boys	Girls	Trans & gender diverse	10–12 (younger children)	13–15 (younger teens)	16–17 (older teens)
Actively engage with others on social media	61	63	82	41	71	83
Receive or send messages from/to individual people	47	50	62	27	58	70
Receive or send messages in a group chat	42	45	57	24	52	63
React to other people’s posts	36	43	63	23	47	56
Comment on other people’s posts	24	29	49	15	32	38
Post or share photos, videos or other content	16	16	29	10	20	23
Post an update on their life, activities or interests	13	13	16	8	15	17
Look at other people’s posts	50	56	71	36	59	71
Search for specific things they are interested in	46	47	68	37	52	57
Base: Children aged 10–17	1,739	1,632	83	1,332	1,297	825

Q: How often do you usually do the following on social media? This question is just about messaging using social media platforms or apps. Later, we will ask you about other ways you might message people. How often do you usually use social media platforms or apps?

Note: Different colour shading indicates that differences are statistically significant within subgroup. White shading indicates that differences are not statistically significant.



Around 2 in 3 children have their own social media profile or account

We asked children who had used social media if they currently had their own profile or account on any social media platforms or apps. We found that around 2 in 3 (68% of children who had used social media; 65% of children surveyed) currently had their own account, as shown in Table 9.

On the other hand:

- just under 1 in 5 said they just use or look at other people's accounts, such as their parent's, caregiver's or a friend's account
- around 1 in 8 said they use social media without a profile or account (on many platforms, this means they can only browse but can't actively contribute).

Table 9: Proportion of children with their own social media profile or accounts (%)

	Children who used social media	All children surveyed
Have their own social media profile or account	68	65
Just use or look at other people's accounts, like their parent's, caregiver's or a friend's	18	18
Just look at social media without using a profile or account	13	12
Never used social media	–	3
Base: Children aged 10–17	3,333	3,454

Q: Do you currently have your own profile or account on any social media platforms or apps?

As shown in Table 10, certain children were more likely than others to have their own social media profile or account, including:

- trans and gender-diverse children (79% versus 64% of boys and 65% of girls)
- teens – in particular, older teens (77 to 90% versus 38% of younger children).

On the other hand, younger children were more likely than teens to use or look at other people's accounts (33% versus 5 to 11%) or to look at social media without using a profile or account (21% versus 3 to 10%).

Table 10: Proportion of children with their own social media profile or accounts, by gender and age (%)

	Child gender			Child age		
	Boys	Girls	Trans & gender diverse	10–12 (younger children)	13–15 (younger teens)	16–17 (older teens)
Have their own social media profile or account	64	65	79	38	77	90
Just use or look at other people's accounts, such as their parent's, caregiver's or a friend's	18	18	11	33	11	5
Just look at social media without using a profile or account	13	12	7	21	10	3
Never used social media	4	3	0	7	1	<1
Base: Children aged 10–17	1,739	1,632	83	1,332	1,297	825

Q: Do you currently have your own profile or account on any social media platforms or apps?

Note: Different colour shading indicates that differences are statistically significant within subgroup. White shading indicates that differences are not statistically significant.

Almost all children use communication platforms

As with the popularity of social media platforms among children surveyed, we found that **communication platforms** were also widely used. Almost all children (95%) had ever used an app or platform for chatting, messaging, calling or video calling someone.⁸

Children reported having used a range of communication platforms. As shown in Table 11, the most popular were FaceTime (47%), text messages (36%), WhatsApp (32%), Messenger Kids (32%) and email (31%).

Table 11: Lifetime use of communication platforms (%)

	Total
Any communication platform	95
FaceTime	47
Text messages	36
WhatsApp	32
Messenger Kids	32
Email	31
Messenger	26
Discord	24
Voice or text chat in a video game or console	14
Skype	6
Google Chat	6
Another app or platform to message, call or chat to people online	5
Telegram	3
WeChat	2
Viber	2
Kik	2
Signal	1
Line	1
KakaoTalk	1
IMO	1
Wickr	<1
Base: Children aged 10–17	3,454

Q: Which, if any, of these apps or platforms have you ever used to chat with, message, call or video call anyone online? You can choose more than one answer.

⁸ Communication platforms included: Discord; email (like Gmail); FaceTime; Google Chat; IMO; KakaoTalk; Kik; Line; Messenger Kids; Messenger (also known as Facebook Messenger); Signal; Skype; Telegram; text messages (like iMessage, Google messages); Viber; voice or text chat in a video game or console; WhatsApp; WeChat; Wickr; 'another app or platform to message, call or chat to people online'.

There are some gender and age differences in the use of communication platforms among children

As shown in Table 12, girls, boys and trans and gender-diverse children tended to favour different communication platforms.

Of note:

- Girls were more likely than boys to have used many of the communication platforms included in the survey, apart from Discord and voice or text chat in games/consoles, which were more popular among boys.
- A relatively high proportion of trans and gender-diverse children used Discord, Google Chat, or another communication app or platform (compared to boys and girls) and voice or text chat in games/consoles (compared to girls).

The use of many communication platforms tended to increase with age. However, Messenger Kids was less popular among teens, especially older teens, than among younger children.



Table 12: Lifetime use of communication platforms, by gender and age (%)

	Child gender			Child age		
	Boys	Girls	Trans & gender diverse	10–12 (younger children)	13–15 (younger teens)	16–17 (older teens)
Any communication platform	94	96	100	93	96	97
FaceTime	43	51	45	40	49	56
Text messages	32	40	31	24	39	48
WhatsApp	32	33	26	22	35	44
Messenger Kids	29	37	22	52	28	7
Email	29	32	38	19	34	44
Messenger	25	27	28	16	27	40
Discord	31	16	50	12	31	32
Voice or text chat in a video game or console	18	9	26	10	16	16
Skype	6	6	5	5	6	8
Google Chat	6	6	12	5	6	8
Another app or platform to message, call or chat to people online	4	6	12	3	6	7
Telegram	2	3	5	1	3	4
WeChat	2	3	2	2	3	3
Viber	2	2	3	1	2	3
Kik	2	2	4	1	2	3
Signal	1	1	3	1	2	1
Line	1	1	2	1	1	1
KakaoTalk	1	1	1	1	1	1
IMO	1	1	2	1	1	1
Wickr	<1	<1	0	0	0	0
Base: Children aged 10–17	1,739	1,632	83	1,332	1,297	825

Q: Which, if any, of these apps or platforms have you ever used to chat with, message, call or video call anyone online? You can choose more than one answer.

Note: Different colour shading indicates that differences are statistically significant within subgroup. White shading indicates that differences are not statistically significant.

Children are currently using a range of communication platforms

We asked children which communication platforms they had used in the 4 weeks prior to the survey. As shown in Table 13, the most common platforms children reported currently using included:

- text messages (29%)
- FaceTime (27%)
- WhatsApp (25%)
- Messenger Kids (21%)
- Messenger (18%).

Fewer children had used:

- Discord (15%)
- email (14%)
- voice or text chat in a video game or console (10%)
- other communication platforms (4%).

Table 13: Use of communication platforms in the past 4 weeks (%)

	Total
Text messages	29
FaceTime	27
WhatsApp	25
Messenger Kids	21
Messenger	18
Discord	15
Email	14
Voice or text chat in a video game or console	10
Another app or platform to message, call or chat to people online	4
Google Chat	2
Skype	2
WeChat	1
Telegram	1
Viber	1
Line	1
Signal	<1
Kik	<1
Kakao Talk	<1
IMO	<1
Wickr	<1
Base: Children aged 10–17	3,454

Q: In the past 4 weeks, which of these apps or platforms have you used to chat to, message, call or video call people online? You can choose more than one answer.



We found a similar pattern of gender and age differences in the use of communication platforms in the past 4 weeks as was observed for lifetime usage (see Table 14).

Table 14: Use of communication platforms in the past 4 weeks, by gender and age (%)

	Child gender			Child age		
	Boys	Girls	Trans & gender diverse	10–12 (younger children)	13–15 (younger teens)	16–17 (older teens)
Text messages	25	33	23	19	31	41
FaceTime	23	32	14	23	28	32
WhatsApp	25	25	22	18	27	33
Messenger Kids	18	24	7	42	12	1
Messenger	17	19	20	11	18	30
Discord	20	8	39	8	19	19
Email	13	16	9	8	15	22
Voice or text chat in a video game or console	14	5	17	7	11	10
Another app or platform to message, call or chat to people online	4	4	5	2	5	5
Google Chat	2	2	5	2	2	2
Skype	2	2	0	2	2	1
WeChat	1	2	2	1	2	1
Telegram	1	1	2	1	1	2
Viber	1	1	1	1	1	1
Line	1	1	2	<1	1	1
Signal	<1	1	0	<1	1	<1
Kik	<1	1	0	<1	<1	1
KakaoTalk	<1	<1	0	<1	<1	1
IMO	<1	<1	1	<1	<1	1
Wickr	<1	<1	0	<1	0	<1
Base: Children aged 10–17	1,739	1,632	83	1,332	1,297	825

Q: In the past 4 weeks, which of these apps or platforms have you used to chat to, message, call or video call people online? You can choose more than one answer.

Note: Different colour shading indicates that differences are statistically significant within subgroup. White shading indicates that differences are not statistically significant.

Over half of children use communication platforms every day

Over half of the children surveyed (52%) said they use communication platforms daily or more often, as shown in Table 15. More specifically:

- 5% use communication platforms every few minutes
- 11% use communication platforms once or twice an hour
- 22% use communication platforms a few times a day (but not every hour)
- 14% said they use communication platforms once or twice a day.

Almost 1 in 4 (23%) said they use communication platforms a few times a week (but not every day), while 16% said they use these platforms about once a week or less.

Table 15: Frequency of communication platforms use (%)

	Children who used communication platforms	All children surveyed
Daily or more often	55	52
Every few minutes	5	5
Once or twice an hour	12	11
A few times a day (but not every hour)	23	22
Once or twice a day	15	14
A few times a week (but not every day)	25	23
About once a week or less	17	16
Never – I don't do this at all anymore	3	3
Never used communication platforms	–	4
Base: Children aged 10–17	3,281	3,454

Q: When you're not at school or at work (or sleeping), how often do you usually message, chat, call or video call anyone using an online messaging platform, email or app?

We found that a similar proportion of girls (53%) and boys (51%) reported using communication platforms daily or more often (see Table 16). However, this frequency of use was more common among trans and gender-diverse children (69%).

In addition, daily (or more frequent) use of communication platforms increased with age.

Table 16: Frequency of communication platform use, by gender and age (%)

	Child gender			Child age		
	Boys	Girls	Trans & gender diverse	10–12 (younger children)	13–15 (younger teens)	16–17 (older teens)
Daily or more often	51	53	69	39	58	65
Every few minutes	4	5	9	2	6	7
Once or twice an hour	11	12	20	7	13	17
A few times a day (but not every hour)	21	22	27	17	24	26
Once or twice a day	14	15	14	13	15	15
A few times a week (but not every day)	23	24	14	28	22	19
About once a week or less	16	16	11	22	13	12
Never – I don't do this at all anymore	3	3	4	4	3	2
Never used communication platforms	5	3	0	7	3	1
Base: Children aged 10–17	1,739	1,632	83	1,332	1,297	825

Q: When you're not at school or at work (or sleeping), how often do you usually message, chat, call or video call anyone using an online messaging platform, email or app?

Note: Different colour shading indicates that differences are statistically significant within subgroup. White shading indicates that differences are not statistically significant.

Almost 9 in 10 children play video games online

Video gaming was popular among children in our survey, with 87% having ever played video games online. As shown in Table A1 in the appendix, video gaming was particularly popular among boys (92% versus 81% of girls).

In addition, many children reported playing online video games frequently (see Table 17):

- 27% at least once or twice a day
- 31% a few times a week
- 12% once a week
- 13% less than once a week.

Table 17: Frequency of online video gaming (%)

	Children who played video games online	All children surveyed
At least once or twice a day	32	27
A few times a week (but not every day)	35	31
About once a week	14	12
Less than once a week	15	13
Never – I don't do this at all anymore	4	3
Never played video games online	–	13
Base: Children aged 10–17	2,994	3,454

Q: How often do you usually do the following online? This could be at home, at school, at a friend's house, or anywhere else you go online. If you're not sure, choose the answer you think is about right. Play video games online.

Among children who had played video games online, we found that boys and trans and gender-diverse children were more likely than girls to do so frequently, as shown in Table 18. For example, 41% of boys and trans and gender-diverse children who played video games online did so at least once or twice a day, compared to 19% of girls.

Children across age groups played online video games at a similar frequency, although older teens (aged 16 to 17) were twice as likely as younger children (aged 10 to 12) and younger teens (aged 13 to 15) to say they were no longer gaming (6% versus 3%).

Table 18: Frequency of online video gaming, by gender and age (%)

	Child gender			Child age		
	Boys	Girls	Trans & gender diverse	10–12 (younger children)	13–15 (younger teens)	16–17 (older teens)
At least once or twice a day	41	19	41	30	33	32
A few times a week (but not every day)	36	34	38	37	36	32
About once a week	11	18	8	15	15	13
Less than once a week	9	22	6	15	13	17
Never – I don't do this at all anymore	2	6	5	3	3	6
Base: Children aged 10–17 who had ever played video games online	1,605	1,317	72	1,135	1,138	721

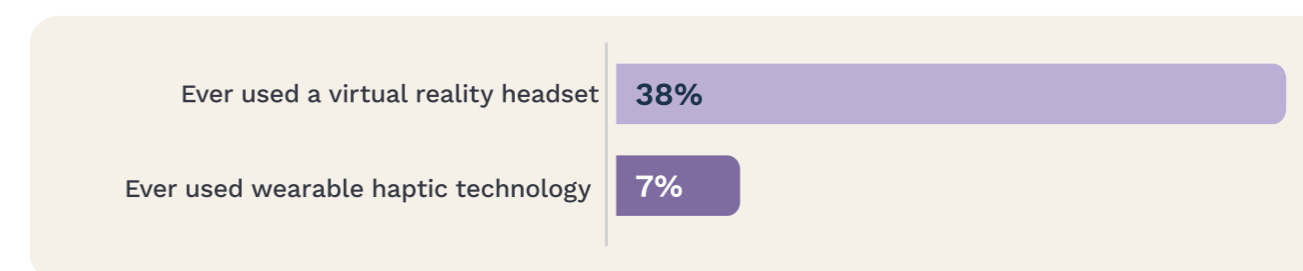
Q: How often do you usually do the following online? This could be at home, at school, at a friend's house, or anywhere else you go online. If you're not sure, choose the answer you think is about right. Play video games online.

Note: Different colour shading indicates that differences are statistically significant within subgroup. White shading indicates that differences are not statistically significant.

A significant proportion of children use virtual reality or haptic technology

We also explored children's engagement with new and emerging forms of digital technology. We found that a significant minority of children in our survey had ever used a **virtual reality** headset (38%) or wearable haptic technologies (7%), as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Lifetime use of virtual reality and haptic technology (%)



Q: Have you ever done any of the following? Used a virtual reality (VR) headset (like Meta Quest, Apple Vision Pro); Used wearable haptic technologies (like HoloSuit, Plexus VR Glove).

Base: Children aged 10–17 (n=3,454).

