

Growing up online:

Parenting young children in the digital age



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Acknowledgement of Country

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

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eSafety research program

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

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- 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.

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About this report

Young children today are growing up in a rapidly evolving digital world. As digital technologies and online platforms continue to evolve and become more embedded in children’s everyday lives, parents and caregivers play a vital role in helping young children learn to navigate online spaces safely, in a way that allows them to maximise the benefits and minimise the risks of being online.

This report explores young children’s online lives through the perspectives of their parents and caregivers. Drawing on a national survey conducted in September 2025 of more than 2,000 parents and caregivers of children aged 3 to 10 in Australia, the report captures how families are navigating digital technologies in the home, outside of formal childcare, preschool or school settings. The survey was conducted prior to the coming into effect of the [Online Safety Amendment \(Social Media Minimum Age\) Act 2024](#), which restricts children under 16 from creating or holding accounts on age-restricted social media platforms. While this legislative change doesn’t significantly alter the online experiences of most children in this study’s age group at present, it forms part of the broader regulatory and social context shaping parents’ and caregivers’ expectations, concerns and the decisions they make about their children’s current and future online engagement. The findings therefore provide an important baseline for understanding digital parenting practices prior to the introduction of the social media age restriction.

The report begins with a snapshot of young children’s online engagement, including the devices they use to go online, their main reasons for doing so, and the types of online activities they engage in. Next, the report examines the role of the internet in family life more broadly, exploring parents’ and caregivers’ feelings about their young children’s online experiences, including the perceived benefits and challenges they encounter. Finally, we examine the strategies parents and caregivers use to help keep their young children safe online. Throughout the report, we consider how parents’ and caregivers’ perceptions of their children’s online lives and their digital parenting practices evolve as their children age.

Overall, we found that internet use has become widespread in the lives of young children in Australia. However, most parents and caregivers have strategies in place to guide their children’s use of the internet, with many only allowing their children to go online when supervised by a parent or caregiver. Despite recognising the benefits of being online for their young children, concerns dominate parents’ and caregivers’ feelings about their children’s online lives, including concerns about the amount of time spent online and displacement of other activities, and exposure to age-inappropriate content¹ or harmful people online. Most parents and caregivers also find helping their young children stay safe

¹This research was conducted prior to the Age-Restricted Material Codes coming into effect. These codes aim to protect Australian children from exposure to potentially harmful age-inappropriate material, including pornography, high-impact violence, and material that promotes disordered eating or self-harm.

online challenging. However, with parents and caregivers today facing more demands, stressors and competing priorities than ever, many have little choice but to turn to the internet to support their parenting and household needs.

The findings presented in this report will inform eSafety’s online safety programs and resources for children, their parents and caregivers, educators and industry. They also contribute to the Australian evidence base on digital parenting practices. Building on this, the report concludes by outlining how these findings can be translated into practical actions to ensure that all parents and caregivers are empowered with the confidence, knowledge and resources needed to support young children to safely navigate a rapidly evolving digital world.

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 3 to 10.

Key terms

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

Parents: Parents, guardians and primary caregivers of children surveyed aged 3 to 10.

Passive mediation: Involves parents monitoring or observing children’s online activity (for example, by 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 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 headset: A virtual reality headset blocks out the real world and makes the user feel like they are inside a computer-generated, three-dimensional environment.



Key findings

Access to the internet is widespread in the lives of young children, though typically only in a supervised capacity. According to parents, almost all children aged 3 to 10 (97%) had been online at some point, and most (94%) had been online in the past 4 weeks. Children commonly accessed the internet via tablets, smart TVs, smartphones or gaming consoles, and many (51%) were only allowed to go online when supervised by a parent.



While most young children access the internet on their parents' devices, many have at least one internet-connected device of their own. Children predominantly accessed the internet on devices that belonged to their parent or another adult in the family. However, over half of parents (57%) reported that their child had at least one device of their own.

The internet is a space where young children can have fun, learn and find information. According to their parents, nearly all young children who had been online (96%) did so for fun and entertainment. Other common reasons for going online included for learning (71%), information (42%) or homework (42%). Reflecting these diverse motivations for online engagement, parents also reported that their children had engaged in a wide variety of online activities. Nearly three quarters (73%) reported that their child had ever used an educational game or app, and more than 3 in 5 (62%) reported their child had ever listened to music, podcasts or audiobooks.

Social media use is relatively common among young children. Almost 1 in 3 parents (31%) reported that their child had ever used a social media platform or app like TikTok, YouTube, Instagram or Snapchat. While these children typically accessed social media via their parents' or other people's account, or without an account, 6% of parents reported that their child had their own profile or account(s).²

Newer and emerging technologies are becoming a part of young children's online lives. Nearly 1 in 6 parents (15%) reported that their child had ever used artificial intelligence (AI) assistants or companions, while 1 in 10 (10%) reported that their child had used virtual reality headsets.

Parents use the internet not only to help manage the demands of modern parenting, but also to have fun and connect with their young children. Around 2 in 3 parents reported that,

² This study was conducted in September 2025, before the Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Act 2024, which restricts children under 16 from creating or holding accounts on age-restricted social media platforms, took effect on 10 December 2025.

in the past 4 weeks, they had used the internet at least once a week to occupy their child while they had a break or some downtime (66%) or while they worked from home or did chores (65%). Many parents also used the internet to help manage their child's behaviour and routines. For example, 46% of parents reported having used the internet at least once a week in the past 4 weeks to play music, podcasts, audiobooks or meditation apps at bedtime to help their child wind down or sleep. Beyond this, many parents (64%) had used the internet at least once a week in the past 4 weeks to have fun or connect with their child through co-engagement.

Concerns about young children going online are front-of-mind for parents. When asked how they feel about their child going online, most parents (67%) described negative feelings, with worry and anxiety dominating. When prompted with a list, nearly two thirds of parents of young children who had ever been online (65%) identified at least one challenge associated with their child being online. Parents most frequently identified challenges relating to online activities interfering with their child's other activities (48%). A significant proportion of parents also reported that being online had created conflict between themselves or other family members and their child (22%), had exposed their child to age-inappropriate content (22%) or had created emotional difficulties for their child (15%). In addition, over half of parents of young children who had ever been online (56%) reported being at least somewhat concerned about the amount of time their child had spent online in the past 4 weeks.

Parents also see benefits in their young children being online, especially for fun, learning and exploration. Though positive feelings were rarely mentioned unprompted, when prompted with a list, nearly all parents of young children who had been online (96%) reported that their child experienced at least one benefit from being online. They most often reported that the internet helped their child to have fun or relax (74%), to learn literacy fundamentals or about the world (74%), or to pursue interests, hobbies or creativity (74%). A smaller proportion of parents reported benefits in relation to social connection (45%), emotional wellbeing (29%) or self-expression (11%).



Despite finding it a challenge to support their young children’s online safety, most parents use a range of strategies to help keep their children safe online. Almost 3 in 4 parents

of young children who had ever been online (73%) reported finding it at least somewhat challenging to help their child stay safe online. Despite this, most parents used various mediation strategies to support their child’s online safety. Among parents of children who had access to an internet-connected device at home, 77% reported using at least one parental control on the devices their child had access to, and almost all (95%) had at least one rule in place to guide their child’s use of such devices. Many parents (74%) also reported monitoring their child’s online activities, such as checking which apps they had downloaded or their online search history.

Most parents talk with their young children about online safety and risks, though some sensitive and emerging topics are less likely to be discussed. Almost all parents of young children who had ever been online (87%) reported having engaged in proactive conversations about online safety with their child, such as encouraging them to speak up if things go wrong online (69%) or talking with them about online safety topics, such as what they have been doing online (70%). Fewer parents reported having discussed sensitive or emerging topics with their child, such as what to do if they see sexual images online (33%) or algorithmic influences (31%).

Parents’ views and approaches to digital parenting evolve as their young children age.

Our findings indicate that children’s online engagement increases steadily with age. Parents of older children were more likely to report that their children used a wider range of devices, had their own personal devices, and engaged in diverse online activities, including using social media and newer and emerging technologies. Parents generally reported similar reasons for device use across age groups, primarily entertainment and learning. However, parents of older children were more likely to report additional reasons, such as homework, communication and social connection. As children age, parents perceive more diverse benefits from online engagement, such as improved connection and support, while parents of younger children more often reported benefits in relation to learning foundational skills, such as how to read. Parental concerns and reported challenges also increased with age, particularly around interference with other activities and the amount of time spent online. Correspondingly, parents of older children employed a broader range of mediation strategies, including parental controls, rules, and active and passive monitoring, while parents of younger children tended to rely more on direct supervision to support their children’s online safety.

