eSafetyresearch

# Balancing risk and reward:

## Parenting in the digital world

June 2026

Australian Government | eSafetyCommissioner

eSafety.gov.au

## 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.


## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the participants in this research who gave their time to contribute to a greater understanding of the online experiences of children and their parents and caregivers in Australia.

eSafety gratefully acknowledges the contributions of our academic collaborators on this research: Distinguished Professor Bronwyn Carlson, Dr Madi Day, Professor Jeff Hancock, Dr Angela Lee, Dr Sunny Xun Liu, Distinguished Professor Ben Mathews, Kailey Roche, Professor Michael Seto, Dr Anja Stevic and Professor Kerryann Walsh.


## Suggested citation

eSafety Commissioner. (2026). *Balancing risk and reward: Parenting in the digital world.* Australian Government.


Contributing authors: Melanie Burton, Claire Lister, Savannah Minihan, Mariesa Nicholas and Laureen Villegas.

## 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**

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

# Contents

# About this report

**In today's evolving digital world, parents and caregivers play a vital role in supporting children to safely navigate online spaces, helping them to maximise the benefits and minimise the risks of being harmed.** While there is no 'one-size-fits-all' approach to digital parenting, research consistently shows that certain strategies can support children's online safety. In particular, having early and ongoing conversations within families about the benefits, risks and harms of children's online activities can better equip parents and caregivers to help their children thrive online.

This need for parental support remains essential even with the implementation of the Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Act 2024 in Australia. This world-first law requires age-restricted social media platforms to take reasonable steps to prevent Australian children under 16 from creating or holding accounts. Despite these restrictions, children will continue to engage online in a variety of ways, particularly as digital platforms continue to evolve and as children potentially migrate to alternative services as a result of the age restrictions. Ongoing parental support and engagement will help children to safely navigate this changing digital environment and build the digital skills they will need when they return to, or begin to use, age-restricted social media platforms on turning 16.

Shortly after the legislation was passed, between December 2024 and February 2025, eSafety conducted the 'Keeping Kids Safe Online' survey of the online experiences of almost 3,500 children in Australia aged 10 to 17 and their parents and caregivers. This cross-sectional study provides a valuable contribution to the national evidence base at a unique point in time – one year prior to the implementation of the age restrictions in December 2025.

This report is part of a series that draws on data from the 'Keeping Kids Safe Online' survey. Our previous report in the series, Connected, curious, cautious: Children's engagement in the digital world (eSafety Commissioner, 2026), explored children's online participation and experiences.

Balancing risk and reward explores digital parenting practices and perceptions. It begins with a snapshot of parental perceptions of children's online engagement, including how parents and caregivers feel about their children going online and their perceptions of the benefits and challenges for their children of growing up online. It then explores parental awareness of children's online activities, highlighting gaps between what parents and caregivers believe their children are doing online and what children themselves report. This is followed by an examination of the strategies parents use to help keep their children safe online, including implementing rules or controls to guide their online behaviour. Finally, the report explores how parents' and caregivers' lived experiences, including their own exposures to online harm and their confidence in using digital technologies, influence their digital parenting practices.

Overall, the study found that parental concerns and perceptions of the negative impacts of children being online were much more prominent than the perceived benefits. Many parents and caregivers expressed concerns about harms such as inappropriate content, cyberbullying and excessive screen time, and most reported negative impacts, especially interference with homework and sleep. While few parents and caregivers mentioned positives unprompted, nearly all acknowledged benefits such as creativity, social connection and relaxation when prompted. However, parents and caregivers tended to underestimate the emotional support children gain online compared to what children themselves reported.

Most parents and caregivers believed they could talk openly with their children about online challenges, but a significant minority felt they weren't fully aware of their child's online activities. When we compared the survey responses given by parents and caregivers with responses given by their children, we found that most parents and caregivers were aware of their child's use of social media, communication platforms or online games. However, there were notable gaps in awareness for parents and caregivers of younger children. Additionally, a significant proportion of parents and caregivers were unaware that their child had used relatively new and emerging technologies, including generative artificial intelligence, virtual reality and wearable haptic technologies, or that they had engaged in potentially risky online behaviours, such as sharing their live location outside of their family or using online dating apps.

The report highlights the role of parents and caregivers in helping to keep children safe online. We found that almost all parents and caregivers were actively engaged in supporting their children's online safety. Most had rules about their child's online activity, and many used parental controls or had regular conversations with their children about online safety. However, discussions within families about online safety tended to focus less on sensitive or emerging issues, such as exposure to sexual content, algorithmic influences and sexual extortion, and more on foundational online safety issues such as cyberbullying and scams.

Digital parenting practices tended to evolve as children aged. Parents and caregivers of teens, particularly older teens, were less likely than parents and caregivers of younger children to use various mediation strategies, likely reflecting increased trust in their child, the child's perceived maturity, and a desire to support their autonomy. In addition, parents and caregivers of boys and trans and gender-diverse children were somewhat less likely than parents of girls to use a range of mediation strategies. The topics covered in online safety discussions also varied by child gender.

The findings from the survey will inform eSafety's online safety programs and resources for children and their parents and caregivers. The findings also provide insight into digital parenting practices that may help to support children's online safety and minimise risky online behaviours, as well as highlight opportunities to strengthen digital parenting practices as children age.

The report concludes with a discussion of how these findings might be used to ensure that all parents and caregivers feel confident and well equipped to help their children maximise the benefits and minimise the risks of being online and that all children continue to be supported to stay safe online as the age restrictions are implemented in Australia.

eSafety acknowledges that families and caregivers are diverse and come in many different forms. For simplicity and consistency throughout this report, we use the term 'parents' to refer collectively to parents, guardians and primary caregivers of children aged 10 to 17.

# Key terms

**Active mediation:** Involves parents regularly engaging in conversations with their children about staying safe online, including talking about potential risks, safety and what to do if problems arise.

**Children:** Children and teenagers aged 10 to 17.

**Generative artificial intelligence (AI):** A type of artificial intelligence technology that can create new content such as text, images and audio.

**Haptic technologies:** Tools or devices that use vibration, motion or pressure. Wearing haptic technologies such as a haptic suit, gloves or backpack makes the user feel like they are physically 'touching' or 'experiencing' whatever is happening in a particular computer-generated virtual environment.

**Parents:** Parents, guardians and primary caregivers of children aged 10 to 17.

**Passive mediation:** Involves parents monitoring or observing children's online activity (for example, checking messages, photos or search history).

**Restrictive mediation:** Involves setting rules or expectations regarding children's online activity (for example, rules around who children interact with online, what they can access, and how they share their personal information).

**Technical mediation:** Involves the use of parental controls to stop children doing or seeing certain things online. These controls can be set up in apps or on devices such as phones, computers, tablets and gaming consoles.

**Virtual reality (VR) headset:** A VR headset blocks out the real world and makes the user feel like they are inside a computer-generated three-dimensional environment.

# Key findings

**Parental concerns about the risks of children being online are much more prominent than the perceived benefits.** When asked to describe, in their own words, how they feel about their children going online, over half of the parents surveyed (56%) reported negative feelings, predominantly worry. These concerns were driven by a range of issues, including the presence of dangerous people online, exposure of their child to potentially harmful or inappropriate content, cyberbullying, excessive time spent online, and difficulties in knowing or understanding what their children are doing online. Reflecting this, almost 3 in 4 parents (74%) said their child had been negatively impacted in some way by being online. The most common concerns related to time spent online interfering with other activities (65%), including homework or study (44%) and sleep (38%).

**Few parents reported positive impacts when asked how they felt about their children being online.** However, when prompted with a list of possible benefits, almost all parents (97%) recognised at least one benefit for their child. Most commonly, they reported that being online had helped their child to explore their interests, hobbies or creativity (82%), connect with others (73%), or have fun or relax (65%).

**Parents may underestimate the beneficial role the internet plays in ensuring some children's emotional wellbeing.**
The perceived benefits and negative impacts of being online for their children, as reported by parents, were broadly aligned with those reported by children themselves, with one notable exception. Parents tended to underestimate children's use of the internet for emotional support: only 35% of parents mentioned the emotional benefits, compared to 50% of children.

**Most parents believe they talk openly with their children about online challenges, but some don't feel fully aware of their children's online activities** More than 4 in 5 parents (83%) felt they had open communication with their child about online challenges, but 1 in 4 (26%) felt they didn't really know what their child does when online.

**Nearly all parents are aware of their children's use of social media, communication platforms and online games.** Among parents of children who reported using various types of online technologies, only a small minority were unaware that their child had used social media (5%), an app or platform for chatting, messaging, calling or video calling someone (4%), or online video games (5%).

**A significant minority of parents whose children have social media accounts are unaware that their child has one.** Only 1 in 10 parents of children with social media accounts (10%) didn't know that their child had an account.

**A significant minority of parents are unaware of their children's use of emerging technologies.** Among parents of children who reported using various types of emerging technologies, 16% were unaware that their child had used generative AI, 19% were unaware they had used virtual reality and 28% were unaware they had used wearable haptic technologies.

**Many parents don't know that their children have engaged in behaviour that may expose them to greater risk online.** One in 4 parents whose children told us they had shared their location with someone outside of their family network using a location sharing app (25%) were unaware that their child had done this.

**More than half of parents of older teens who had used dating apps were unaware that their child had done this.** Among parents of older teens (aged 16 to 17) who had ever used dating apps, more than half (54%) didn't know their children had used these apps.

**Many parents feel they struggle to keep their children safe online, although almost as many believe their children can look after themselves.** Almost 3 in 5 parents (58%) agreed they find it challenging to help their child stay safe online. At the same time, almost half (46%) felt confident of their child's ability to look after themselves online.

**Most parents have rules in place to help their child stay safe online, and many commonly monitor their child's online activities to support their online safety.** Over 9 in 10 parents (92%) used restrictive mediation strategies, having at least one rule in place for their child's online activities. Additionally, almost 7 in 10 (68%) reported regularly engaging in at least one passive mediation strategy, by monitoring their child's online activities to support their online safety.

**Many parents use parental controls; however, barriers such as knowledge gaps and a high degree of trust in their children's ability to avoid harm online mean this approach isn't universal.** Almost 7 in 10 parents (69%) reported using parental controls, but almost 3 in 10 (29%) weren't using this form of technical mediation, most often citing trust or confidence in their child's online abilities or behaviour, such as trusting them to access appropriate content online (49%). Several other barriers were also cited, including not knowing how to use parental controls (14%), concerns that using them would create distrust or conflict (14%) and a belief that their child would be able to bypass controls (11%). Indeed, a significant minority of parents who had used controls said their child had bypassed them (29%) or that use of the controls had caused distrust or conflict between them and their child (26%).

**Most parents use active mediation strategies, helping to build open communication and encouraging children to seek support when something goes wrong online.** More than 4 in 5 parents (84%) indicated they regularly used active mediation, such as encouraging their child to talk to them if anything goes wrong online (67%). However, 1 in 6 parents (16%) didn't regularly have these conversations with their children. Encouragingly, when these conversations occur, they appear to have a positive impact. More than 9 in 10 children whose parent said they regularly use active mediation (92%) indicated they would talk to them if something went wrong online, compared to 79% of children whose parents didn't regularly have these conversations.

**Most parents discuss online safety with their children, but sensitive and emerging risks are far less likely to be addressed.** More than 9 in 10 parents (93%) reported that they had talked to their child about at least one online safety topic in the past 12 months. However, certain sensitive or emerging topics were much less likely to be discussed, such as sexual extortion (8%), how generative AI can be used or misused (11%), and algorithmic influences (26%).

**Parents may see having conversations with their child about online safety as occasional or one-off events, with barriers to discussing sensitive issues.** Among parents who hadn't discussed any sensitive online safety topics with their child in the past year, the most common reason provided was that they had talked about this issue in the past, but not recently (45%). However, over 1 in 4 (26%) cited barriers to initiating these conversations, including uncertainty about how to begin (9%), discomfort (4%), or a lack of knowledge of the topic (4%). Additionally, 40% explained that they hadn't discussed online safety in the past year because they trusted their child or were confident of their child's ability to stay safe online.

**Parents' views and approaches to digital parenting shift as children grow.** Parents of teens were more likely to see both the benefits and drawbacks of online activity, to feel less aware of what their child is doing online, and to rely less on rules or parental controls, than parents of younger children. However, awareness of the types of technologies children had used tended to be higher among parents of teens than of younger children. Conversations about online safety became less frequent with child age; however, parents of teens were more likely to discuss complex or sensitive topics.

**Child gender[1] may influence how parents approach online safety.** Parents of girls were more likely to feel uneasy about their child being online and to use a wider range of mediation strategies, while those with boys were more likely to believe their child could manage online risks independently. Parents of trans and gender-diverse children often recognised both the benefits and risks of being online and tended to focus more on open conversations than on rules or monitoring, especially around sensitive topics such as sexual content and algorithmic influence.

**Parents' confidence with technology, personal experience of online harm and their own gender may influence their digital parenting practices.** Almost two-thirds of parents (64%) reported feeling confident using new apps, technologies and devices, and those who felt confident were more likely than other parents to use parental controls (71% versus 65%) and passive mediation (70% versus 64%) and to discuss online safety with their children. Parents who had experienced online harm themselves (34%) tended to be more vigilant about their child's online safety. Women also reported using a wider range of mediation strategies and having more frequent online safety conversations with their children.

[1] All children were given the option to answer questions about their gender. Nine in 10 children (92%) chose to share their gender identity. Where a child declined to provide their gender identity, the gender provided by their parent is reported. Where the gender provided by the parent and child differed, the gender provided by the child is reported. See the methodology report for further details.



# 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. To achieve these aims, we surveyed a nationally representative sample of almost 3,500 children in Australia aged 10 to 17 and their parents about their online activities and experiences. The research was conducted from December 2024 to 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 took effect on 10 December 2025.

## Online survey

A total of 3,454 children aged 10 to 17 and their parent or caregiver took part in the survey. This sample included children with a 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)[2] (*n* = 169), and trans and gender-diverse children (*n* = 83).

As shown in Table 1, the sample of parents comprised more women than men, likely reflecting both traditional caregiving roles and the tendency for research panels to be disproportionately made up of women. Most parents reported that the child who completed the survey lived with them either all or more than half the time. The sample included trans or gender-diverse parents and those who personally spoke a language other than English at home.

[2] Some 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.

**Table 1:** Demographic characteristics of parent survey participants

| | | Sample *n* | Sample % (unweighted) | Sample % (weighted) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Parent gender** | Men | 1,055 | 31 | 30 |
| | Women | 2,348 | 68 | 68 |
| | Trans and gender diverse* | 33 | 1 | 1 |
| **Parent language** | Speaks a language other than English at home | 632 | 18 | 20 |
| **Proportion of time child spends living with parent** | All the time | 2,961 | 86 | 86 |
| | More than half the time | 279 | 8 | 8 |
| | Around half the time | 149 | 4 | 4 |
| | Less than half the time | 49 | 1 | 1 |
| | They don't live with me | 11 | <1 | <1 |
| **Total sample** | | 3,454 | | |

**Note:** *'Trans and gender diverse' includes parents who identified as 'non-binary', 'trans man', 'trans woman', 'sistergirl' and/or 'brotherboy', as well as those who identified as more than one gender or were 'still working it out'.

The survey had three components: a 15-minute parent survey, a 20-minute child core survey, and a 10-minute child follow-up survey. Informed consent to participate in all components of the study was sought from both parents and children. Parents with multiple children were asked to respond in relation to one specific child only, in the 10 to 17 age range.

The research was approved by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies ethics committee, ensuring it met high standards for research involving children. Additionally, the survey was developed in collaboration with domestic and international experts, was informed by the latest literature, and was cognitively tested with children and parents to ensure clarity and sensitivity. For further details on the survey methodology, see the **methodology report**.





## Data analysis

Apparent differences between sub-groups of parents who participated in the survey 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). This means that relatively large percentage point differences need to be observed for results 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 in this report.

We also note that the sample size for trans and gender-diverse parents (*n* = 33) is small and this affects how their data can be used in quantitative analyses. Parents who identified as trans or gender diverse were subsequently asked which of three options best reflected their gender ('man', 'woman' or 'non-binary'). Parents who indicated that 'man' best reflected their gender have been included in the 'Men' group, and those who indicated that 'woman' best reflected their gender have been included in the 'Women' group, for analyses in which parent gender was required. We note that restricting analyses to binary gender categories means that, in some analyses, trans and gender-diverse parents' digital parenting experiences are lacking. Future research with a larger sample of trans and gender-diverse parents would be required to understand their digital parenting experiences.

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 Bill 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 underreport 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 for multiple responses. Tables and figures may not include the response options 'prefer not to answer', 'don't know' or 'another reason'– for example, if the number of respondents was small.

Free-text questions were coded thematically using Q Research Software and peer reviewed by a second member of 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.

# Parents' feelings about their children being online

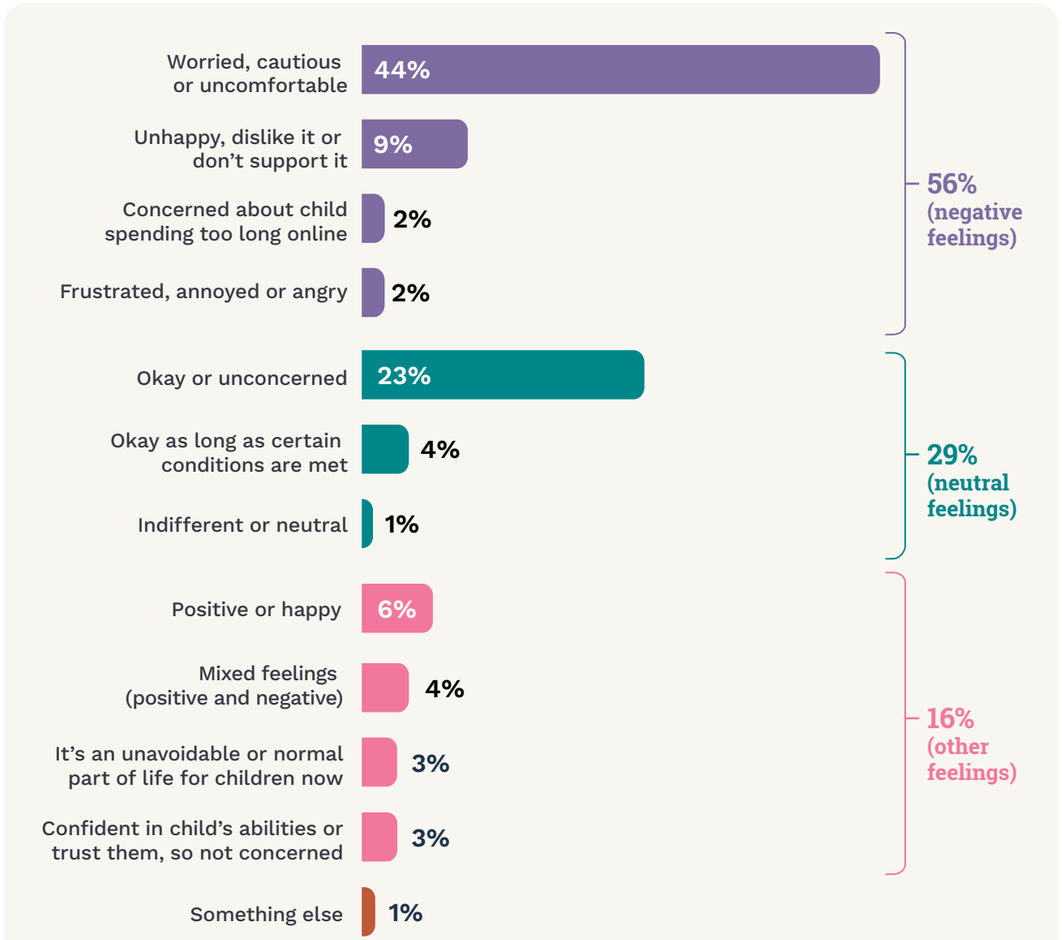
**This section focuses on parents' perceptions of the impacts of their child being online and highlights how these views align with – or differ from – those of their children.**

## Parental concerns about children being online are prominent

We start by considering how parents feel about their children being online, as expressed in their own words.

Over half of parents surveyed (56%) reported negative feelings about their child being online, with worry dominating – many parents described feeling anxious, worried, cautious or concerned. Almost 3 in 10 parents (29%) reported neutral feelings, such as a lack of concern or 'okay'. A smaller proportion (16%) expressed a range of other emotions, including happiness, other positive feelings or mixed feelings, as shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1:** Parents' feelings about their child being online




**Q:** How do you feel about your child going online? Free text response.

**Base**: Parents of children aged 10 to 17 (*n* = 1,732[3]).

[3] To minimise participant burden, a split-sample approach was used for the two free text questions included in the survey: 50% of participants responded to the first question ('How do you feel about your child going online? Why?'), while the remaining 50% responded to the second question ('If the internet were an animal, what animal would it be? Why?').

When parents were asked to articulate the reason for their feeling(s) about their child being online, their responses revealed various underlying concerns.

Some parents particularly feared grooming and online predators; others were worried about cyberbullying.

> **Worried about the dangers of online bullying or them over sharing information. There's so many bad stories about kids online.**
> (Parent of a girl aged 13)

Concerns about excessive screen time, the displacement of offline activities, and mental health or developmental impacts were also raised, along with exposure to harmful or misleading content.

> **I get anxious, but I also understand we live in a digital time. I feel as though the internet can be an awful place, bullying etc., exposure to sexualising content.**
> (Parent of a trans or gender-diverse child aged 12)

> **I really dislike it. He spends a lot of time online because that's where he talks to his friends. I worry about gaming addiction, exposure to harmful things online and the possible negative impacts on his mental health. I notice differences in his behaviour and mood when he spends time offline (he's better able to emotionally regulate when he spends less time online).**
> (Parent of a boy aged 12)

Some parents expressed anxiety about their limited visibility or understanding of their child's online world. They described being unsure about what their child was doing online and who they were interacting with, and finding it impossible to monitor all their children's online experiences. Some expressed a sense of being overwhelmed by rapidly changing technologies or struggling to keep up.

**I don't like it. I feel anxious about it. Because of all the online games and the side chats it makes it hard to keep up with who's who and making sure she's only playing with real life friends and not strangers on the internet.**
(Parent of a girl aged 12)

**[I'm] scared and anxious of what they can see and who they interact with. Loss of control and the ability to parent/control to keep them safe ... I feel that I'm not educated enough on the platforms etc. the kids use.**
(Parent of a girl aged 12)

**Anxious. I am unsure of all of the risks and I find it overwhelming to research each online game.**
(Parent of a boy aged 10)

Other parents framed their feelings about their children being online in the context of their education and mediation practices. These parents had implemented various strategies, including rules and monitoring, teaching their child about online safety, and encouraging open communication. Some noted this had eased their concerns about their children being online.

**[I feel] semi comfortable. I have spoken with my daughter about the dangers of being online and to speak up if something doesn't feel right, but [I'm] still worried for her safety.**
(Parent of a girl aged 12)

**Satisfied. I believe we have taught him safety.**
(Parent of a boy aged 17)





In contrast to the dominant feelings of anxiety and concern, some parents expressed confidence in their child's ability to deal with online risks. This trust often stemmed from the child's growing maturity as well as from the parents' desire to allow them greater independence.

**I feel ok now he's older. [He] can make wiser choices. [It] was scary when he was younger.**
(Parent of a boy aged 16)

**I'm ok with it as she is older and has more of an understanding of keeping safe on social media. We definitely had heaps of chats when she was younger and [we] pulled her up on a number of issues growing up that were not appropriate, so she has definitely grown from this and [is] way more mature.**
(Parent of a girl aged 17)

A few parents indicated that their children wouldn't experience online harms because they were well-behaved or intelligent. While this confidence may reflect their children's strong digital literacy skills, it could also reflect an underlying perception that only badly behaved or careless children are at risk of online harms.

**Not too concerned. She is a smart girl and wouldn't be coerced into something she didn't want to do.**
(Parent of a girl aged 17)

**I feel fine. She is a good girl, and I trust she can make right decisions.**
(Parent of a girl aged 12)

A number of parents referenced the inevitability of children being online in their response; some seemed comfortable with this, while others appeared more resigned.

> **Fine. It's unavoidable in today's world that our children will live online lives.**
>
> (Parent of a boy aged 11)

> **Scared and pressured. I'm scared they will fall behind if they don't [go online] but I don't think it's safe.**
>
> (Parent of a girl aged 14)

As already described, most parents' feelings about their children being online were driven by concern. However, among those parents who expressed positive feelings, these most often related to their children benefiting from connection with others or opportunities for learning and creativity online.