Additionally, as shown in Table 19, we found:

- Use of virtual reality headsets was most common among trans and gender-diverse children (59%), followed by boys (44%), then girls (30%), as was using wearable haptic technologies (15% versus 9% versus 5%, respectively).
- Younger teens (aged 13 to 15) were more likely than younger children (aged 10 to 12) to have used a virtual reality headset (42% versus 34%).

Table 19: Lifetime use of virtual reality headsets and wearable haptic technologies, by gender and age (%)

	Child gender			Child age		
	Boys	Girls	Trans & gender diverse	10–12 (younger children)	13–15 (younger teens)	16–17 (older teens)
Used a virtual reality headset	44	30	59	34	42	38
Used wearable haptic technologies	9	5	15	6	8	7
Base: Children aged 10–17	1,739	1,632	83	1,332	1,297	825

Q: Have you ever done any of the following? Used a virtual reality headset (like Meta Quest, Apple Vision Pro); Used wearable haptic technologies (like HoloSuit, Plexus VR Glove).

Note: Different colour shading indicates that differences are statistically significant within subgroup. White shading indicates that differences are not statistically significant.

Most children who had ever used these technologies said they only use them relatively infrequently (see Table 20). It may be that some children tried out these emerging technologies through friends or in community or educational settings, rather than having ongoing access to them at home.

For example:

- Around one-third (36%) of children who had ever used a virtual reality headset said they do so less than once a week, and another 37% said they don't do this anymore.
- Likewise, 29% of children who had ever used haptic technologies said they do so less than once a week, while 20% don't do this anymore.
- A significant minority (32%), however, said they use haptic technology a few times a week or more.

Table 20: Frequency of using virtual reality headsets and haptic technologies (%)

	Virtual reality headsets		Haptic technologies	
	Children who ever used virtual reality headsets	All children surveyed	Children who ever used wearable haptic technologies	All children surveyed
At least once or twice a day	4	1	8	1
A few times a week (but not every day)	12	4	24	2
About once a week	11	4	18	1
Less than once a week	36	14	29	2
Never – I don't do this at all anymore	37	14	20	1
Never used	–	61	–	92
Base: Children aged 10–17	1,325	3,454	270	3,454

Q: How often do you usually do the following online? This could be at home, at school, at a friend's house, or anywhere else you go online. If you're not sure, choose the answer you think is about right. Use a virtual reality headset; Use wearable haptic technologies.

As shown in Table A2 in the appendix, there were few differences by age or gender in the frequency with which children used VR headsets or wearable haptic technologies.

More than 4 in 10 children use generative artificial intelligence

We also asked children in our survey if they had ever used **generative artificial intelligence** – over 2 in 5 children (42%) had done so.

We found that teens (aged 13 to 17) and trans and gender-diverse children were most likely to have used generative AI, as shown in Table 21.

Table 21: Lifetime use of generative artificial intelligence, by gender and age (%)

	Child gender			Child age		
	Boys	Girls	Trans & gender diverse	10–12 (younger children)	13–15 (younger teens)	16–17 (older teens)
Yes	42	41	54	30	47	51
No	57	58	41	69	51	48
Base: Children aged 10–17	1,739	1,632	83	1,332	1,297	825

Q: Have you ever done any of the following? Used generative AI.

Note: Different colour shading indicates that differences are statistically significant within subgroup. White shading indicates that differences are not statistically significant.



A minority of older teens use dating apps

We asked older teens (aged 16 to 17) if they had ever used online **dating apps**. As shown in Table 22, a minority reported having done so (7%).

Of older teens who had ever used online dating apps, one-third (33%) reported that they were 16 or older when they first created an online dating profile. However, one-quarter (25%) said they were 14 or 15 and a significant proportion – around 1 in 8 (13%) – said they were younger, while 29% didn't want to say.⁹ This equates to 3% of all 16- to 17-year-olds saying they first signed up for a dating app when they were 15 or younger.

Among older teens who had ever used online dating apps:¹⁰

- 58% had used Tinder
- 28% had used Hinge
- 25% had used Bumble
- 22% had used Grindr
- 8% had used another dating app or website.

Table 22: Use of online dating apps among teens aged 16 to 17 (%)

	Older teens (aged 16–17) who used dating app	All older teens (aged 16–17) surveyed
Any online dating app	7	7
Tinder	58	4
Hinge	28	2
Bumble	25	2
Grindr	22	2
Another dating app or website	8	1
Base: Teens aged 16–17	62	825

Q: Have you ever done any of the following? Used online dating apps (like Hinge, Tinder, Grindr, Bumble); Which of these dating apps have you ever used? You can choose more than one answer.

We found that, among older teens, boys were more likely than girls to have ever used online dating apps (9% versus 4%).¹¹

⁹ The small sample size should be considered when interpreting these findings (n=62).

¹⁰ The small sample size should be considered when interpreting these findings (n=62).

¹¹ The sample size was too small to report the percentage of trans and gender-diverse children aged 16 to 17 who had ever used online dating apps (n=30).

Discussion

Access to the internet and online services has become essentially ubiquitous among children in Australia. In line with the increasing ease with which children can access the internet, we found that children in our study were avid internet users, engaging and participating online in various digital spaces. In particular, children commonly used social media and communication platforms, with almost all having used these platforms and many doing so frequently. For many, especially teens and trans and gender-diverse children, social media platforms were a space where they could actively engage with others, by posting updates about their lives or interests, sharing photos, videos or other content, or receiving or sending messages. Most children also participated in online gaming, and a significant minority had used new and emerging forms of digital technology, such as generative AI, VR headsets and haptic technologies.

While these digital spaces can offer many benefits and opportunities to the children who use them, they also carry a degree of risk of harm. With so many children today participating in the online world, it is important that we understand their experiences in these spaces, including the benefits and the risks some children may take. The next section explores children's own views on how online participation affects them, highlighting both the perceived benefits and negative impacts of engaging in digital spaces.

The impact on children of online participation

In this section, we present children's perspectives on what they enjoy about the online world and how it benefits them, as well as the challenges of being online and using social media.

Being online offers opportunities for connection, fun and learning

We begin by looking at how the children in our survey explained, in their own words, the 'best thing about being online'.¹² The most common themes were connecting with other people, gaming or play, entertainment and learning.

Over half (54%) suggested that they liked connecting with other people online – mostly with friends, sometimes with family, especially those who lived far away.

“Being able to talk to my friends even when we're not at school together about stuff – like holidays and weekends when we don't see each other.”
(Girl, age 13)

“I like feeling close to my friends and joking around with them.”
(Boy, age 11)

“Talking to my grandmother who lives in another state.”
(Girl, age 10)

“Feeling part of a community with likeminded people who are experiencing similar life events.”
(Boy, age 16)

Almost 1 in 5 children (17%) told us how much they enjoyed playing games online. They often saw online gaming not just as fun, but as a way to connect with their friends or family.

“Playing games and keeping in touch with my school friends and close friends who live overseas.”
(Girl, age 11)

“Playing fun games with my school friends, brothers or Mum ...”
(Girl, age 11)

“Playing games with my friends.”
(Boy, age 16)

“Talking to friends and playing online together.”
(Boy, age 15)

¹² Q: For you, what is the best thing about being online? Base: Children aged 10 to 17 who did the recontact survey (n=2,302).

As we might expect, a significant number of children (18%) told us the best thing about being online was simply being entertained, such as watching videos, listening to music or following their favourite sports.

“Seeing all my favourite things.”
(Girl, age 11)

“Looking at music artists I like, finding new music ...”
(Girl, age 14)

“Looking up cricket results, watching cricket.”
(Boy, age 17)

“People send each other pictures of their cute cats and dogs and share good music with each other.”
(Boy, age 10)

More than 1 in 5 children (22%) told us that access to information and education was the best thing about being online. Some said they used the internet for schoolwork or studies, while others said it helped them to learn more about their interests or hobbies.

“I can access so much inspiration. I can get ideas for drawing, for stories, I can play games with interesting ideas I would've never known about.”
(Boy, age 17)

“Learning. I love learning and researching topics.”
(Girl, age 11)

Around 1 in 7 children (14%) gave a range of other responses to this question, such as understanding world events or different cultures (3%) and relaxation or escapism (2%).

“I can speak to other people who I would normally never meet. People from other countries and I can see what these places look like without actually going there.”
(Boy, age 15)

“... It also allows me to not have to think about everyday things and I can relax and not have to worry.”
(Boy, age 16)



We note that choosing just one ‘best thing’ proved too hard for many children – so they happily gave several, as these quotes illustrate:

“Getting to see other creators do stuff in maybe a different place and to see the world and to watch stuff. And being able to connect with friends and family.”
(Girl, age 11)

“Being able to connect and not be alone. Being a part of different communities that all have the same interests. Having fun learning different and new things. Seeing what people are doing. Talking to others. Getting ideas. Creating collages.”
(Girl, age 17)

Children report that being online benefits them in a variety of ways

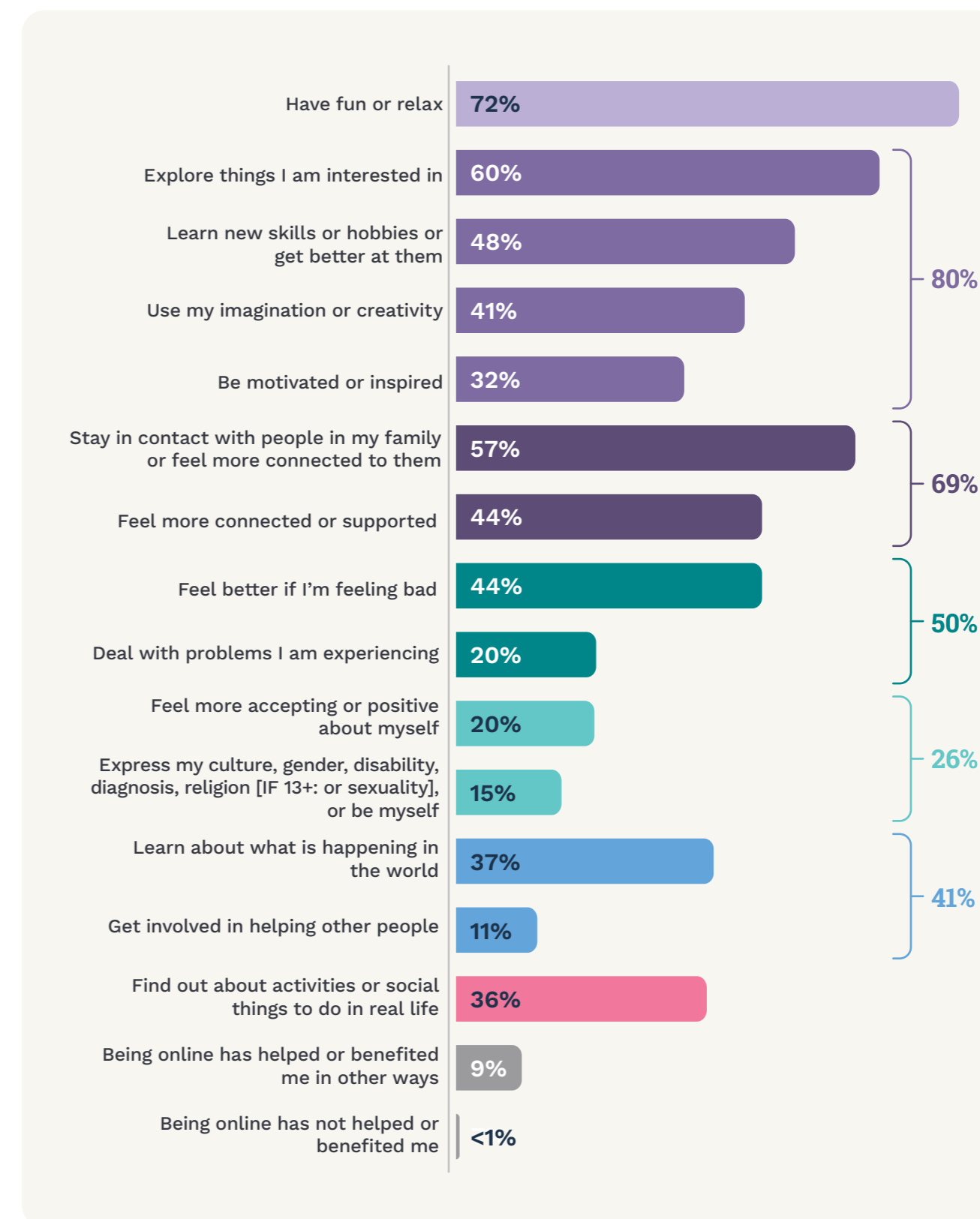
We also asked children to select from a list how being online had benefited them (if at all). Almost all (99%) reported at least one benefit, including a majority who said being online helped them to:

- have **fun or to relax** (72%)
- pursue their **interests** or **hobbies** or to explore their **creativity** (80%)
- **connect** with others (69%).

Others said being online helped them to:

- **deal with problems** or **feel better** if they were feeling bad (50%)
- learn about **world events** or get involved in **helping others** – for example, through online campaigns or fundraising (41%)
- **find out about activities** to do ‘in real life’ (36%)
- improve their **self-esteem** or give them an opportunity **to express their identity/true self** (26%), as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Benefits of being online



Q: Overall, how, if at all, has being online helped or benefited you? Being online has helped me to ...

Base: Children aged 10 to 17 (n=3,454).



Teens (aged 13 to 17) were more likely than younger children (aged 10 to 12) to report a range of online benefits. These included:

- feeling connected and supported
- learning about world events or getting involved in helping others
- discovering offline activities
- expressing themselves or feeling more positive about their identity.

As shown in Table 23, these benefits were also more commonly reported by girls than boys, as were emotional benefits.

Emotional benefits were especially prevalent among trans and gender-diverse children, who were more likely than both boys and girls to report positive impacts on:

- their emotional wellbeing
- their self-esteem or feelings about their identity
- learning about the world or getting involved in helping others.



Table 23: Benefits of being online, by age and gender (%)

	Child gender			Child age		
	Boys	Girls	Trans & gender diverse	10–12 (younger children)	13–15 (younger teens)	16–17 (older teens)
Interests, hobbies, creativity	78	81	83	80	80	79
Fun/relaxation	72	71	77	73	71	71
Connection to family	51	63	59	54	58	60
Emotional wellbeing	47	52	73	47	52	52
Connection and support (friendships)	40	47	56	36	47	52
Learning about world events or getting involved in helping others	39	42	55	35	44	46
Finding out about offline activities	33	39	35	30	37	42
Self-expression/ acceptance (gender, sexuality, disability, etc.)	21	30	68	23	27	31
Other benefits	7	11	21	8	10	10
No benefits	<1	<1	0	<1	<1	1
I don't know	1	1	0	1	1	1
I don't want to say	<1	<1	0	<1	1	<1
Base: Children aged 10–17	1,739	1,632	83	1,332	1,297	825

Q: Overall, how, if at all, has being online helped or benefited you? Being online has helped me to ...

Note: Different colour shading indicates that differences are statistically significant within subgroup. White shading indicates that differences are not statistically significant.

The internet is an important source of information for children

As we might expect, the internet is an important source of information for most children. As shown in Figure 3, in the 4 weeks preceding the survey, more than 3 in 5 (63%) had looked online for information about a **topic they were interested in**. Many had also looked online for information related to:

- their **schoolwork** or **studies** (33%)
- **fitness** or **diet** (28%)
- paid **work** (20%)
- **physical health** (16%).