Methodology

This report draws on data from eSafety’s ‘Young Children’s Internet Use’ research. The research aimed to build on our understanding of the prevalence and nature of internet use among young children outside of formal childcare, preschool or school settings. The research also explored the role of the internet in family life, parental perceptions of the benefits and challenges of internet use for young children, and the strategies parents use to keep their children safe online. To achieve these aims, we surveyed a sample of just over 2,000 parents of children in Australia aged 3 to 10 about their children’s online engagement and their digital parenting practices.

Online survey

A total of 2,008 parents of children aged 3 to 10 took part in the survey, which was conducted in September 2025. To best reflect a nationally representative sample, parents were recruited to quotas in relation to their child’s age and gender, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander identity, state/territory, location and socio-economic area.

Our sample included parents of children with a disability or diagnosis (*n* = 416),³ parents of children from non-English speaking backgrounds (*n* = 432) and parents of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children (*n* = 125). Few parents reported that their children were non-binary or gender diverse (*n* = 5).

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.

³Including children with neurodivergence, a behavioural disorder, a diagnosed mental health condition, sensory disability, chronic disease, physical disability, cognitive or intellectual disability, or a different disability or diagnosis that had lasted or was likely to last for at least 6 months.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of parent survey participants

		Sample <i>n</i>	Sample % (unweighted)	Sample % (weighted)
Parent gender	Men	514	26	25
	Women	1,486	74	74
	Non-binary and gender diverse*	7	<1	<1
Parent age	18–25	54	3	3
	26–35	677	34	34
	36–45	1,093	54	55
	46–55	166	8	8
	56–74	18	1	1
Parent language	Speaks a language other than English at home	368	18	19
Total sample				2,008

Note: * ‘Non-binary and gender diverse’ includes parents and caregivers who identified as ‘non-binary’ and/or ‘sistergirl’ or those who identified as more than one gender. No parents/caregivers in our sample identified as ‘transgender’ or ‘brotherboy’ or used a different word for their gender.

The survey took approximately 20 minutes to complete. Informed consent to participate was sought from parents, and those with multiple children were asked to respond in relation to one specific child only, in the 3 to 10 age range. The research was approved by the Bellberry Human Research Ethics Committee. For further details on the survey methodology, see the methodology report.

Data analysis

Apparent differences between subgroups 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.

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 response options ‘prefer not to answer’, ‘don’t know’ or ‘another reason’ – for example, if the number of respondents was low.

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, including parents of children with a disability or diagnosis, 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 experiencing online harms.





Parental perspectives on young children's online engagement

Young children today are a digitally connected generation. Most are growing up in households with internet access, during an era when digital technologies and online platforms are rapidly evolving (OECD, 2025). This section of the report explores parental perspectives on young children's online engagement outside of formal childcare, preschool or school settings, including the devices they use and the activities they engage in online. It highlights that many young children have used the internet at some point, often in a supervised capacity, with most parents only allowing their children to go online when supervised. Our findings additionally show that young children predominantly use the internet to play, learn and explore.

Almost all young children have been online at some point

Almost all the parents surveyed (97%) indicated that their child had ever used a device to go online outside of formal childcare, preschool or school settings. Most parents also reported that their child had been online recently – 94% said their child had used at least one device to access the internet in the past 4 weeks.

As shown in Table 2, parents reported that their children used a range of devices to go online, most commonly:

- tablets (83%)
- smart TVs (82%)
- smartphones (71%)
- gaming consoles (57%).

Most households today are equipped with smart TVs, and many adults report streaming online video content on them (Australian Communications and Media Authority, 2026), which likely contributes to the high rates of smart TV usage by young children. Ownership of devices such as tablets, smartphones and gaming consoles is also widespread across households (Mann et al., 2025). These devices may also provide a convenient source of entertainment and learning for families with young children, both at home and when out and about.

Table 2: Devices used by young children to go online (%)

	Ever	Past 4 weeks
Any device	97	94
Tablet (e.g. iPad)	83	70
Smart TV (e.g. to watch YouTube videos – not free-to-air or subscription TV or movie services like Netflix or Disney+)	82	74
Smartphone (e.g. iPhone, Samsung Galaxy)	71	59
Gaming console or handheld gaming device (e.g. Xbox, PlayStation, Nintendo Switch)	57	42
Laptop computer	46	29
Smart home device (e.g. Google Home, Amazon Alexa)	36	25
Desktop computer	31	18
Internet-connected smart toy (e.g. coding robots like Sphero or Poe the AI Story Bear)	16	8
Smart watch (e.g. Apple Watch)	14	8
e-reader (e.g. Kindle)	10	5
Base: Parents of children aged 3–10	2,008	2,008

Q (Ever): Has your child ever used any of these devices to go online, outside of formal childcare, preschool or school settings? By ‘used’ we mean the child has been operating the device, possibly with some help, but not just looking at what an adult or another child is doing online. Remember, this could be at home, at another family member or friend’s house, at a public place or anywhere else they go online other than formal childcare/preschool/school settings.

Q (Past 4 weeks): Thinking just about the past 4 weeks... Has your child used any of these devices to go online outside of formal childcare, preschool or school settings, in the past 4 weeks?

Young children typically access the internet on a family member’s devices, and most are only allowed to do so when supervised by a parent

We asked parents how their young child accessed the devices they had used to go online – whether they had a device of their own, shared or sometimes used a family member’s device, or accessed a device elsewhere.

As shown in Table 3, children predominantly accessed the internet on devices that belonged to their parent or another adult in the family, which likely provides parents with greater control over their children’s internet access. Indeed, among parents who reported that their child had access to an internet-connected device at home, over half (51%) said

they only allowed the child to go online when they were supervising them.⁴ We explore other strategies parents use to keep their young children safe online later in the report (pages 45–57).

Over half of parents (57%) reported that their child had at least one device of their own. Parents were especially likely to report that their child had their own tablet (43%).

In addition:

- 1 in 6 parents (17%) reported that their child had their own gaming console
- 1 in 10 (10%) reported that their child had their own smartphone.

Previous research has shown that a key reason for parents providing their children with their own internet-connected device, particularly smartphones, is to enable them to communicate with their child (Pew Research Center, 2020).

Table 3: Means of access to devices among young children (%)

	Smart-phone	Smart TV	Tablet	Laptop	Gaming console	Smart toy	Desktop computer	Smart watch	e-reader	Smart home device
Child has own device	10	7	43	7	17	6	3	7	3	7
Child has device to use at home, that was provided by school	–	–	3	3	–	–	–	–	–	–
Child shares device with another child in the family	4	10	11	6	19	4	4	2	2	4
Child shares or sometimes uses device that belongs to parent or another adult in the family	56	68	28	31	23	5	21	5	4	26
Child accessed device another way	3	2	3	2	4	3	5	1	2	2
Child never used device	29	17	17	54	42	82	67	85	88	63
Base: Parents of children aged 3–10										2,008

Q: Does your child have their own [DEVICE], do they share it, or do they use a [DEVICE] somewhere else?

⁴ Either directly or by keeping an eye on their child when using an internet-connected device in a shared living space.