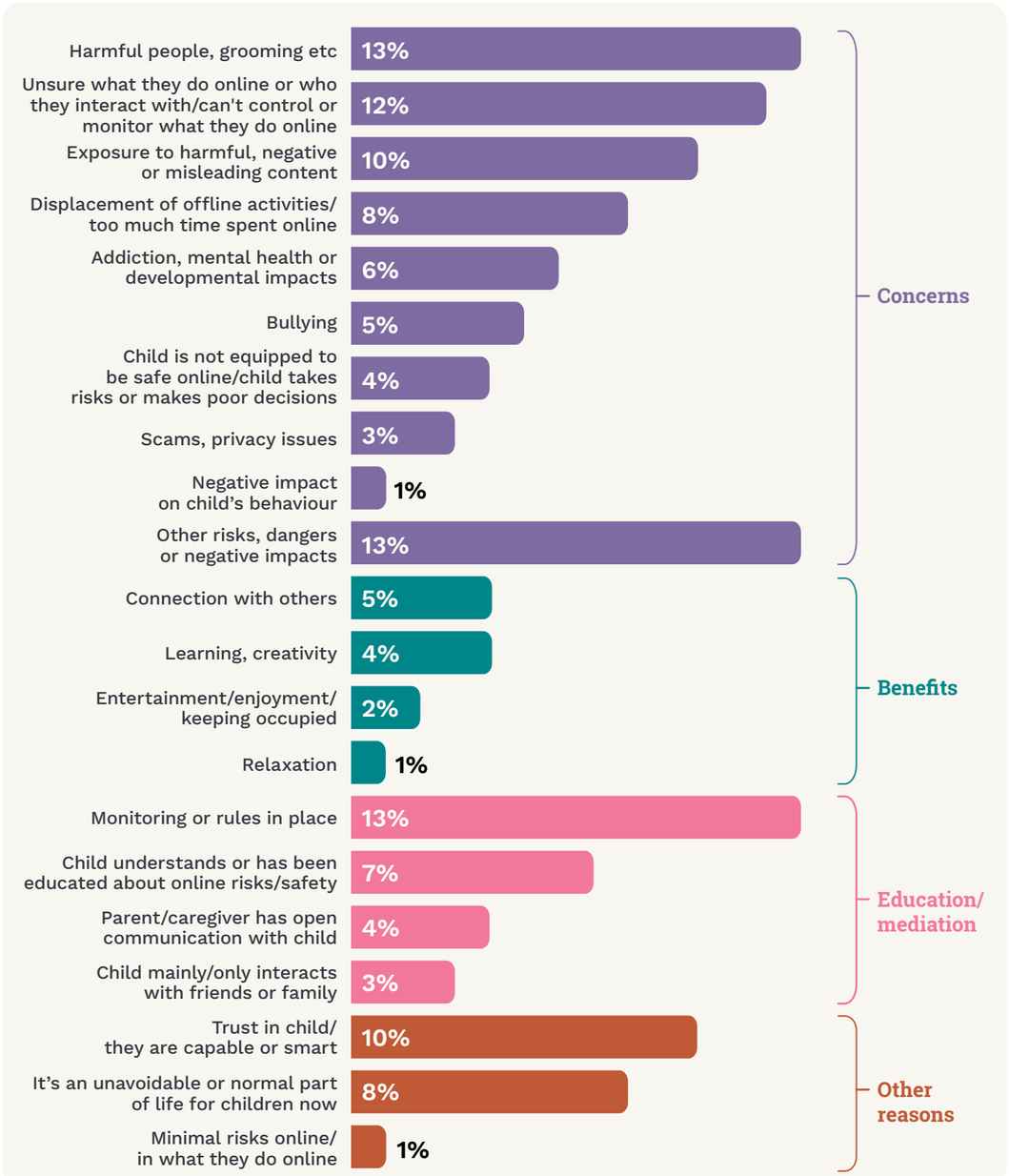
> **Comfortable. I am constantly aware of my son's gaming. I am aware of who he connects with online as well. He's had issues with schooling and this has been a great social outlet for him.**
>
> (Parent of a boy aged 13)

> **[I feel] both supportive and cautious. The internet is a valuable tool for learning, socialising, and exploring interests, which I want my child to benefit from.**
>
> (Parent of a boy aged 13)





**Figure 2:** Reasons for parents' feelings about their child being online




**Q:** How do you feel about your child going online? Free text response.

**Base**: Parents of children aged 10 to 17 (n = 1,732).[4]

[4] To minimise participant burden, a split-sample approach was used for the two free text questions included in the survey: 50% of participants responded to the first question ('How do you feel about your child going online? Why?'), while the remaining 50% responded to the second question ('If the internet were an animal, what animal would it be? Why?').

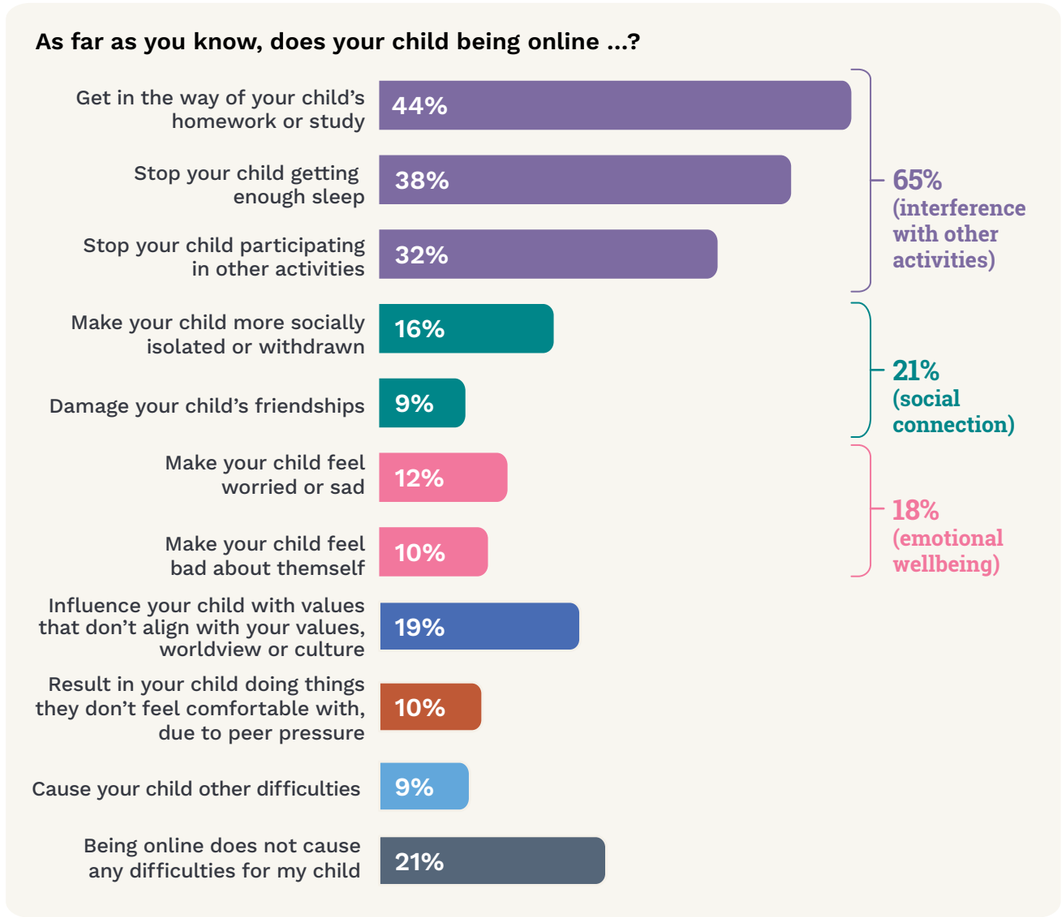
## Parents are concerned that time spent online displaces or interferes with other important activities

Consistent with our finding that most parents held negative views about their children going online, 3 in 4 (74%) reported, when prompted with a list, that their child had experienced at least one potential negative impact. The most common concerns related to **time spent online interfering with other activities** (65%), including their child's **homework or study** (44%) or **sleep** (38%).

As shown in Figure 3, a significant minority also perceived negative impacts related to their child's:

- social connection (21%)
- emotional wellbeing (18%)
- values or worldview (19%)
- experience of peer pressure (10%).

**Figure 3:** Parent-reported negative impacts of their child being online




**Q:** As far as you know, does your child being online ...?

**Base:** Parents of children aged 10 to 17 (*n* = 3,454).

**Note:** 'Interference with other activities' combines 'get in the way of your child's homework or study', 'stop your child getting enough sleep' and/or 'stop your child participating in other activities'. 'Social connection' combines 'damage your child's friendships' and/or 'make your child more socially isolated or withdrawn'. 'Emotional wellbeing' combines 'make your child feel bad about themself and/or 'make your child feel worried or sad'.

These findings broadly align with the views of children, reported in **Connected, curious, cautious: Children's engagement in the digital world**.[5] For example, around 1 in 3 children 'agreed' they were spending too much time online (34%) or that the amount of time they spent online was causing issues with their homework/study (31%) or sleep (29%).

[5] This comparison is indicative only, as a different question format was used in the children's survey.

# Harms dominate parental perceptions of children's online activity, but almost all recognise benefits when prompted

When prompted with a list of possible benefits, 97% of parents recognised at least one **benefit** to their child from being online.

Most parents reported that being online helped their child to:

- pursue their interests or hobbies or explore their creativity (82%)
- connect with others (73%)
- have fun or relax (65%).

Many also said that being online had helped their child:

- to learn about world events or get involved in helping others (47%) – for example, by keeping up with news or current affairs
- to find out about activities to do in 'in real life'[6] (39%)
- with their emotional wellbeing (35%) – for example, to 'feel better if they were feeling bad' (29%)
- with their self-esteem or opportunities to express their identity/true self (24%), as shown in Figure 4.

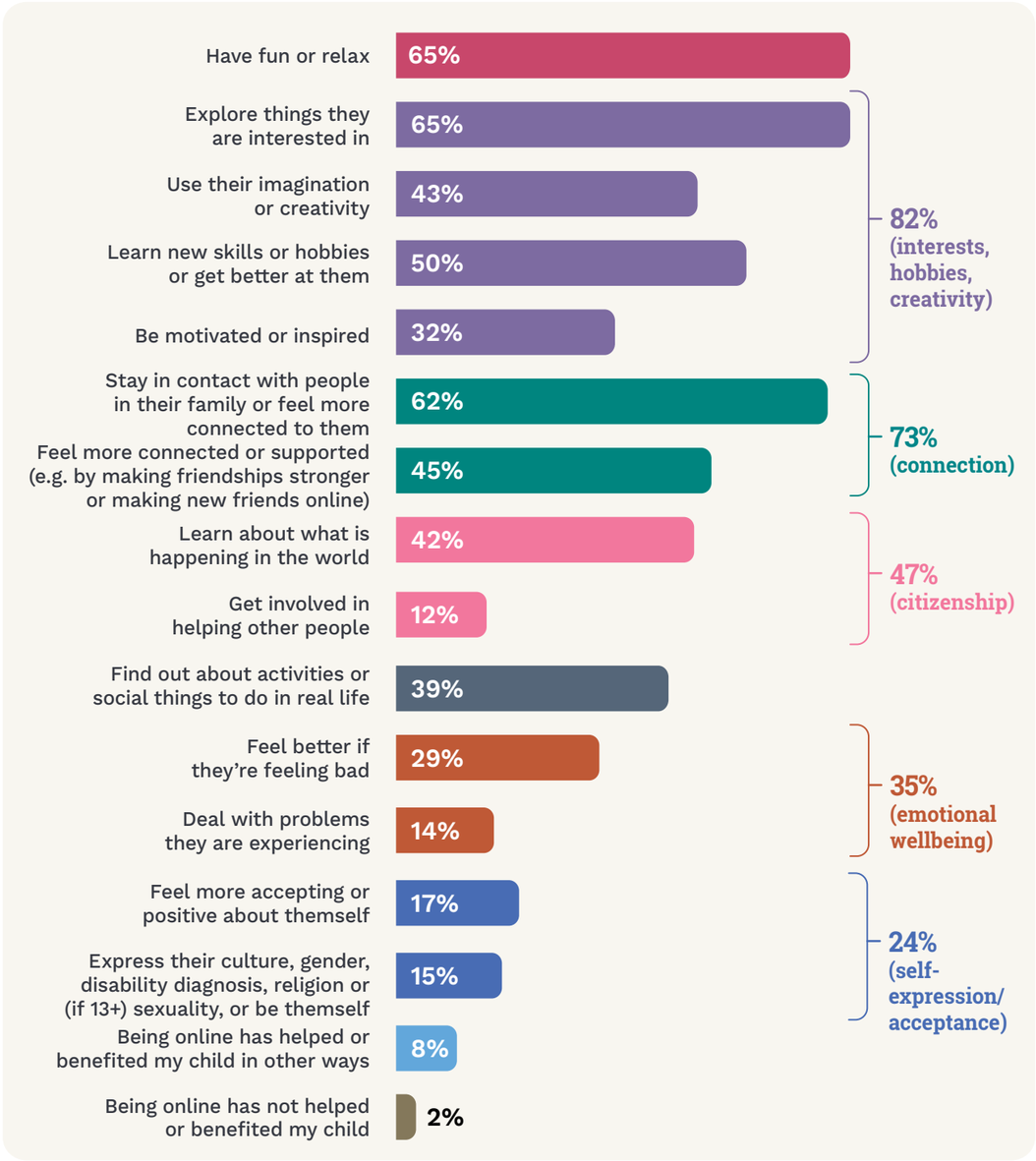
Parents' views on the benefits of being online broadly aligned with those reported by the children who participated in the survey, with one notable exception. Parents tended to underestimate children's use of the internet for emotional support – only 35% of parents mentioned the emotional benefits of being online, compared to 50% of children (as reported in Connected, curious, cautious).

[6] 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.





**Figure 4:** Parent-reported benefits of their child being online




**Q**: Overall, how, if at all, has being online helped or benefited your child?

**Base**: Parents of children aged 10 to 17 (*n* = 3,454).

**Note**: 'Interests, hobbies, creativity' combines 'explore things they are interested in', 'use their imagination or creativity', 'learn new skills or hobbies or get better at them' and/or 'be motivated or inspired'. 'Connection' combines 'stay in contact with people in their family or feel more connected to them' and/or 'feel more connected or supported'. 'Citizenship' combines 'learn about what is happening in the world' and/or 'get involved in helping other people'. 'Emotional wellbeing' combines 'feel better if they're feeling bad' and/or 'deal with problems they are experiencing'. 'Self-expression/ acceptance' combines 'feel more accepting or positive about themself and/or 'express their culture, gender, diagnosis, religion or (if 13+) sexuality, or be themself'.

In addition, we found that most parents **believe that learning about online technologies is valuable**: 9 in 10 parents (90%) agreed (39% strongly) that it's important for their child to learn about online technologies.

## Both perceived benefits and negative impacts from being online are heightened for parents of teens, girls, and trans and gender-diverse children

Parents of **trans and gender-diverse children** were particularly likely to report that their child experienced emotional benefits from being online, including positive impacts on their emotional wellbeing, self-esteem or feelings about their identity.

Parents of **girls** were also more likely than parents of boys to say being online enhanced their child's sense of connection to their family (67% versus 57%).

Parents of **teens** (aged 13 to 17) tended to perceive more benefits than parents of younger children (aged 10 to 12), including benefits relating to their child:

- feeling connected and supported
- learning about the world or getting involved in helping others
- feeling more positive about themselves or their identity.

As shown in Table 2, women were more likely than men to cite connection and support as benefits of being online for their child.





**Table 2:** Parent-reported benefits of their child being online, by child gender and age and parent gender (%)

| | Child gender | | | Child age | | | Parent gender | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Boys | Girls | Trans & gender diverse | 10–12 (younger children) | 13–15 (younger teens) | 16–17 (older teens) | Men | Women |
| Interests, hobbies, creativity[7] | 82 | 83 | 80 | 84 | 80 | 82 | 83 | 82 |
| Fun/relaxation | 67 | 64 | 66 | 68 | 63 | 64 | 66 | 65 |
| Connection to family | 57 | 67 | 58 | 61 | 62 | 63 | 55 | 65 |
| Learning about the world or helping others[8] | 45 | 48 | 53 | 40 | 50 | 53 | 46 | 47 |
| Connection and support (friendships) | 44 | 47 | 53 | 39 | 49 | 50 | 39 | 48 |
| Emotional wellbeing/ dealing with problems[9] | 33 | 36 | 53 | 35 | 33 | 37 | 36 | 34 |
| Self-expression/ acceptance (gender, [if 13+] sexuality, disability, etc.)[10] | 21 | 26 | 68 | 22 | 26 | 26 | 25 | 24 |
| Other benefits | 8 | 8 | 15 | 7 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 8 |
| No benefits | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| **Base: Parents of children aged 10–17** | **1,739** | **1,632** | **83** | **1,332** | **1,297** | **825** | **1,069** | **2,357** |

**Q:** Overall, how, if at all, has being online helped or benefited your child?

**Note**: Different colour shading indicates that differences are statistically significant within a sub-group. White shading indicates that differences are not statistically significant.

However, parents of girls and trans and gender-diverse children, as well as teens, were also more likely to think that being online had negatively impacted their child in various ways, as shown in Table 3. For example:

- Parents of girls were more likely than parents of boys to report that their child had done things they were uncomfortable with, due to peer pressure online. They were also more likely to report negative impacts on their child's emotional wellbeing.

[7] Combined 'explore things they are interested in', 'use their imagination or creativity', 'learn new skills or hobbies or get better at them' and/or 'be motivated or inspired'.

[8] Combined 'learn about what is happening in the world' and/or 'get involved in helping other people'.

[9] Combined 'feel better if they're feeling bad' and/or 'deal with problems they are experiencing'.

[10] Combined 'feel more accepting or positive about themself' and/or 'express their culture, gender, diagnosis, religion or (if 13+) sexuality, or be themself'.

- Parents of trans and gender-diverse children were even more likely to cite negative emotional impacts on their child, as well as negative impacts in general.
- Parents of teens were more likely than parents of younger children to mention one or more negative impacts of their child being online, particularly in terms of online activities interfering with their child's participation in offline activities.

We found similar perceptions associated with age and gender among children. As we reported in **Connected, curious, cautious**, both trans and gender-diverse children and teens were more likely than other children to report experiencing both benefits and negative impacts from being online.

**Table 3:** Parent-reported negative impacts of their child being online, by child gender and age and parent gender (%)

| | Child gender | | | Child age | | | Parent gender | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Boys | Girls | Trans & gender diverse | 10–12 (younger children) | 13–15 (younger teens) | 16–17 (older teens) | Men | Women |
| **Any difficulties (combined)** | 74 | 74 | 89 | 71 | 76 | 77 | 73 | 75 |
| Interferes with offline activities[11] | 66 | 64 | 76 | 60 | 68 | 70 | 63 | 67 |
| Negative impact(s) on social connection[12] | 20 | 22 | 28 | 19 | 24 | 20 | 20 | 22 |
| Influenced by values that don't align with your values, worldview or culture | 18 | 20 | 26 | 20 | 19 | 18 | 19 | 19 |
| Negative impact(s) on emotional wellbeing[13] | 13 | 22 | 32 | 16 | 19 | 20 | 16 | 18 |
| Child doing things they don't feel comfortable with, due to peer pressure | 8 | 11 | 13 | 10 | 11 | 9 | 11 | 9 |
| Other difficulties | 9 | 9 | 11 | 10 | 9 | 6 | 8 | 9 |
| **No difficulties** | 22 | 21 | 10 | 25 | 20 | 18 | 22 | 21 |
| **Base: Parents of children aged 10–17** | 1,739 | 1,632 | 83 | 1,332 | 1,297 | 825 | 1,069 | 2,357 |

**Q:** As far as you know, does your child being online ...?

**Note**: Different colour shading indicates that differences are statistically significant within a sub-group. White shading indicates that differences are not statistically significant.

[11] Combined 'get in the way of your child's homework or study', 'stop your child getting enough sleep' and/or 'stop your child participating in other activities'.

[12] Combined 'damage your child's friendships' and/or 'make your child more isolated or withdrawn'.

[13] Combined 'make your child feel bad about themselves' and/or 'make your child feel worried or sad'.



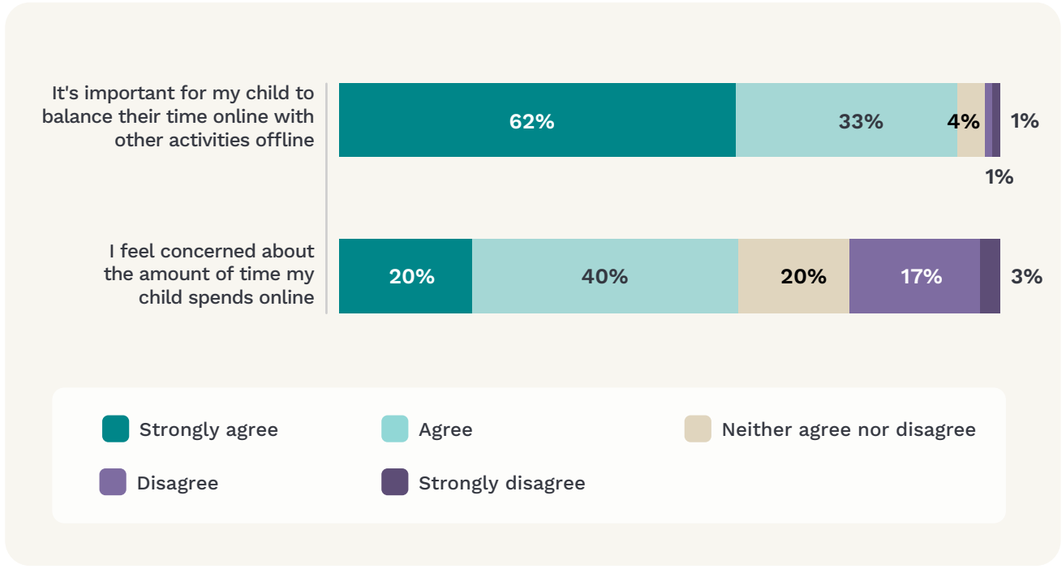


## Parents want their children to balance their online and offline activities

Reflecting parents' concerns about time spent online displacing other activities, almost all the survey participants (94%) agreed (62% strongly) that it is important for their child to **balance time online with offline activities**.

Similarly, 3 in 5 (60%) agreed (20% strongly) that they are concerned about how much time their child spends online, with 20% indicating they weren't concerned about this (see Figure 5).

**Figure 5:** Parents' feelings about their child's time spent online




**Q:** How much do you agree with the following statements?

**Note**: Parents of children aged 10 to 17 (*n* = 3,454).

Parents of trans and gender-diverse children were less likely than others to agree that it is important for their child to balance time online with offline activities (82% versus 94% of parents of boys and 95% of parents of girls). This result perhaps reflects their recognition of the unique benefits the online world provides for trans and gender-diverse children.

Parental concern about how much time their children spend online was higher among those with teen children (aged 13 to 17) than those with younger children (aged 10 to 12) (62% versus 57%), reflecting our finding that parents of teens were more likely to agree that online activities interfere with their child's participation in offline activities.

## Discussion

Our findings show that parental concerns about children being online are much more front-of-mind than the potential benefits. Parents described a range of concerns, including the risk of online grooming, exposure to potentially harmful or inappropriate content, and cyberbullying. However, when prompted with a list of possible benefits, almost all parents acknowledged that being online had helped their child in at least one way. This suggests that digital parenting tends to be focused more on shielding children from online harms than on supporting them to maximise the benefits of being online.

Parents also commonly expressed concerns about children spending too much time online, and about the impact this has on their offline activities such as study and sleep – particularly among teens. It is important that families feel equipped to set age-appropriate boundaries around online use that work for their family, while keeping in mind that the nature of what children are doing online may be more important than the amount of time spent online. Parents also play a critical role in shaping healthy digital habits through active engagement, positive role modelling and responsive support (American Psychological Association, 2023).

We found that parents' perceptions of the benefits and negative impacts of being online mostly mirror those reported by children in **Connected, curious, cautious** – a positive sign that families are engaging in meaningful conversations about online experiences. However, our findings also suggest that some parents underestimate children's use of the internet for emotional support. Encouraging families to engage in deeper conversations about what children gain from being online might help parents to integrate this perspective into their digital parenting practices. These conversations are especially important now that the social media age restrictions are in effect. Children who experienced benefits largely from social media may require more targeted support to ensure they can access these benefits from alternative sources.