A significant minority of children had looked online for information relating to more personal or sensitive topics, including:

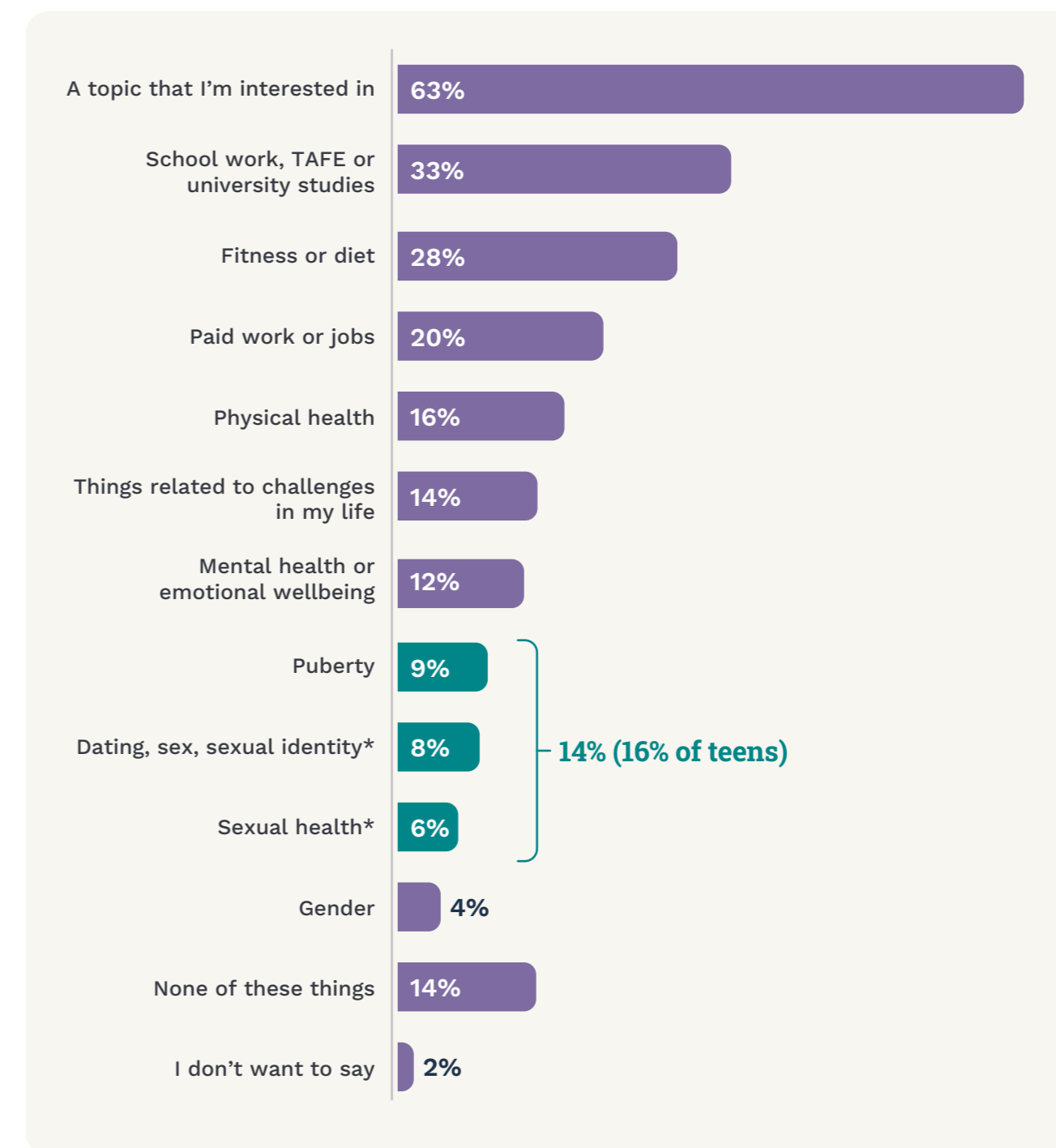
- **sex, dating, sexual health** or **puberty** (14%; 16% of teens¹³)
- **challenges** in their life (14%)
- **mental health** or **emotional wellbeing** (12%)
- **gender** (4%).

These findings suggest that some children may feel more comfortable exploring sensitive issues in the privacy of online spaces.

¹³Q: Response items 'Dating, sex, sexual identity' and 'Sexual health' were only shown to teens (aged 13 to 17).



Figure 3: Information sourced online



Q: Which, if any, of these types of information have you purposely looked for online in the past 4 weeks? This could be for yourself or for someone you know.

Base: Children aged 10 to 17 (n=3,454). *Teens aged 13 to 17 (n=2,122).

Our findings indicate that as children grow older, the internet becomes an increasingly important source of information for a wide range of topics (see Table 24).

As shown in Table 24, we also found that girls were more likely than boys to have looked online for information on several sensitive topics in the past 4 weeks, including:

- mental health or emotional wellbeing
- challenges in their life
- puberty.

Trans and gender-diverse children were even more likely than both boys and girls to have looked online for information on all the sensitive topics included in the survey. In the 4 weeks prior to the survey:

- just under 3 in 4 trans and gender-diverse children (74%) had sought out information on at least one sensitive topic
- more than 1 in 2 (54%) had looked for information on gender
- just under 1 in 2 (46%) had looked for information relating to mental health or emotional wellbeing.

These findings further highlight the importance of online spaces as a private and accessible source of support and information, especially for children exploring personal or identity-related topics.

Table 24: Information sourced online, by age and gender (%)

	Child gender			Child age		
	Boys	Girls	Trans & gender diverse	10–12 (younger children)	13–15 (younger teens)	16–17 (older teens)
A topic that I'm interested in	63	63	64	63	64	62
School work, TAFE or university studies	29	37	37	19	34	52
Fitness or diet	27	28	28	15	32	41
Paid work or jobs	19	21	22	4	24	41
Physical health	17	16	20	10	17	25
Things related to challenges in my life	12	15	31	11	15	16
Mental health or emotional wellbeing	9	15	46	7	13	20
Puberty	6	12	25	9	9	8
Dating, sex, sexual identity	4	5	26	–	7	8
Gender	3	3	54	4	5	4
Sexual health	3	4	15	–	4	7
'Sexual health/dating/puberty (combined)'	10	16	45	9	15	18
'Personal/sensitive issues (combined)'	25	34	74	22	33	39
I don't want to say	2	2	1	1	2	1
None of these things	14	14	1	23	10	4
Base: Children aged 10–17	1,739	1,632	83	1,332	1,297	825

Q: Which, if any, of these types of information have you purposely looked for online in the past 4 weeks? This could be for yourself or for someone you know.

*Personal/sensitive issues: 'Mental health or emotional wellbeing', 'Things related to challenges in my life', 'Sexual health', 'Puberty', 'Gender', 'Dating, sex, sexual identity'.

Note: Different colour shading indicates that differences are statistically significant within subgroup. White shading indicates that differences are not statistically significant.

Most children reject the idea that the amount of time they spend online is problematic, although some do have concerns

Children who took part in the survey were shown a series of statements about how being online and using social media might impact them and were asked to indicate the extent to which each statement was true or untrue for them personally.

As shown in Figure 4, most children rejected the idea that being online makes them feel **bad about themselves**. Seven in 10 (71%) said this was not very or not at all true for them (compared to 8% who said this was quite or very true for them).

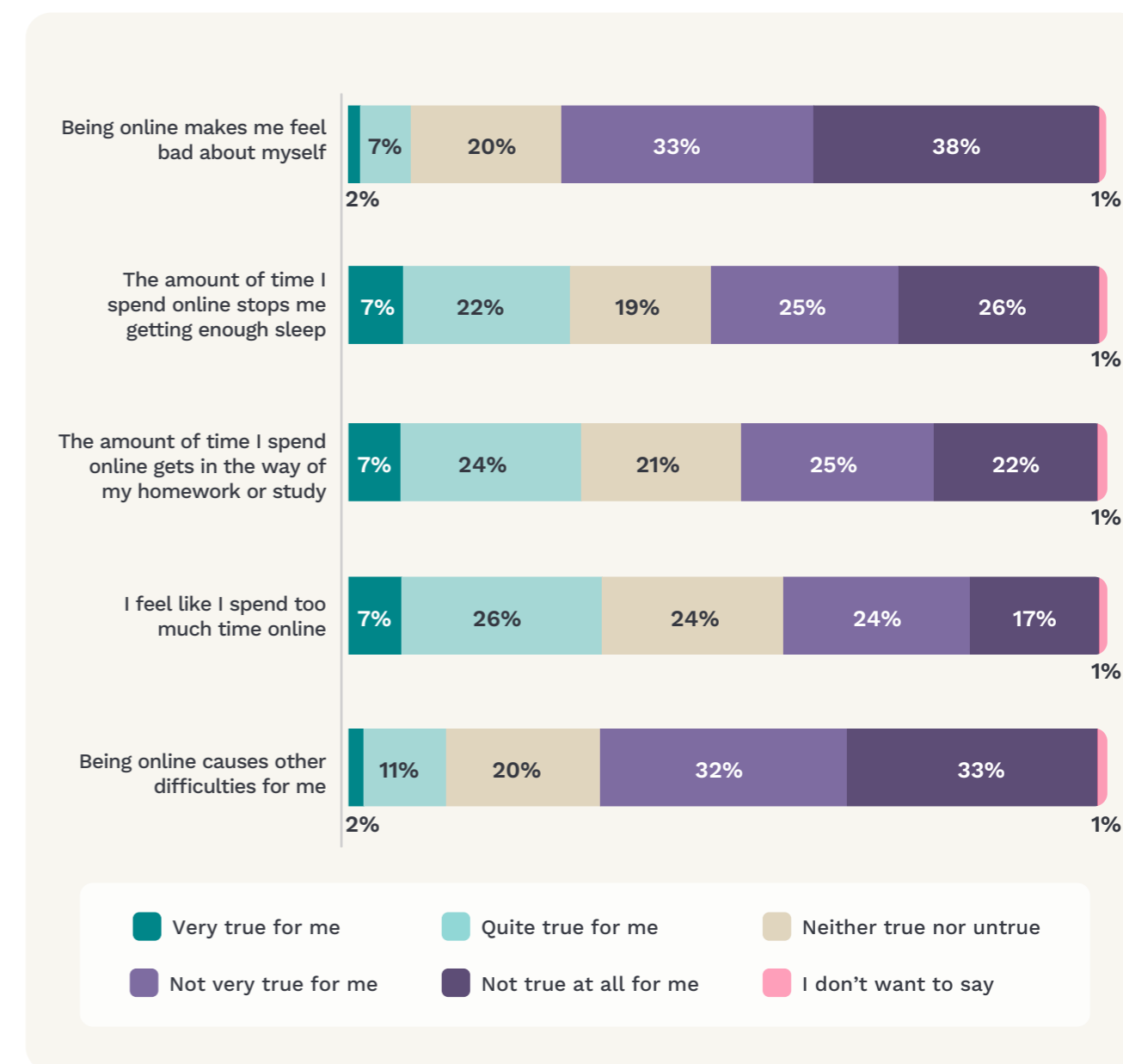
Children were also more likely to reject than accept the idea that the amount of time they spent online causes **problems for them**. Specifically:

- around half said it was not ('not very' or 'not at all') true that the amount of time they spent online stopped them getting enough **sleep** (51%) or got in the way of their **homework** or **study** (47%)
- 2 in 5 (42%) did not feel like they were spending **too much time** online.

However, this leaves around 1 in 3 who did feel they were spending too much time online (34%) or that the amount of time they spent online was causing issues with their sleep (29%) or homework/study (31%).



Figure 4: Negative impacts of being online



Q: How true, or untrue, are each of the following statements for you?

Base: Children aged 10 to 17 (n=3,454).

As children age, they are more likely to perceive negative impacts of being online (see Table 25). For example, 43% of older teens (aged 16 to 17) felt they spend too much time online, compared with 35% of younger teens (aged 13 to 15) and 26% of younger children (aged 10 to 12) ('quite true'/'very true' for them).

Trans and gender-diverse children were more likely than both boys and girls to report experiencing each of the negative impacts of being online included in this survey. We also found that boys were slightly more likely than girls to report that the amount of time they spent online interferes with their homework, study or sleep.

Table 25: Negative impacts of being online (% 'quite true' or 'very true')

	Child gender			Child age		
	Boys	Girls	Trans & gender diverse	10–12 (younger children)	13–15 (younger teens)	16–17 (older teens)
I feel like I spend too much time online	32	34	54	26	35	43
The amount of time I spend online gets in the way of my homework or study	32	29	43	23	33	40
The amount of time I spend online stops me getting enough sleep	30	27	55	20	31	43
Being online makes me feel bad about myself	8	9	19	7	9	10
Being online causes other difficulties for me	13	12	26	11	13	17
Base: Children aged 10–17	1,739	1,632	83	1,332	1,297	825

Q: How true, or untrue, are each of the following statements for you?

Note: Different colour shading indicates that differences are statistically significant within subgroup. White shading indicates that differences are not statistically significant.

Children tend to be positive about social media and its impacts on them, but also acknowledge that managing their use of it can be a challenge

Looking at social media specifically, children who had used social media were mostly positive about its impact on them and their ability to manage their use of it, while also acknowledging some of the challenges with controlling their usage (see Figure 5).

For example:

- Most children surveyed indicated that using social media is fun for them (78% said this was 'very true' or 'quite true' for them).
- Most also said it helps them to **learn and understand** things (67% 'very true' or 'quite true'), and around half said that using social media is **meaningful** for them (49% 'very true' or 'quite true').
- Only a minority said that each of these statements was 'not very' or 'not at all' true for them (6%, 9% and 17%, respectively).
- Further, children were more likely to reject than accept the idea that social media is a **waste of time** for them (49% 'not very' or 'not at all' true versus 19% 'very true' or 'quite true').