Young children go online for various reasons, often for fun, learning and information

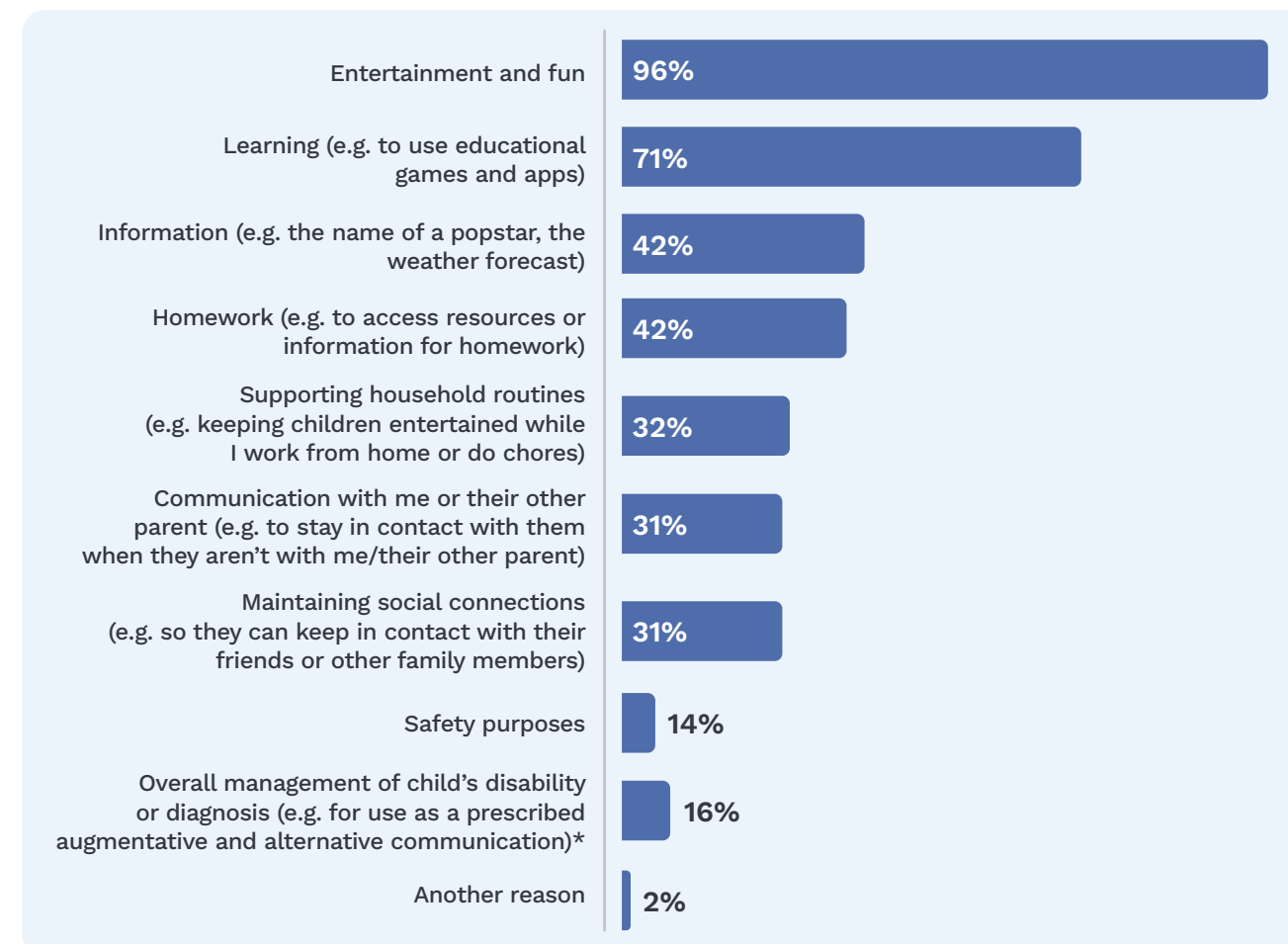
Among parents who reported that their child had ever used a device to go online, almost all (96%) said that entertainment and fun was one of the main reasons their child had been online.

As shown in Figure 1, many parents reported that their young child also used the internet for educational purposes, such as for homework (42%) or learning via educational games (71%).

Other common reasons included to:

- find information (42%)
- support household routines (32%)
- communicate with parents (31%)
- maintain social connections (31%).

Figure 1: Main reasons young children go online



Q: What are the main reasons why your child uses (or has used) a [DEVICE] to go online, outside of formal childcare, preschool or school settings?

Base: Parents of children aged 3 to 10 who had ever used a device to go online ($n = 1,939$).

Note: * Only shown to parents of children with a disability or diagnosis (base: $n = 410$).

As shown in Table 4, parents reported that their young child used different devices to go online for a range of reasons. Among those who indicated that their child had used various devices, the devices were used as follows:

- Smart TVs and gaming consoles were overwhelmingly associated with entertainment and fun, reported by 91% and 92% of parents, respectively.
- Smartphones were primarily used for entertainment and fun (76%), but also for homework and learning (33%) and communication with parents (23%).
- Laptops, desktop computers and e-readers were most commonly used for homework and learning (69%, 65% and 63%, respectively). However, around half of parents also reported that these devices were used for entertainment and fun (55%, 53% and 46%, respectively).
- Smart watches were often used for entertainment and fun (36%), safety purposes (35%) and communication with parents (31%).
- Tablets and smart toys were frequently used for entertainment and fun (85% and 66%, respectively), as well as for homework and learning (62% and 49%, respectively).
- Smart home devices were used mainly for entertainment and fun (65%), followed by accessing information (37%) and for homework and learning (28%).

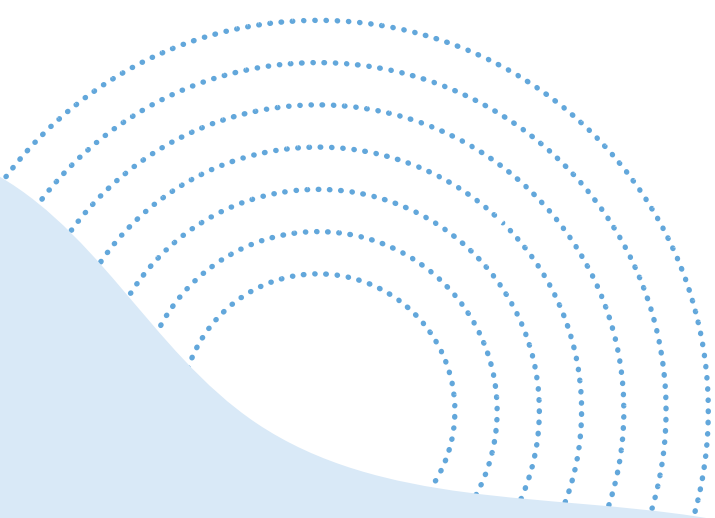


Table 4: Main reasons young children go online on different devices (%)

	Smart-phone	Smart TV	Tablet	Laptop	Gaming console	Smart toy	Desktop computer	Smart watch	e-reader	Smart home device
For entertainment and fun	76	91	85	55	92	66	53	36	46	65
For learning	30	24	57	56	9	41	53	15	53	24
For communication with me or their other parent	23	3	17	6	4	15	9	31	12	12
For information	20	9	22	24	3	10	25	11	15	37
For maintaining social connection	19	4	19	10	9	13	9	11	8	8
For supporting household routines	16	18	18	10	10	13	9	12	10	16
For homework	10	5	26	44	4	18	42	9	24	13
For safety purposes	9	2	4	3	2	8	3	35	8	5
For overall management of my child's disability or diagnosis*	6	5	10	6	3	19	6	10	9	4
Another reason	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	5	0	0
Base: Parents of children aged 3–10 who had ever used each device to go online	1,939	1,648	1,664	912	1,138	312	626	282	208	720

Q: What are the main reasons why your child uses (or has used) a [DEVICE] to go online outside of formal childcare, preschool or school settings?

Note: * Only shown to parents of children with a disability or diagnosis (base: n = 50 to 375).



Young children engage in a wide variety of online activities, reflecting their diverse motivations for online engagement

We asked parents if their children had ever engaged in a range of activities online, including playing educational games, listening to audio content and searching for information.

Reflecting our finding that one of the main reasons young children go online is for learning, almost 3 in 4 parents surveyed (73%) reported that their child had ever used an educational game, website or app, with 50% having done so in the past 4 weeks.

As shown in Table 5, other common activities young children engaged in online included:

- listening to music, podcasts or audiobooks (62%)
- looking for information about things they are interested in (51%)
- using a social media or messaging platform or app specifically designed for children, such as YouTube Kids or Messenger Kids (46%)
- using an online learning platform to do and submit schoolwork (37%).

A significant minority of parents reported that their child had ever used newer and emerging technologies, including AI assistants or companions (15%) or virtual reality headsets (10%).

Notably, almost 1 in 3 parents (31%) reported that their child had ever used a social media platform or app, such as TikTok, YouTube (full version), Instagram or Snapchat. One in 4 parents (24%) indicated that their child had used social media in the past 4 weeks.

In addition:

- Almost 2 in 5 parents (37%) reported that their child had ever used a messaging platform or app to message, email, call or video call someone, such as WhatsApp, Messenger, Gmail, iMessage, Discord or FaceTime⁵.
- A similar proportion of parents (30%) indicated that their child had used messaging platforms in the past 4 weeks.

While we didn't ask parents the extent to which their young child engaged in each of these online activities independently, it's likely that many parents engage in these activities together with their children. For example, parents may use messaging platforms such as FaceTime to video call family or friends together with their young children or to co-view content on social media platforms. Indeed, previous research has shown that most parents watch YouTube alongside their young children (Mann et al., 2025; Pew Research Center, 2025). Additionally, as we show later in the report (page 30), most parents use the internet to have fun or connect with their child, such as by viewing content together.