Parents of girls and trans and gender-diverse children were more likely than parents of boys to perceive both risks and benefits of their children being online. This echoes the perceptions of children, reported in **Connected, curious, cautious**. It also reflects other findings from the '**Keeping Kids Safe Online**' survey that show a high incidence of online harms among the trans and gender-diverse children surveyed, as well as the relatively higher incidence of some harms among girls than boys, including cyberbullying (eSafety Commissioner, 2025c) and non-consensual tracking, monitoring and harassment (eSafety Commissioner, 2025e). This highlights the challenge parents face of balancing protection from potential harms with ensuring their children can access the positive opportunities of online engagement. It also suggests that some parents might underestimate the online risks for boys. For example, boys were just as likely as girls to indicate they had been exposed to or personally experienced online hate or had encountered other types of content associated with harm online (eSafety Commissioner, 2025a, 2025b, 2025d). Recent research also indicates that boys are increasingly being targeted by perpetrators of financially motivated sexual extortion (Wolbers et al., 2025). This suggests that efforts to equip parents to support their children's online safety must account for the nuanced influence that gender can have on online experiences.

Both the benefits and risks of online engagement were also more apparent for parents of teens than for parents of younger children. Again, this parental perception reflects the findings reported in **Connected, curious, cautious**, as well as the higher rates of online harm experienced by teens (eSafety Commissioner, 2025b, 2025d, 2025d, 2025e). How children's age, as well as gender, shapes digital parenting practices is explored later in this report (pp. 79-88).

Lastly, some parents expressed anxiety about their limited awareness and understanding of their children's online activities and a feeling of being overwhelmed by the pace of technological change. This speaks to the need to support parents with their own digital literacy, as well as to provide effective and user-friendly technical mediation tools.

Collectively, our findings emphasise the importance of open dialogue among families regarding children's online participation and experiences and suggest that tailored support for families may be needed to help all children get the most out of being online while minimising the harms.

# Parental awareness of children's online engagement

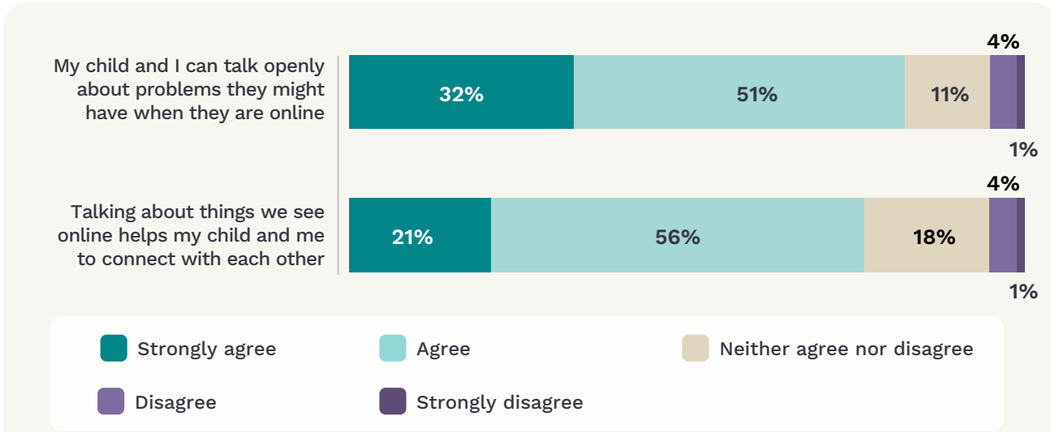
**As we saw in Connected, curious, cautious, children today are participating online in diverse ways and in various digital spaces.** This section of the report explores parental awareness of children's online engagement, including their use of social media and communication platforms, online gaming, and engagement with new and emerging technologies. It highlights the aspects of children's online participation that parents have high levels of awareness of, as well as the areas where there are gaps in parental awareness.

## Parental concerns about children being online are prominent

Parents generally reported that they can have **open conversations with their children** about what they are experiencing online and that this **strengthens their connection**. As shown in Figure 6, we found that:

- over 4 in 5 parents (83%) agreed (32% strongly) that they and their child can talk openly about problems their child might have online
- 77% agreed (21% strongly) that talking about things they have seen online helps them to connect with their child.

**Figure 6:** Parents' feelings about their child being online – communication and connection




**Q:** How much do you agree with the following statements?

**Note**: Parents of children aged 10 to 17 (*n* = 3,454).

However, parents tended to feel less able to talk openly with their children about online problems as they get older. For example, 78% of parents of older teens (aged 16 to 17) agreed that they and their child can talk openly about problems the child might have online, compared with 84% of parents of younger teens (aged 13 to 15) and 86% of parents of younger children (aged 10 to 12).

Parents of trans and gender-diverse children were also less likely than other parents to agree that they can talk openly with their child about problems the child might be having online (71% versus 82% of parents of boys versus 85% of parents of girls).

In addition, a higher proportion of women than men said they and their child can talk openly about online issues (85% versus 80%).

## One in 4 parents believe they don't really know what their child is doing online

We also asked parents the extent to which they agreed with the statement '**I don't really know what my child is doing online**'. While almost half of parents (49%) disagreed (11% strongly) with this statement, over 1 in 4 (26%) agreed (4% strongly) that they don't really know what their child is doing online. A similar proportion (25%) said they neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement.

We found that parents of trans and gender-diverse children were more likely than other parents to agree that they don't really know what their child is doing online (43% versus 26% of parents of boys and 25% of parents of girls).

Agreement with this statement also increased with child age. For example, 38% of parents of older teens agreed that they don't really know what their child is doing online, compared with 27% of parents of younger teens and 18% of parents of younger children.

## Most parents are aware of their children's use of social media and communication platforms

We asked parents about their awareness of their child's engagement with specific online activities. Only a small minority of parents reported they were unaware of their





child's use of social media and communication platforms, although others over- or underestimated the frequency of their child's use of these platforms.

For example, when we compared responses from matched parent–child pairs (see Table 4), we found that:[14,15]

- 5% of parents reported that their child never used social media, despite the child reporting they did
- 4% thought their child never used communication platforms, despite the child reporting they did
- 1 in 5 (20%) thought their child used social media less frequently than the child reported, while another 20% said their child used social media more frequently than the child reported
- over 1 in 3 (34%) thought their child used communication platforms more frequently than the child reported, while almost 1 in 5 (18%) thought their child used communication platforms less frequently than the child reported.

[14] We note that children's and parents' responses to questions about how frequently they engage in online activities rely on recall and accurate reporting. If children, in particular, were aware that their parents, or society more broadly, have concerns about the amount of time children spend online, they may have downplayed/underestimated the amount of time they spent doing online activities (due to social desirability bias).

[15] We note that children and parents may have a differing understanding of what constitutes 'social media'. To facilitate consistent understanding, both children and parents were provided with the following definition of social media: 'Social media' is any online platform or app where people can both interact with other people and post or share content like photos or videos.

**Table 4:** Alignment between parent- and child-reported frequency of children's social media and communications platform use (%)

| | Social media | Communication platforms |
|---|---|---|
| Parent and child reported same frequency | 47 | 32 |
| Parent reported lower frequency than child | 20 | 18 |
| Parent reported higher frequency than child | 20 | 34 |
| Parent reported child never used; child reported having used | 5 | 4 |
| Parent reported child used but didn't know how often | 3 | 3 |
| Parent reported child used; child reported never having used | 2 | 4 |
| Parent and child reported child never used | 2 | 3 |
| Parent didn't know if child used | <1 | 1 |
| **Base: Parents of children aged 10–17** | **3,454** | **3,454** |

**Q (parent survey):** When your child isn't at school or at work (or sleeping), how often, if at all, do they usually use social media (for example, TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, etc.)? Please read all the options before you choose. If you're not sure, choose the answer that seems about right. When your child isn't at school or at work (or sleeping), how often, if ever, do they usually message, chat, call or video call anyone using an online messaging platform, email or app (for example, WhatsApp, Messenger Kids, iMessage, Discord)? Please read all the options before you choose. If you're not sure, choose the answer that seems about right. IMPORTANT: Do not include social media apps here that your child might use to message or chat to others on, like Instagram or Snapchat.

**Q (child survey):** 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. When you're not at school or at work (or sleeping), how often do you usually use any social media? Which, if any, of these apps or platforms have you ever used to chat with, message, call or video call anyone online? 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?

Parents of younger children were more likely than parents of teens (aged 13 to 17) to be unaware that their child had used social media or communication platforms. For example:

- One in 10 parents of younger children (10%) said their child never used social media, despite the child reporting that they had (see Table 5).
- One in 20 parents (5%) said their child never used communication platforms, despite the child reporting they did (see Table 6).

However, we found that parents of teens were more likely than parents of younger children to provide higher estimates of the frequency with which their children used communication platforms, when compared to the estimates provided by their children, as shown in Table 6.

**Table 5:** Alignment between parent- and child-reported frequency of children's social media use, by child gender and age and parent gender (%)

| | Child gender | | | Child age | | | Parent gender | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Boys | Girls | Trans & gender diverse | 10–12 (younger children) | 13–15 (younger teens) | 16–17 (older teens) | Men | Women |
| Parent and child reported same frequency | 46 | 48 | 44 | 40 | 50 | 53 | 47 | 47 |
| Parent reported lower frequency than child | 20 | 20 | 24 | 19 | 21 | 20 | 19 | 20 |
| Parent reported higher frequency than child | 20 | 20 | 23 | 21 | 20 | 19 | 23 | 19 |
| Parent reported child used; child reported never having used | 2 | 2 | 0 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| Parent and child reported child never used | 3 | 2 | 0 | 5 | 1 | <1 | 2 | 3 |
| Parent reported child never used; child reported having used | 5 | 5 | 0 | 10 | 3 | 1 | 4 | 6 |
| Parent reported child used but didn't know how often | 4 | 3 | 6 | 1 | 4 | 6 | 3 | 3 |
| Parent didn't know if child used | <1 | 0 | 1 | <1 | <1 | <1 | 0 | <1 |
| **Base: Parents of children aged 10–17** | **1,739** | **1,632** | **83** | **1,332** | **1,297** | **825** | **1,069** | **2,357** |

**Q (parent survey):** This first question is just about social media. 'Social media' is any online platform or app where people can both interact with other people and post or share content like photos or videos. When your child isn't at school or at work (or sleeping), how often, if at all, do they usually use social media (for example, TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, and so on)? Please read all the options before you choose. If you're not sure, choose the answer that seems about right.

**Q (child survey):** 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 a sub-group. White shading indicates that differences are not statistically significant.

**Table 6:** Alignment between parent- and child-reported frequency of children's use of communication platforms, by child gender and age and parent gender (%)

| | Child gender | | | Child age | | | Parent gender | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Boys | Girls | Trans & gender diverse | 10–12 (younger children) | 13–15 (younger teens) | 16–17 (older teens) | Men | Women |
| Parent and child reported same frequency | 31 | 34 | 29 | 35 | 32 | 28 | 31 | 33 |
| Parent reported lower frequency than child | 18 | 17 | 26 | 18 | 18 | 18 | 18 | 18 |
| Parent reported higher frequency than child | 33 | 34 | 30 | 28 | 36 | 39 | 36 | 33 |
| Parent reported child used; child reported never having used | 4 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 3 |
| Parent and child reported child never used | 4 | 2 | 1 | 6 | 2 | <1 | 3 | 3 |
| Parent reported child never used; child reported having used | 5 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 5 |
| Parent reported child used but didn't know how often | 3 | 3 | 6 | 2 | 4 | 6 | 3 | 3 |
| Parent didn't know if child used | 1 | 1 | 1 | <1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| **Base: Parents of children aged 10–17** | **1,739** | **1,632** | **83** | **1,332** | **1,297** | **825** | **1,069** | **2,357** |

**Q (parent survey):** When your child isn't at school or at work (or sleeping), how often, if ever, do they usually message, chat, call or video call anyone using an online messaging platform, email or app (for example, WhatsApp, Messenger Kids, iMessage, Discord)? Please read all the options before you choose. If you're not sure, choose the answer that seems about right. IMPORTANT: Do not include social media apps here that your child might use to message or chat to others on, like Instagram or Snapchat.

**Q (child survey):** 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 a sub-group. White shading indicates that differences are not statistically significant.



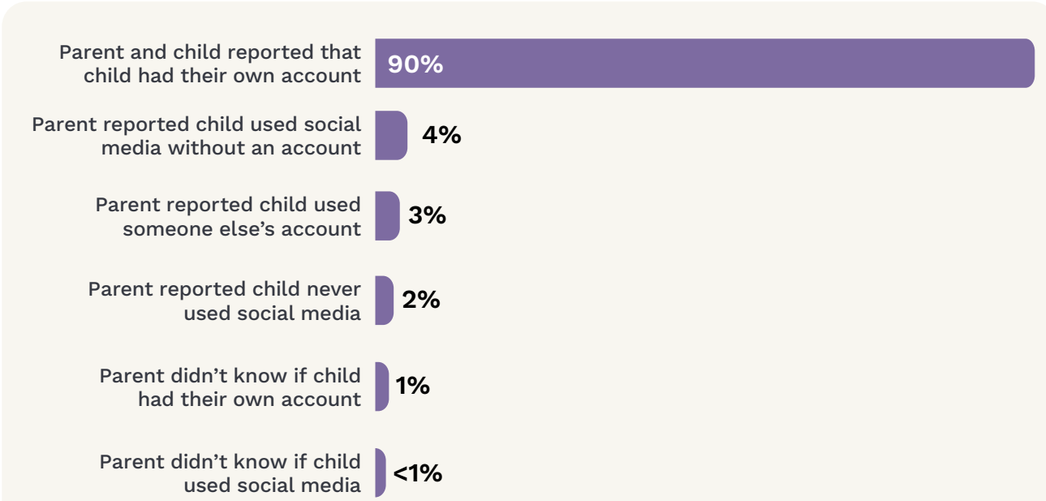


We also asked parents if their children had their own **social media accounts** and found that most parents had accurate insight. For example, 9 in 10 parents of children with social media accounts (90%) reported that their child had their own account (see Figure 7).

However, 1 in 10 were unaware that their child had their own account.

- 4% said their child used social media without an account.
- 3% said their child used someone else's account.
- 2% said their child never used social media.
- 1% said they didn't know if their child had an account

**Figure 7:** Alignment between parent- and child-reported social media account ownership




**Q (parent survey):** Does your child currently have their own profile or account on any social media platform or app (for example, their own Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok or YouTube account)? This doesn't include accounts on messaging platforms like Messenger Kids or WhatsApp.

**Q (child survey):** Do you currently have your own profile or account on any social media platforms or apps?

**Base:** Parents of children aged 10 to 17 who had their own social media account (*n* = 2,251).

Again, these differences were especially apparent for parents of younger children and, to a lesser extent, parents of younger teens (see Table 7). For example, almost all parents of older teens with a social media account (97%) were aware that their child had an account, compared with 90% of parents of younger teens and 80% of parents of younger children.

**Table 7:** Alignment between parent- and child-reported social media account ownership, by child gender and age and parent gender (%)

| | Child gender | | | Child age | | | Parent gender | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Boys | Girls | Trans & gender diverse | 10–12 (younger children) | 13–15 (younger teens) | 16–17 (older teens) | Men | Women |
| Parent and child reported that child had their own account | 90 | 91 | 87 | 80 | 90 | 97 | 89 | 91 |
| Parent reported child used social media without an account | 4 | 3 | 6 | 6 | 4 | 1 | 4 | 4 |
| Parent reported child used someone else's account | 3 | 4 | 4 | 9 | 3 | 1 | 4 | 3 |
| Parent reported child never used social media | 2 | 1 | 0 | 5 | 1 | <1 | 2 | 2 |
| Parent didn't know if child had their own account | 1 | 1 | 4 | <1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Parent didn't know if child used social media | <1 | 0 | 0 | <1 | <1 | 0 | 0 | <1 |
| **Base: Parents of children aged 10–17 who had their own social media account** | **1,117** | **1,069** | **65** | **509** | **998** | **744** | **722** | **1,514** |

**Q (parent survey):** Does your child currently have their own profile or account on any social media platform or app (for example, their own Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok or YouTube account)? This doesn't include accounts on messaging platforms like Messenger Kids or WhatsApp.

**Q (child survey):** 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 a sub-group. White shading indicates that differences are not statistically significant.

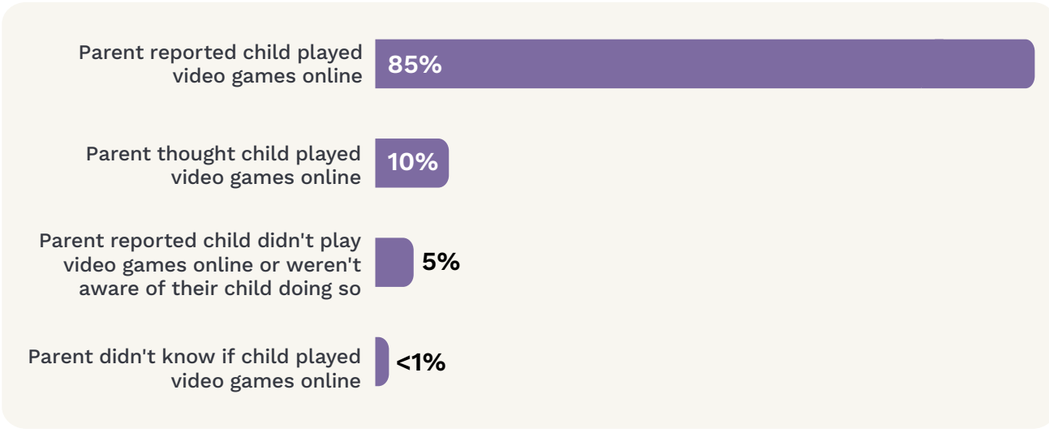




## Most parents are aware that their child has played video games online

We also found that most parents were aware of their child's **online gaming habits**. When we compared matched parent–child pairs, we found that only a minority of parents whose children played video games (5%) weren't aware of this, as shown in Figure 8.

**Figure 8:** Alignment between parent- and child-reported prevalence of children's use of online video games




**Q (parent survey):** Has your child ever done any of the following? Played video games online.

**Q (child survey):** Have you ever done any of the following? Played video games online.

**Base:** Parents of children aged 10 to 17 who played online video games (*n* = 2,994).

However, among parents of children who told us they had played video games online, parents of younger children were less likely to be aware of this, compared with parents of teens (see Table 8). For example, 6% of parents of younger children who had played online games weren't aware of their child's online gaming, compared to 3% of parents with teens.

Parents of girls were also less likely to be aware that their child had played video games online, compared with parents of boys.

**Table 8:** Alignment between parent- and child-reported prevalence of children's use of online video games, by child gender and age and parent gender (%)

| | Child gender | | | Child age | | | Parent gender | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Boys | Girls | Trans & gender diverse | 10–12 (younger children) | 13–15 (younger teens) | 16–17 (older teens) | Men | Women |
| Parent reported child played video games online | 89 | 80 | 84 | 82 | 86 | 88 | 83 | 86 |
| Parent thought child played video games online | 8 | 14 | 10 | 11 | 10 | 9 | 12 | 10 |
| Parent reported child didn't play video games online or weren't aware of their child doing so | 3 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 5 |
| Parent didn't know if child played video games online | 0 | <1 | 0 | <1 | <1 | <1 | <1 | <1 |
| **Base: Parents of children aged 10–17 who played online video games** | **1,605** | **1,317** | **72** | **1,135** | **1,138** | **721** | **944** | **2,029** |

**Q (parent survey):** Has your child ever done any of the following? Played video games online.

**Q (child survey):** Have you ever done any of the following? Played video games online.

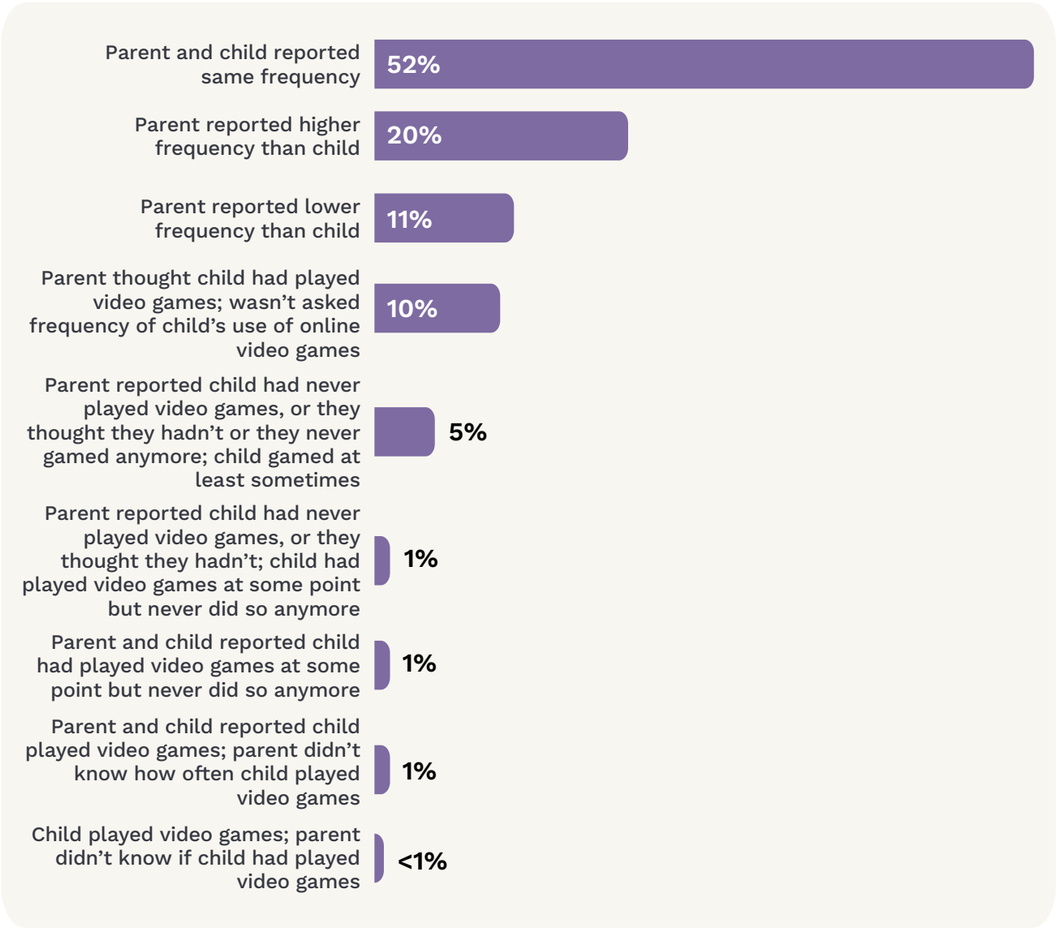
**Note:** Different colour shading indicates that differences are statistically significant within a sub-group. White shading indicates that differences are not statistically significant.





Among parents of children who had played video games online, 20% reported that their child gamed online more frequently than reported by the child, while 11% of parents reported a lower frequency than their child reported (see Figure 9).

**Figure 9:** Alignment between parent- and child-reported frequency of children's use of online video games




**Q (parent survey):** How often does your child usually play video games online? This could be at home, at school, at a friend's house, or anywhere else they game online. If you're not sure, choose the answer you think is about right.

**Q (child survey):** 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.

**Base:** Parents of children aged 10 to 17 who played online video games (*n* = 2,994).

As shown in Table 9, the gaming frequency estimates provided by the parents of teens and boys were most likely to be aligned with those of their child.