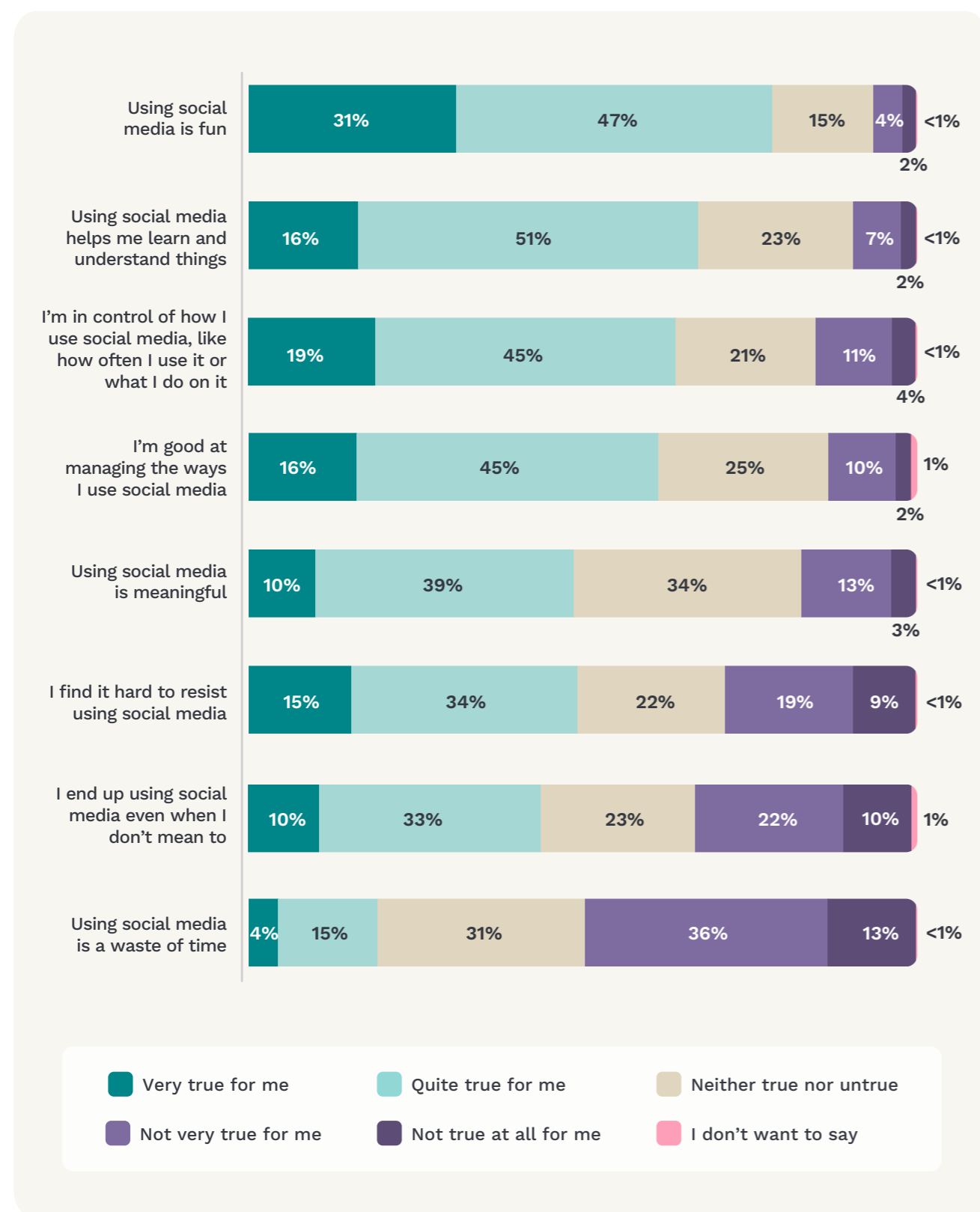
Most children who had used social media also reported feeling in control of their social media use, with just over 3 in 5 indicating that it was 'quite true' or 'very true' that they:

- were good at **managing** the ways they use social media (61%)
- **feel in control** of how they use social media (64%).

However, around half acknowledged that they find it **hard to resist** using social media (49% 'very true' or 'quite true'), and more than 2 in 5 said they end up using social media even when they **don't mean to** (43% 'very true' or 'quite true').

Further analysis shows that 37% of those who said they were good at managing the ways they use social media indicated they end up using it even when they don't want to, and 42% said they find it hard to resist using social media.

Figure 5: Social media impacts and management



Q: How true, or untrue, are each of the following statements for you? We are interested in how you personally feel about using social media.

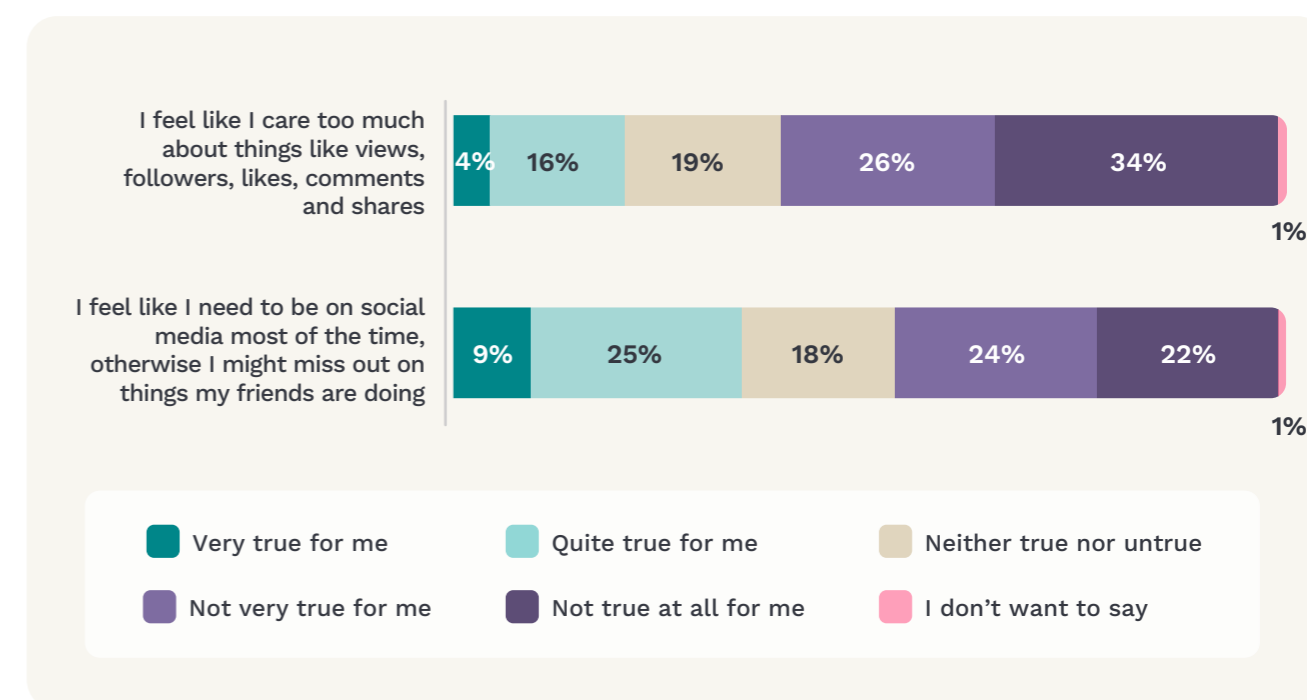
Base: Children aged 10 to 17 who had ever used social media and did the recontact survey (n=2,223).

As shown in Figure 6, children in our survey who had used social media were more likely to reject than accept the idea that they felt pressured by it. Specifically:

- 59% said it was 'not very true' or 'not true at all' that they **cared too much** about things like views, followers, likes, comments and shares
- 46% said it was 'not very true' or 'not true at all' that they needed to be on social media most of the time to **avoid missing out** on things their friends were doing.

However, a significant minority did report feeling these pressures – 21% and 34%, respectively.

Figure 6: Challenges managing social media



Q: How true, or untrue, are each of the following statements for you?

Base: Children aged 10 to 17 who had ever used social media (n=3,333).

As children grow older, they gain confidence in navigating social media, even as they become more aware of its complexities and risks

Among those who had ever used social media, teens were more likely than younger children to be positive about their ability to manage social media and its impact on them personally, as shown in Table 26. As previously mentioned, teens use social media more frequently and engage more actively than younger children, giving them more opportunities to learn and build confidence over time.

Trans and gender-diverse children were less likely than both boys and girls to feel they are good at managing the ways they use social media.

Table 26: Benefits and management of social media, by age and gender (% ‘quite true’ or ‘very true’)

	Child gender			Child age		
	Boys	Girls	Trans & gender diverse	10–12 (younger children)	13–15 (younger teens)	16–17 (older teens)
Using social media is fun	76	81	73	75	81	80
Using social media helps me learn and understand things	66	68	72	65	68	70
I’m in control of how I use social media, like how often I use it or what I do on it	63	65	66	55	68	72
I’m good at managing the ways I use social media	61	62	44	57	64	63
Using social media is meaningful	48	51	46	45	51	51
Base: Children aged 10–17 who had ever used social media and did the recontact survey	1,107	1,058	58	850	851	522

Q: How true, or untrue, are each of the following statements for you?

Note: Different colour shading indicates that differences are statistically significant within subgroup. White shading indicates that differences are not statistically significant.

Teens, especially older teens, were more likely than younger children to acknowledge challenges with managing their social media usage. For example, 59% of older teens (aged 16 to 17) told us they find it hard to resist using social media, compared with 48% of younger teens (aged 13 to 15) and 43% of younger children (aged 10 to 12).

This was also more common among girls and trans and gender-diverse children than boys, as shown in Table 27.

Table 27: Challenges managing social media, by age and gender (% ‘quite true’ or ‘very true’)

	Child gender			Child age		
	Boys	Girls	Trans & gender diverse	10–12 (younger children)	13–15 (younger teens)	16–17 (older teens)
I feel like I need to be on social media most of the time, otherwise I might miss out on things my friends are doing	30	39	43	26	37	42
I feel like I care too much about things like views, followers, likes, comments and shares	19	22	29	17	22	25
Base: Children aged 10–17 who had ever used social media	1,669	1,581	83	1,237	1,278	818
I find it hard to resist using social media	46	52	61	43	48	59
I end up using social media even when I don’t mean to	41	46	46	37	44	52
Using social media is a waste of time	20	18	25	20	19	19
Base: Children aged 10–17 who had ever used social media and did the recontact survey	1,107	1,058	58	850	851	522

Q: How true, or untrue, are each of the following statements for you?

Note: Different colour shading indicates that differences are statistically significant within subgroup. White shading indicates that differences are not statistically significant.

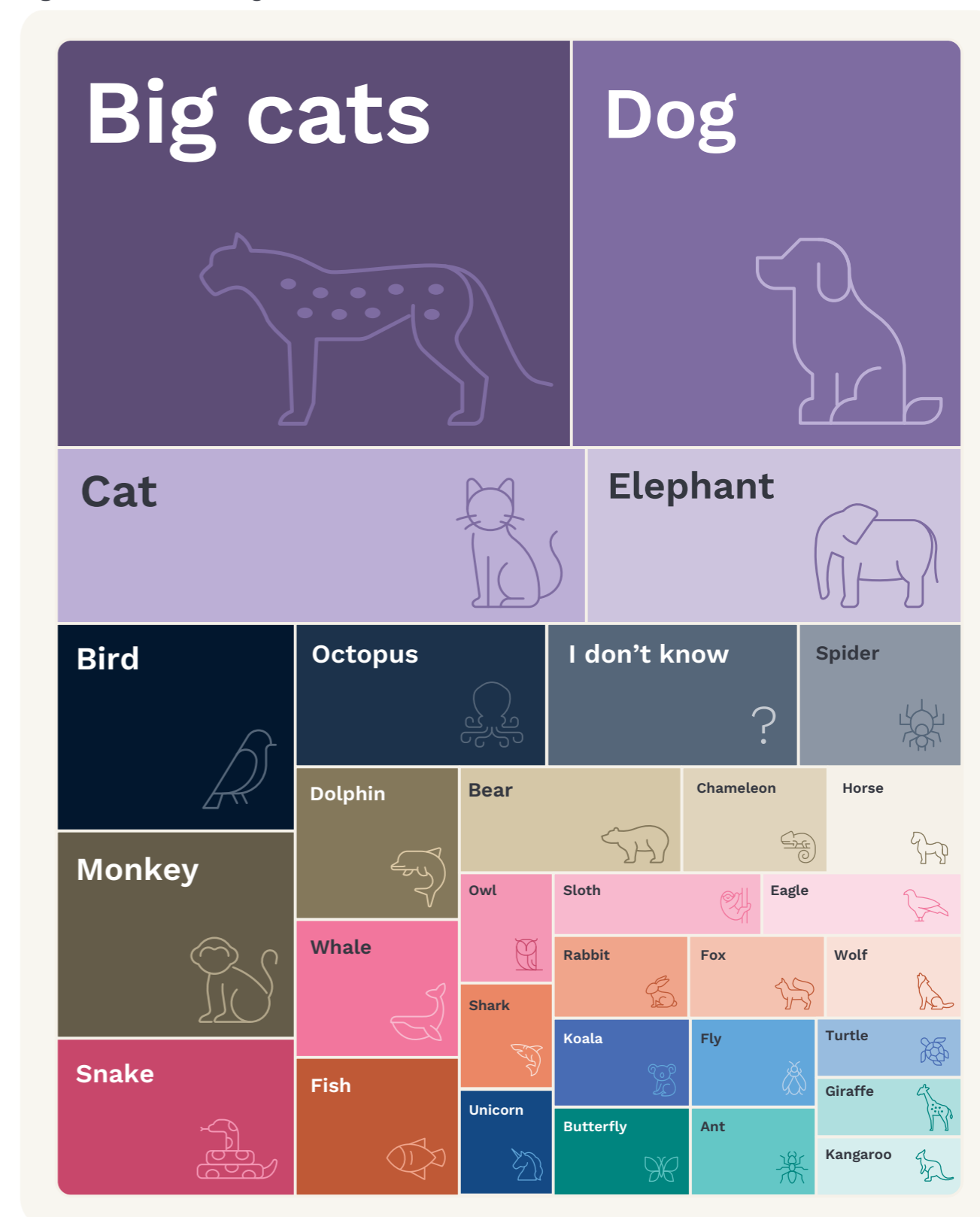
Children have mixed feelings about the nature of the internet

We asked children to imagine the internet as an **animal**, to tell us what animal they had chosen and why. Their responses reveal the diverse ways children experience the online world – not just in terms of its features, but how it makes them feel and, in many cases, their awareness of its risks.

Children suggested more than 130 different animals, reflecting the diversity of their online experiences. Some chose animals for their lovable or playful traits, while others selected creatures known for being dangerous, unpredictable or powerful. Many children described animals that could be both friendly and threatening – suggesting an awareness that the internet, like these animals, can be fun and helpful but also risky or harmful if not approached with care.

- The most common suggestion was a member of the Big Cat family – around 1 in 5 (17%) named one of the big cats (including lions, tigers, or cheetahs). Children most often said they chose big cats for their dangerous, unpredictable nature, with some also citing their speed, strength or dominance. This suggests that some children see the internet as a powerful force that commands attention and respect, but also as one that can be threatening or overwhelming.
- Next were pets – dogs or puppies (13%) and cats or kittens (8%). These were typically chosen for their likeable, playful or ‘cute’ qualities. However, some children also noted these animals’ potential to attack, especially if provoked. This duality reflects how children may experience the internet as both a source of comfort and connection, and as a space where things can quickly go wrong.
- Other suggestions are shown in Figure 7. (Larger boxes represent more popular choices.)

Figure 7: Internet imagined as an animal



Q: If the internet were an animal, what animal would it be? Why?

Base: Children aged 10 to 17 who answered this question (n=1,726).¹⁴

Note: Only shows animals mentioned by at least 1% of recontact survey participants.

¹⁴Half of the children who did the core survey were asked this free text question; the other half were asked a different free text question (to minimise participant fatigue).

Overall, 1 in 5 children (22%) described the internet in ways that reflected an awareness of its risks, unpredictability or dual nature. Specifically, just over 1 in 10 (11%) said the internet reminded them of an animal that was ‘scary’, ‘fierce’, ‘wild’, ‘dangerous’, ‘unpredictable’ or similar, suggesting a clear recognition of the potential for harm or threat in online spaces. Their explanations reflect a sense of caution and the need to stay alert while navigating the digital world.

“It will sit, hunt, attack and devour its prey if they are not paying attention.”

(Boy, age 17, chose a lion)

“cause it is sneaky and fast and at times can be very dangerous.”