⁵ Examples of services were provided to parents to facilitate their understanding of the survey questions. However, we have categorised services in a certain way for purposes of this report only and that doesn't mean we've assessed them that way under the Online Safety Act or any subordinate legislation.

Table 5: Activities young children engage in online (%)

	Ever	Past 4 weeks
Used an educational game, website or app (e.g. ABC Reading Eggs, Duolingo, Epic, Khan Academy, Mathletics)	73	50
Listened to music, podcasts or audiobooks online (e.g. on Spotify)	62	53
Looked for information about things they are interested in online (e.g. Google, Wikipedia)	51	40
Used a social media or messaging platform or app specifically designed for children (e.g. YouTube Kids, Messenger Kids)	46	37
Used a messaging platform or app to message, email, call or video call someone (e.g. via WhatsApp, Messenger (full version), Gmail, iMessage, Discord, FaceTime)	37	30
Used an online learning platform to do and submit schoolwork (e.g. Seesaw, Google Classroom)	37	25
Used a social media platform or app (e.g. TikTok, the full version of YouTube, the teen or full version of Instagram, Snapchat)	31	24
Used an AI assistant (e.g. Chat GPT or Gemini) or an AI companion (e.g. My AI or Character AI)	15	10
Used a virtual reality headset to enter a VR environment (e.g. Meta Quest, Apple Vision Pro)	10	4
Used an online help website or chat service (e.g. Kids Helpline)	8	4
Base: Parents of children aged 3–10	2,008	2,008

Q (Ever): Has your child ever done any of the following, anywhere other than formal childcare/preschool/school (e.g. at your home or at a friend or relative’s home)? This could be by themselves or with some help (but not just looking at what someone else is doing online).

Q (Past 4 weeks): Thinking just about the past 4 weeks... Has your child done any of the following, anywhere other than at formal childcare/ preschool/ school) in the past 4 weeks?

While social media usage is relatively common among young children, few have their own profile or account

We asked parents who reported that their child had ever used social media if their child had their own profile or account on a social media platform or app. Almost 1 in 5 of these parents (18%) reported that their child had their own social media profile or account. This equates to 6% of all parents surveyed (see Table 6).

A significant minority of parents reported that their child used social media:

- by using or looking at a parent’s or someone else’s account (15%)
- without using a profile or account (10%).

Table 6: Social media account ownership among young children (%)

	Parents of children who had used social media	All parents surveyed
Child has own profile or account(s)	18	6
Child uses or looks at a parent’s or someone else’s account (e.g. an account owned by their other parent/caregiver or a friend)	49	15
Child looks at social media without using a profile or account	31	10
Base: Parents of children aged 3–10	622	2,008

Q: Does your child currently have their own profile or account on any social media platform or app (e.g. their own Snapchat, TikTok, Instagram (teen or full version) or YouTube (full version) account)? IMPORTANT: This doesn’t include accounts on messaging platforms like Messenger or WhatsApp, or accounts on children’s versions of social media like YouTube Kids.

Online engagement increases with a child’s age

Unsurprisingly, our findings revealed that online engagement increased as children age, with parents of older children more likely to report that their children had ever been online across a range of devices and engaged in a greater variety of online activities.

For example:

- Virtually all parents of children aged 5 to 6 (97%) and 7 to 8 (99%), and all parents of children aged 9 to 10 (100%), reported that their child had ever used a device to go online (see Table A1 in the Appendix).
- While fewer parents of children aged 3 to 4 reported that their child had ever been online, a majority still reported they had done so (90%).
- Parents of older children were also more likely to report that their child had been online in the past 4 weeks (see Table A2 in the Appendix).

We also found greater diversity of device use as children aged, with parents of children aged 7 to 8, and especially parents of children aged 9 to 10, more likely to report that their child had used most devices to go online, including in the past 4 weeks, compared with parents of younger children (see Tables A1 and A2 in the Appendix). Likewise, device ownership increased sharply with child age, ranging from 29% among parents of children aged 3 to 4 to 83% among parents of children aged 9 to 10. This age-related increase in device ownership was broadly consistent across most devices included in the survey (see Table A3 in the Appendix).

Regardless of their child's age, parents cited similar reasons for device use – primarily, for entertainment, fun and learning (see Table A4 in the Appendix). However, parents of older children, especially those aged 9 to 10, were also more likely to cite a range of other reasons for their child going online, including for information or homework, communication with parents and maintaining social connections.

Parents of older children, particularly those aged 9 to 10, were also more likely to report that their child had engaged in a range of online activities, including using social media and messaging platforms, as well as newer and emerging technologies, such as AI assistants or companions, or virtual reality headsets (see Table A5 in the Appendix). Social media account ownership similarly increased sharply with child age, peaking at 10% among parents of children aged 9 to 10 (see Table A6 in the Appendix).



Discussion

Our findings reveal that young children today are engaging online in various ways and for diverse reasons. Virtually all young children aged 3 to 10 have been online at some point, although many are only allowed to do so when supervised by a parent. Young children use a range of devices to go online, most commonly tablets, smart TVs, smartphones and gaming consoles. While they often go online with devices belonging to their parents or other adults in the family, many also have at least one internet-connected device of their own. This finding is consistent with previous research (Mann et al., 2025; OECD, 2025; Ofcom, 2025; Pew Research Center, 2025).

Parents overwhelmingly reported that entertainment and fun were the main reasons their young child went online. However, young children also use the internet to learn or do homework, find information, and communicate with family and friends. A significant minority of parents also noted that their child uses internet-connected devices for safety purposes or to manage their disability or diagnosis. Parents also reported that children engaged in a diverse range of online activities, including educational games and listening to music, podcasts and audiobooks.

Newer and emerging online technologies are also present in the lives of some young children. A significant minority of parents reported that their child had used internet-connected smart toys, AI assistants or companions, or virtual reality headsets. As uptake of these technologies increases, it's important that parents are informed about the full range of online activities their children might be engaging in and the potential risks they might encounter on various platforms. Parents also need to be equipped and empowered with knowledge, confidence and resources to support and guide their children's online safety or to set age-appropriate boundaries around use.

Collectively, our findings demonstrate that internet access has become widespread in the lives of young children in Australia, reflecting similar findings from both Australia and many other countries (Mann et al., 2025; OECD, 2025; Ofcom, 2025; Pew Research Center, 2025). With children participating online from a young age and for diverse purposes, our findings highlight the importance of embedding Safety by Design principles from the outset in online spaces that young children engage with, especially newer and emerging technologies such as AI and virtual reality.

Additionally, with a small number of parents reporting that their children had their own social media account(s), and with the Social Media Minimum Age legislation now in effect in Australia, requiring age-restricted social media platforms to take reasonable steps to prevent children under 16 from creating or holding accounts, it's essential that parents receive clear, accessible resources and guidance to help their children understand and adapt to this change.



The role of the internet in family life

With parents today facing more pressures, demands and stressors than ever, often in the context of increased judgement and scrutiny about their parenting practices (Office of the Surgeon General, 2024), some families may at times need to turn to the internet to support their parenting or household needs. This section of the report explores the role of the internet in family life, including the extent to which parents use it to support parenting and household routines.