**Table 9:** Alignment between parent- and child-reported frequency of children's use of online video games, by child gender and age and parent gender (%)

| | Child gender | | | Child age | | | Parent gender | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Boys | Girls | Trans & gender diverse | 10–12 (younger children) | 13–15 (younger teens) | 16–17 (older teens) | Men | Women |
| Parent and child reported same frequency | 59 | 44 | 56 | 48 | 54 | 55 | 52 | 52 |
| Parent reported higher frequency than child | 18 | 22 | 18 | 21 | 19 | 20 | 19 | 20 |
| Parent reported lower frequency than child | 11 | 10 | 8 | 12 | 10 | 10 | 11 | 11 |
| Parent thought child had played video games; wasn't asked frequency of child's use of online video games | 8 | 14 | 10 | 11 | 10 | 9 | 12 | 10 |
| Parent reported child had never played video games, or they thought they hadn't or they never gamed anymore; child gamed at least sometimes | 3 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 5 | 3 | 5 | 5 |
| Parent reported child had never played video games, or they thought they hadn't; child had played video games at some point but never did so anymore | <1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | <1 | <1 | <1 | 1 |
| Parent and child reported child had played video games at some point but never did so anymore | <1 | 1 | 0 | <1 | 1 | 1 | <1 | 1 |
| Parent and child reported child played video games; parent didn't know how often child played video games | <1 | 1 | 0 | <1 | 1 | 1 | <1 | 1 |
| Child played video games; parent didn't know if child had played video games | 0 | <1 | 0 | <1 | <1 | <1 | <1 | <1 |
| **Base: Parents of children aged 10–17 who played online video games** | **1,605** | **1,317** | **72** | **1,135** | **1,138** | **721** | **944** | **2,029** |

**Q (parent survey):** How often does your child usually play video games online? This could be at home, at school, at a friend's house, or anywhere else they game online. If you're not sure, choose the answer you think is about right.

**Q (child survey):** 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 a sub-group. White shading indicates that differences are not statistically significant.





## A significant minority of parents aren't aware that their child has engaged with new and emerging technologies

We asked parents about their awareness of their child's engagement, if any, with new and emerging forms of digital technology, including **generative AI, virtual reality** and **haptic technology**. When we compared matched parent–child pairs, we found that a significant minority of parents weren't aware that their child had used these technologies (see Table 10). For example:

- Around 1 in 6 parents whose children told us they had used generative AI (16%) were unaware of this.
- Among parents of children who had used a virtual reality headset, 1 in 5 (19%) weren't aware of this.
- Among parents of children who had used wearable haptic technologies, almost 3 in 10 (28%) weren't aware of this.

Generative AI is rapidly being taken up in many settings, so children may have come across it outside of the family home (for example, at school, out-of-school-hours care, community centres or friends' homes). Parents may also be unaware that many popular social media platforms used by children now have AI-integrated functionality – for example, MyAI in Snapchat. Additionally, technologies such as virtual reality and haptic technology are relatively new and expensive, so, again, children may have accessed them outside of the home – for example, in youth centres, at entertainment venues, and so on – which could help to explain gaps in parental awareness.

**Table 10:** Alignment between parent- and child-reported prevalence of lifetime use of new and emerging technologies (%)

| | Generative AI | Virtual reality headset | Wearable haptic technology |
|---|---|---|---|
| Child said they had used this; parent said child had used this | 50 | 59 | 34 |
| Child said they had used this; parent said they thought their child had used this | 32 | 21 | 35 |
| Child said they had used this; parent said their child hadn't used this or they weren't aware of their child using this | 16 | 19 | 28 |
| Child said they had used this; parent said they didn't know if their child had used this | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| **Base: Parents of children aged 10–17 who had used generative AI/a virtual reality headset/ wearable haptic technology** | **1,447** | **1,325** | **270** |

**Q (parent survey):** Has your child ever done any of the following? Used a generative AI tool (like ChatGPT, My AI, Bing Chat, DALL-E); Used a virtual reality (VR) headset (like Meta Quest, Apple Vision Pro); Used wearable haptic technologies (like HoloSuit, Plexus VR Glove).

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

Parents of younger children and, to a lesser extent, parents of younger teens were more likely than parents with older teens to be unaware that their child had used generative AI (see Table 11). For example, among parents of younger children who had used generative AI, 21% were unaware of their child's use of the technology, compared with 16% of parents of younger teens and 11% of parents of older teens.

There were few differences in parental awareness of children's use of virtual reality and haptic technology, by child or parent gender or by child age (see Table A1 in the Appendix).

**Table 11:** Alignment between parent- and child-reported prevalence of children's use of generative AI, by child gender and age and parent gender (%)

| | Child gender | | Child age | | | Parent gender | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Boys | Girls | 10–12 (younger children) | 13–15 (younger teens) | 16–17 (older teens) | Men | Women |
| Parent reported child had used generative AI | 51 | 50 | 46 | 52 | 53 | 50 | 51 |
| Parent thought child had used generative AI | 31 | 33 | 32 | 30 | 35 | 36 | 31 |
| Parent reported child hadn't used generative AI or weren't aware of their child doing so | 16 | 16 | 21 | 16 | 11 | 13 | 16 |
| Parent didn't know if child had used generative AI | 2 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| **Base: Parents of children aged 10–17 who had used generative AI** | **731** | **670** | **403** | **619** | **425** | **480** | **953** |

**Q (parent survey):** Has your child ever done any of the following? Used a generative AI tool (like ChatGPT, My AI, Bing Chat, DALL-E).

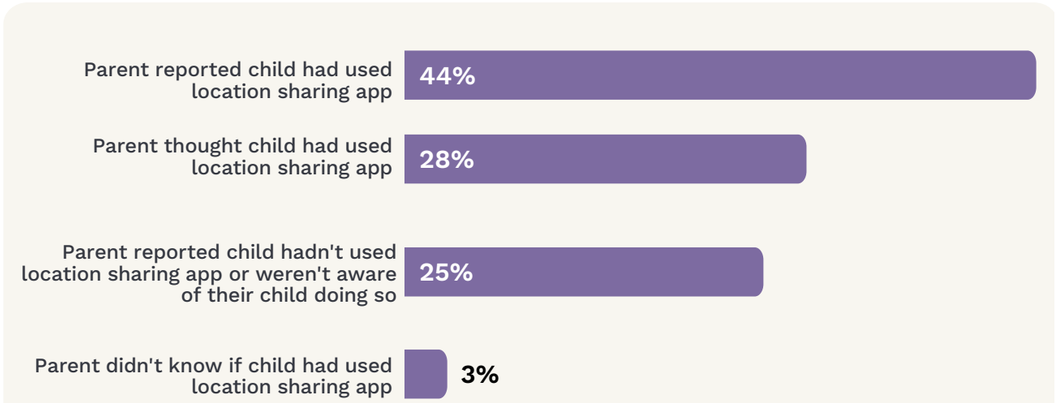
**Q (child survey):** Have you ever done any of the following? Used generative AI.

**Note:** The sample size was too small to report data for trans and gender-diverse children who had used generative AI (*n* = 46). Different colour shading indicates that differences are statistically significant within a sub-group. White shading indicates that differences are not statistically significant.

## One in 4 parents of children who use apps to share their live location with non-family members don't know their child does this

We also asked parents if, to their knowledge, their child 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). Among parents of children who had used location sharing apps to share their location with someone outside of their family, 1 in 4 (25%) weren't aware that their child had done this (see Figure 10).

**Figure 10:** Alignment between parent- and child-reported prevalence of children's use of location sharing apps to share their location with people outside of their family




**Q (parent survey):** Has your child ever done any of the following? Shared their exact real-time location with someone who isn't in their family using a location sharing app (like Find My Friends, Life360, Snap Map).

**Q (child survey):** 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).

**Base:** Parents of children aged 10 to 17 who had used a location sharing app (*n* = 955).

Parents of older teens were more likely to be aware that their child had used a location sharing app, compared with parents of younger teens and younger children (see Table 12).

**Table 12.** Alignment between parent- and child-reported prevalence of children's use of location sharing apps to share their location with people outside of their family, by child gender and age and parent gender (%)

| | Child gender | | Child age | | | Parent gender | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Boys | Girls | 10–12 (younger children) | 13–15 (younger teens) | 16–17 (older teens) | Men | Women |
| Parent reported child had used location sharing app | 43 | 45 | 38 | 42 | 50 | 40 | 46 |
| Parent thought child had used location sharing app | 28 | 29 | 30 | 30 | 25 | 34 | 26 |
| Parent reported child hadn't used location sharing app or weren't aware of their child doing so | 26 | 24 | 29 | 25 | 22 | 24 | 25 |
| Parent didn't know if child had used location sharing app | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 |
| **Base: Parents of children aged 10–17 who had used a location sharing app** | **435** | **491** | **188** | **429** | **338** | **311** | **638** |

**Q (parent survey):** Has your child ever done any of the following? Shared their exact real-time location with someone who isn't in their family using a location sharing app (like Find My Friends, Life360, Snap Map).

**Q (child survey):** 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).

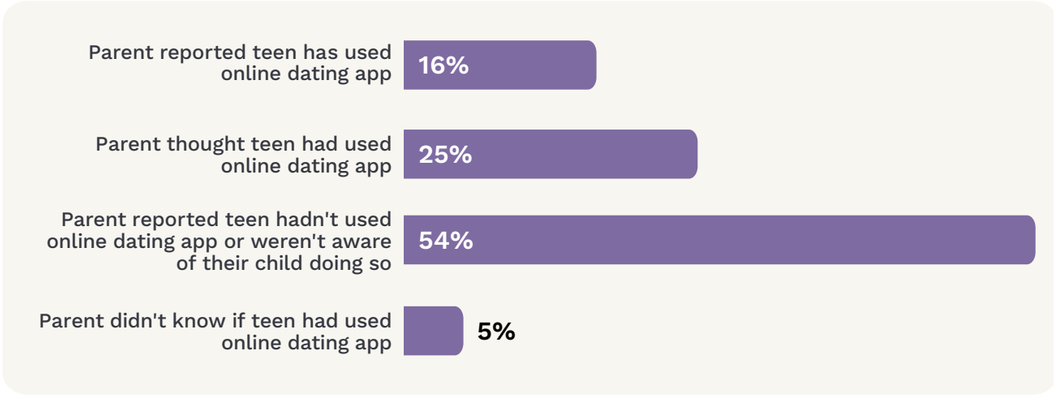
**Note:** The sample size was too small to report data for parents of trans and gender-diverse children (*n* = 29). Different colour shading indicates that differences are statistically significant within a sub-group. White shading indicates that differences are not statistically significant.

## Most parents are unaware that their older teen has used dating apps

Finally, we asked parents of older teens (aged 16 to 17) if their teen had ever used an online dating app. We found that, among parents of older teens who had used dating apps:

- over half (54%) weren't aware that their 16- to 17-year-old had used dating apps
- another 5% reported that they didn't know if their 16- to 17-year-old had used them (see Figure 11).

**Figure 11:** Alignment between parent- and teen-reported prevalence of older teens' use of online dating apps




**Q (parent survey):** Has your child ever done any of the following? Used online dating apps (like Hinge, Tinder, Grindr, Bumble).

**Q (child survey):** Have you ever done any of the following? Used online dating apps (like Hinge, Tinder, Grindr, Bumble).

**Base:** Parents of teens aged 16 to 17 who had used online dating apps (*n* = 62).

**Note:** Only asked of teens aged 16 to 17 and parents of teens aged 16 to 17.





## Discussion

We found that many parents were aware of their children's engagement in various online activities, especially in relation to their use of social media, communication platforms or online games. However, a significant minority of parents gave responses that differed from their children's responses about how often they participated in these online spaces, and 1 in 10 parents of children with social media accounts didn't know that their child had an account.

A significant minority of parents were also unaware that their children had used new and emerging technology, including generative AI, virtual reality and haptic technology, perhaps because some children are engaging with these technologies outside of the home or because they are increasingly and rapidly being embedded into platforms and environments children already use, such as social media apps or gaming spaces.

In addition, some parents were unaware of their children's participation in potentially risky online behaviours, such as sharing their live location outside their family or engaging in online dating. As these behaviours become normalised among young people (eSafety Commissioner, 2025f) there is a risk that they may underestimate the potential harms associated with these activities. When normalisation occurs without parental awareness or involvement, it can lead to missed opportunities for guidance, support and timely conversations about safety and boundaries. Parental awareness of new technologies and of the evolving patterns of how young people are using existing technologies is critical. This should be complemented by open, honest and non-judgemental conversations within families about online activities and safety.

Parental awareness also varied according to children's age. Parents of younger children, compared with parents of teens, tended to feel they knew more about their child's online activities and were more likely to agree that they could talk openly with their child about problems they might have online. However, when comparing responses from matched parent–child pairs, a paradox emerged: actual awareness of children's use of various online technologies was often higher among parents of teens than parents of younger children.

This suggests that while parents of younger children may feel more in control, they may in fact be less informed about their child's digital activities. This gap between perception and reality highlights the need for online safety conversations to begin earlier than many parents anticipate.

Awareness also differed across family contexts. Parents of trans and gender-diverse children were less likely than parents of boys and girls to feel informed about their child's online activities and were less likely than others to agree that they can talk openly with their child about problems they might be having online.

These findings point to a need for accessible resources that support families to have open and ongoing conversations about what children are doing online, both inside and outside the home, from an early age and in age-appropriate ways. Although the new age restrictions affect social media accounts of children under 16, it remains essential for families to continue engaging in these conversations. Early and consistent discussions about online safety will better prepare children to use age-restricted social media safely and responsibly when they turn 16. Such conversations may also encourage younger children and teens to seek help from their parents if they are using these accounts prior to turning 16 and something goes wrong. Even if children are not using age-restricted social media platforms, they are still likely to be online and therefore require guidance on safe and responsible digital use. A deeper understanding of their children's online experiences may also help parents feel more connected to their children's digital world and better equipped to support their safety online.



# Steps parents take to help keep their children safe online

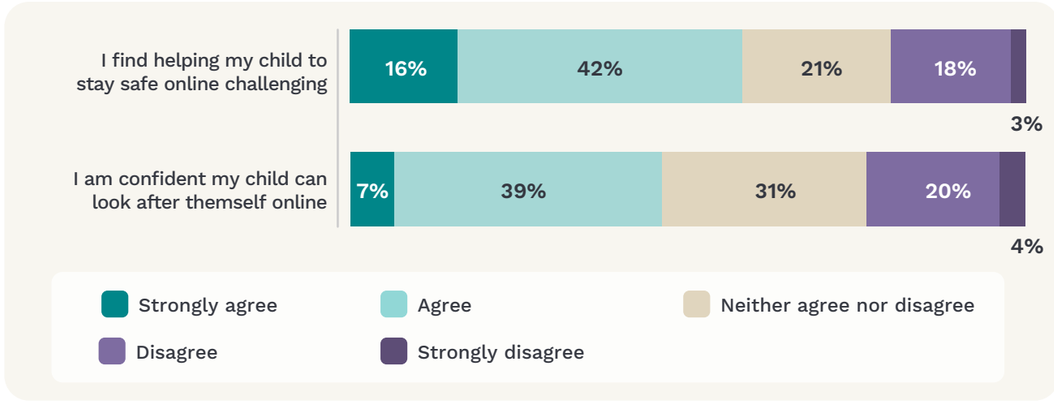
**Parents play a vital role in helping children safely navigate online spaces.** This section explores the various strategies parents use to guide their children's online activity, including rules, parental controls, monitoring and communication practices. It highlights the widespread use of mediation approaches and the motivations behind some of them, offering insight into how families balance safety, trust and autonomy. In the next section, we discuss how children's age and gender shape parental mediation (pp. 79–88).

## Many parents feel they struggle to keep their children safe online, while others believe their children can look after themselves

Most parents (58%) agreed (16% strongly) that they find it **challenging to help their child stay safe online**. At the same time, almost half (46%) felt confident of their child's ability to **look after themself online.** A quarter (23%) disagreed with this and 31% gave a neutral response (see Figure 12).

Perhaps surprisingly, there is overlap between these two groups: 37% of the parents who told us they find it challenging to help their child stay safe online also told us they were confident their child could look after themself online. However, even if children are capable of using online technologies, they are still likely to need support to safely navigate the complexities and challenges of online environments.

**Figure 12:** Parents' feelings about their child's online safety




**Q:** How much do you agree with the following statements?

**Note:** Parents of children aged 10 to 17 (*n* = 3,454).

# Most parents have rules to guide their child's online activities and support their online safety

Although many parents find it challenging to help their child stay safe online, they are taking steps to protect them. Most parents (92%) used some form of **restrictive mediation**, having at least one rule or expectation regarding their child's online activity. We also found that 69% of parents who had rules around their child's online activity had involved their child in deciding what rules they will follow for going online.

As shown in Figure 13, 2 in 3 parents (66%) had set rules around **who** their child interacts with online.

- 54% said their child is only allowed to talk to or message people online if they already know them in real life.
- 51% said their child is only allowed to accept online friend or follow requests from people if they already know them in real life.

A significant proportion of parents (65%) had set one or more rules about **when or where** their child can go online, reflecting a focus on managing screen time and encouraging healthy digital habits. For example:

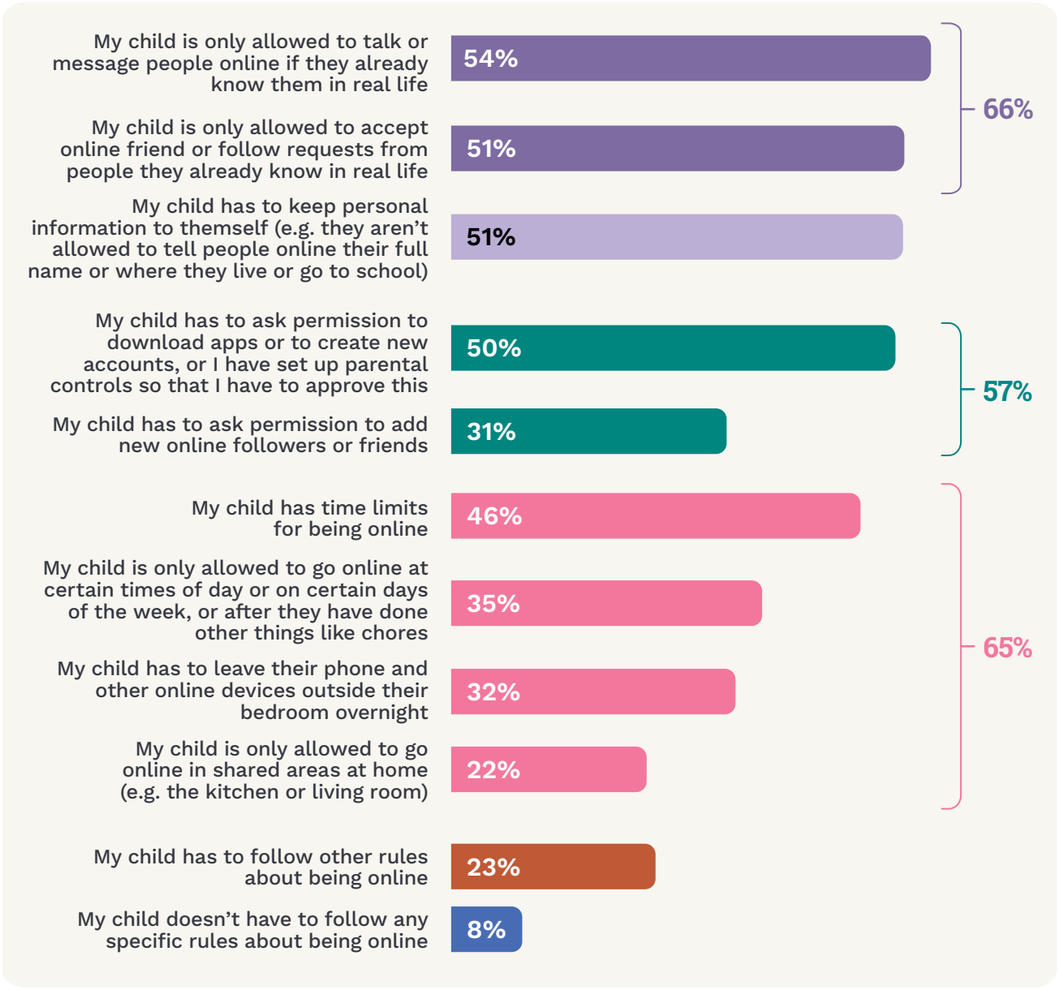
- 46% said their child has time limits for being online.
- 35% said their child is only allowed to go online at certain times of the day or on certain days of the week or after they have done other things like chores.
- 32% said their child has to leave their phone and other online devices outside their bedroom overnight.
- 22% said their child is only allowed to go online in shared areas at home.

In addition, over half of parents had set rules around **what** their child can access online – 57% said their child must ask permission to download apps or to create new accounts (50%) and/or to add new followers or friends (31%).





**Figure 13:** Restrictive mediation strategies used by parents




**Q:** Think about all the online devices your child has access to at home. Which, if any, of the following rules do you have for your child?

**Base:** Parents of children aged 10 to 17 (*n* = 3,454).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, however, children don't always follow the rules their parents put in place. When we compare the rules implemented by parents with the online activities reported by children, we can see that 1 in 3 children whose parent said they were only allowed to communicate online with people they already knew in real life (33%) had in fact communicated with someone online who was unknown to them in real life (see Connected, curious, cautious).

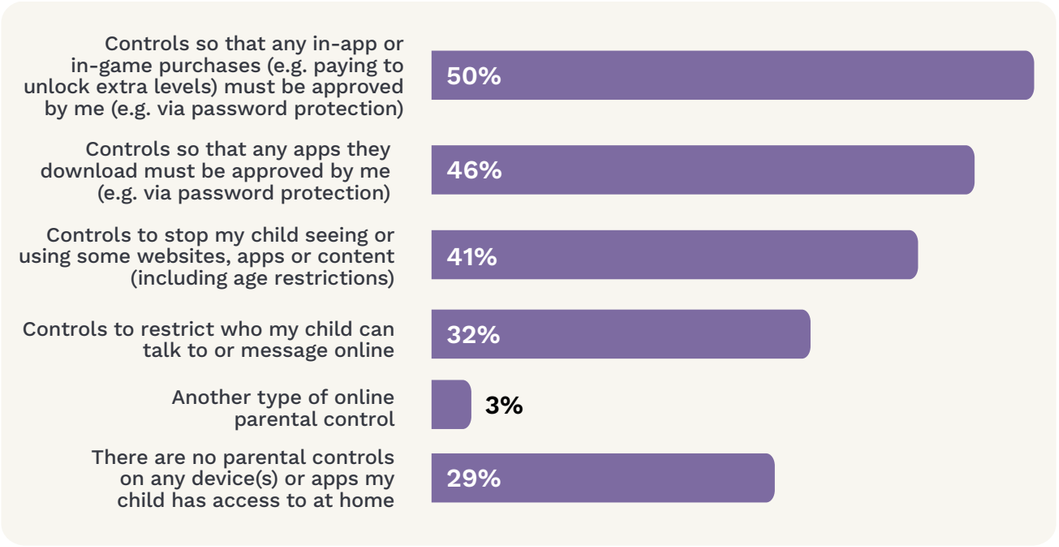
## Many parents use at least one type of parental control

Parental controls are settings that help parents restrict what their children can do or see online and are a form of **technical mediation**. Many parents (69%) reported that they were currently using at least one type of parental control.

As shown in Figure 14:

- 50% used controls so that they had to approve any in-app or in-game purchases
- 46% used controls so that they had to approve any apps their child downloads
- 41% used controls to stop their child seeing or using particular websites, apps or content
- 32% used controls to restrict who their child can talk to online.

**Figure 14:** Parent use of controls on their children's devices




**Q:** Which, if any, of these parental controls do you (or another parent or caregiver) currently have on the device(s) or apps your child has access to at home (for example, phones, computers, tablets, gaming consoles)? Important: We are not asking about parental controls for TV or movie streaming services like Netflix or Disney+.

**Base:** Parents of children aged 10 to 17 (*n* = 3,454).





While most parents reported using at least one technical mediation strategy, a significant minority (29%) said that there were no parental controls currently in place on any device(s) or apps their child had access to at home.

We asked these parents about their reasons for not using parental controls. As shown in Figure 15, the most common responses reflected a high level of trust or confidence in their child's online abilities or behaviour.