(Girl, age 17, chose a snake)

“Coz it’s really large and can be a grumpy and scary place”

(Girl, age 10, chose a bear)

Another 1 in 10 (11%) explained that they had chosen an animal with positive characteristics that also had the capacity to ‘turn’ and be dangerous. These choices suggest that many children see the internet as something that can shift quickly from being safe to unsafe, or from fun to scary, depending on how it is used or approached.

“It can be your best friend but if you pull its tail it will bite.”

(Boy, age 12, chose a dog)

“Sometimes it’s nice other times attacks without warning.”

(Girl, age 17, chose a cat)

“Looks cute but can tear you to shreds.”

(Boy, age 16, chose a bear)

“Because they have to be trained to be good, or else they can be scary like wolves.”

(Girl, age 14, chose a dog)

However, almost 1 in 5 (19%) told us they had chosen an animal because they liked it for various reasons, including because it was ‘cool’, ‘fun’, ‘cheerful’, ‘friendly’, ‘beautiful’ or ‘playful’. These responses may reflect children who have had mostly positive experiences online, or who associate the internet with enjoyment, creativity and connection.

“I enjoy and have fun on the internet and feel like Monkeys are like this.”

(Girl, age 17, chose a monkey)

“Because it’s my favourite animal and it makes me happy like the internet makes me happy sometimes.”

(Girl, age 11, chose a panda)

“They are the best.”

(Girl, age 12, chose a dog)

“So fun!”

(Boy, age 11, chose a dolphin)

Beyond perceptions of danger or playfulness, many children described the internet using animals that represented its scale, speed, intelligence and reach. These responses suggest that children are not only aware of how the internet feels emotionally, but also of how it functions and influences their lives. Their choices reflected ideas such as:

- intelligent (9%) – ‘Because it never forgets anything.’ (Girl, age 14, chose an elephant)
- large (8%) – ‘Because it is very big and can get places very fast.’ (Boy, age 10, chose a megalodon)
- pervasive (7%) – ‘... it reaches everywhere like a spider’s web.’ (Girl, age 14, chose a spider)
- fast (6%) – ‘Because it’s so fast to access anything and everything.’ (Boy, age 16, chose a cheetah)
- adventurous, explorative or free (6%) – ‘I would think of it as an eagle, showing me the whole world.’ (Boy, age 10)
- strong or dominant (5%) – ‘It is a boss, it really rules our lives and it can be ferocious.’ (Boy, age 17, chose a lion)
- untrustworthy or sneaky (3%) – ‘Cos bad things can be hidden like a snake in the grass.’ (Girl, age 17, chose a snake)
- able to change, evolve or camouflage (3%) – ‘Snakes slither in many different places, shed and change into different things much like the web.’ (Girl, age 14)

Younger children (aged 10 to 12) were more likely than teens (aged 13 to 17) to imagine the internet as an animal they simply liked or considered as friendly, playful or fun (23% versus 17% of younger teens aged 13 to 15 and 15% of older teens aged 16 to 17), suggesting that they are more likely to have more positive or less complex experiences online.

Girls were more likely to perceive the internet as something dangerous or potentially dangerous (25% of girls, compared to 19% of boys). Trans and gender-diverse children were as likely as girls to see the internet in this way (28%).

These differences reflect how children's experiences and perceptions of risk evolve with age and identity, reinforcing the need for nuanced, developmentally appropriate approaches to online safety.

Discussion

Almost all the children who participated in this study said that being online benefited them in various ways – from having fun and relaxing to improving their emotional wellbeing and sense of connection. The vast majority had recently used the internet to search for information, and for some this included seeking information on sensitive topics such as mental health or sexual health. These findings highlight the internet's role not only in supporting curiosity and learning, but also in helping children navigate complex aspects of growing up.

Most children rejected the idea that being online and using social media had various negative impacts on them. However, some acknowledged that the amount of time they spent online did cause them problems, as well as recognising the challenges of managing their social media use. Many also acknowledged that the internet could be both beneficial and potentially risky. The next section of this report explores the behaviours that children may engage in online that can increase their exposure to risks.



Behaviours that may increase exposure to online harm

Despite the benefits and advantages for children of being online, with the internet providing a space for fun, relaxation, exploration and connection, the digital world also presents substantial risks to children (**snapshots**). Some online behaviours – such as having a public social media profile, sharing nude images of themselves, and speaking to strangers online – could increase exposure to negative, and potentially harmful, online experiences. For example, having a public social media account increases the likelihood of a child’s personal information and/or photos being seen by strangers online and reduces the control they have over who they interact with online. In this section of the report, we explore behaviours that children may engage in online that carry more risk. Future reports will examine the association between these behaviours and experiences of online harm.

More than 1 in 10 children have public or secret social media accounts

As described earlier in this report (p. 26), most of the children we surveyed (65%) said they had a personal social media account. We asked children about the types of social media accounts they held at that time and found that, while 1 in 2 (51% of children surveyed; 79% of social media account holders) only had private social media accounts, more than 1 in 10 (12% of children surveyed; 18% of social media account holders) had at least one **public** social media account (see Table 28).¹⁵

We also found that more than 1 in 10 (13% of children surveyed; 20% of social media account holders) had **ever** had an **extra or hidden** social media profile or account (‘secret social media account’)¹⁶ they didn’t want their parent or caregiver to know about.

¹⁵ Excluding YouTube Kids.

¹⁶ Excluding YouTube Kids.

Table 28: Types of social media accounts held by children (%)

	Current social media account holders	All children surveyed
Only private account(s)*	79	51
At least one public account	18	12
Ever had a secret social media account	20	13
Base: Children aged 10–17	2,251	3,454

Q: Most social media platforms and apps have settings that let you choose who you share your posts or your content with. Which of the following types of social media accounts do you have? You can choose more than one answer.

Q: Have you ever had an extra or hidden social media profile or account that you do not want your parent or caregiver to know about?

Note: *Private accounts included: ‘private, so only my friends or followers can see it’ and ‘private, so only I can see it’.

Trans and gender-diverse children and teens are more likely than other children to have public and secret social media accounts

As shown in Table 29, trans and gender-diverse children in our survey were significantly more likely than both girls and boys to report having:

- at least one public social media account
- ever had a secret social media account.

We also found that:

- boys were more likely than girls to have a public social media account
- girls were more likely than boys to have ever had a secret social media account.

In addition, our findings suggest that as children get older, they are not only more likely to have a personal social media account (see p. 27) but are also more likely to have at least one public account and to have ever had a secret social media account.



Table 29: Types of social media accounts held by children, by gender and age (%)

	Child gender			Child age		
	Boys	Girls	Trans & gender diverse	10–12 (younger children)	13–15 (younger teens)	16–17 (older teens)
Only private account(s)*	49	54	53	27	62	73
At least one public account	13	9	23	8	12	16
Ever had a secret social media account	12	14	32	6	15	23
Base: Children aged 10–17	1,739	1,632	83	1,332	1,297	825

Q: Most social media platforms and apps have settings that let you choose who you share your posts or your content with. Which of the following types of social media accounts do you have? You can choose more than one answer.

Q: Have you ever had an extra or hidden social media profile or account that you do not want your parent or caregiver to know about?

Note: *Private accounts included: ‘private, so only my friends or followers can see it’ and ‘private, so only I can see it’. Different colour shading indicates that differences are statistically significant within subgroup. White shading indicates that differences are not statistically significant.

More than 1 in 4 children use location sharing apps to share their location with people outside of their family

More than 1 in 4 children (27%) said they had ever shared their exact real-time location with someone who wasn’t in their family, using a location sharing app (like Find My Friends, Life360, Snap Map).

As shown in Table 30, we found that girls and teens (especially older teens aged 16 to 17) were more likely than boys and younger children to have ever shared their location with someone outside of their family.



Table 30: Children who have ever used a location sharing app to share their location with people outside of their family, by gender and age (%)

	Child gender			Child age		
	Boys	Girls	Trans & gender diverse	10–12 (younger children)	13–15 (younger teens)	16–17 (older teens)
No	74	69	61	85	66	57
Yes	24	30	34	14	32	41
Base: Children aged 10–17	1,739	1,632	83	1,332	1,297	825

Q: Have you ever done any of the following? Shared your exact real-time location with someone who isn’t in your family using a location sharing app (like Find My Friends, Life360, Snap Map).

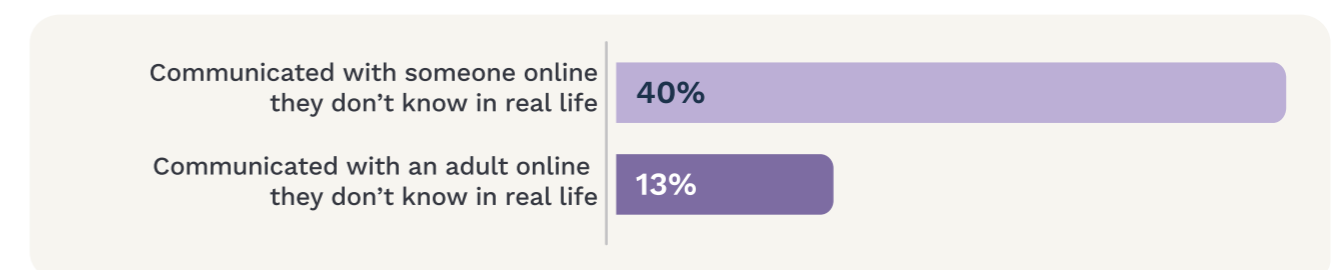
Note: Different colour shading indicates that differences are statistically significant within subgroup. White shading indicates that differences are not statistically significant.

Around 2 in 5 children communicate online with people they don’t know offline

We found that a significant number of children engage in online communication with people they don’t know offline, and that the likelihood of this increases with age and varies across genders (see Figure 8). Specifically:

- 40% of children had messaged, texted or talked online with someone they **didn’t already know** ‘in real life’
- 13% of children (32% of those who had communicated online with someone they didn’t already know) had communicated with an **adult** they didn’t already know ‘in real life’.

Figure 8: Children who have communicated online with people they don’t know ‘in real life’



Q: Have you ever messaged, texted or talked online with anyone you don’t already know in real life? This could be while gaming, in messaging apps, social media, texts, video chat, emails [IF AGED 16+: or dating apps].

Q: So, thinking just about the people you messaged or talked to online, who you did not already know in real life ... Were any of these people adults?

Base: Children aged 10 to 17 (n=3,454).

As shown in Table 31, we found that trans and gender-diverse children were more likely than girls and boys to have communicated online with:

- people they didn't already know 'in real life'
- an adult they didn't already know 'in real life'.

In addition, boys were more likely than girls to have had both these types of interaction online.

We also found that age played a significant role, with teens (aged 13 to 17) and especially older teens (aged 16 to 17) more likely to have engaged in these types of online communication.

Table 31: Children who have communicated online with someone they don't know 'in real life', by gender and age (%)

	Child gender			Child age		
	Boys	Girls	Trans & gender diverse	10–12 (younger children)	13–15 (younger teens)	16–17 (older teens)
Communicated with someone online they don't know in real life	43	35	74	30	42	51
Communicated with an adult online they don't know in real life	16	9	30	8	13	21
Base: Children aged 10–17	1,739	1,632	83	1,332	1,297	825

Q: Have you ever messaged, texted or talked online with anyone you don't already know in real life? This could be while gaming, in messaging apps, social media, texts, video chat, emails [IF AGED 16+ or dating apps].

Q: So, thinking just about the people you messaged or talked to online who you did not already know in real life ... Were any of these people adults?

Note: Different colour shading indicates that differences are statistically significant within subgroup. White shading indicates that differences are not statistically significant.

A significant proportion of children who communicate with unknown adults online have been asked to meet up or to provide personal information

Highlighting the risks of children communicating online with adults they don't know 'in real life', we found that of children who had done this:

- nearly 3 in 10 (28%) had been asked to **send the adult a photo or video** of themselves
- more than 1 in 4 (26%) had been asked to tell the adult **personal details**, such as their full name, address or phone number
- 1 in 5 (20%) had been asked to **meet up with the adult 'in real life'** (see Table 32).

Table 32: Requests received from adults online who children don't know 'in real life'

	Children who had communicated with an adult online who they didn't know in real life	All children surveyed
To meet up with them in real life	20	3
To send them a photo or video of yourself	28	4
To tell them who you are or how to find or contact you (like your full name, address or phone number)	26	3
Base: Children aged 10–17	453	3,454

Q: Have any of the adults who you didn't already know in real life ever asked you to ...? (a) meet up with them in real life; (b) send them a photo or video of yourself; (c) tell them who you are or how to find or contact you (like your full name, address or phone number).

Close to 1 in 10 children have shared a nude image of themselves with someone online

In our survey, 8% of children had ever **shared a nude image** of themselves with someone else online, with 4% having done so in the past 12 months (see Table 33). We also found that:

- 7% had shared a nude image of themselves with someone they already knew 'in real life'
- 5% had shared a nude image of themselves with someone **not known to them 'in real life'**.

Table 33: Children who have shared a nude image of themselves online (%)

		Total
Anyone	ever	8
	past 12 months	4
To send them a photo or video of yourself	ever	7
	past 12 months	4
Someone not known in real life	ever	5
	past 12 months	2
Base: Children aged 10–17 who completed recontact survey and chose to see the questions on nude image sharing	453	1,948

Q: Have you ever shared a nude image of yourself online with someone that you already knew in real life?

Q: Have you ever shared a nude image of yourself online with someone you didn't already know in real life?

Note: Experiences of nude image sharing were examined in a recontact survey. Children were given the option of skipping certain sensitive questions in the survey, including those asking about nude image sharing. Among the 2,302 children aged 10 to 17 who completed the recontact survey, 354 declined to see the questions on nude image sharing. The prevalence of nude image sharing reported here is therefore based on a subset of the overall sample (n=1,948).

There were no significant differences in nude image sharing between girls and boys surveyed (see Table 34).¹⁷

However, as shown in Table 34, sharing nude images was much more common among teens, especially older teens (aged 16 to 17), who were more likely to have:

- ever shared a nude image of themselves online
- shared a nude image of themselves with someone they knew ‘in real life’
- shared a nude image of themselves with someone they didn’t know ‘in real life.’

Table 34: Nude image sharing, by gender and age (%)

		Child gender		Child age		
		Boys	Girls	10–12 (younger children)	13–15 (younger teens)	16–17 (older teens)
Anyone	ever	8	7	4	8	14
	past 12 months	4	4	3	4	7
Someone known in real life	ever	7	7	4	7	13
	past 12 months	4	3	2	4	6
Someone not known in real life	ever	5	4	3	5	7
	past 12 months	1	2	1	1	3
Base: Children aged 10–17 who completed recontact survey and chose to see the questions on nude image sharing		969	931	751	732	465

Q: Have you ever shared a nude image of yourself online with someone that you already knew in real life?

Q: Have you ever shared a nude image of yourself online with someone you didn’t already know in real life?

Note: Experiences of nude image sharing were examined in a recontact survey. Children were given the option of skipping certain sensitive questions in the survey, including those asking about nude image sharing. Among the 2,302 children aged 10 to 17 who completed the recontact survey, 354 declined to see the questions on nude image sharing. The prevalence of nude image sharing reported here is therefore based on a subset of the overall sample (n=1,948).

Different colour shading indicates that differences are statistically significant within subgroup. White shading indicates that differences are not statistically significant.