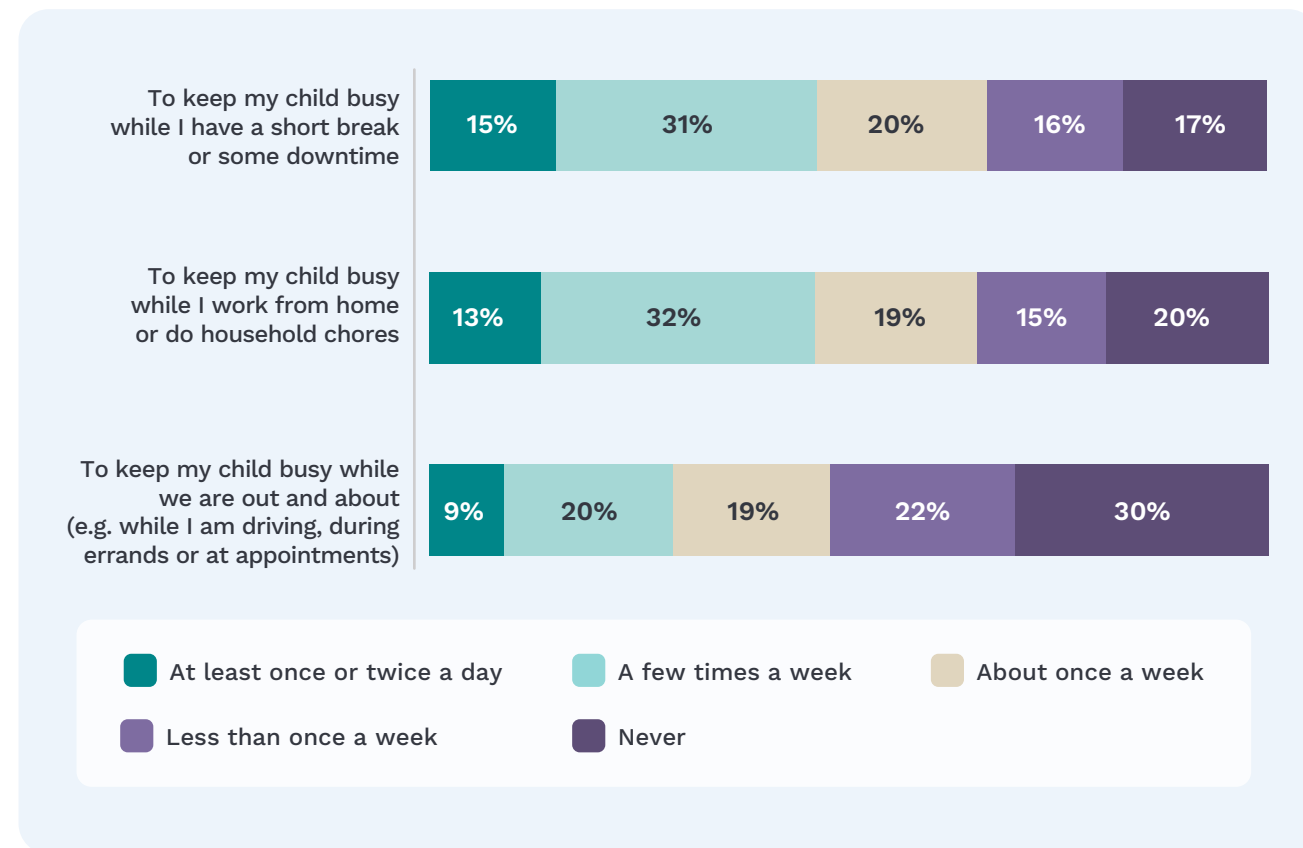
For many parents, the internet is a useful tool for keeping their child busy while at home or out and about

We asked parents how often, in the past 4 weeks, they used the internet to support their family's parenting or household needs. Many parents reported using the internet as a tool for keeping their child busy while at home or out and about (see Figure 2), reflecting the reality that most parents today are juggling working with meeting their family and household responsibilities (Naidoo et al., 2024).

For example:

- Two in 3 parents said they used the internet once a week or more often to keep their child busy while they had a short break or some downtime (66%), or while they worked from home or did household chores (65%).
- Almost half of parents (48%) reported using the internet once a week or more to keep their child busy while they were out and about, such as while driving, when running errands or at appointments.

These findings are consistent with previous research showing that balancing work, family responsibilities and personal needs presents a significant challenge for many parents, and that they often use digital technologies to help manage these competing demands (Geurts et al., 2022; Langton et al., 2025; Mallawaarachchi et al., 2022).

Figure 2: Parents' use of the internet to support their parenting and household needs

Q: In the past 4 weeks, how often, if at all, have you used the internet (including gaming, YouTube, searching online, etc.) to support your family's parenting or household needs, such as ...

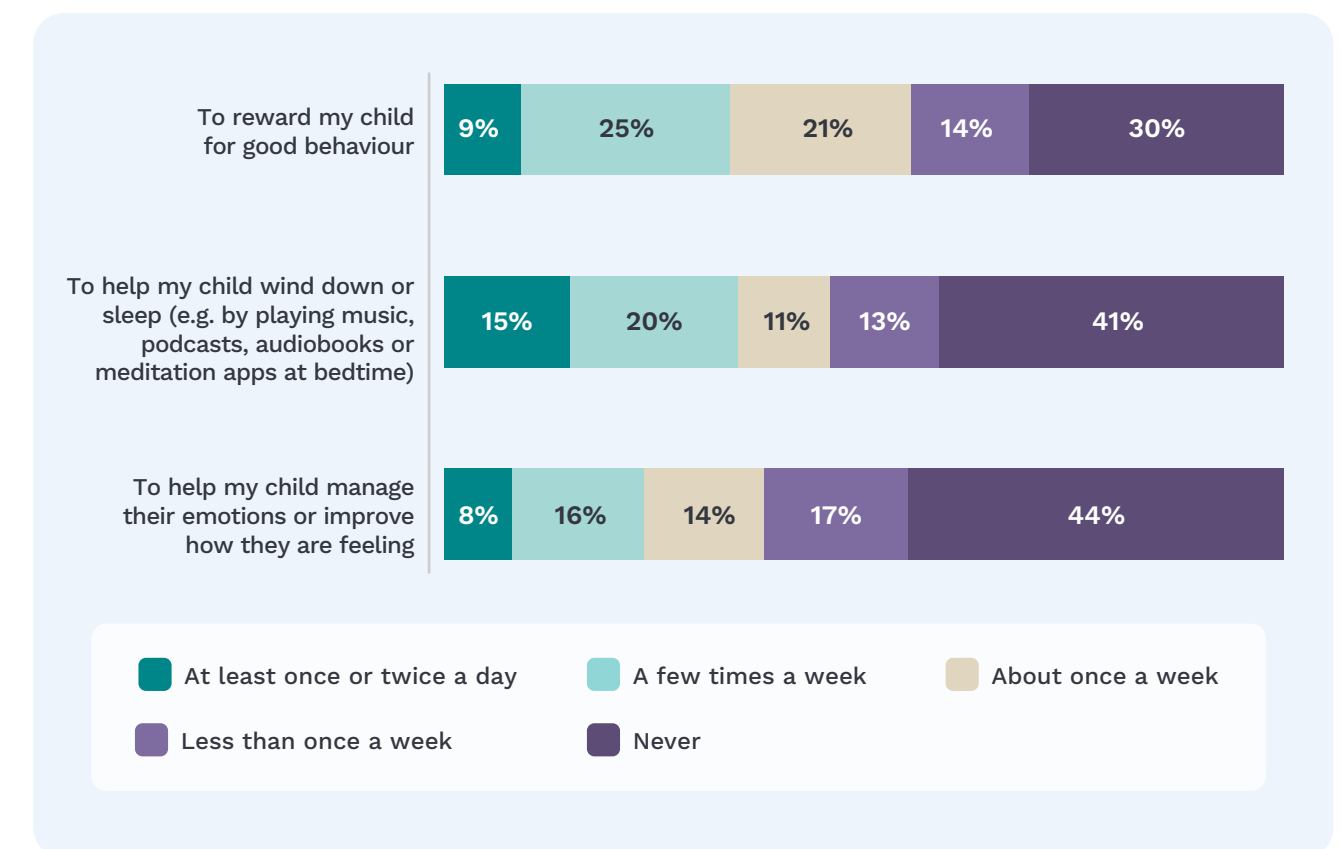
Base: Parents of children aged 3 to 10 ($n = 2,008$).

Parents often use the internet to help manage their child's behaviour and routines

In addition to using the internet to help juggle the demands of modern parenting, many parents also reported using it to help manage their child's behaviour and daily routines.

For example, over half of parents (55%) reported they use the internet weekly or more often to reward their child for good behaviour. As shown in Figure 3, a significant minority of parents also used the internet weekly or more often to help their child:

- wind down or sleep – for example, by playing music, podcasts, audiobooks or meditation apps at bedtime (46%)
- manage their emotions or improve how they are feeling (38%).

Figure 3: Parents' use of the internet to manage their young child's behaviour and routines

Q: In the past 4 weeks, how often, if at all, have you used the internet (including gaming, YouTube, searching online, etc.) to support your family's parenting or household needs, such as ...