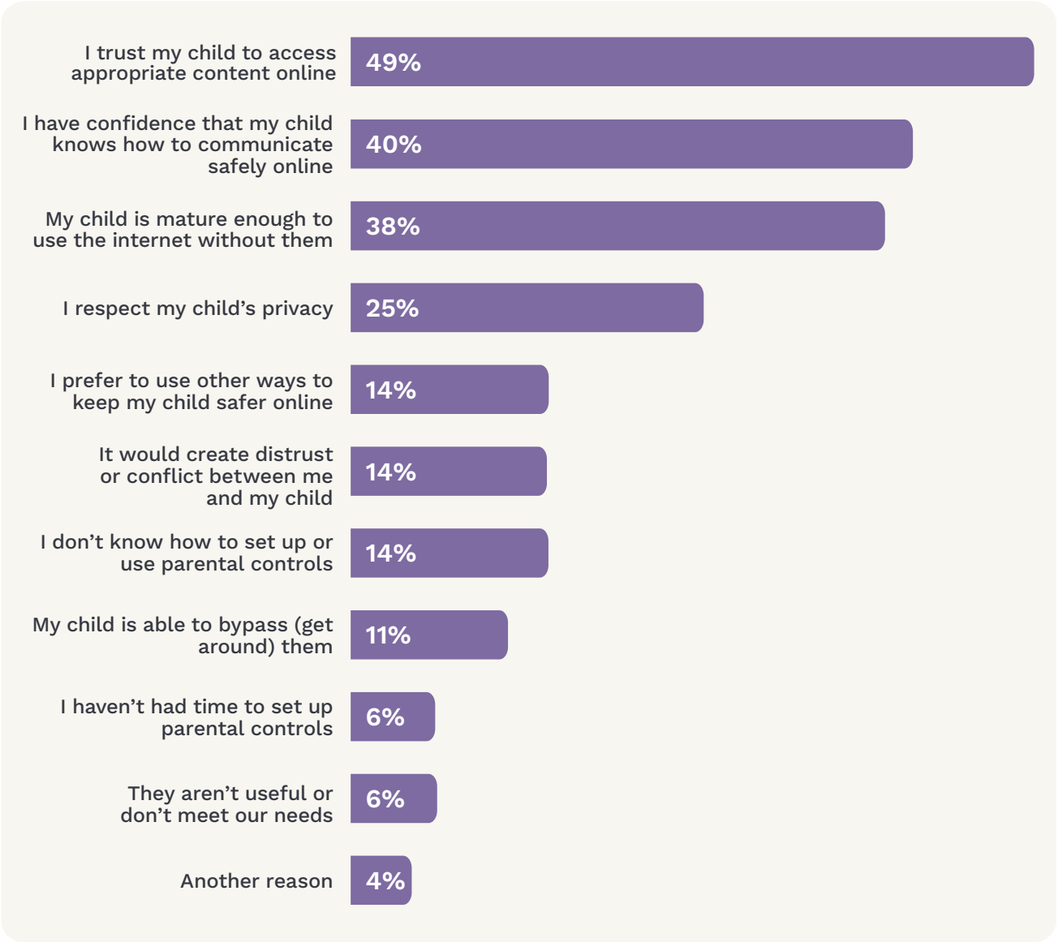
- 49% didn't use parental controls because they trusted their child to access appropriate content online.
- 40% were confident their child knows how to communicate safely online.
- 38% believed their child was mature enough to use the internet without parental controls.
- 25% didn't use parental controls because they respected their child's privacy.

However, a notable proportion cited barriers or concerns that may prevent the adoption of parental controls.

- 14% didn't know how to set up or use parental controls.
- 14% were concerned that using parental controls would create distrust or conflict with their child.
- 11% believed their child would be able to bypass the parental controls.

These findings suggest that while many parents who opt out of parental controls do so based on trust in their child and the child's perceived maturity, some may be deterred by technical challenges or relational concerns.

**Figure 15:** Main reasons why parents don't use parental controls




**Q:** You said that there are no parental controls on devices or apps your child has access to at home. What are the main reasons why you don't use parental controls? You can choose more than one answer.

**Base:** Parents of children aged 10 to 17 not currently using any parental controls (*n* = 976).





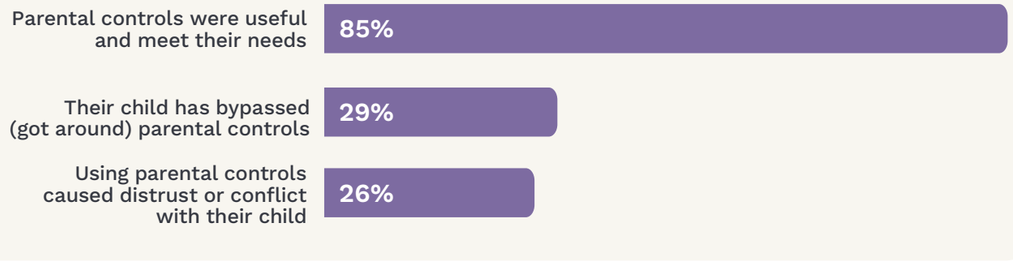
## Most parents who use parental controls find that they meet their needs

Most parents who reported using at least one parental control (85%) felt they were useful and met their needs (see Figure 16). This indicates that technical mediation strategies are generally perceived as a useful tool for managing children's online activity.

However, a significant minority (29%) said their child had bypassed parental controls, demonstrating that technical mediation tools should be used in combination with other approaches to supporting children's online safety.

We also found that while parental controls may offer a sense of security for parents, they may place strain on some parent–child relationships. More than 1 in 4 parents who used parental controls (26%) reported that using them had caused distrust or conflict between them and their child.

**Figure 16:** Parent experiences of using parental controls




**Q:** Have you (or another parent or caregiver) ever ...?

**Base:** Parents of children aged 10 to 17 currently using parental controls (*n* = 2,372).

## Technical and restrictive mediation strategies are often introduced in response to new digital access, but they can also be reactive when introduced in response to negative experiences

We asked parents who were using technical and/or restrictive mediation strategies (for example, parental controls and/or rules around their child's online activity) about their main initial reasons for implementing these measures. As shown in Figure 17, the most common trigger was when their child obtained access to a device or a new app, website or game (61%). Specifically:

- 50% implemented controls or rules when their child got their own device
- 19% did so when their child had access to a shared device
- 8% did so in response to their child starting to use a specific app, website, game or technology feature.

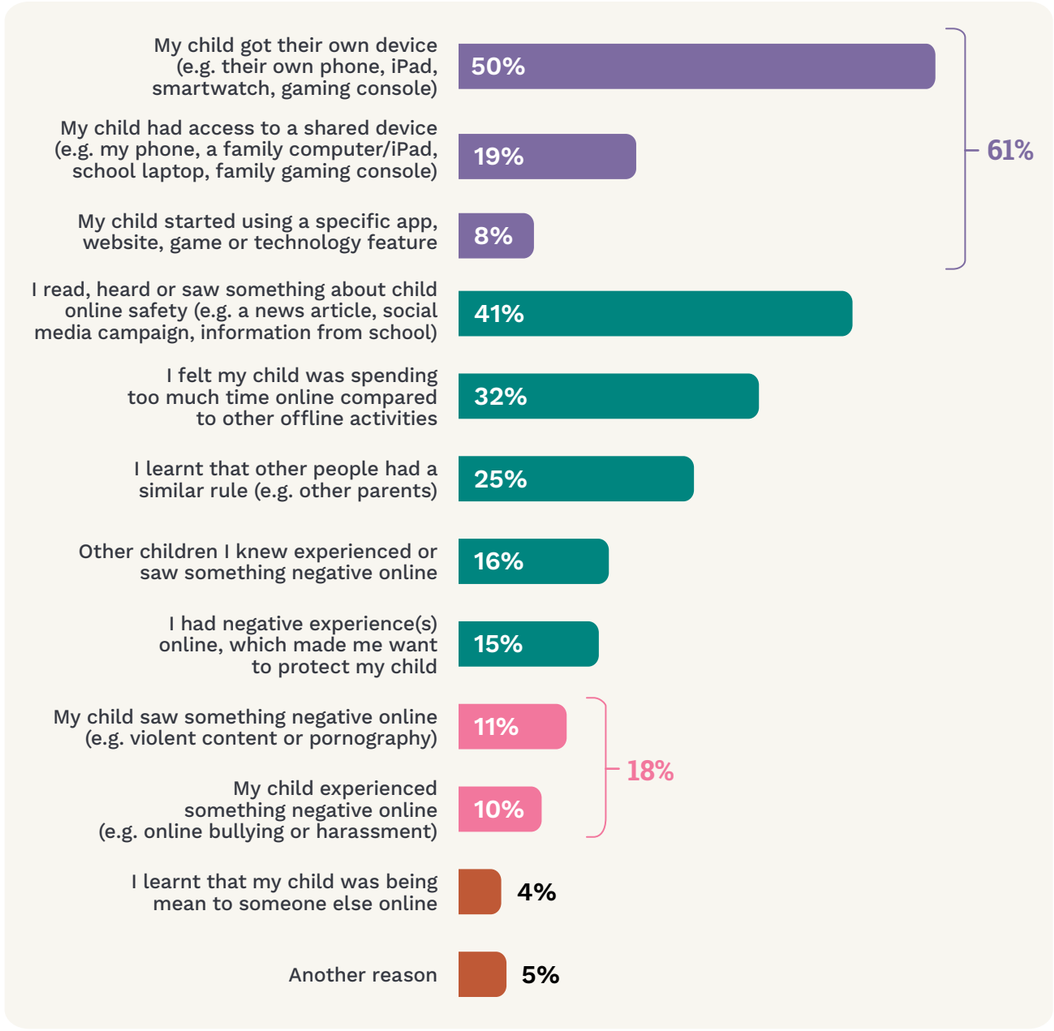
Among parents who introduced controls or rules in response to their child starting to use a specific app, website, game or technology feature, the most cited were Roblox (38%), Snapchat (22%), TikTok (12%), YouTube (11%) and Fortnite (10%).

Parents also commonly introduced technical or restrictive mediation strategies in response to growing awareness of online safety issues, perceived excessive screen time, or social influence, including:

- reading, hearing or seeing something about child online safety (41%)
- feeling like their child was spending too much time online compared to other offline activities (32%)
- learning that other people had a similar rule in place (for example, other parents) (25%).

Importantly, almost 1 in 5 parents (18%) said they first put these strategies in place when their child saw or experienced something negative online.

**Figure 17:** Key reasons why parents implement restrictive or technical mediation strategies




**Q:** Think about all of the rules or parental controls you have in place. What first prompted you (or another parent or caregiver) to put these rules or parental controls in place for your child? You can choose more than one answer.

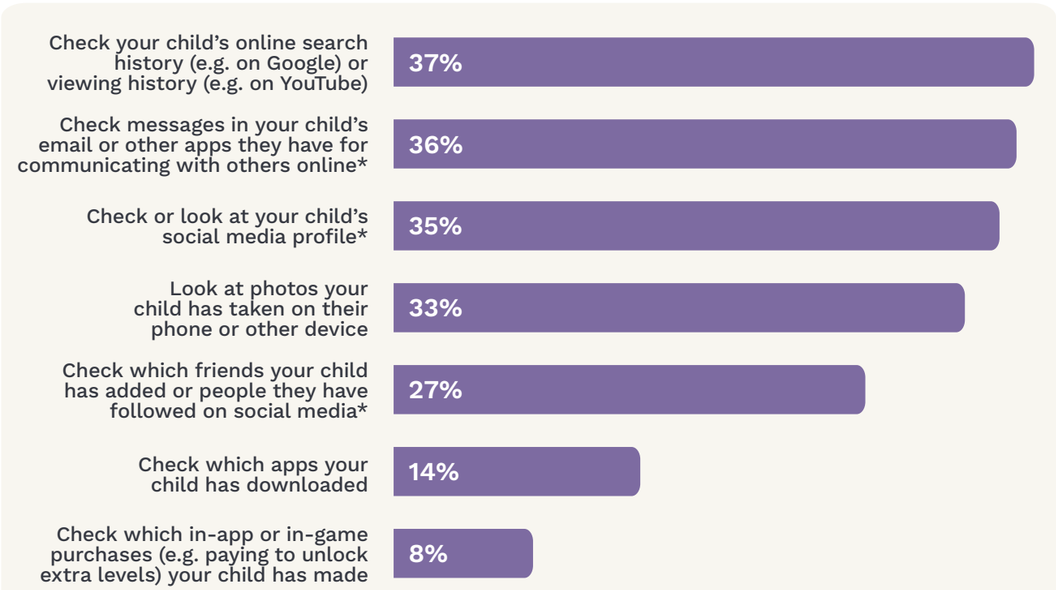
**Base:** Parents of children aged 10 to 17 who used at least one parental control and/or had at least one rule about online activity in place (*n* = 3,208).

## Many parents regularly monitor their children's online activities to support their online safety

As shown in Figure 18, almost 7 in 10 parents (68%) reported that they (or another parent) regularly monitored or observed their child's online activities (that is, engaged in at least one passive mediation strategy), including:

- checking their child's online search or viewing history (37%)
- checking messages in their child's email or other messaging apps (36%)
- looking at photos their child has taken on their phone or other device (33%)
- checking to see which friends their child has added or people they have followed on social media (27%).

**Figure 18:** Parent use of passive mediation strategies




**Q:** Some parents or caregivers closely monitor their child online; other families are more relaxed. Which, if any, of the following do you (or another parent or caregiver) regularly do (for example, once a month or more)?

**Note:** *These items were only shown to parents who said their child used communication platforms (*n* = 3,160), used social media (*n* = 3,188) or had their own social media profile (*n* = 2,158). Therefore, the prevalence for these items is based on parents who said their child used communication platforms or social media, or had their own social media profile, respectively, and not on all parents surveyed.

**Base:** Parents of children aged 10 to 17 (*n* = 3,454).





## Around 2 in 3 parents regularly encourage their child to let them know if they feel unsafe online

Most parents in our survey (84%) indicated that they used **active mediation** to help keep their children safe online; that is, they regularly[16] provide their child with guidance and advice about how to stay safe online. Specifically:

- 67% regularly encourage their child to talk to them if anything happens online that makes them feel uncomfortable or unsafe
- 58% regularly talk to their child about what they have been doing online
- 57% regularly talk to their child about how they can be safer online.

However, this means that 1 in 6 (16%) didn't regularly talk to their child about any of these issues.

Encouragingly, talking regularly to their child appeared to have a positive impact. More than 9 in 10 children whose parent said they regularly used active mediation (92%) thought they would talk to a parent if something happened to them online that made them feel upset, uncomfortable or ashamed, compared to just under 4 in 5 children whose parents didn't regularly use any of the active mediation strategies included in the survey (79%).

We also asked parents about the online safety topics they (or another parent) had discussed with their child in the past 12 months.[17] Overall, most parents (93%) reported that they had talked to their child about at least one online safety topic.

Parents indicated that they were most likely to have discussed the following topics with their child (in the past 12 months):

- how to keep personal information private online (62%)
- that what you see on social media isn't always realistic (60%)
- the risks of dangerous people being online or of online 'grooming' (59%)
- online bullying (55%).

As shown in Figure 19, we found that certain sensitive or emerging topics were less likely to be discussed. Specifically:

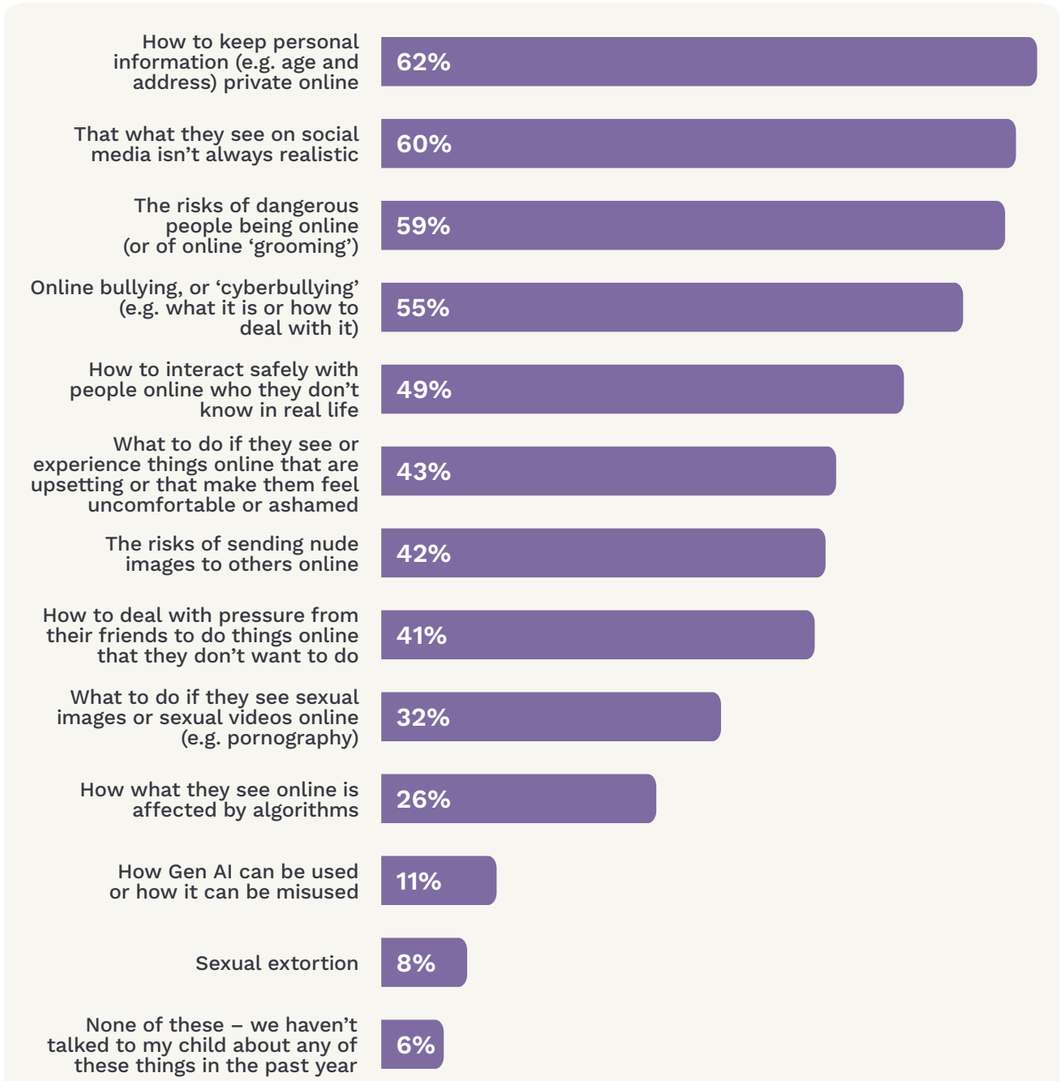
- the risks of sending nude images to others online (42%)
- what to do if they see sexual images or sexual videos online (for example, pornography) (32%)
- that what they see online is affected by algorithms (26%)

[16] We defined 'regularly' as 'once a month or more'.

[17] It is important to note that these findings reflect parent recollections of conversations with their child. Children were also asked about the online safety topics they had discussed with their parent. These findings are reported in Connected, curious, cautious.

- how generative AI can be used or misused (11%)
- sexual extortion (8%).

**Figure 19:** Online safety topics parents discussed with their children in the past year




**Q:** Which, if any, of the following things have you (or another parent or caregiver) talked to your child about in the past year?

**Base:** Parents of children aged 10 to 17 (*n* = 3,454).





We also asked parents what prompted their most recent conversation with their child about a sensitive online safety topic.[18] As shown in Figure 20, the most common reason was that they felt it was an important topic to discuss (51%). Other prompts included:

- talking to their child generally about what they were doing or seeing online, and the topic came up (39%)
- reading or seeing something about the topic (25%)
- their child's school providing information on the topic (18%).

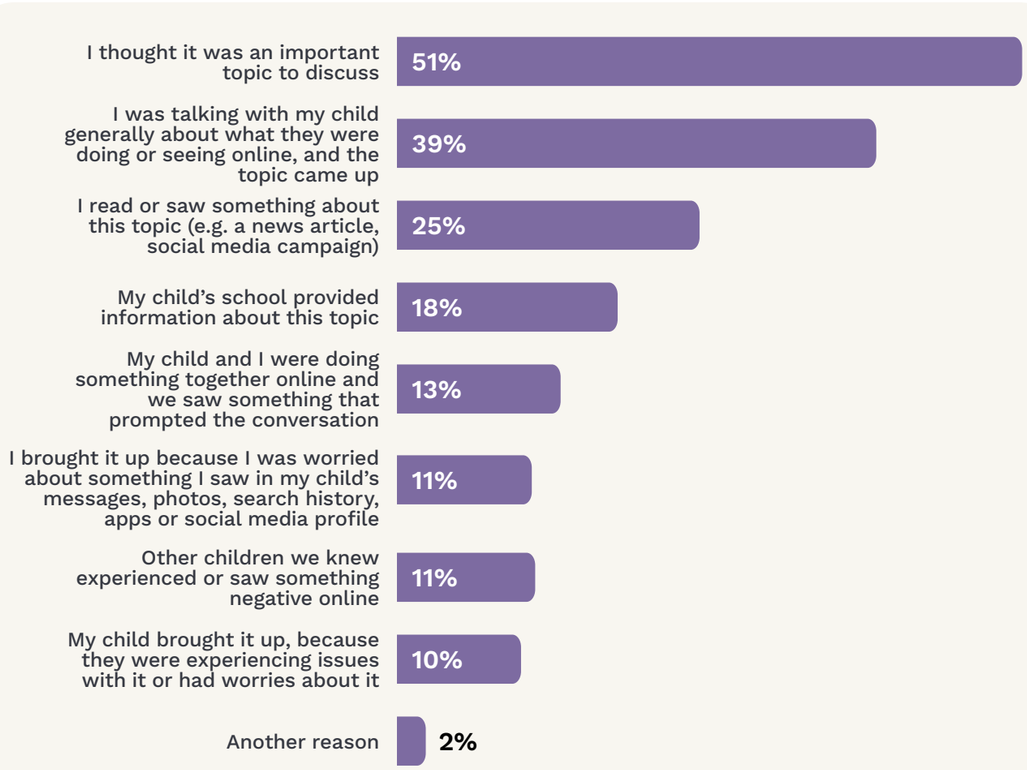
In addition, a significant minority of parents (29%) were prompted by their child's online experiences. For example:

- They were doing something with their child online and they saw something that prompted the conversation (13%).
- They were worried about something they saw in their child's messages, photos, search history, apps or social media profile (11%).
- Their child brought it up, because they were experiencing issues with it or had worries about it (10%).

These findings suggest that while many discussions about sensitive online safety topics are planned or arise organically, a notable proportion are reactive, triggered by specific events or observations.

[18] For 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.

**Figure 20:** Reasons why parents discussed sensitive online safety topics with their children




**Q:** Think about the most recent time you discussed [INSERT TOPIC] with your child. What prompted you to have this conversation?

**Base:** Parents of children aged 10 to 17 who had discussed at least one sensitive topic with their child in the past 12 months (*n* = 2,444).






We asked parents to reflect on how their most recent conversation with their child about a sensitive online safety topic went. Overall, as shown in Table 13, most parents indicated that the conversation went well.

However, more than 1 in 5 parents (22%) said they thought their child was worried after their conversation. This suggests that while these conversations are generally positive, they may also be challenging for some children, highlighting the importance of approaching online safety conversations, particularly about sensitive topics, with sensitivity and reassurance.

In addition, 12% of parents felt uncomfortable or embarrassed.

**Table 13:** Parental feelings about having sensitive online safety conversations with their children (%)

| | Very true or quite true | Neither true nor untrue | Not very true or not true at all |
|---|---|---|---|
| I think my child understood what I was saying | 91 | 7 | 2 |
| It was an open and honest conversation (e.g. I think my child felt they could ask any questions they wanted to) | 90 | 8 | 2 |
| I knew enough about the topic | 82 | 14 | 4 |
| I think my child was worried after we had talked about it | 22 | 29 | 50 |
| I felt uncomfortable or embarrassed | 12 | 16 | 72 |

**Q:** Keep thinking about the most recent time you discussed [INSERT TOPIC] with your child. How true or untrue for you are the following statements about how it went?

**Base:** Parents of children aged 10 to 17 who had discussed at least one sensitive topic with their child in the past 12 months (*n* = 2,444).

As reported in **Connected, curious, cautious**, children provided similar feedback about the most recent time they had discussed a sensitive online safety issue with their parent. For example, 90% said they understood what was being said, 83% felt they could ask questions, and 92% found the discussion useful, while 17% said they felt worried, and 15% thought their parent was uncomfortable or embarrassed. When parental feelings of discomfort are obvious to children, the effectiveness of the conversation may be reduced – for example, children may feel less comfortable asking questions or for clarification.

## There are a variety of barriers to parents discussing sensitive online safety topics with their children

Parents who hadn't discussed at least one sensitive online safety topic[19] with their child in the past year were asked why they hadn't done so.[20] The most common reason provided was prior conversations (see Figure 21). Nearly half (45%) indicated they had already addressed the topic in the past, just not recently. This suggests that, for some parents, certain online safety discussions may be perceived as occasional talks rather than ongoing dialogues. In addition, some topics may have been considered more relevant when their child was younger.