Overall, more than half of the children (55%) in our survey had engaged in online behaviours that could increase their risk of harm. These include sharing their real-time location with non-family members, communicating with strangers online, sending nude images of themselves to people they didn’t know ‘in real life’, using dating apps, or maintaining hidden or public social media accounts.

The proportion of children engaging in potentially risky online activities increased with age 40% of 10- to 12-year-olds versus 60% of 13- to 15-year-olds versus 70% of 16- to 17-year-olds). Incidence was also higher among boys (56%) than girls (52%), and highest among trans and gender-diverse children (81%).

Discussion

We found that children engage in a range of behaviours online that may increase their likelihood of exposure to potential harm. These include having public social media accounts (as opposed to accounts restricted to friends and family) or, conversely, secret social media accounts, sharing their real-time location with people outside their family, and communicating with people they don’t know offline – including adults. A smaller but significant proportion of children in our study also reported sharing nude images of themselves online. These behaviours tended to be more common among teens and trans and gender-diverse children, suggesting that age and gender can influence both exposure to and engagement in online risks.

While some of these behaviours may reflect a desire for autonomy, social connection or exploration of identity, they also increase the likelihood of encountering harmful or exploitative situations. The findings underscore the importance of understanding the contexts in which children take these risks and the need for supportive, age-appropriate and non-judgemental interventions that help them to navigate the digital world safely. In the following section, we explore children’s online safety knowledge and the strategies they use to protect themselves online.

¹⁷ Sample sizes were too small to report the prevalence of nude image sharing among trans and gender-diverse children aged 10 to 17 (n=48).



Children's strategies and sources of knowledge for keeping safe online

While online environments pose risks, there are many strategies that children can use to help them stay safe online. There are also various sources of information for children about online safety, from family and friends, to teachers or government programs. Parents and caregivers, in particular, can play an important role in increasing or facilitating children's knowledge about safety online. This section explores the skills and knowledge that children use to help keep themselves safe online and the conversations they have with their parents and caregivers about online safety.

Parents, caregivers and teachers are the most common sources of information about online safety for children

Nearly all children (98%) surveyed reported that they had seen or heard something about how to stay safe online. As shown in Figure 9, the most common sources were:

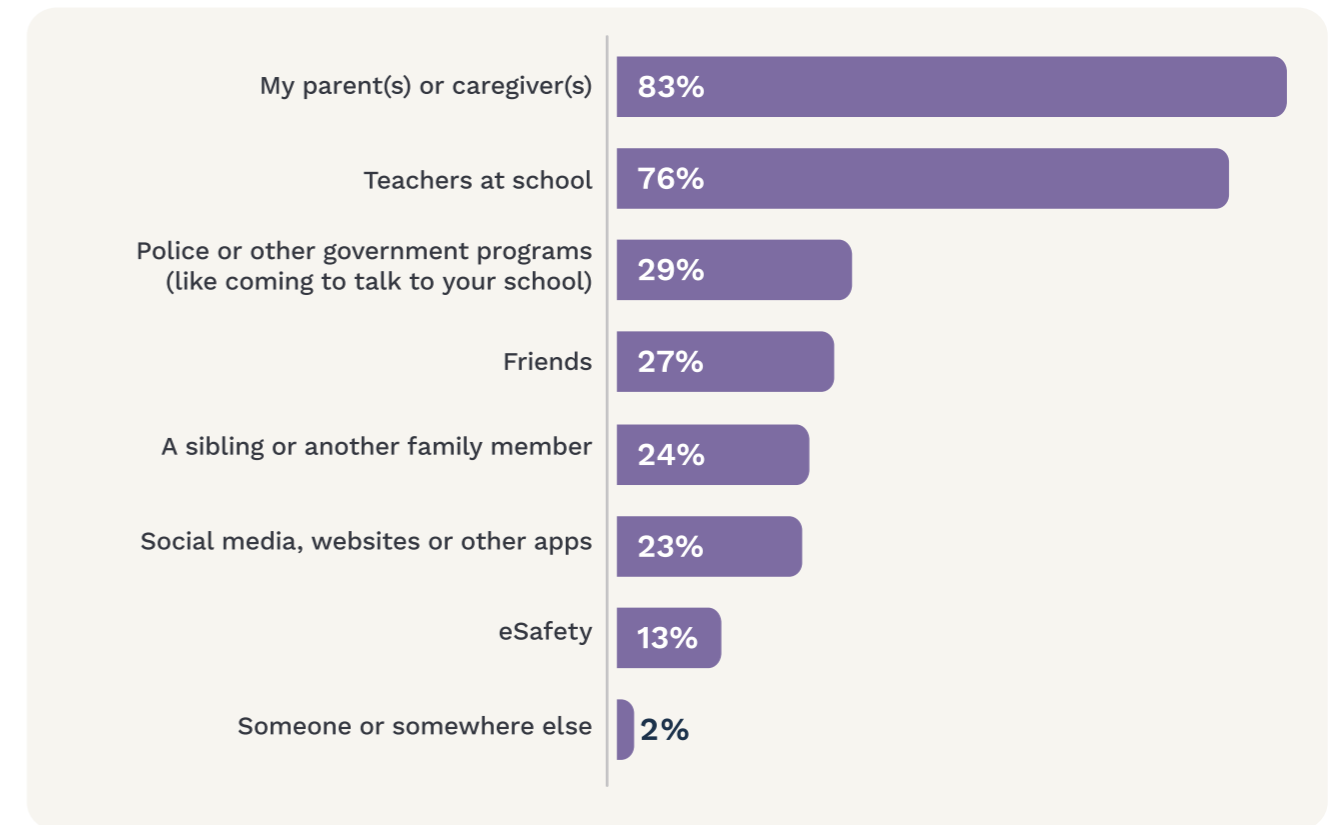
- **parents or caregivers** (83%)
- **teachers** at school (76%).

Many children also reported learning about online safety from:

- the **police** or other **government programs** (29%)
- **friends** (27%)
- **other family** members (24%)
- **online sources** (23%).

For gender and age differences in sources of information about online safety, see Table A3 in the appendix.

Figure 9: Sources of information for children about online safety



Q: Where have you ever seen or heard anything about how to stay safe online, if anywhere? You can choose more than one answer.

Base: Children aged 10 to 17 (n=3,454).



Almost 2 in 3 children are regularly encouraged by their parents and caregivers to let them know if they feel unsafe online

Parents and caregivers play a key role in supporting children's online safety. As shown in Figure 10, a majority (65%) of children surveyed reported that their parent or caregiver regularly¹⁸ **encourages them** to tell them if anything happens online that makes them feel **uncomfortable or unsafe**.

In addition, more than 1 in 2 reported that their parent or caregiver regularly talks to them about:

- how they can be safer online (56%)
- what they have been doing online (53%).

Figure 10: Regular conversations with parents and caregivers about online safety



Q: Parents, caregivers and families can have different ways of talking about staying safe online. Which, if any, of the following does your parent or caregiver regularly do (for example, once a month or more)? You can choose more than one answer.

Base: Children aged 10 to 17 ($n=3,454$).

¹⁸ 'Regularly' was defined as once a month or more.

Regular conversations between parents, caregivers and children about online safety decrease with age

We also found that parental engagement in regular online safety discussions tends to decrease as children get older. As shown in Table A4 in the appendix, younger children (aged 10 to 12) and younger teens (aged 13 to 15) were more likely than older teens (aged 16 to 17) to report that their parent or caregiver:

- talks to them regularly about how to be safer online (56 to 59% versus 49%)
- asks, or talks to them, about what they have been doing online (55 to 57% versus 44%).

Most children think they would talk to their parent or caregiver about negative experiences online

Open communication with trusted adults is a key protective factor when children encounter negative experiences online (eSafety Commissioner, n.d.; Kuldass et al., 2023). In our survey, 90% of children said they would either definitely or probably talk to their parent or caregiver if they experienced something online that made them feel upset, uncomfortable or ashamed. This increased to 95% among children who said their parents regularly encouraged them to talk to them in this situation, compared to 81% of those who said their parents didn't regularly encourage them to do this.

As shown in Table A5 in the appendix:

- younger children (aged 10 to 12) were more likely than teens (aged 13 to 17) to say they would talk to their parent or caregiver in such situations (93% versus 88%)
- trans and gender-diverse children were more likely than girls to say they **wouldn't** talk to their parent or caregiver (16% versus 7%), though a majority (84%) still said they would.



Children talk with their parents and caregivers about a range of online safety issues

We asked children in our survey about the online safety topics they had discussed with their parents or caregivers in the past 12 months. They indicated that parents and caregivers were most likely to have addressed the following issues with them:¹⁹

- how to keep **personal information** private online (52%)
- the risks of **dangerous people** being online [IF 13+: or online 'grooming'] (48%)
- that what you see on social media isn't always **realistic** (48%)
- online **bullying** (44%).

Overall, most children (88%) reported that their parent or caregiver had talked to them about at least one online safety topic in the past 12 months.

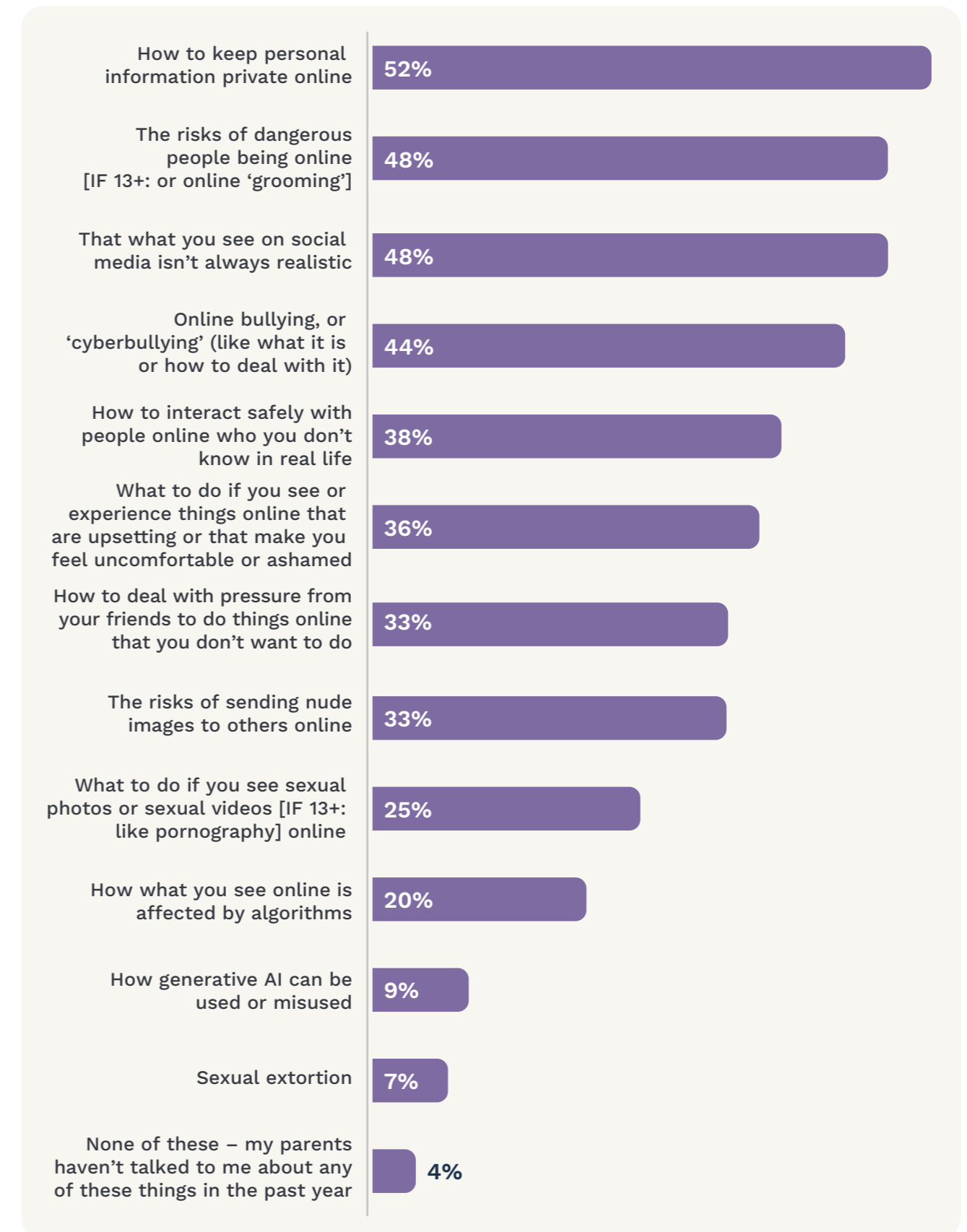
However, as shown in Figure 11, certain sensitive or emerging topics were less frequently discussed with their parents or caregivers. Specifically:

- the risks of sending **nude images** of themselves to others online (33%)
- what to do if they see **sexual photos or sexual videos** [IF 13+: like pornography] online (25%)
- that what they see online is affected by **algorithms** (20%)
- how **generative AI** can be used or misused (9%)
- **sexual extortion** (7%).

These findings highlight a gap in communication about more complex or sensitive online safety issues, suggesting a need for increased support and resources to help parents and caregivers navigate these conversations.

¹⁹It is important to note that these findings reflect children's recollections of conversations with their parents and caregivers. Parents and caregivers were also asked about the online safety topics they had discussed with their child. Findings from the parent survey will be presented in a forthcoming report.

Figure 11: Online safety topics parents and caregivers discussed with children in the past year



Q: Which, if any, of the following things has your parent or caregiver talked to you about in the past year?

Base: Children aged 10 to 17 (n=3,454).

We also asked children a follow-up question about how they felt during or after their most recent conversation with a parent or caregiver about a sensitive online safety topic.²⁰ Overall, most children reported a positive experience (see Figure 12). Specifically:

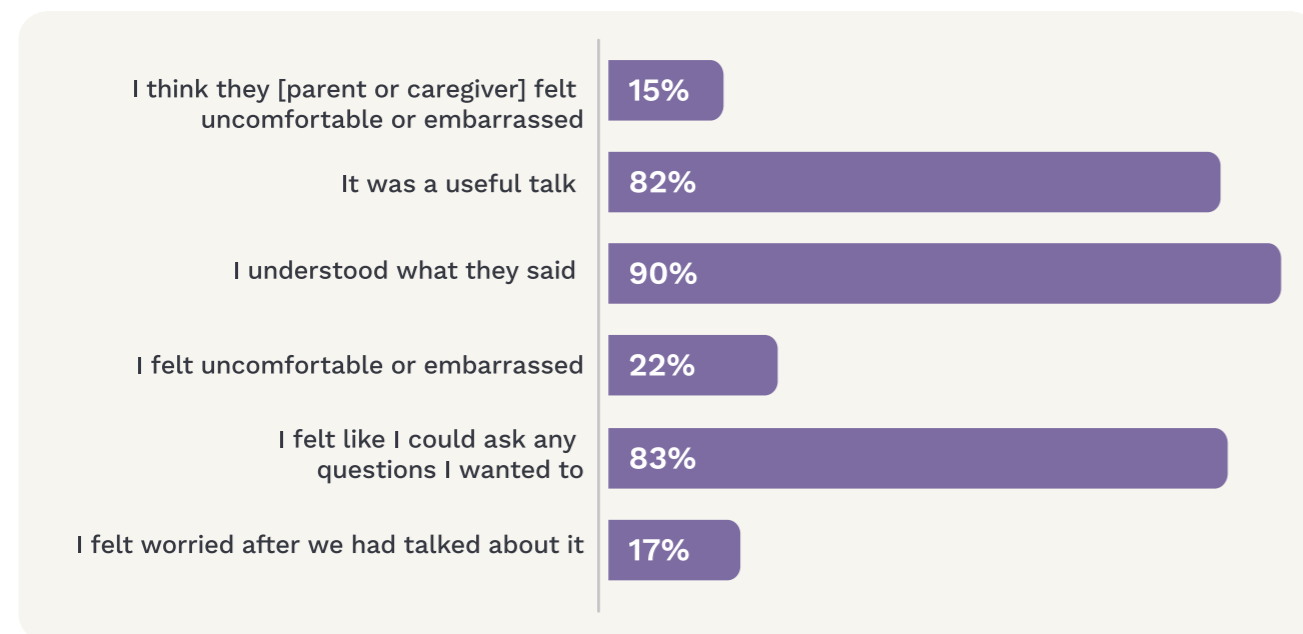
- 90% said they **understood** what was being said
- 83% said they felt they could **ask any questions** they wanted to
- 82% said it was a **useful** talk.