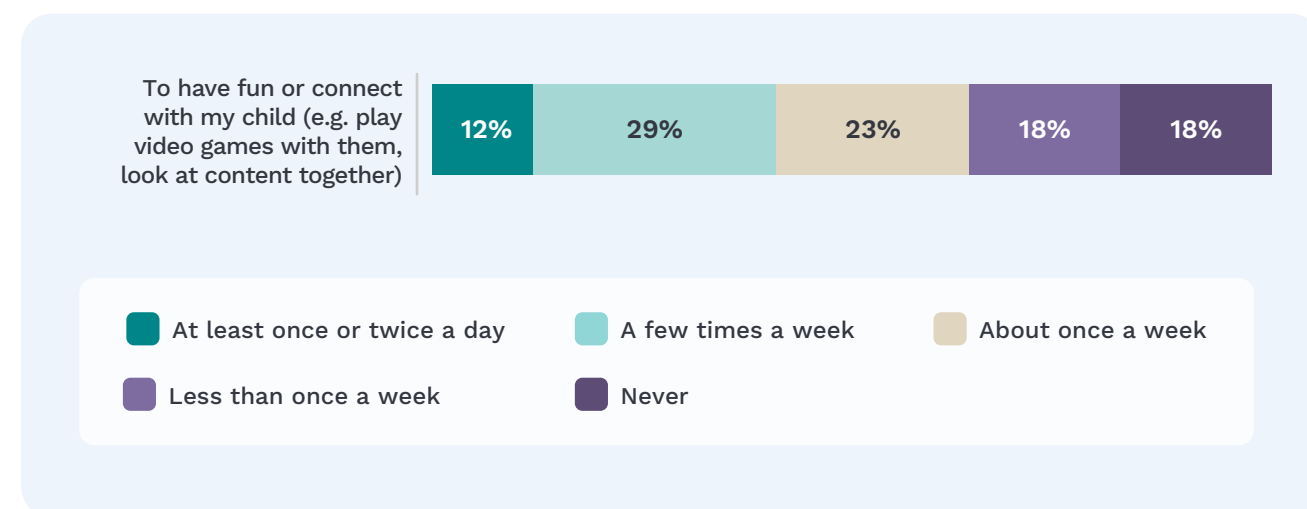
Base: Parents of children aged 3 to 10 ($n = 2,008$).

Almost 2 in 3 parents use the internet weekly or more often to have fun or connect with their child

Beyond supporting routines and behaviour management, most parents reported that the internet is a source of fun and connection between them and their child. This finding is consistent with previous research showing that co-engagement is a common strategy used by parents of young children (Luo et al., 2025).

As shown in Figure 4, almost 2 in 3 parents (64%) reported using the internet weekly or more often to have fun or connect with their child, such as by playing video games or looking at content together.

Figure 4: Parents' use of the internet to have fun or connect with their young child



Q: In the past 4 weeks, how often, if at all, have you used the internet (including gaming, YouTube, searching online, etc.) to support your family's parenting or household needs, such as...

Base: Parents of children aged 3 to 10 ($n = 2,008$).

Parents of children of varying ages use the internet for similar purposes in their family lives

Parents generally reported using the internet for broadly similar purposes to support their parenting and household needs, regardless of their child's age. One notable exception was that parents of children aged 3 to 4 who had ever been online were less likely to have used the internet to have fun or connect with their child – 77% of these parents had done so in the past 4 weeks, compared with 87% of parents of children aged 5 to 10 (see Table A7 in the Appendix).

Discussion

Most parents in our study reported using the internet in recent weeks to support their parenting or household needs. Uses ranged from helping to occupy young children while parents worked, completed chores or took short breaks, through to supporting routines such as bedtime or helping children to manage their emotions. Parents also commonly reported using the internet as a source of fun and connection with their young children, highlighting its role not only as a practical support tool but also as part of family bonding and shared activities. Together, these findings underscore the internet's integral role in supporting family life and daily routines for parents of children across a range of ages.

These findings align with national and international research that has found parents commonly use the internet to entertain children in certain situations, to foster bonding or connection, or to reward good behaviour (Langton et al., 2025; Mallawaarachchi et al., 2022; Mann et al., 2025). Previous research has also shown that some families use digital devices to help their children manage their emotions; for example, almost 1 in 5 parents of children aged 0 to 8 in the United States reported that their child sometimes or often used a mobile device to help regulate negative emotions, such as when they felt angry, sad or upset (Mann et al., 2025).

Despite the widespread reliance on digital tools to manage the demands of modern parenting, many parents report feeling judged for how they manage their child's screen time (Hendry et al., 2025; Mallawaarachchi et al., 2022; Pew Research Center, 2025). Rather than judgement, families need and want supportive, empowering and flexible guidance that considers the challenges and competing priorities parents face today, the differing needs and lived experiences of parents and their young children, and the diversity of family contexts in which young children are going online (Hendry et al., 2025).



Parents' feelings about their young children being online

This section of the report explores how parents reported feeling about their child going online, including the perceived benefits, challenges and difficulties.

Concerns dominate parents' feelings about their young child going online

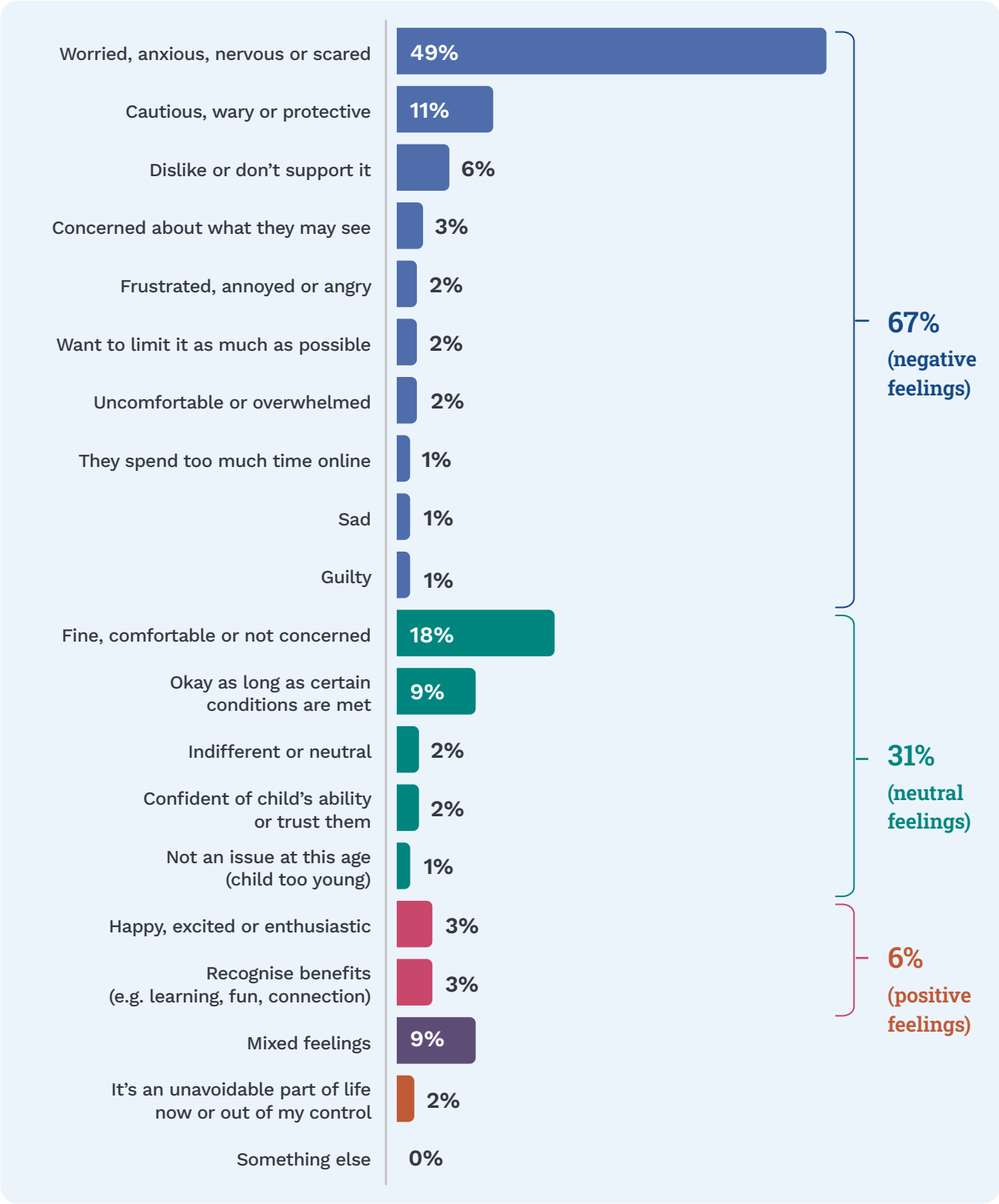
We asked parents of young children who had ever been online to describe, in their own words, how they felt about their child going online. Two thirds of these parents (67%) reported negative feelings, with almost half describing feeling worried, anxious, nervous or scared (49%), while others reported being cautious, wary or protective (11%).