One in 2 parents (50%) provided explanations based on trust and perceived ability, such as believing their child already knows enough about the topic, is responsible online or would raise any issues they had. Specifically, parents reported:

- they trust their child to act responsibly online and don't feel the need to talk to them about it (21%)
- their child already knows a lot about it (20%)
- their child would tell them about it if it was a problem (14%).

In addition, 12% felt that their child was too young to talk with about sensitive online safety matters. As noted, we examine how children's age shapes digital parenting in more detail later in this report (pp. 79–84).

[19] For 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.

[20] Parents were asked why they hadn't discussed one particular sensitive topic (using a least filled approach).





However, more than 1 in 4 parents (26%) cited barriers to initiating conversations about sensitive online safety topics, including lack of awareness, discomfort, or uncertainty about how to begin. Specifically, some parents indicated:

- they hadn't thought about doing it (10%)
- they weren't sure how to start the conversation(s) with their child (9%)
- they felt uncomfortable talking to their child about the topic (4%)
- they didn't know enough about the topic(s) (4%)
- they hadn't had time to talk to their child about it yet (3%)
- this topic isn't talked about in their culture (2%).

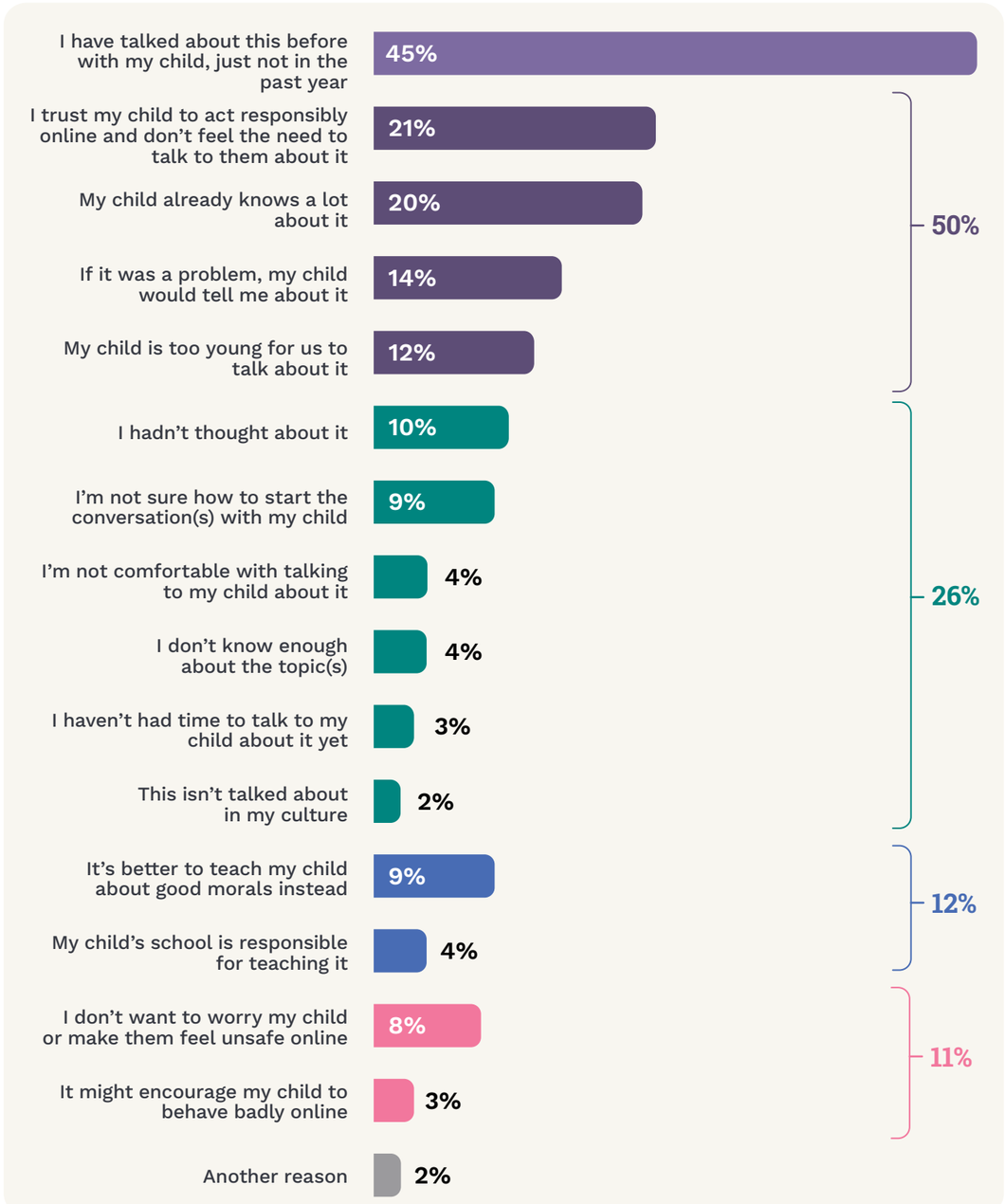
A smaller proportion of parents (12%) passed the responsibility for discussing sensitive online safety topics to external sources such as school or moral teachings. For example:

- 9% said it's better to teach their child about good morals instead
- 4% said their child's school is responsible for teaching it.

Finally, 1 in 10 parents (11%) reported having concerns about the negative impact of discussing sensitive online safety topics with their child. Specifically:

- 8% didn't want to worry their child or make them feel unsafe online
- 3% thought it might encourage their child to behave badly online.

**Figure 21:** Barriers to parents having conversations about sensitive online safety topics with their children




**Q:** You said you haven't talked to your child about [SENSITIVE TOPIC NOT DISCUSSED] in the past year. Could you tell us the main reasons for this? You can choose more than one answer.

**Base**: Parents of children aged 10 to 17 who hadn't discussed at least one sensitive online safety topic with their child in the past year (*n* = 3,257).





## One in 4 parents regularly look for information or advice on how to keep their child safe online

While almost all parents engage in mediation strategies, only a minority regularly seek external guidance. We found that 1 in 4 parents (24%) said they regularly look for information or advice about how to keep their child safe online. For some, this may reflect a strong reliance on their own knowledge, experience and confidence in navigating online safety. Others may simply have many demands on their time and attention and be juggling various parenting challenges, which could be a barrier to them proactively seeking out additional information even though almost 3 in 5 (58%) indicated they find helping their child stay safe online challenging.

## Discussion

To support children's online safety, families need a solid understanding of online safety issues and how to address them. However, many parents report struggling to keep their children safe online, an understandable challenge given the rapid evolution of online technologies. As we saw earlier in this report, when asked how they feel about their children going online, some parents described difficulties in monitoring all their children's online experiences or a sense of being overwhelmed or being unable to keep up with new technologies. Easily digestible and accessible education for parents is crucial to ensure they have the resources and information required to support their children's online safety.

Despite many parents feeling that they struggle with online safety issues, almost all parents are actively engaged in supporting their children's online safety, using a combination of mediation strategies. Most parents employ one or more restrictive mediation strategies, such as setting limits on screen time or requiring parental permission for downloads. These rules often encourage healthy digital habits alongside reducing risk. However, our findings suggest that children don't always follow the rules put in place by their parents. Involving children in setting and adapting rules as they age and gain greater autonomy online may help to build mutual understanding and encourage responsible behaviour online.

Technical mediation strategies were also widely used. These controls help parents to manage their children's access to content and interactions with others online. However, we found that a sizeable minority of parents reported not using any parental controls, citing trust in their child's maturity or ability, practical barriers, concerns about the controls' effectiveness, or concerns that they may create distrust or conflict. This finding suggests that decisions around technical mediation strategies are shaped not

only by safety concerns but by confidence in children's capabilities and by broader family dynamics. However, even children with high levels of digital literacy who follow their family rules may still be exposed to inappropriate or harmful content, often unintentionally, through features such as algorithm-driven recommendations and autoplay. This highlights the limits of relying solely on trust in one's child or on technical controls, and the importance of open lines of communication within families.

Passive mediation strategies, including checking search histories and social media interactions, and active mediation strategies, involving open conversations about online experiences and risks, were also common. Topics such as privacy, cyberbullying and online grooming were frequently discussed. However, more sensitive or emerging issues, such as exposure to sexual content, algorithmic influence and sexual extortion, were less frequently addressed. While many parents who hadn't discussed these topics with their child in the past year indicated that these conversations had occurred previously, others cited trust in their child's maturity or readiness, or faced barriers such as discomfort, uncertainty or lack of awareness. Resources that model how to discuss complex or sensitive issues in abstract, general or hypothetical ways may help to reduce discomfort and encourage open dialogue within families.

Despite most parents telling us they find it challenging to help their children stay safe online, relatively few regularly seek external guidance. This may reflect competing demands on their time and attention, rather than a lack of interest. It may also suggest that some parents may be navigating online safety in ways that feel intuitive and contextually appropriate to them.

These findings highlight the need for accessible, easily digestible and practical resources to support parents in keeping their children safe online and having open, age-appropriate conversations about online safety.




# How children's age and gender shape digital parenting

Parental approaches to children's online safety are not static; they evolve in response to a child's age and developmental stage and appear to differ in some respects according to a child's gender. This section examines how these factors influence the types of mediation strategies parents use, as well as the nature of the conversations they have with their children.

## As children grow older, parents feel they are more capable of looking after themselves online

Parents' confidence in their children's ability to look after themselves increases as their children age. For example, 62% of parents of older teens (aged 16 to 17) felt confident that their child could look after themselves online. This compared with 48% of parents of younger teens (aged 13 to 15) and 34% of parents of younger children (aged 10 to 12).

In addition:

- Parents of boys were slightly more likely than parents of girls to feel that their child could look after themselves online (48% versus 43%).
- Men were also more likely than women to agree that their child can look after themselves online (55% versus 42%).

## Parental use of mediation strategies evolves as children age

Our findings showed a consistent shift in digital parenting practices as children grow older. We found that parents of older teens were less likely to regularly seek information or advice about how to keep their child safe online, compared to parents of younger teens and younger children (14% versus 24% versus 30%). This suggests that as parents become more confident in their child's digital capabilities, they may feel less need to actively seek advice about how to guide and support them, despite the increasing complexity of online risks during adolescence.

We also found that parents of teens, particularly older teens, were less likely to use technical or restrictive mediation strategies, which may reflect a transition away from direct supervision towards digital autonomy, trust-based guidance and a more collaborative or hands-off approach (see Table 14). Specifically:

- 40% of parents of older teens reported that they were using at least one parental control, compared to 70% of parents with younger teens and 85% of those with younger children.
- 79% of parents of older teens reported that there was at least one rule in place for their child's online activity, compared to 93% of parents with younger teens and 98% of those with younger children.

Interestingly, when rules were in place, parents of teens were more likely than parents of younger children to involve their child in setting them (72% versus 65%).

**Table 14:** Parent use of mediation strategies, by child age (%)

| | Child age | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | 10–12 (younger children) | 13–15 (younger teens) | 16–17 (older teens) |
| Any restrictive mediation strategy | 98 | 93 | 79 |
| Any technical mediation strategy | 85 | 70 | 40 |
| Any active mediation strategy | 88 | 85 | 75 |
| Any passive mediation strategy | 78 | 69 | 49 |
| **Base: Parents of children aged 10–17** | **1,332** | **1,297** | **825** |

**Q:** Think about all the online devices your child has access to at home. Which, if any, of the following rules do you have for your child?

**Q:** Which, if any, of these parental controls do you (or another parent or caregiver) currently have on the device(s) or apps your child has access to at home (for example, phones, computers, tablets, gaming consoles)? Important: We are not asking about parental controls for TV or movie streaming services like Netflix or Disney+.

**Q:** Some parents or caregivers closely monitor their child online; other families are more relaxed. Which, if any, of the following do you (or another parent or caregiver) regularly do (for example, once a month or more)?

**Note:** Different colour shading indicates that differences are statistically significant within a sub-group. White shading indicates that differences are not statistically significant.

This trend was consistent across various types of rules and parental controls examined in the survey (see Table A2 in the Appendix) and mirrors our finding that younger children and younger teens are more likely to use a range of strategies to try and stay safe online, perhaps because of the rules their parents have in place for them regarding being online (see Connected, curious, cautious).





Our findings signal that digital parenting strategies evolve as children age, often shifting from supervision to shared responsibility. As shown in Table 15, this shift may be driven by increased trust in teens' digital capabilities, their maturity, and increased respect for their privacy. Parents of teens, especially older teens, were more likely to report that they didn't use parental controls because they:

- were confident their child knows how to communicate safely online
- believed their child was mature enough to use the internet without them
- respected their child's privacy.

**Table 15:** Main reasons why parents don't use parental controls, by child age (%)

| | Child age | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | 10–12 (younger children) | 13–15 (younger teens) | 16–17 (older teens) |
| I trust my child to access appropriate content online | 45 | 49 | 52 |
| I have confidence that my child knows how to communicate safely online | 25 | 42 | 44 |
| My child is mature enough to use the internet without them | 23 | 35 | 46 |
| I respect my child's privacy | 14 | 22 | 31 |
| I prefer to use other ways to keep my child safer online | 16 | 17 | 11 |
| It would create distrust or conflict between me and my child | 8 | 14 | 15 |
| My child is able to bypass (get around) them | 8 | 13 | 11 |
| I haven't had time to set up parental controls | 9 | 6 | 5 |
| They aren't useful or don't meet our needs | 9 | 3 | 7 |
| Another reason | 6 | 3 | 4 |
| I don't know how to set up or use parental controls | 25 | 15 | 9 |
| **Base: Parents of children aged 10–17 not currently using any parental controls** | **166** | **347** | **463** |

**Q:** You said that there are no parental controls on devices or apps your child has access to at home. What are the main reasons why you don't use parental controls? You can choose more than one answer.

**Note:** Different colour shading indicates that differences are statistically significant within a sub-group. White shading indicates that differences are not statistically significant.

However, this transition isn't without challenges. Parents of teens (aged 13 to 17) who used parental controls were more likely than parents of younger children to report difficulties with them and were less likely to report that they found them useful. Specifically:

- 33% reported that their child had bypassed parental controls (versus 24%)
- 31% indicated that using parental controls had caused distrust or conflict with their child (versus 21%).

As shown in Table 14, we also found that parents of younger children and, to a lesser extent, parents of younger teens, were more likely than parents of older teens to report that they regularly used:

- at least one passive mediation strategy (for example, checking their child's online search history, their messages, or friends they have added on social media)
- at least one active mediation strategy (for example, talking to their child about what they have been doing online or how to be safer online).

This trend was consistent across various passive and active mediation strategies examined in the survey (see Table A3 in the Appendix).

Across all types of technical, restrictive, passive and active mediation strategies included in the survey, parents of younger children implemented an average of 11.3 different types of mediation strategies. This compared to an average of 9.3 types of strategies among parents of younger teens and 5.6 among parents of older teens.

In summary, as children grow older, parents tend to reduce their direct involvement in restricting, monitoring and guiding their child's online activity.

## Age influences the online safety topics parents discuss with their children

The nature of the online safety conversations parents have with their children also evolves with the child's age (see Table A4 in the Appendix). Parents of teens were more likely than parents of younger children to have discussed complex or sensitive topics in the past year, including:

- the risks of sending nude images to others online (47% versus 33%)
- how generative AI can be used or misused (12% versus 9%)
- sexual extortion (9% versus 6%).





However, discussions about some sensitive topics seem to tail off in the later teen years, as parents of younger teens (aged 13 to 15) were more likely than parents with older teens (aged 16 to 17) to report having discussed:

- the risks of sending nude images to others online (49% versus 44%)
- how to interact safely online with people they don't know in real life (52% versus 44%)
- what to do if they see sexual images or sexual videos online (for example, pornography) (36% versus 28%).

Parents of younger children and younger teens (aged 10 to 15) were also more likely than parents of older teens (aged 16 to 17) to focus on what might be considered foundational online safety topics, such as:

- how to keep personal information private online (63% versus 57%)
- the risks of dangerous people being online or of online 'grooming' (61% versus 54%)
- online bullying, or 'cyberbullying' (56% versus 49%)
- what to do if they see or experience things online that are upsetting or that make them feel uncomfortable or ashamed (46% versus 34%)
- how to deal with pressure from their friends to do things online that they don't want to do (42% versus 37%).

These age-based differences may reflect how parents adapt their online safety guidance to match their child's developmental stage and emerging online experiences.

Among parents who hadn't discussed at least one sensitive online safety topic[21] with their child in the past year, parents of teens, especially older teens, were more likely to cite reasons based on trust or prior knowledge or conversations (see Table A5 in the Appendix). For example:

- I have talked about this before with my child, just not in the past year (55% of older teens versus 49% of younger teens versus 36% of younger children).
- I trust my child to act responsibly online and don't feel the need to talk to them about it (27% of older teens versus 23% of younger teens versus 16% of younger children).
- My child already knows a lot about it (28% of older teens versus 22% of younger teens versus 13% of younger children).

[21] For 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.

Parents of younger children and younger teens more often cited barriers to initiating conversations, including lack of perceived readiness or awareness, discomfort, or uncertainty about how to begin. For example:

- My child is too young for us to talk about it (24% of younger children versus 6% of younger teens versus 2% of older teens).
- I hadn't thought about it (12% of younger children and younger teens versus 6% of older teens).
- I'm not sure how to start the conversation with my child (10% of younger children and younger teens versus 6% of older teens).

Parents of younger children were also more likely than parents of teens to avoid these conversations because they didn't want to worry their child or make them feel unsafe (11% versus 6% of teens), or due to concerns it might encourage their child to behave badly online (5% versus 2% of older teens).

## Parents of girls may implement a broader range of mediation strategies compared to parents of boys

Parents of girls were slightly more likely than parents of boys to implement a broader range of mediation strategies, both restrictive and non-restrictive. Across all types of technical, restrictive, passive and active mediation strategies included in the survey, parents of girls reported using an average of 9.5 mediation strategies, while parents of boys implemented an average of 9 strategies (see Tables A2 and A3 in the Appendix). This suggests slightly heightened perceptions of risk among parents of girls and a somewhat more active role in shaping their child's digital environment. As previously noted, other findings from the '**Keeping Kids Safe Online**' survey show that a higher proportion of girls have had some types of negative experiences online (eSafety Commissioner, 2025c, 2025e). However, boys are equally likely to have had other negative online experiences, including exposure to content associated with harm (eSafety Commissioner, 2025d), exposure to online hate (eSafety Commissioner, 2025a) and personal experience of online hate (eSafety Commissioner, 2025b).

Most parents, regardless of their child's gender, reported using at least one restrictive mediation strategy to manage online activity. However, compared to parents of boys, parents of girls were more likely to:

- allow their child to talk to or message people online only if they already know them in real life (58% versus 51%)
- allow their child to accept online friend or follow requests only from people they already know in real life (55% versus 48%)
- require their child to ask permission to add new online followers or friends (34% versus 29%).





While there were no differences between parents of girls and boys in the overall use of parental controls, parents of girls were more likely than those of boys to use controls so that any apps their child downloads must be approved (48% versus 44%).

The differing rules implemented by parents of boys and girls mirror the online safety strategies boys and girls told us they use (see **Connected, curious, cautious**). For example, girls were more likely than boys to interact only with people they already know in real life and to seek permission from their parent before downloading apps, creating new accounts or adding new friends or followers, perhaps because of the rules or controls their parents had in place.

In addition, although there were no gender differences in the overall use of active mediation, parents of girls were more likely than parents of boys to make regular use of a range of passive mediation strategies. As shown in Table A3 in the Appendix, this included regularly:

- looking at photos their child has taken on their phone or device (35% versus 31%)
- checking which friends their child has added or people they have followed on social media (29% versus 25%)
- checking or looking at their child's social media profile (38% versus 31%).

## Parents of trans and gender-diverse children are less likely to use a range of mediation strategies

When examining the use of mediation strategies among parents of trans and gender-diverse children, the differences were more pronounced, with parents of trans and gender-diverse children implementing 7.6 different types of mediation strategies, on average (compared to 9 for boys and 9.5 for girls). This could reflect a range of factors, including differing perceptions of risk or differing parenting approaches, or a recognition and understanding of the unique needs and experiences of trans and gender-diverse children.

Looking at these findings in more detail, mediation strategies that were less likely to be used by parents of trans and gender-diverse children, compared to parents of cis-gender children, included the following (see Table A2 in the Appendix):

- only allowing their child to talk to or message, or to accept online friend or follow requests from, people they already know in real life (51% versus 66%)
- setting rules about when and where their child can go online (46% versus 66%), including time limits for being online (27% versus 46%), only being allowed to go online in shared areas at home (9% versus 22%), and only being allowed to go online at certain times of day or on certain days of the week (22% versus 35%)

- regularly checking their child's online search history or viewing history (24% versus 37%)
- setting parental controls (57% versus 69%).

As we saw in **Connected, curious, cautious**, trans and gender-diverse children were less likely than boys and girls to report using a range of online safety strategies, including limiting their online interactions to people they know in real life.

## Gender influences some of the online safety topics parents discuss with their children

We observed some gender differences in the topics parents discussed with their children. In the past year, parents of girls were more likely than parents of boys to have discussed the following with their child (see Table A4 in the Appendix):

- that what they see on social media isn't always realistic (63% versus 57%)
- what to do if they see or experience things online that are upsetting or that make them feel uncomfortable or ashamed (45% versus 41%)
- how to deal with pressure from their friends to do things online that they don't want to do (44% versus 39%).

In addition, parents of trans and gender-diverse children were more likely than parents of boys or girls to have discussed the following in the past year:

- what to do if they see sexual images or sexual videos online (for example, pornography) (45% versus 32% of cis-gender children)
- how what they see online is affected by algorithms (38% versus 26% of cis-gender children).

Among parents who hadn't discussed at least one sensitive online safety topic[22] with their child in the past year, those with trans and gender-diverse children were more likely than those with boys or girls to report they hadn't talked about a sensitive topic because their child already knew a lot about it (36% versus 19%). However, they were also more likely to cite barriers related to not knowing how to start the conversation with their child (17% versus 9%) (see Table A5 in the Appendix).

These findings suggest that parents tailor the content of their online safety conversations to the perceived risks and needs of their child, which may be influenced by the child's gender.

[22] For 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.





## Discussion

Parent use of mediation strategies shifts in response to a child's age, developmental stage and gender. We found that parents of older children were more likely to feel confident that their child could look after themselves online and tended to reduce their use of restrictive and technical strategies, likely reflecting increased trust in their child, the child's perceived maturity, and a desire to support their autonomy. This transition was particularly evident among parents of older teens, who were more likely to adopt collaborative approaches and less likely to monitor or control online activity directly.

However, this evolution in digital parenting is not without its challenges. As children grow older and parents shift towards more collaborative and autonomy-supporting approaches, many report difficulties in maintaining effective oversight. For example, parents of teens were more likely than parents of younger children to say their child had bypassed parental controls or that using such controls had led to conflict or distrust. These findings highlight the delicate balance parents must strike between protecting their child and respecting their growing independence. Additionally, some parents may feel uncertain about how to initiate conversations on sensitive topics or may lack confidence in their own digital literacy, which can hinder their ability to provide guidance. These challenges suggest a need for more targeted support and resources to help parents navigate the changing landscape of online safety as their children mature.

Although parents of younger children were more likely than parents of teens to use a range of mediation strategies, including restrictive, technical and passive mediation, our findings suggest that, for some parents of younger children, gaps in parental awareness may remain. As we saw earlier in the report, when we compared younger children's self-reported online behaviours with parental awareness, we found a notable disconnect between perception and reality. This suggests that mediation and perceived oversight may not always reflect actual insight into the entirety of children's online activities. Where there are gaps in parental awareness, children may be at greater risk of harm online. For example, children might engage in risky behaviour without parental guidance or encounter harmful content or interactions on platforms their parents don't know they are using, which may hinder help-seeking behaviour. Our findings highlight that children are more likely to talk to their parents about upsetting online experiences when their parents regularly encourage them to do so. Without these conversations, children may be less inclined to disclose problems, leaving them to deal with issues alone. Collectively, these findings emphasise the importance of initiating online safety conversations earlier than many parents anticipate and ensuring that these conversations are informed by an understanding of the full range of technologies and platforms children may be using. By initiating these conversations early and regularly, parents may help to establish trust and

openness with their children, promote help-seeking behaviour and ensure their children are better prepared to stay safe online.