However, the findings also suggest that these conversations can be challenging for some families. For example:

- 22% of children reported feeling **uncomfortable or embarrassed**
- 17% of children said they felt **worried** after the conversation
- 15% of children thought their parent or caregiver felt **uncomfortable or embarrassed**.

Further detail on children's feelings about specific sensitive topics discussed with their parents and caregivers is provided in Table A6 in the appendix.

Figure 12: Children's feelings about sensitive conversations with their parents or caregivers (% 'very true' or 'quite true')



Q: Think about the most recent time you talked about [sensitive topic] with your parent or caregiver. How true or untrue are the following statements about how it went? (The table presents those that said each statement was 'very true' or 'quite true'.)

Note: This question was only asked of children who reported that their parents or caregivers had talked to them about one of the five sensitive topics in the past year. If they had a conversation about more than one sensitive topic in the past year, they were only asked about their most recent experience.

Base: Children aged 10 to 17 who had talked with a parent or caregiver about a sensitive online safety topic in the past 12 months (n=2,279).

²⁰For the purpose of this research, 'sensitive' topics included: sexual extortion, what to do if you see sexual photos or sexual videos online, the risks of sending nude images to others online, the risks of dangerous people being online or of online 'grooming', and what to do if you see or experience things online that are upsetting or that make you feel uncomfortable or ashamed.

Girls are more likely than boys to have conversations with their parent or caregiver about a range of online safety topics

Our findings indicate that a child's gender may influence the types of online safety conversations they have with their parents or caregivers (see Table A7 in the appendix). Girls in our survey were more likely than boys to report having discussed a range of online safety topics with their parent or caregiver in the past 12 months. Notably, girls were more likely than boys to have had conversations about:

- the risks of dangerous people being online [IF 13+: or online grooming] (51% versus 45%)
- that what you see on social media isn't always realistic (52% versus 44%)
- what to do if they see or experience things online that are upsetting or that make them feel uncomfortable or ashamed (39% versus 32%)
- how to deal with pressure from their friends to do things online that they don't want to do (37% versus 30%)
- the risks of sending nude images of themselves to others online (35% versus 30%)
- what to do if they see sexual photos or sexual videos [IF 13+: like pornography] online (27% versus 23%).

Age influences the online safety topics discussed by children and their parent or caregiver

Our findings also indicate that as children grow older, parents and caregivers tend to engage in more complex and sensitive online safety discussions (see Table A7).

Teens (aged 13 to 17) were more likely than younger children (aged 10 to 12) to have had conversations with their parent or caregiver about:

- the risks of sending nude images of themselves to others (36% versus 27%)
- how what they see online is affected by algorithms (23% versus 15%)
- how generative AI can be used or misused (10% versus 7%)
- sexual extortion (8% versus 5%).

In comparison, younger children were more likely than teens to have had conversations in the past 12 months with their parent or caregiver about:

- the risks of dangerous people being online [IF 13+: or online grooming] (54% versus 45%)
- online bullying, or 'cyberbullying' (47% versus 43%)
- what to do if they see or experience things online that are upsetting or that make them feel uncomfortable or ashamed (38% versus 34%).

Among teens, younger teens (aged 13 to 15) were more likely than older teens (aged 16 to 17) to report having discussed:

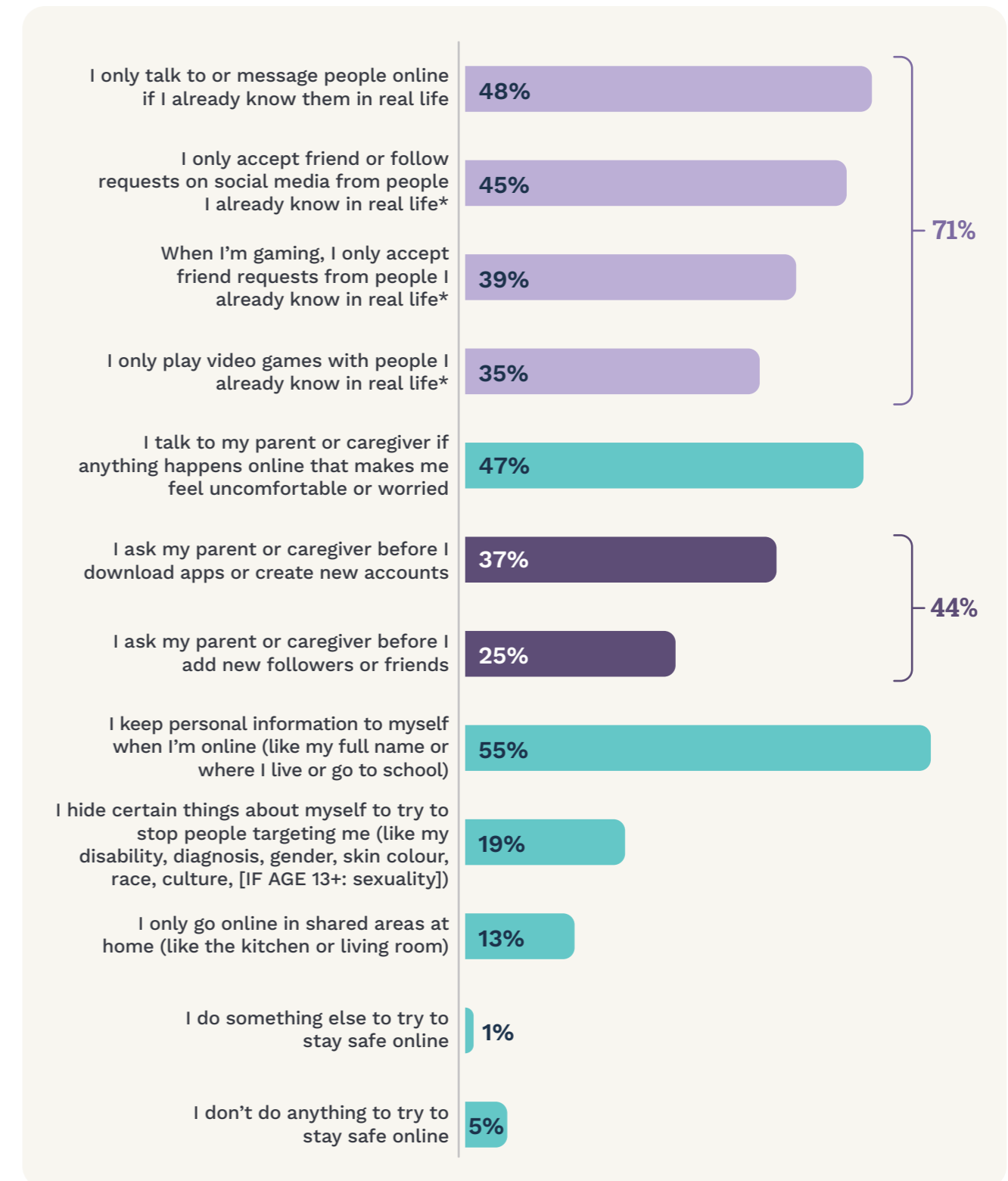
- the risks of dangerous people being online [IF 13+: or online grooming] (47% versus 41%)
- what to do if they see or experience things online that are upsetting or that make them feel uncomfortable or ashamed (37% versus 29%)
- what to do if they see sexual photos or sexual videos (like pornography) online (27% versus 22%)
- how what they see online is affected by algorithms (24% versus 20%).

Children use a broad range of proactive strategies to help them stay safe online

Almost all children surveyed (93%) reported engaging in at least one behaviour or strategy to help keep themselves safe online. As shown in Figure 13, children most commonly reported:

- only interacting with people online they **already know in 'real life'** (71%)
- **talking** to their parent or caregiver if something happens online that makes them feel uncomfortable or worried (47%)
- **seeking permission** from their parent or caregiver before downloading apps, creating new accounts (37%) or adding new friends or followers (25%)
- not sharing **personal information** online (55%).

Figure 13: Strategies children use to help stay safe online



Q: What, if anything, do you do to try to stay safe online? This includes when you're gaming, using social media or doing anything else online.

Note: *These items were only shown to children who had ever used social media (n=3,333) or ever played video games online (n=2,994). Therefore, the prevalence for these items is based on social media users or children who have gamed, respectively, and not on all children surveyed.

As mentioned above, 47% of children said they talk to their parent or caregiver if anything happens online that makes them feel uncomfortable or worried. This increased to 59% among children who said their parents regularly encouraged them to talk to them in this situation, compared to 24% of those who said their parents didn't regularly encourage them to do this.

Girls and younger children are more likely to use a range of strategies to help them stay safe online

As shown in Table A8 in the appendix, we found that children's use of online safety strategies varies both by gender and by age.

Girls were more likely than boys to:

- only interact with people they already know 'in real life' (75% versus 69%)
- seek permission from their parent or caregiver before downloading apps, creating new accounts or adding new friends or followers (46% versus 42%)
- talk to their parent or caregiver if something happens online that makes them feel uncomfortable or worried (51% versus 44%)
- hide certain things about themselves online to try to stop people targeting them (21% versus 17%).

In addition, girls were more likely than trans and gender-diverse children to interact only with people they already know 'in real life' (75% versus 55%) and to seek permission from their parent or caregiver before downloading apps, creating new accounts or adding new friends or followers (46% versus 34%).

Boys were also more likely than trans and gender-diverse children to:

- interact only with people they already know 'in real life' (69% versus 55%)
- ask their parent or caregiver before they download apps or create new accounts (36% versus 23%).



Finally, trans and gender-diverse children were more likely than both girls and boys to hide certain things about themselves online to try to stop people targeting them (38% versus 17 to 21%).

We also found that younger children (aged 10 to 12) and younger teens (aged 13 to 15) were generally more likely than older teens (aged 16 to 17) to report using online safety strategies.

For example, younger children and younger teens were more likely than older teens to:

- interact only with people they knew 'in real life' (72 to 73% versus 67%)
- seek permission from their parent or caregiver to download apps, create new accounts or add new followers or friends (59% versus 41% versus 23%)
- talk to their parent or caregiver if something happens online that makes them feel uncomfortable or worried (52% versus 47% versus 39%)
- only go online in shared areas at home (20% versus 12% versus 5%).

On the other hand, older teens were more likely than younger children to hide certain things about themselves online to try to stop people targeting them (22% vs. 17%).

Discussion

Despite the risks they face of being online, we found that most children in our study demonstrated a strong awareness of online safety and actively engage in behaviours to protect themselves. Common strategies included limiting interactions to people they know offline, seeking parental permission before engaging in certain online activities, and keeping personal information private. We also found that parents, caregivers and teachers were key sources of online safety information, and that many children reported having regular conversations with their parents about how to stay safe online.

However, we also found that these conversations often don't cover more sensitive or emerging topics such as sexual extortion, the influence of algorithms or the misuse of generative AI. They also tend to decrease with age. Further, while most children feel supported and able to ask questions during discussions about online safety, some report feeling uncomfortable or worried about doing this.

As children grow older, they tend to become more independent online – just as they do offline. Older teens are less likely to seek parental permission and are more likely to interact with people they don't yet know. While this growing independence is expected, it remains crucial that teens feel comfortable turning to parents, caregivers or another trusted adult if something online concerns them.

These findings highlight the importance of fostering open, ongoing dialogue between children and trusted adults, and of ensuring that online safety education evolves alongside the digital landscape.

Conclusion

This report provides a snapshot of how children in Australia participated in and navigated the online world at a unique point in time, one year prior to the implementation of the social media age restrictions. As digital technologies become increasingly embedded in everyday life, children's online participation is not only widespread but deeply integrated into their social, emotional and cognitive development (Clemente-Suárez et al., 2024; Costa et al., 2025; Internet Matters, 2024). Our findings show that children are not passive consumers of digital content; they are active participants who use the internet to connect with others, explore their interests, have fun and express themselves. In line with existing research (eSafety Commissioner, 2025; Ofcom, 2025; Pew Research Center, 2024), nearly all children surveyed had used social media or communication platforms, with most doing so daily or more often, including a majority of 10- to 15-year-olds whose social media accounts are impacted by the age restrictions.

Children's engagement with digital technologies reflected the growing diversity of online spaces available to them, with most children participating in online gaming and a significant proportion exploring new and emerging technologies such as virtual reality and generative AI. Importantly, we found that the nature of this engagement varied by age and gender, highlighting that children's experiences are shaped by their developmental stage and identity, as well as by the evolving digital landscape. At the time this study was designed, the use of AI companions had not yet emerged as a prominent trend, highlighting the rapid pace of technological advancement and change. Future research should explore how children are engaging with these tools and consider their potential implications, especially in light of potential migration to alternative platforms following implementation of the social media age restrictions.

Inclusive, supportive and informative digital spaces can empower children to thrive online

Our findings affirm that digital engagement offers significant benefits for children. Children told us that being online supports their creativity, emotional wellbeing and identity development. This finding aligns with existing research that demonstrates how digital technologies can enhance learning, foster social connection, and provide critical access to information and support (eSafety Commissioner, 2022, 2024a; Ofcom, 2025; Pew Research Center, 2025). Notably, trans and gender-diverse children were more likely to report that being online benefited their emotional wellbeing, self-expression and identity development, consistent with previous research (Common Sense, 2024; eSafety Commissioner, 2024b).

Further, our findings emphasise the critical role of the internet as a source of information on personal and sensitive topics, including mental health, identity and wellbeing. We found that many children, particularly teens, are not only turning to the internet for entertainment and connection but also for guidance and support as they navigate complex aspects of growing up. Online spaces may provide private, accessible and non-judgemental spaces where children can access information that they may not feel comfortable discussing offline. Trans and gender-diverse children were more likely to seek out information on gender, mental health and emotional wellbeing.

Collectively, these findings emphasise the internet's role as a vital space for support, exploration, affirmation and information, especially among diverse communities of young people. Therefore, ensuring that digital spaces are not only safe but also inclusive, affirming and reliably informative is essential to providing children with the support and knowledge they need. Ensuring that these spaces exist beyond age-restricted social media accounts will be critical in enabling children to retain access to the support, information and affirmation they often seek online and mitigating potential unintended consequences that may arise following implementation of the age restrictions, such as reduced social connection or access to supportive online communities.