Three in 10 parents (31%) reported having neutral feelings, including being unconcerned about their child going online or being comfortable in certain circumstances, such as when the child was supervised by a parent.

As shown in Figure 5, a small proportion of parents reported having mixed feelings (9%), while others reported experiencing positive feelings, including enthusiasm for or recognition of the benefits for their young child of being online (6%).



Figure 5: Parent-reported feelings about their young child being online



Q: How do you feel about your child going online? Why?

Base: Parents of children aged 3 to 10 who had ever used a device to go online (n = 966).

Note: To minimise participant burden, a split-sample approach was used for the two free text questions included in the survey: 50% of participants whose child had ever been online 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 there was one thing you could change about the internet for your child, what would it be and why?').

Parents described a range of concerns driving their feelings about young children being online

Some were worried that their child would be exposed to harmful or inappropriate content, while others feared online predators or cyberbullying or had more general concerns about the dangers of being online.

- Apprehensive and worried. Because I know that there are predators able to disguise who they are and speak to my child. I also worry about what they are watching on YouTube and if it is age-appropriate. Sometimes they view videos that make him scared later in the night/day.**
(Parent of a boy aged 9)
- Worried. There are many dangers online.**
(Parent of a girl aged 6)

Parents also raised concerns about excessive or problematic use, the internet’s potential mental health, developmental or behavioural impacts, and screen time displacing other activities.

- Annoyed and concerned. Because he gets lost and never wants to get off. Like it’s the priority, nothing else is important.**
(Parent of a boy aged 10)
- I am always a little anxious about it and tend to be very strict about access and length of time. Because I want them to be safe and not spend too much of their time and energy there. I really notice their behaviour changes after any sort of screen time. They can get very dysregulated and agitated.**
(Parent of a non-binary child aged 4)

Some parents described having strategies in place to help keep their young child safe online, including setting rules and monitoring use, teaching their child about online safety, encouraging open communication, or trusting their child to behave responsibly online. For some, these strategies helped to mitigate their concerns.

Cautious, comfortable, proud. We spend time teaching her online safety in addition to her school teaching the same. I'm still cautious as there is always going to be danger, but I'm proud she is open with speaking to us if she comes across things she doesn't understand or like.
(Parent of a girl aged 7)

Fine. It's only occasional and always supervised.
(Parent of a boy aged 3)

Reasonably ok and comfortable. I trust that he's doing the right thing. We have taught him what's safe and what's not.
(Parent of a boy aged 8)

Other parents reported they had difficulty controlling or monitoring all of their child's online activities, with some feeling their child wasn't equipped to be safe online or that they themselves didn't know enough to manage their child's online safety.

Uneasy. I can't monitor what they're doing online every minute, so it worries me that they're being exposed to content that is unsafe or engaging with people that are harmful to her mental health. She's just too young to be exposed to danger and won't be able to recognise it.
(Parent of a girl aged 8)

Nervous, anxious, weary. Devices have gotten so complex it's difficult to know what's safe and what isn't.
(Parent of a girl aged 10)

Some parents referenced the inevitability of children accessing the internet, with some being accepting of this while others were more resigned. Other parents acknowledged the need for their children to learn about technology so as not to be left behind.

Resistant, hesitant, cautious, protective. The internet is an incredibly dangerous, unpredictable and often unsafe environment for a child to navigate. However, I have resigned myself to the fact that it will play a huge part in their life growing up, so we must guide them through the experience.
(Parent of a boy aged 4)

It is the era we live in, so I don't mind. I don't want her to be left behind.
(Parent of a girl aged 9)

While concerns were the dominant driver of parents' feelings about their children going online, some parents recognised the benefits for their young children, typically in relation to learning and creativity, entertainment and connection.

Happy. She watches lots of educational shows.
(Parent of a girl aged 3)

Alright. Because he's not a super social kid, so he's usually on games to keep him happy.
(Parent of a boy aged 6)

However, recognition of the benefits for young children of being online was often in the context of also recognising its challenges.

Generally positive. It's engaging and entertaining, can be educational such as assistance learning to draw, can make them anxious at times, I feel.
(Parent of a boy aged 6)

In the previous section, we discussed the role of the internet in family life, with some parents at times relying on the internet to support the demands of modern parenting. This challenge was reflected in the responses of a small number of parents when describing how they feel about their children going online.

Mixed feelings. Sometimes it's a good distraction if I'm doing housework and need her to chill for a minute. However, if she accesses YouTube she has nasty tantrums and I regret giving it to her.
(Parent of a girl aged 5)

Frustrated annoyed complacent acceptance. It's a massive combination of feelings and factors because I'm doing this on my own and he often has to come to work with me. When he is at work with me there's nothing else to do but use the devices.
(Parent of a boy aged 8)

Many parents believe that being online has caused difficulties for their young child

When prompted with a list of ways that being online might have caused difficulties or challenges for their young children, most parents of a child who had ever been online (65%) said the child had been impacted in one or more of these ways.

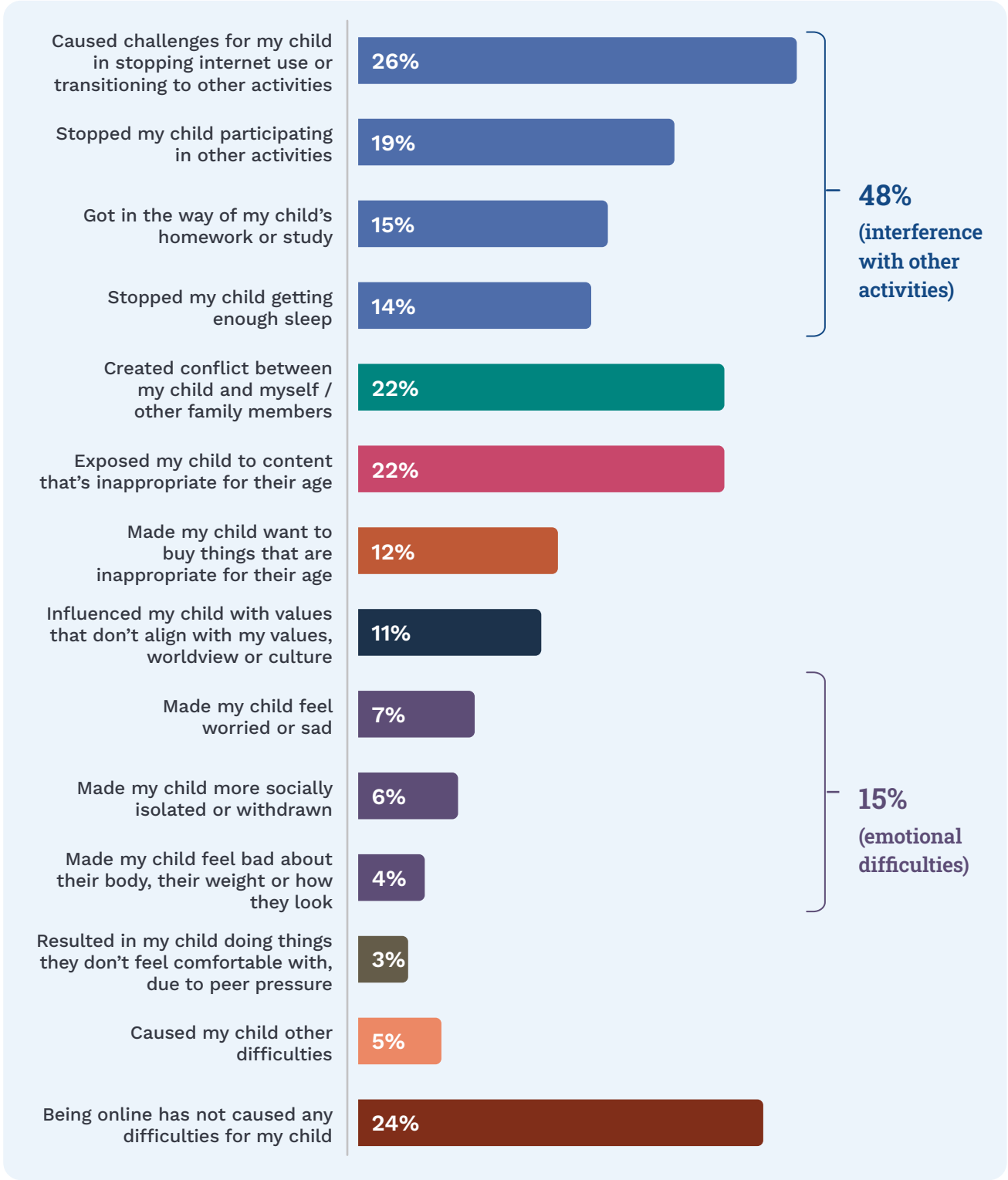
The most common concern related to time spent online interfering with other activities (48%), including causing challenges for their child stopping internet use or transitioning to other activities (26%), including causing challenges for their child stopping internet use or transitioning to other activities (26%).