In addition to age, child gender also plays a significant role in shaping parenting practices. Parents of girls were somewhat more likely than parents of boys to implement a broader range of mediation strategies, particularly passive and restrictive ones, and to discuss certain online safety issues, reflecting the somewhat heightened perception of risk for girls discussed previously. In contrast, parents of trans and gender-diverse children tended to use fewer mediation strategies overall. This finding may reflect a more nuanced understanding of the importance of online spaces for identity exploration and peer connection for trans and gender diverse-children, and a desire to avoid limiting their access to supportive communities. These findings underscore the importance of tailoring digital parenting approaches to the evolving needs of children while taking account of their age, developmental stage and gender identity. They also highlight the need for resources that support parents in navigating these transitions effectively.

# The impact of lived experience on how parents manage their children's online activity

Parents' own experiences with technology and online harm can influence how they approach their children's digital safety. This section explores how factors such as digital confidence, personal exposure to online harm, and parent gender shape the use of mediation strategies and safety conversations with their children. It provides insight into how lived experience informs parenting decisions and highlights areas where additional support for parents may be needed.

## Most parents feel confident in using new apps, technologies and devices

Almost 2 in 3 parents (64%) agreed (16% strongly) that they feel confident in using new apps, technologies and devices, indicating a relatively high level of digital confidence among our sample. However, a significant minority expressed uncertainty or a lack of confidence, with 24% neither agreeing nor disagreeing and 12% disagreeing (2% strongly) that they felt confident in their digital abilities.

These findings suggest that while most parents feel equipped to navigate digital tools, a significant minority may feel they lack the confidence needed to fully engage with or guide their child's online activity. This lack of confidence could impact their ability to implement effective mediation strategies, particularly those involving technical controls or emerging digital technologies.

## Parents who are confident in using apps, technologies and devices are more likely to use technical and passive mediation strategies

Parental confidence in using new apps, technologies and devices didn't appear to influence whether parents had set rules around their child's online activity. However, confidence did seem to play a role in how those rules were established.

Parents who agreed that they felt confident using new technologies (72%) were more likely to have involved their child in deciding what online rules to follow, compared to those who neither agreed nor disagreed (64%) and those who disagreed (63%).

Building on this, we also found that parental confidence with new apps, technologies and devices was associated with greater use of technical mediation strategies (for example, parental controls) – 71% of those who agreed that they felt confident had used at least one parental control, compared to 66% of those who neither agreed nor disagreed and 63% of those who disagreed, as shown in Table 16. This finding suggests that a sense of digital confidence may empower parents to engage more actively with available online safety tools.

**Table 16:** Parent use of technical mediation strategies, by confidence in using new apps, technologies and devices (%)

| | Confidence in using apps, technologies and devices (agreement level) | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Strongly agree or agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree or strongly disagree |
| **Any technical mediation strategy** | 71 | 66 | 63 |
| Controls so that any in-app or in-game purchases (e.g. paying to unlock extra levels) must be approved by me (e.g. via password protection) | 52 | 46 | 43 |
| Controls so that any apps they download must be approved by me (e.g. via password protection) | 48 | 42 | 41 |
| Controls to stop my child seeing or using some websites, apps or content (including age restrictions) | 44 | 37 | 36 |
| Controls to restrict who my child can talk to or message online | 34 | 31 | 29 |
| Another type of online parental control | 3 | 3 | 4 |
| **There are no parental controls on any device(s) or apps my child has access to at home** | 27 | 30 | 33 |
| **Base: Parents of children aged 10–17** | **2,204** | **815** | **435** |

**Q:** Which, if any, of these parental controls do you (or another parent or caregiver) currently have on the device(s) or apps your child has access to at home (for example, phones, computers, tablets, gaming consoles)?

**Note:** Different colour shading indicates that differences are statistically significant within a sub-group. White shading indicates that differences are not statistically significant.





Confidence in using new technologies also appeared to influence how parents perceived the impact and effectiveness of parental controls. Those who agreed they felt confident in using new apps, technologies and devices were:

- more likely than those who neither agreed nor disagreed to report that parental controls were useful and met their needs (87% versus 79%)
- less likely to report that they found using parental controls had caused distrust or conflict with their child (24%), compared to those who neither agreed nor disagreed (29%) and those who disagreed (34%).

Parents' confidence in using new apps, technologies and devices didn't appear to significantly influence their regular use of active mediation strategies (see Table 17). We did find, however, that confidence in using new apps, technologies and devices was associated with greater use of passive mediation strategies. Among parents who agreed that they felt confident, 70% reported regularly using at least one passive mediation strategy. This compared to 65% of those who neither agreed nor disagreed and 64% of those who disagreed.

As shown in Table 17, parents who agreed that they felt confident in using new apps, technologies and devices were more likely to regularly:

- check their child's online search history
- check which friends their child has added or people they have followed on social media
- look at or check their child's social media profile.

This finding indicates that digital confidence may help parents to navigate online platforms to supervise their children's online activities and/or increase their awareness of the tools available to help them do so.

**Table 17:** Parent use of passive and active mediation strategies, by confidence in using new apps, technologies and devices (%)

| | Confidence in using apps, technologies and devices (agreement level) | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Strongly agree or agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree or strongly disagree |
| **Any passive mediation strategy** | 70 | 65 | 64 |
| Check your child's online search history (e.g. on Google) or viewing history (e.g. on YouTube) | 39 | 33 | 33 |
| Check messages in your child's email or other apps they have for communicating with others online* | 38 | 33 | 36 |
| Look at photos your child has taken on their phone or other device | 34 | 31 | 30 |
| Check which friends your child has added or people they have followed on social media* | 29 | 23 | 21 |
| Check or look at your child's social media profile* | 37 | 31 | 28 |
| Check which apps your child has downloaded | 13 | 14 | 15 |
| Check which in-app or in-game purchases (e.g. paying to unlock extra levels) your child has made | 8 | 7 | 8 |
| **Any active mediation strategy** | 84 | 83 | 84 |
| Encourage your child to talk to you if anything happens online that makes them feel uncomfortable or unsafe | 68 | 65 | 66 |
| Talk with your child about what they have been doing online | 60 | 53 | 55 |
| Talk to or remind your child about how they can be safer online | 58 | 55 | 57 |
| **None of these** | 6 | 6 | 6 |
| **Base: Parents of children aged 10–17** | **2,204** | **815** | **435** |

**Q:** Some parents or caregivers closely monitor their child online; other families are more relaxed. Which, if any, of the following do you (or another parent or caregiver) regularly do (for example, once a month or more)?

**Note:** Different colour shading indicates that differences are statistically significant within a sub-group. White shading indicates that differences are not statistically significant.

*These items were only shown to parents who said their child used communication platforms (strongly agree or agree, *n* = 2,027; neither agree nor disagree, *n* = 747; disagree or strongly disagree, *n* = 386), used social media (strongly agree or agree, *n* = 2,042; neither agree nor disagree, *n* = 761; disagree or strongly disagree, *n* = 385) or had their own social media profile (strongly agree or agree, *n* = 1,399; neither agree nor disagree, *n* = 502; disagree or strongly disagree, *n* = 257). Therefore, the prevalence of these items is based on parents who said their child used communication platforms or social media, or had their own social media profile, respectively, and not on all parents surveyed.

## Parents who are confident in using apps, technologies and devices are more likely to discuss certain online safety topics with their children

As shown in Table 18, parents who agreed they felt confident in using apps, technologies and devices were more likely to have discussed several online safety topics with their child in the past year, including:

- how to keep personal information private online
- how to interact safely online with people they don't know in real life
- how to deal with pressure from their friends to do things online that they don't want to do
- what to do if they see sexual images or sexual videos online (for example, pornography)
- how what they see online is affected by algorithms.

However, digital confidence didn't appear to influence the likelihood of discussing certain emotionally charged topics with children, such as the risks of dangerous people online (including 'grooming'), what to do if they see or experience things online that are upsetting or make them feel uncomfortable or ashamed, or cyberbullying.

While digital confidence may support parents to have conversations with their children about technical and behavioural aspects of online safety, it doesn't necessarily translate into greater engagement with emotionally sensitive or socially nuanced issues, which may require different kinds of support or awareness.

**Table 18:** Online safety topics parents discussed with their children in the past year, by confidence in using new apps, technologies and devices (%)

| | Confidence in using apps, technologies and devices (agreement level) | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Strongly agree or agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree or strongly disagree |
| How to keep personal information private online | 64 | 59 | 56 |
| The risks of dangerous people being online (or of online 'grooming') | 60 | 58 | 58 |
| That what they see on social media isn't always realistic | 61 | 58 | 56 |
| Online bullying, or 'cyberbullying' | 56 | 51 | 56 |
| How to interact safely with people online who they don't know in real life | 51 | 45 | 44 |
| What to do if they see or experience things online that are upsetting or that make them feel uncomfortable or ashamed | 44 | 40 | 41 |
| How to deal with pressure from their friends to do things online that they don't want to do | 44 | 38 | 33 |
| The risks of sending nude images to others online | 43 | 39 | 41 |
| What to do if you see sexual images or sexual videos online (e.g. pornography) | 34 | 29 | 28 |
| How what they see online is affected by algorithms | 30 | 20 | 18 |
| How generative AI can be used or how it can be misused | 12 | 10 | 8 |
| Sexual extortion | 8 | 8 | 6 |
| None of these | 4 | 7 | 8 |
| **Base: Parents of children aged 10–17** | **2,204** | **815** | **435** |

**Q:** Which, if any, of the following things have you (or another parent or caregiver) talked to your child about in the past year?

**Note:** Different colour shading indicates that differences are statistically significant within a sub-group. White shading indicates that differences are not statistically significant.





## Parents who have experienced online harm themselves are more likely to use mediation strategies to keep their children safe online

Our findings showed that a significant minority of parents (34%) had ever experienced someone treating them in a 'hurtful or nasty way online'.[23]

We found that parents who had ever been treated in a hurtful or nasty way online were more likely to report using mediation strategies than parents who had never experienced this online. However, the differences were more pronounced for certain types of mediation strategies, particularly technical and passive mediation (see Table 19 and, for further details, Tables A6 and A7 in the Appendix).

These patterns suggest that being treated badly online may heighten parental vigilance and lead to more use of mediation practices, especially hands-on supervision of their children's online activities.

**Table 19:** Parent use of mediation strategies, by personal experience of being treated in a nasty or hurtful way online (%)

| | Parent ever been treated in a nasty or hurtful way online | |
|---|---|---|
| | Yes | No |
| Any restrictive mediation strategy | 93 | 91 |
| Any technical mediation strategy | 73 | 66 |
| Any active mediation strategy | 86 | 83 |
| Any passive mediation strategy | 76 | 64 |
| **Base: Parents of children aged 10–17** | **1,184** | **2,161** |

**Q:** Think about all the online devices your child has access to at home. Which, if any, of the following rules do you have for your child?

**Q:** Which, if any, of these parental controls do you (or another parent or caregiver) currently have on the device(s) or apps your child has access to at home (for example, phones, computers, tablets, gaming consoles)? Important: We are not asking about parental controls for TV or movie streaming services like Netflix or Disney+.

**Q:** Some parents or caregivers closely monitor their child online; other families are more relaxed. Which, if any, of the following do you (or another parent or caregiver) regularly do (for example, once a month or more)?

**Note:** Different colour shading indicates that differences are statistically significant within a sub-group. White shading indicates that differences are not statistically significant.

[23] **Q:** Has anyone ever treated you in a hurtful or nasty way online? This could have happened in posts, comments, texts, messages, chats, livestreams, memes, images, online video games, videos, emails or anywhere else online.
**Base:** Parents of children aged 10 to 17 (*n* = 3,454: 1,069 men; 2,357 women).

## Women are more likely than men to use a broad range of mediation strategies

We found that women were consistently more likely than men to use a wide range of mediation strategies to guide their children's online activities (see Tables 20 and 21). Women implemented an average of 9.7 different types of mediation strategies, compared with an average of 8 strategies among men.

**Table 20:** Parent use of restrictive and technical mediation strategies, by parent gender (%)

| | Parent gender | |
|---|---|---|
| | Men | Women |
| **Any restrictive mediation strategy** | 91 | 92 |
| Only allowed to talk to or message people online if they already know them in real life | 46 | 58 |
| Only allowed to accept online friend or follow requests from people they already know in real life | 43 | 56 |
| Has to keep personal information to themself (e.g. they aren't allowed to tell people online their full name or where they live or go to school) | 36 | 57 |
| Has to ask permission to download apps or to create new accounts, or I have set up parental controls so that I have to approve this | 44 | 53 |
| Has to ask permission to add new online followers or friends | 27 | 32 |
| Has time limits for being online | 46 | 46 |
| Is only allowed to go online at certain times of day or on certain days of the week, or after they have done other things like chores | 33 | 36 |
| Has to leave their phone and other online devices outside their bedroom overnight | 29 | 34 |
| Is only allowed to go online in shared areas at home (e.g. the kitchen or living room) | 20 | 23 |
| Has to follow other rules about being online | 19 | 25 |
| **Doesn't have to follow any specific rules about being online** | 8 | 7 |
| **Any technical mediation strategy** | 69 | 68 |
| Controls so that any in-app or in-game purchases (e.g. paying to unlock extra levels) must be approved by me (e.g. via password protection) | 47 | 51 |
| Controls so that any apps they download must be approved by me (e.g. via password protection) | 43 | 48 |
| Controls to stop my child seeing or using some websites, apps or content (including age restrictions) | 40 | 42 |
| Controls to restrict who my child can talk to or message online | 28 | 34 |
| Another type of online parental control | 2 | 4 |
| **There are no parental controls on any device(s) or apps my child has access to at home** | 28 | 29 |
| **Base: Parents of children aged 10–17** | **1,069** | **2,357** |

**Q:** Think about all the online devices your child has access to at home. Which, if any, of the following rules do you have for your child?

**Q:** Which, if any, of these parental controls do you (or another parent or caregiver) currently have on the device(s) or apps your child has access to at home (for example, phones, computers, tablets, gaming consoles)? Important: We are not asking about parental controls for TV or movie streaming services like Netflix or Disney+.

**Note:** Different colour shading indicates that differences are statistically significant within a sub-group. White shading indicates that differences are not statistically significant.

**Table 21:** Parent use of passive and active mediation strategies, by parent gender (%)

| | Parent gender | |
|---|---|---|
| | Men | Women |
| **Any passive mediation strategy** | 64 | 70 |
| Check your child's online search history (e.g. on Google) or viewing history (e.g. on YouTube) | 32 | 39 |
| Check messages in your child's email or other apps they have for communicating with others online* | 27 | 41 |
| Look at photos your child has taken on their phone or other device | 25 | 36 |
| Check which friends your child has added or people they have followed on social media* | 23 | 28 |
| Check or look at your child's social media profile* | 26 | 39 |
| Check which apps your child has downloaded | 15 | 13 |
| Check which in-app or in-game purchases (e.g. paying to unlock extra levels) your child has made | 8 | 7 |
| **Any active mediation strategy** | 80 | 86 |
| Encourage your child to talk to you if anything happens online that makes them feel uncomfortable or unsafe | 57 | 71 |
| Talk with your child about what they have been doing online | 51 | 61 |
| Talk to or remind your child about how they can be safer online | 50 | 61 |
| **None of these** | 6 | 6 |
| **Base: Parents of children aged 10–17** | **1,069** | **2,357** |

**Q:** Some parents or caregivers closely monitor their child online; other families are more relaxed. Which, if any, of the following do you (or another parent or caregiver) regularly do (for example, once a month or more)?

**Note:** Different colour shading indicates that differences are statistically significant within a sub-group. White shading indicates that differences are not statistically significant.

*These items were only shown to parents who said their child used communication platforms (men, *n* = 997; women, *n* = 2,139), used social media (men, *n* = 1,003; women, *n* = 2,158) or had their own social media profile (men, *n* = 691; women, *n* = 1,449). Therefore, the prevalence of these items is based on parents who said their child used communication platforms or social media, or had their own social media profile, respectively, and not on all parents surveyed.





Women were also more likely than men to report that they or another parent had discussed a wide range of online safety topics with their child in the past year (see Table A8 in the Appendix). Topics included:

- keeping personal information private online (66% versus 51%)
- the risks of dangerous people being online or of online 'grooming' (63% versus 52%)
- cyberbullying (58% versus 46%)
- that what they see on social media isn't always realistic (65% versus 48%)
- how to interact safely online with people they don't know in real life (52% versus 42%).

This pattern extended to more sensitive topics, such as the risks of sending nude images (45% versus 35%) and exposure to sexual images or videos online (34% versus 27%).

Together, these findings may suggest that women tend to take a more active and comprehensive role in managing their children's online experiences compared to men, particularly in terms of communication about online safety issues, supervision/monitoring and rule-setting.

## Discussion

Parents' own experiences with technology and online harm appear to play a role in how they approach their children's online activity.

We found that digital confidence may empower some parents to engage more actively with technical and passive mediation strategies, and to navigate online platforms more effectively. Parents who felt confident in using new technologies were not only more likely to use parental controls and monitoring strategies, but also reported more positive experiences with these strategies, including fewer instances of conflict with their child. Accessible and digestible resources that increase a parent's digital confidence may help to ensure that all parents feel equipped to help their children safely navigate the digital world.

However, while digital confidence supports engagement with tools and technical safety measures, it doesn't necessarily translate into comfort with emotionally sensitive conversations, such as those involving grooming or exposure to sexual content. This finding suggests that emotional readiness and literacy may be equally important in helping parents to navigate complex online safety issues with their children.

Building on this, personal experiences of online harm may further shape how parents engage with their children's digital lives. Those who had ever been treated in a hurtful or nasty way online used a broader range of mediation strategies. This suggests that lived experience may heighten awareness of online risks and motivate more proactive digital parenting.

Beyond personal experience, gender differences were also evident. Women were consistently more likely than men to use a wide range of mediation strategies and to discuss both general and sensitive online safety topics with their children. These patterns may reflect existing and broader caregiving roles and social expectations within society, with women often assuming greater responsibility for managing children's wellbeing.

Together, these findings provide insight into how lived experience shapes the way parents approach the online safety of their children. Recognising these influences is important for designing support and resources that meet families where they are and help them to navigate the digital world with confidence.



# Conclusion and implications

This report explores how parents in Australia are navigating digital parenting. For most people today, especially children, the internet has become deeply integrated into everyday life, with online and offline experiences often intertwined. As both digital technologies and approaches to regulating children's online safety continue to evolve, digital parenting practices must also evolve. Our findings highlight a range of strategies that may help parents to support their children's online safety and emphasise the need for targeted and digestible resources and guidance to support parents through this challenge.

## Conversations about online safety within families should start early and be revisited regularly

Our findings show that parental awareness of children's online engagement evolves as children age. Parents of younger children tend to feel more confident in their knowledge of their children's online activities, compared with parents of teens. However, when we compared what children told us about their digital engagement with what parents were aware of, we found that parents of teens often had more accurate insights into the types of technology or online platforms their children had used.

Gaps in parental awareness, especially for younger children, can increase the risk of harm online and lead to missed opportunities for parental guidance, support and timely conversations about online safety. This gap between perception and reality highlights the need for online safety conversations to begin earlier than many parents anticipate. These conversations should be informed by an understanding of the full range of technologies children may be using, including emerging technologies, such as generative AI, virtual reality headsets and haptic technology, as well as an understanding of the potentially risky behaviours some children may be engaging in online, such as live location sharing or online dating.

Encouraging parents to have open and ongoing conversations with their children about their online experiences from an early age, even if they have limited access to online platforms at home, could increase parental awareness of their child's online activities and create opportunities to talk about online safety. Having these conversations may, in turn, establish trust and openness within families and encourage children to instigate discussions with their parents about their online experiences. Without these conversations, children may be less inclined to disclose problems, leaving them to deal with issues alone.

The social media age restrictions introduced in December 2025 require age-restricted social media platforms to take reasonable steps to prevent Australian children under 16 from creating or holding accounts. Despite these restrictions, it remains essential for parents to continue to have open and ongoing conversations with their children about their social media use and other online activities. Early and ongoing conversations about online safety will help to ensure children are better prepared to navigate social media responsibly when they turn 16. These conversations also encourage younger children and teens to seek help from their parents if they are using age-restricted social media accounts and something goes wrong. Even if children are not using age-restricted social media platforms, they are still likely to be online and therefore require guidance on safe use, particularly when engaging with alternative platforms such as messaging apps, online games or generative AI.

### Targeted and digestible resources are needed to empower parents in their digital parenting practices

In line with existing research (Internet Matters, 2022; Ofcom, 2025), we found that most parents implement a range of strategies to help keep their children safe online, from rules about how and when their children use the internet, to technical controls to prevent them from seeing or doing certain things online, to monitoring their online participation.

However, with most parents agreeing that they find it challenging to help their children stay safe online and some feeling overwhelmed or unable to keep up with new technologies, our findings indicate that parents, especially those who lack confidence in using digital technologies, would benefit from more guidance to help them support their children's online safety.

Our findings additionally suggest that targeted resources are needed to ensure that both men and women are encouraged and empowered to play an active role in supporting their children's digital wellbeing.

Ideally, online safety guidance should be proactively delivered to parents, in a format that is both easy to digest and to share, as most parents don't actively seek it out.

### Parents should be cautious of relying solely on parental controls or trust to keep their children safe online

Our findings indicate that a significant proportion of parents aren't using parental controls. This is in line with previous research showing that parental controls are often underutilised on digital devices (Family Online Safety Institute, 2025). Parents often cited barriers to using these tools, including not knowing how to set them up, concerns about creating distrust or conflict with their child, or a belief that their child would be able to bypass controls.

Other parents indicated that they trusted their child to access appropriate content or to communicate safely online. However, children may still be exposed to inappropriate or harmful content, often unintentionally, through features such as algorithm-driven recommendations and autoplay. This highlights the limits of relying solely on trust and the importance of having open lines of communication within families.

While parental controls can be a useful tool, and their take-up should be encouraged, parents should be cautious of relying solely on them, particularly as children grow older. Involving children in age-appropriate discussions about online safety and giving them agency in shaping the strategies they follow may increase their willingness to adhere to them. Tools such as family tech agreements can support this.

### Industry has a role to play in continuously improving parental controls and providing guidance for their use

Industry should continuously improve parental controls in order to keep up with the technical abilities of the children they are designed to protect and ensure that user-friendly parental control guidelines are available for parents. These guidelines should provide instructions for use, as well as an accurate description of the controls' capabilities and limitations.

Industry should also explore opportunities for increased interoperability in parental controls and consistency in design, to reduce the burden on parents to have in-depth technical knowledge across a broad range of applications. In addition, platforms and devices should default to the highest privacy and safety settings for children.

### Open communication within families can enhance children's online safety, but families may need more support to facilitate ongoing conversations about sensitive or emerging risks

Parents in our study said they regularly talk with their children about what they are doing online and encourage their child to talk to them if anything goes wrong online. Encouragingly, we found that children are more likely to tell their parents about unsafe or uncomfortable online experiences if their parents regularly encourage them to do so. These findings reaffirm the importance of open and ongoing communication within families in promoting children's online safety.

However, certain sensitive or emerging topics were less likely to be discussed among families, including sexual extortion, the misuse of generative AI and algorithmic influences.

Given the increasing rate at which children report encountering emerging harms such as sexual extortion (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 to help families feel confident and equipped to talk about these complex and sometimes uncomfortable topics. Resources should prioritise increasing parents' emotional readiness and confidence to have these conversations, and helping families to feel equipped to talk about these risks early and often.

Resources that model how parents can talk with their children about online risks in abstract, hypothetical or general ways, without causing anxiety, may help to facilitate these more sensitive conversations within families.

Reminding parents of the resources available to them if they become aware that their child has personally experienced online harm, including **eSafety's reporting schemes**, will also help to ensure that parents are equipped to support their children if online harms do occur.

### Digital parenting practices should balance autonomy, independence, risk and reward as children age

Despite research showing that engagement in potentially risky online behaviours and exposure to online harms increases with age (eSafety Commissioner, 2022, 2026; Thorn, 2024), we found that as children enter their teen years, parents tend to reduce their use of meditation strategies. This finding is consistent with previous research (Ofcom, 2025). While it likely reflects parents' increased trust in their child, the child's perceived maturity and a desire to support their autonomy, this needs to be balanced with the increased level of risks teens are often exposed to, and at times seek out, online. The observed decline in the use of parental mediation strategies as children age may also indicate a gap in understanding among parents that online risk-taking can increase as children age, in much the same way as offline risk-taking.