However, our findings also show that some children, particularly trans and gender-diverse children, feel the need to hide parts of their identity online to avoid being targeted, which may limit their ability to find connection, community, information and support online. This highlights the importance of inclusive and supportive online environments where all children feel safe to express themselves, and of ensuring that online safety initiatives don't inadvertently make children feel like they must hide who they are.

Supportive, age-appropriate interventions can foster children's online safety and autonomy

The digital environment also presents complex and evolving risks (Thorn, 2024), and certain behaviours that children may engage in online can place them at greater risk of harm (Finkelhor et al., 2024; Gámez-Guadix et al., 2018; Gámez-Guadix & Mateos-Pérez, 2019; Staksrud et al., 2013). We found that a significant proportion of children engage in behaviours online that may increase their exposure to harm, such as having public or secret social media accounts, sharing nude images of themselves, using dating apps, or communicating with unknown individuals online, including unknown adults. Research has shown that engagement in such behaviours, which are oftentimes driven by normal adolescent exploration of identity and sexuality, may also increase children's exposure to harm. For example, studies have found higher rates of image-based abuse, cyberbullying and online sexual solicitations from adults among children and young people who engage in nude image sharing or interact with strangers online (Finkelhor et al., 2024; Gámez-Guadix et al., 2018; Gámez-Guadix & Mateos-Pérez, 2019). We also found that some of these behaviours were more common among teens and trans and gender-diverse children, in line with existing research (eSafety Commissioner, 2024b; Seto et al., 2023; Thorn, 2023).

Together, these findings suggest that risk taking may be influenced by both developmental factors and the search for connection or identity, particularly among diverse communities of children. These findings indicate the need for supportive, age-appropriate interventions that prioritise safety without undermining children's autonomy and developmental need for identity exploration.

Open communication with parents and caregivers is a key component of children's digital safety

Our findings also highlight the critical role of parents and caregivers in shaping children's online safety. For example, most children reported that their parents or caregivers were key sources of information and advice about keeping safe online. Many children also said that their parents or caregivers regularly encourage them to speak out if they experience something that makes them feel uncomfortable online and have regular conversations with them about their online activities and how to stay safe online. We also found that children were more likely to say that they would seek help after a negative online experience when parents actively encouraged dialogue around such experiences.

Our findings highlight the protective role of proactive parenting in digital safety, where regular encouragement to talk not only builds trust but also enables early intervention. By fostering open communication, parents can step in before harm escalates, helping to prevent long-term emotional distress or further exposure to harmful content or interactions. Although social media accounts of children under 16 are impacted by the age restrictions, which may create a perception that they are now safer online, it is essential that online safety conversations continue within families. Even if children are not using age-restricted social media platforms, they are still likely to be online and so require guidance on safe use, particularly when engaging with alternative platforms such as messaging apps, online games or generative AI. Early and ongoing conversations about online safety will also help ensure that children are better prepared to navigate social media safely and responsibly when they turn 16. These discussions may additionally encourage younger children and teens to seek help from their parents if they are using age-restricted social media accounts and something goes wrong.

However, a significant minority of children indicated that their parents didn't talk regularly with them about online safety issues. This highlights the need to raise awareness among a broad spectrum of parents about the importance of these conversations and to equip all parents with practical guidance and resources to support them in this. These approaches should be flexible, culturally sensitive and respectful of diverse family dynamics and communication styles, to ensure that every parent feels empowered to engage in meaningful, age-appropriate dialogue about online safety in a way that works for their family.

In addition, older teens were less likely to report having these ongoing conversations with their parents, despite research showing that exposure to online risks increases with age (eSafety Commissioner, 2022; Thorn, 2024). This suggests a possible disconnect between the increased level of risk older teens are exposed to online and reduced parental involvement in their online safety.

Our findings therefore highlight the need for ongoing, age-appropriate parental involvement in children's online safety, to ensure that as children age, they continue to be supported to stay safe online. Further, the findings point to the importance of sustaining online safety education throughout the later years of high school to ensure that older teens continue to receive relevant guidance and support after they begin to use or return to age-restricted social media accounts on turning 16.

Targeted resources are needed to support parents' and caregivers' discussions of sensitive or emerging risks with their children

While most children reported receiving guidance about online safety from their parents or caregivers, conversations about more sensitive or emerging risks – such as sexual extortion, algorithmic influence, or the misuse of generative AI – were far less common. We also found that parents and caregivers were more likely to talk to girls about a range of online safety topics compared to boys, suggesting that some children, particularly boys, may be missing out on critical guidance.

Given the increasing rate at which children report encountering these risks (Burton et al., 2025; Thorn, 2025; Thorn and National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), 2024), this gap suggests a need for more targeted resources and support to help parents and caregivers feel confident and equipped to address these complex and sometimes uncomfortable topics. Tailored messaging and interventions may also be needed to ensure that boys are equally engaged and supported in these conversations.

Reassuringly, most children who had discussed a sensitive topic with a parent or caregiver reported positive experiences, either during or after their most recent conversation, including that they understood the content and were able to ask questions. However, a notable minority experienced discomfort, worry or perceived parental discomfort.

Therefore, some families may benefit from additional support to make these conversations more comfortable and constructive. It is also important that educators and other trusted adults are equipped to provide accurate, age-appropriate information on these topics.

Children should be supported to use proactive safety strategies as their online experiences evolve

Encouragingly, most children in our study demonstrated proactive behaviours to protect themselves online, such as limiting interactions to known individuals and keeping personal information private. These findings align with existing research that emphasises the importance of empowering children with the skills and knowledge to manage their own safety (Livingstone et al., 2023).

Our findings also suggest that girls and younger children use more proactive safety strategies online. As described above, we also found that girls were more likely than boys to have had conversations with their parents or caregivers about a range of online safety topics. Future research should explore the potential protective role of parental engagement in encouraging children's ongoing online safety behaviours. At the same time, while most parents are actively involved in their children's online safety, there is a decline in engagement with older teens and lower levels of safety strategy use among this cohort.

Addressing this trend will require targeted, inclusive and age-appropriate approaches to ensure that all children, particularly older teens, continue to be supported, and encouraged to seek help if they need it, as their online experiences evolve.

The findings from this research highlight that, as digital technologies continue to become increasingly embedded in children's lives, and as new and emerging forms of digital technologies become available to them, supporting children to have safer and more positive experiences online has never been more important.

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Appendix: Additional data tables

Table A1: Lifetime use of online video games, by gender and age (%)

	Child gender			Child age		
	Boys	Girls	Trans & gender diverse	10–12 (younger children)	13–15 (younger teens)	16–17 (older teens)
Yes	92	81	87	85	88	87
No	7	19	8	14	11	12
Base: Children aged 10–17	1,739	1,632	83	1,332	1,297	825

Q: Have you ever done any of the following? Played video games online.

Note: Different colour shading indicates that differences are statistically significant within subgroup. White shading indicates that differences are not statistically significant.

Table A2: Frequency of virtual reality and haptic technology use, by gender and age (%)

	Child gender			Child age		
	Boys	Girls	10–12 (younger children)	13–15 (younger teens)	16–17 (older teens)	
At least once or twice a day	4	4	3	5	3	
A few times a week (but not every day)	14	8	12	11	12	
About once a week	11	12	11	12	10	
Less than once a week	35	37	40	36	30	
Never – I don't do this at all anymore	36	39	34	35	45	
Base: Children aged 10–17 who used virtual reality	777	499	458	547	320	
At least once or twice a day	7	8	3	12	10	
A few times a week (but not every day)	23	26	28	25	17	
About once a week	18	21	20	16	18	
Less than once a week	29	29	28	26	36	
Never – I don't do this at all anymore	23	14	19	21	19	
Base: Children aged 10–17 who used haptic technology	167	90	92	114	64	

Q: How often do you usually do the following online? This could be at home, at school, at a friend's house, or anywhere else you go online. If you're not sure, choose the answer you think is about right. Use a virtual reality headset; Use wearable haptic technologies.

Note: Sample size too small to report frequency of virtual reality and haptic technology use among trans and gender-diverse children (n=13 to 49). Different colour shading indicates that differences are statistically significant within subgroup. White shading indicates that differences are not statistically significant.

Table A3: Sources of information for children about online safety, by gender and age (%)

	Child gender			Child age		
	Boys	Girls	Trans & gender diverse	10–12 (younger children)	13–15 (younger teens)	16–17 (older teens)
My parent(s) or caregiver(s)	82	84	76	84	83	81
Teachers at school	75	77	74	75	76	76
Police or other government programs (like coming to talk to your school)	27	31	45	27	30	33
Friends	24	29	27	22	28	32
A sibling or another family member	22	26	38	24	23	27
Social media, websites or other apps	21	24	42	15	26	31
eSafety	14	12	11	12	14	14
Someone or somewhere else	2	3	2	3	2	2
Base: Children aged 10–17	1,739	1,632	83	1,332	1,297	825

Q: Where have you ever seen or heard anything about how to stay safe online, if anywhere? You can choose more than one answer.

Note: Different colour shading indicates that differences are statistically significant within subgroup. White shading indicates that differences are not statistically significant.

Table A4: Regular conversations with parents and caregivers about online safety, by gender and age (%)

	Child gender			Child age		
	Boys	Girls	Trans & gender diverse	10–12 (younger children)	13–15 (younger teens)	16–17 (older teens)
Encourage you to talk to them if anything happens online that makes you feel uncomfortable or unsafe	64	67	68	65	67	63
Talk to you or remind you about how you can be safer online	54	58	44	59	56	49
Ask, or talk with you, about what you have been doing online	53	54	59	57	55	44
Base: Children aged 10–17	1,739	1,632	83	1,332	1,297	825

Q: Parents, caregivers and families can have different ways of talking about staying safe online. Which, if any, of the following does your parent or caregiver regularly do (for example, once a month or more)? You can choose more than one answer.

Note: Different colour shading indicates that differences are statistically significant within subgroup. White shading indicates that differences are not statistically significant.

Table A5: Children who would or would not talk to their parent or caregiver if they experienced something online that made them feel upset, uncomfortable or ashamed, by gender and age (%)

	Child gender			Child age		
	Boys	Girls	Trans & gender diverse	10–12 (younger children)	13–15 (younger teens)	16–17 (older teens)
Yes	89	91	84	93	88	88
No	9	7	16	6	10	10
Base: Children aged 10–17	1,739	1,632	83	1,332	1,297	825

Q: Imagine if something happened online in the future that made you feel upset, uncomfortable or ashamed. Do you think you would talk to a parent or caregiver about it, or not?

Note: ‘Yes’ includes ‘definitely yes’ and ‘probably yes’ responses, and ‘no’ includes ‘definitely no’ and ‘probably no’ responses. Different colour shading indicates that differences are statistically significant within subgroup. White shading indicates that differences are not statistically significant.

Table A6: Children’s feelings about sensitive conversations with their parents or caregivers (%)

	Sexual extortion	What to do if you see sexual photos or sexual videos [IF 13+: like pornography] online	The risks of sending nude images to others online	The risks of dangerous people being online [IF 13+: or online ‘grooming’]	What to do if you see or experience things online that are upsetting or that make you feel uncomfortable or ashamed
I think they felt uncomfortable or embarrassed	25	23	19	14	12
It was a useful talk	90	78	76	82	85
I understood what they said	91	81	93	90	89
I felt uncomfortable or embarrassed	32	36	29	20	17
I felt like I could ask any questions I wanted to	80	74	83	81	87
I felt worried after we had talked about it	20	23	15	20	13
Base: Children aged 10–17 who had discussed sensitive topic most recently	53	167	443	1,018	598

Q: Think about the most recent time you talked about [sensitive topic] with your parent or caregiver. How true or untrue are the following statements about how it went? (The table presents those that said each statement was ‘very true’ or ‘quite true’.)

Note: This question was only asked of children who reported that their parents had talked to them about one of the five sensitive topics in the past year. If they had a conversation about more than one sensitive topic in the past year, they were only asked about their most recent experience.

Table A7: Online safety topics parents discussed with children in the past year, by gender and age (%)

	Child gender			Child age		
	Boys	Girls	Trans & gender diverse	10–12 (younger children)	13–15 (younger teens)	16–17 (older teens)
How to keep personal information private online	51	54	53	53	53	50
The risks of dangerous people being online [IF 13+: or online ‘grooming’]	45	51	56	54	47	41
That what you see on social media isn’t always realistic	44	52	55	47	49	46
Online bullying, or ‘cyberbullying’	42	46	47	47	44	40
How to interact safely with people online who you don’t know in real life	36	40	44	37	40	36
What to do if you see or experience things online that are upsetting or that make you feel uncomfortable or ashamed	32	39	46	38	37	29
How to deal with pressure from your friends to do things online that you don’t want to do	30	37	28	34	35	30
The risks of sending nude images to others online	30	35	30	27	37	35
What to do if you see sexual photos or sexual videos [IF 13+: like pornography] online	23	27	33	25	27	22
How what you see online is affected by algorithms	19	21	21	15	24	20
How generative AI can be used or misused	9	8	13	7	9	10
Sexual extortion	7	6	8	5	8	7
None of these – my parents haven’t talked to me about any of these things in the past year	5	3	10	3	4	6
Base: Children aged 10–17	1,739	1,632	83	1,332	1,297	825

Q: Which, if any, of the following things has your parent or caregiver talked to you about in the past year?

Note: Different colour shading indicates that differences are statistically significant within subgroup. White shading indicates that differences are not statistically significant.

Table A8: Strategies children use to help stay safe online, by gender and age (%)

	Child gender			Child age		
	Boys	Girls	Trans & gender diverse	10–12 (younger children)	13–15 (younger teens)	16–17 (older teens)
I keep personal information to myself when I'm online (like my full name or where I live or go to school)	54	56	61	53	56	58
I only talk to or message people online if I already know them in real life	43	53	39	52	46	44
I talk to my parent or caregiver if anything happens online that makes me feel uncomfortable or worried	44	51	42	52	47	39
I only accept friend or follow requests on social media from people I already know in real life ²¹	41	50	30	45	46	44
I ask my parent or caregiver before I download apps or create new accounts	36	38	23	50	34	18
When I'm gaming, I only accept friend requests from people I already know in real life ²²	39	40	33	43	40	30
I only play video games with people I already know in real life ⁷	36	34	18	39	35	29
I ask my parent or caregiver before I add new followers or friends	23	28	20	37	22	12
I hide certain things about myself to try to stop people targeting me (like my disability, diagnosis, gender, skin colour, race, culture, [IF 13+: sexuality])	17	21	38	17	20	22
I only go online in shared areas at home (like the kitchen or living room)	14	13	9	20	12	5
I don't do anything to try to stay safe online	6	4	10	4	5	6
I do something else to try to stay safe online	<1	1	3	1	1	1
Base: Children aged 10–17	1,739	1,632	83	1,332	1,297	825

Q: What, if anything, do you do to try to stay safe online? This includes when you're gaming, using social media or doing anything else online.

Note: Different colour shading indicates that differences are statistically significant within subgroup. White shading indicates that differences are not statistically significant.

²¹This item was only shown to children who had ever used social media (n=3,333). Therefore, the prevalence for this item was based on social media users, not on all children surveyed.

²²This item was only shown to children who had ever played online video games (n=2,994). Therefore, the prevalence for this item was based on children who have gamed, not on all children surveyed.