In addition, as children grow older, parents may begin to feel that their child can look after themself online. This response often coincides with the parent feeling less able to talk openly with older teens about problems they might encounter online. This combination of feelings among parents of older teens may limit the extent to which they can help their teens safely navigate online environments. It is crucial that teens feel able to talk to a trusted adult, despite their growing independence, especially if something goes wrong online. Increasing confidence among parents, especially those of older teens, in having these conversations will be important in bridging this gap.

Our findings highlight the need for ongoing, age-appropriate parental engagement in children's online safety, to ensure that, as children age and potentially encounter and explore riskier online situations, they continue to be supported to stay safe online. Ensuring that older teens continue to receive relevant guidance and support from parents will be essential in enabling teens to safely and responsibly navigate their evolving digital experiences.

Resources that support parents to be confident and empowered to continue open conversations with their children as they progress through their teen years while balancing their children's autonomy and independence will be important in addressing this need.

### Tailored resources could help to ensure that all children are supported to stay safe online

Our findings indicate that parents may benefit from online safety guidance that takes account of the nuanced ways in which gender can influence online risks and experiences. We found that parents of girls were slightly more likely than parents of boys to implement a broader range of mediation strategies and to discuss more online safety topics with their children. This suggests a heightened perception of risk among parents of girls, in line with recent research showing that parents of girls are more concerned about their children encountering harm online, compared with parents of boys (Internet Matters, 2026). The differences were more pronounced for parents of trans and gender-diverse children who tended to implement fewer mediation strategies. Given that parents of trans and gender-diverse children were especially likely to report several benefits for their children of being online, these differences in parental mediation may reflect a nuanced understanding of the importance of online spaces for identity exploration and peer connection for trans and gender diverse-children.

However, previous findings from this research show that trans and gender-diverse children, as well as boys, were more likely to engage in risky online behaviours (see **Connected, curious, cautious**). Further, boys were just as likely as girls to experience some online harms, and trans and gender-diverse children were more likely than cis-gender children to have experienced most types of online harms covered by this study. This finding highlights a potential disconnect between the mediation strategies and online safety conversations some parents of boys and trans and gender-diverse children have, and the level of risk that boys and trans and gender-diverse children may encounter online.

Raising awareness that boys are just as likely to experience certain online harms as girls, and providing guidance that feels equally relevant to boys, may help to address this gap.

Targeted and inclusive guidance for parents of trans and gender-diverse children may also help to ensure that all children are supported to stay safe online, in a way that doesn't undermine their online autonomy and enables them to continue to reap the benefits of the online world. Resources for trans and gender-diverse children and their families should be developed in close consultation with trans and gender-diverse people.

Of course, the burden of safety should never fall solely on users. While parents play an important role in supporting their children to navigate the online world safely, the greater responsibility rests with industry. Companies must design online spaces with safety at their core — embedding Safety by Design principles throughout every stage of product development and reinforcing them with robust moderation practices.



# References

American Psychological Association. (2023). Health Advisory on Social Media Use in Adolescence. **https://www.apa.org/topics/social-media-internet/health-advisory-adolescent-social-media-use.pdf**

Burton, M., Minihan, S., Nicholas, M., Connor, J., & Trengove, K. (2025). Regulating image-based abuse: An examination of Australia's reporting and removal scheme. *Journal of Online Trust and Safety, 2*(5). **https://doi.org/10.54501/jots.v2i5.222**

eSafety Commissioner. (2022). *Mind the gap: Parental awareness of children's exposure to risks online*. Australian Government. **https://www.esafety.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-02/Mind%20the%20Gap%20%20-%20Parental%20awareness%20of%20children%27s%20exposure%20to%20risks%20online%20-%20FINAL.pdf?v=1750222012520**

eSafety Commissioner. (2025a). *How common are experiences of seeing online hate among children in Australia?* Australian Government. **https://www.esafety.gov.au/research/the-online-experiences-of-children-in-australia/snapshot-seen-online-hate**

eSafety Commissioner. (2025b). *How common are personal experiences of online hate among children in Australia?* Australian Government. **https://www.esafety.gov.au/research/the-online-experiences-of-children-in-australia/snapshot-personal-experiences-of-online-hate**

eSafety Commissioner. (2025c). *How common is cyberbullying among children in Australia?* Australian Government. **https://www.esafety.gov.au/research/the-online-experiences-of-children-in-australia/snapshot-cyberbullying**

eSafety Commissioner. (2025d). *How common is exposure to content associated with harm among children in Australia?* Australian Government. **https://www.esafety.gov.au/research/the-online-experiences-of-children-in-australia/snapshot-content-associated-with-harm**

eSafety Commissioner. (2025e). *How common is non-consensual tracking, monitoring and harassment among children in Australia?* Australian Government. **https://www.esafety.gov.au/research/the-online-experiences-of-children-in-australia/snapshot-non-consensual-tracking-monitoring-harassment**

eSafety Commissioner. (2025f). *Track, harass, repeat: Investigating attitudes that normalise tech-based coercive control*. Australian Government. **https://www.esafety.gov.au/sites/default/files/2025-04/Track-harass-repeat-attitudes-around-tech-based-coercive-control.pdf?v=1759966652781**

eSafety Commissioner. (2026). **Connected, curious, cautious: Children's engagement in the digital world**. Australian Government.

Family Online Safety Institute. (2025). *Connected and protected: Insights from FOSI's 2025 Online Safety Survey*. **https://fosi.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Connected-and-Protected-Insights-from-FOSIs-2025-Online-Safety-Survey.pdf**

Internet Matters. (2022). *Digital parenting: How parents support children's wellbeing in a digital world*. **https://www.internetmatters.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/IM-Google-Wellbeing-Report-Screen.pdf**

Internet Matters. (2026). *The gender gap: Understanding and responding to girls' and boys' online experiences*. **https://www.internetmatters.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/Internet-Matters-gender-gap-research-briefing-jan-2026.pdf**

Ofcom. (2025). *Children and parents: Media use and attitudes report*. **https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/research-and-data/media-literacy-research/children/childrens-media-use-and-attitudes-report-2025/childrens-media-literacy-report-2025.pdf?v=396621**

Thorn. (2024). *Youth perspectives on online safety, 2023*. **https://info.thorn.org/hubfs/Research/Thorn_23_YouthMonitoring_Report.pdf**

Thorn. (2025). *Deepfake nudes & young people: Navigating a new frontier in technology-facilitated nonconsensual sexual abuse and exploitation*. **https://info.thorn.org/hubfs/Research/Thorn_DeepfakeNudes&YoungPeople_Mar2025.pdf**

Thorn and National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC). (2024). *Trends in financial sextortion: An investigation of sextortion reports in NCMEC CyberTipline data*. **https://info.thorn.org/hubfs/Research/Thorn_TrendsInFinancialSextortion_June2024.pdf**

Wolbers, H., Cubitt, T., Napier, S., Cahill, M., Nicholas, M., Burton, M., & Giunta, K. (2025). Sexual extortion of Australian adolescents: Results from a national survey. *Trends & Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice* no. 712. Australian Institute of Criminology. **https://doi.org/10.52922/ti77819**



# Appendix: Additional data tables

**Table A1:** Alignment between parent- and child-reported prevalence of lifetime use of virtual reality headsets and haptic technology, by child gender and age and parent gender (%)

| | Child gender | | Child age | | | Parent gender | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Boys | Girls | 10–12 (younger children) | 13–15 (younger teens) | 16–17 (older teens) | Men | Women |
| **Virtual reality headset** | | | | | | | |
| Child said they had used this; parent said child definitely had used this | 61 | 56 | 58 | 61 | 56 | 56 | 60 |
| Child said they had used this; parent said they thought their child had used this | 19 | 23 | 24 | 18 | 23 | 23 | 20 |
| Child said they had used this; parent said their child definitely hadn't used this or they weren't aware of their child using this | 19 | 20 | 18 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 19 |
| Child said they had used this; parent said they didn't know if their child had used this | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| **Base: Parents of children aged 10–17 who had used a virtual reality headset** | **777** | **499** | **458** | **547** | **320** | **407** | **907** |
| **Wearable haptic technology** | | | | | | | |
| Child said they had used this; parent said child definitely had used this | 34 | 34 | 34 | 40 | 25 | 39 | 30 |
| Child said they had used this; parent said they thought their child had used this | 37 | 33 | 40 | 27 | 42 | 32 | 37 |
| Child said they had used this; parent said their child definitely hadn't used this or they weren't aware of their child using this | 26 | 31 | 25 | 27 | 33 | 29 | 27 |
| Child said they had used this; parent said they didn't know if their child had used this | 4 | 2 | 1 | 6 | 0 | 1 | 5 |
| **Base: Parents of children aged 10–17 who had used wearable haptic technology** | **167** | **90** | **92** | **114** | **64** | **129** | **136** |

**Q (parent survey):** Has your child 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).

**Q (child survey):** 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:** The sample size was too small to report data for trans and gender-diverse children who had used a virtual reality headset ($n$ = 49) or wearable haptic technology ($n$ = 13). Different colour shading indicates that differences are statistically significant within a sub-group. White shading indicates that differences are not statistically significant.

**Table A2:** Use of restrictive and technical mediation strategies by parents, by child 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 restrictive mediation strategy** | 91 | 92 | 88 | 98 | 93 | 79 |
| Only allowed to talk to or message people online if they already know them in real life | 51 | 58 | 42 | 64 | 55 | 37 |
| Only allowed to accept online friend or follow requests from people they already know in real life | 48 | 55 | 41 | 58 | 53 | 38 |
| Has to keep personal information to themself (e.g. they aren't allowed to tell people online their full name or where they live or go to school) | 49 | 52 | 60 | 56 | 53 | 38 |
| Has to ask permission to download apps or to create new accounts, or I have set up parental controls so that I have to approve this | 49 | 51 | 38 | 66 | 50 | 25 |
| Has to ask permission to add new online followers or friends | 29 | 34 | 22 | 48 | 27 | 10 |
| Has time limits for being online | 47 | 46 | 27 | 60 | 45 | 25 |
| Is only allowed to go online at certain times of day or on certain days of the week, or after they have done other things like chores | 37 | 34 | 22 | 48 | 35 | 15 |
| Has to leave their phone and other online devices outside their bedroom overnight | 34 | 31 | 27 | 42 | 32 | 17 |
| Is only allowed to go online in shared areas at home (e.g. the kitchen or living room) | 23 | 21 | 9 | 31 | 21 | 10 |
| Has to follow other rules about being online | 22 | 24 | 22 | 27 | 25 | 15 |
| **Doesn't have to follow any specific rules about being online** | 8 | 7 | 12 | 1 | 6 | 20 |
| **Any technical mediation strategy** | 67 | 70 | 57 | 85 | 70 | 40 |
| Controls so that any in-app or in-game purchases (e.g. paying to unlock extra levels) must be approved by me (e.g. via password protection) | 49 | 51 | 36 | 66 | 50 | 23 |
| Controls so that any apps they download must be approved by me (e.g. via password protection) | 44 | 48 | 36 | 61 | 47 | 20 |
| Controls to stop my child seeing or using some websites, apps or content (including age restrictions) | 40 | 43 | 31 | 55 | 42 | 19 |
| Controls to restrict who my child can talk to or message online | 31 | 34 | 21 | 49 | 30 | 10 |
| Another type of online parental control | 3 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 1 |
| **There are no parental controls on any device(s) or apps my child has access to at home** | 30 | 27 | 42 | 13 | 27 | 57 |
| **Base: Parents of children aged 10–17** | **1,739** | **1,632** | **83** | **1,332** | **1,297** | **825** |

**Q:** Think about all the online devices your child has access to at home. Which, if any, of the following rules do you have for your child?

**Q:** Which, if any, of these parental controls do you (or another parent or caregiver) currently have on the device(s) or apps your child has access to at home (for example, phones, computers, tablets, gaming consoles)? Important: We are not asking about parental controls for TV or movie streaming services like Netflix or Disney+.

**Note**: Different colour shading indicates that differences are statistically significant within a sub-group. White shading indicates that differences are not statistically significant.

**Table A3:** Use of passive and active mediation strategies by parents, by child gender and age of child (%)

| | Child gender | | | Child age | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Boys | Girls | Trans & gender diverse | 10–12 (younger children) | 13–15 (younger teens) | 16–17 (older teens) |
| **Any passive mediation strategy** | 68 | 69 | 57 | 78 | 69 | 49 |
| Check your child's online search history (e.g. on Google) or viewing history (e.g. on YouTube) | 37 | 37 | 24 | 49 | 37 | 17 |
| Check messages in your child's email or other apps they have for communicating with others online* | 35 | 39 | 25 | 50 | 37 | 16 |
| Look at photos your child has taken on their phone or other device | 31 | 35 | 23 | 44 | 32 | 14 |
| Check which friends your child has added or people they have followed on social media* | 25 | 29 | 20 | 36 | 26 | 15 |
| Check or look at your child's social media profile* | 31 | 38 | 39 | 43 | 36 | 28 |
| Check which apps your child has downloaded | 14 | 13 | 15 | 15 | 14 | 11 |
| Check which in-app or in-game purchases (e.g. paying to unlock extra levels) your child has made | 9 | 6 | 4 | 7 | 8 | 8 |
| **Any active mediation strategy** | 84 | 84 | 82 | 88 | 85 | 75 |
| Encourage your child to talk to you if anything happens online that makes them feel uncomfortable or unsafe | 66 | 67 | 73 | 71 | 68 | 58 |
| Talk with your child about what they have been doing online | 56 | 60 | 57 | 64 | 59 | 47 |
| Talk to or remind your child about how they can be safer online | 57 | 58 | 54 | 62 | 60 | 46 |
| **None of these** | 6 | 6 | 8 | 3 | 4 | 12 |
| **Base: Parents of children aged 10–17** | **1,739** | **1,632** | **83** | **1,332** | **1,297** | **825** |

**Q:** Some parents or caregivers closely monitor their child online; other families are more relaxed. Which, if any, of the following do you (or another parent or caregiver) regularly do (for example, once a month or more)?

**Note:** Different colour shading indicates that differences are statistically significant within a sub-group. White shading indicates that differences are not statistically significant.

*These items were only shown to parents who said their child used communication platforms (boys, *n* = 1,564; girls, *n* = 1,517; trans and gender diverse, *n* = 79; aged 10 to 12, *n* = 1,165; aged 13 to 15, *n* = 1,213; aged 16 to 17, *n* = 782), used social media (boys, *n* = 1,590; girls, *n* = 1,516; trans and gender diverse, *n* = 82; aged 10 to 12, *n* = 1,126; aged 13 to 15, *n* = 1,246; aged 16 to 17, *n* = 816) or had their own social media profile (boys, *n* = 1,073; girls, *n* = 1,023; trans and gender diverse, *n* = 62; aged 10 to 12, *n* = 454; aged 13 to 15, *n* = 956; aged 16 to 17, *n* = 748). Therefore, the prevalence of these items is based on parents who said their child used communication platforms or social media, or had their own social media profile, respectively, and not on all parents surveyed.

**Table A4:** Online safety topics parents discussed with children in the past year, by child 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 | 60 | 63 | 61 | 63 | 63 | 57 |
| The risks of dangerous people being online (or of online 'grooming') | 58 | 61 | 69 | 60 | 62 | 54 |
| That what they see on social media isn't always realistic | 57 | 63 | 61 | 60 | 61 | 57 |
| Online bullying, or 'cyberbullying' | 54 | 55 | 57 | 55 | 58 | 49 |
| How to interact safely with people online who they don't know in real life | 48 | 49 | 56 | 48 | 52 | 44 |
| What to do if they see or experience things online that are upsetting or that make them feel uncomfortable or ashamed | 41 | 45 | 52 | 47 | 44 | 34 |
| How to deal with pressure from their friends to do things online that they don't want to do | 39 | 44 | 35 | 42 | 43 | 37 |
| The risks of sending nude images to others online | 39 | 43 | 50 | 33 | 49 | 44 |
| What to do if they see sexual images or sexual videos online (e.g. pornography) | 31 | 32 | 45 | 31 | 36 | 28 |
| How what they see online is affected by algorithms | 25 | 26 | 38 | 23 | 28 | 27 |
| How generative AI can be used or how it can be misused | 11 | 10 | 11 | 9 | 11 | 13 |
| Sexual extortion | 8 | 7 | 8 | 6 | 9 | 9 |
| None of these | 5 | 6 | 10 | 5 | 5 | 7 |
| **Base: Parents of children aged 10–17** | **1,739** | **1,632** | **83** | **1,332** | **1,297** | **825** |

**Q:** Which, if any, of the following things have you (or another parent or caregiver) talked to your child about in the past year?

**Note:** Different colour shading indicates that differences are statistically significant within a sub-group. White shading indicates that differences are not statistically significant.

**Table A5:** Barriers to parents having conversations about sensitive online safety topics with their children, by child 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 have talked about this before with my child, just not in the past year | 46 | 44 | 42 | 36 | 49 | 55 |
| I trust my child to act responsibly online and don't feel the need to talk to them about it | 21 | 20 | 23 | 16 | 23 | 27 |
| My child already knows a lot about it | 19 | 20 | 36 | 13 | 22 | 28 |
| If it was a problem, my child would tell me about it | 14 | 13 | 10 | 13 | 14 | 13 |
| My child is too young for us to talk about it | 11 | 14 | 7 | 24 | 6 | 2 |
| I hadn't thought about it | 10 | 11 | 12 | 12 | 11 | 6 |
| It's better to teach my child about good morals instead | 10 | 8 | 10 | 9 | 9 | 7 |
| I don't want to worry my child or make them feel unsafe online | 7 | 9 | 11 | 11 | 7 | 5 |
| I'm not comfortable with talking to my child about it | 4 | 5 | 6 | 5 | 5 | 3 |
| My child's school is responsible for teaching it | 4 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| It might encourage my child to behave badly online | 4 | 3 | 5 | 5 | 3 | 2 |
| I haven't had time to talk to my child about it yet | 3 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 2 |
| This isn't talked about in my culture | 2 | 3 | 5 | 2 | 2 | 4 |
| I'm not sure how to start the conversation(s) with my child | 9 | 9 | 17 | 11 | 10 | 6 |
| I don't know enough about the topic(s) | 4 | 4 | 8 | 4 | 5 | 3 |
| Another reason | 3 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 2 |
| **Base: Parents of children aged 10–17 who hadn't discussed at least one sensitive online safety topic with their child in the past year** | **1,648** | **1,531** | **78** | **1,277** | **1,207** | **773** |

**Q:** You said you haven't talked to your child about [SENSITIVE TOPIC NOT DISCUSSED] in the past year. Could you tell us the main reasons for this? You can choose more than one answer.

**Note:** Different colour shading indicates that differences are statistically significant within a sub-group. White shading indicates that differences are not statistically significant.

**Table A6:** Parent use of restrictive and technical mediation strategies, by personal experience of being treated in a nasty or hurtful way online (%)

| | Parent ever been treated in a nasty or hurtful way online | |
|---|---|---|
| | Yes | No |
| **Any restrictive mediation strategy** | 93 | 91 |
| Only allowed to talk to or message people online if they already know them in real life | 59 | 52 |
| Only allowed to accept online friend or follow requests from people they already know in real life | 53 | 51 |
| Has to keep personal information to themself (e.g. they aren't allowed to tell people online their full name or where they live or go to school) | 57 | 48 |
| Has to ask permission to download apps or to create new accounts, or I have set up parental controls so that I have to approve this | 53 | 49 |
| Has to ask permission to add new online followers or friends | 32 | 30 |
| Has time limits for being online | 48 | 45 |
| Is only allowed to go online at certain times of day or on certain days of the week, or after they have done other things like chores | 38 | 34 |
| Has to leave their phone and other online devices outside their bedroom overnight | 34 | 32 |
| Is only allowed to go online in shared areas at home (e.g. the kitchen or living room) | 23 | 21 |
| Has to follow other rules about being online | 27 | 22 |
| **Doesn't have to follow any specific rules about being online** | 6 | 8 |
| **Any technical mediation strategy** | 73 | 66 |
| Controls so that any in-app or in-game purchases (e.g. paying to unlock extra levels) must be approved by me (e.g. via password protection) | 54 | 47 |
| Controls so that any apps they download must be approved by me (e.g. via password protection) | 48 | 45 |
| Controls to stop my child seeing or using some websites, apps or content (including age restrictions) | 46 | 40 |
| Controls to restrict who my child can talk to or message online | 37 | 30 |
| Another type of online parental control | 4 | 3 |
| **There are no parental controls on any device(s) or apps my child has access to at home** | 25 | 31 |
| **Base: Parents of children aged 10–17** | **1,184** | **2,161** |

**Q:** Think about all the online devices your child has access to at home. Which, if any, of the following rules do you have for your child?

**Q:** Which, if any, of these parental controls do you (or another parent or caregiver) currently have on the device(s) or apps your child has access to at home (for example, phones, computers, tablets, gaming consoles)? Important: We are not asking about parental controls for TV or movie streaming services like Netflix or Disney+.

**Note:** Different colour shading indicates that differences are statistically significant within a sub-group. White shading indicates that differences are not statistically significant.

**Table A7:** Parent use of passive and active mediation strategies, by personal experience of being treated in a nasty or hurtful way online (%)

| | Parent ever been treated in a nasty or hurtful way online | |
|---|---|---|
| | Yes | No |
| **Any passive mediation strategy** | 76 | 64 |
| Check your child's online search history (e.g. on Google) or viewing history (e.g. on YouTube) | 43 | 34 |
| Check messages in your child's email or other apps they have for communicating with others online* | 41 | 34 |
| Look at photos your child has taken on their phone or other device | 37 | 30 |
| Check which friends your child has added or people they have followed on social media* | 32 | 24 |
| Check or look at your child's social media profile* | 40 | 32 |
| Check which apps your child has downloaded | 15 | 12 |
| Check which in-app or in-game purchases (e.g. paying to unlock extra levels) your child has made | 9 | 7 |
| **Any active mediation strategy** | 86 | 83 |
| Encourage your child to talk to you if anything happens online that makes them feel uncomfortable or unsafe | 71 | 65 |
| Talk with your child about what they have been doing online | 61 | 57 |
| Talk to or remind your child about how they can be safer online | 61 | 56 |
| **None of these** | 5 | 6 |
| **Base: Parents of children aged 10–17** | 1,184 | 2,161 |

**Q:** Some parents or caregivers closely monitor their child online; other families are more relaxed. Which, if any, of the following do you (or another parent or caregiver) regularly do (for example, once a month or more)?

**Note:** Different colour shading indicates that differences are statistically significant within a sub-group. White shading indicates that differences are not statistically significant.

*These items were only shown to parents who said their child used communication platforms (had been treated in a nasty or hurtful way online, *n* = 1,088; had never been treated in a nasty or hurtful way online, *n* = 1,971), used social media (had been treated in a nasty or hurtful way online, *n* = 1,099; had never been treated in a nasty or hurtful way online, *n* = 1,990), or had their own social media profile (had been treated in a nasty or hurtful way online, *n* = 757; had never been treated in a nasty or hurtful way online, *n* = 1,347). Therefore, the prevalence of these items is based on parents who said their child used communication platforms or social media, or had their own social media profile, respectively, and not on all parents surveyed.

**Table A8:** Online safety topics parents discussed with children in the past year, by parent gender (%)

| | Parent gender | |
|---|---|---|
| | Men | Women |
| How to keep personal information private online | 51 | 66 |
| The risks of dangerous people being online (or of online 'grooming') | 52 | 63 |
| That what they see on social media isn't always realistic | 48 | 65 |
| Online bullying, or 'cyberbullying' | 46 | 58 |
| How to interact safely with people online who they don't know in real life | 42 | 52 |
| What to do if they see or experience things online that are upsetting or that make them feel uncomfortable or ashamed | 32 | 48 |
| How to deal with pressure from their friends to do things online that they don't want to do | 32 | 45 |
| The risks of sending nude images to others online | 35 | 45 |
| What to do if they see sexual images or sexual videos online (e.g. pornography) | 27 | 34 |
| How what they see online is affected by algorithms | 25 | 26 |
| How generative AI can be used or how it can be misused | 14 | 9 |
| Sexual extortion | 8 | 7 |
| None of these | 6 | 5 |
| **Base: Parents of children aged 10–17** | 1.069 | 2,357 |

**Q:** Which, if any, of the following things have you (or another parent or caregiver) talked to your child about in the past year?

**Note:** Different colour shading indicates that differences are statistically significant within a sub-group. White shading indicates that differences are not statistically significant.