As shown in Figure 6, a significant minority of parents also reported that being online has:

- created conflict between their child and themselves or other family members (22%)
- exposed their child to content that is inappropriate for their age (22%)
- caused emotional difficulties for their child, such as making them feel worried or sad, socially isolated or withdrawn, or bad about their body or appearance (15%)
- made their child want to buy things that are inappropriate for their age (12%)
- influenced their child with values that don't align with their own values, worldview or culture (11%).



Figure 6: Parent-reported challenges for their young child of being online



Q: How, if at all, has being online caused difficulties or challenges for your child? Please select all that apply. Being online has ...

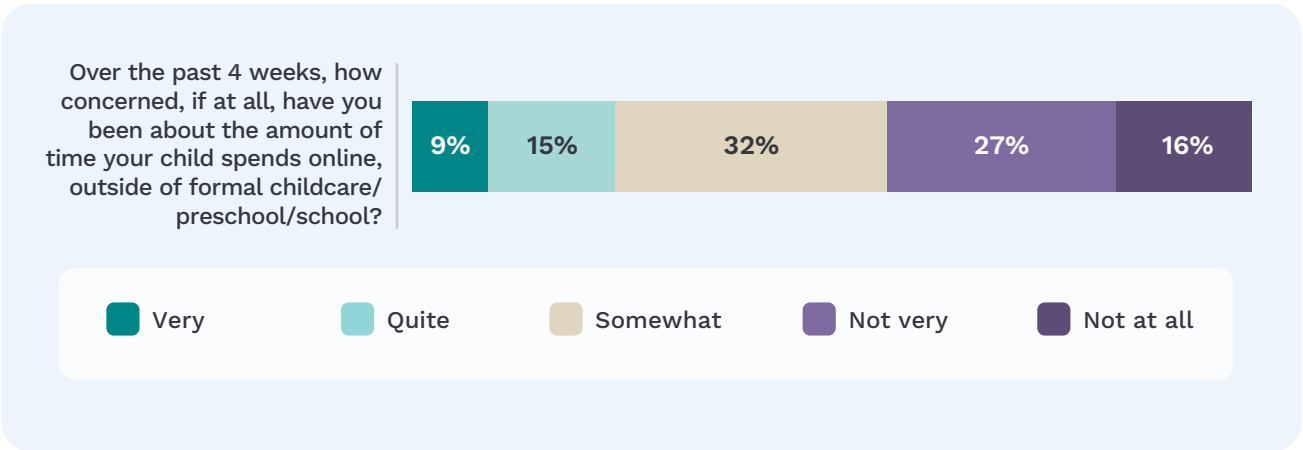
Base: Parents of children aged 3 to 10 who had ever used a device to go online (n = 1,939).

More than half of parents are concerned about the amount of time their young child spends online

Consistent with our finding that a key concern for parents is time spent online interfering with their child’s other activities, over half of parents whose child had ever used a device to go online (56%) reported that, in the past 4 weeks, they were at least somewhat concerned about the amount of time their child spent online. As shown in Figure 7, almost 1 in 10 parents (9%) were very concerned about this.

On the other hand, around 2 in 5 parents (43%) weren’t very concerned about this.

Figure 7: Parent-reported level of concern about the amount of time their young child spends online (%)



Base: Parents of children aged 3 to 10 who had ever used a device to go online (n = 1,939).

Most parents also acknowledge that being online has helped their child in some way

We found that most parents also recognised benefits in their young child being online. When prompted with a list of possible benefits, almost all parents who reported that their child had ever been online (96%) acknowledged at least one way that being online had helped their child.

Most parents (74%) reported that the internet had helped their child to learn foundational skills, such as how to read, or to learn about the world, such as about science or nature. An equivalent proportion (74%) reported that the internet was a helpful tool for their child to pursue their interests or hobbies or to explore their creativity.

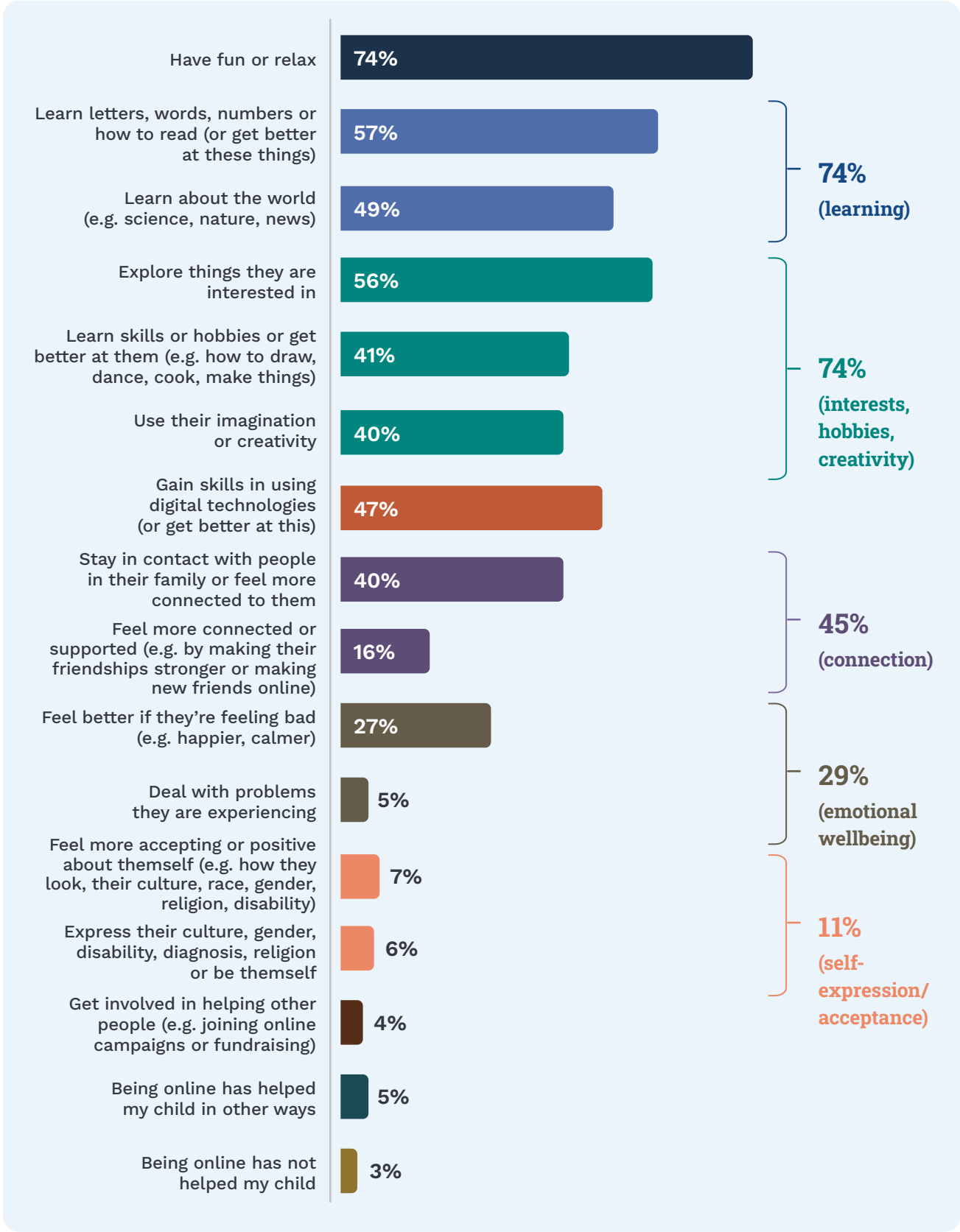
As shown in Figure 8, many parents also reported that being online helped their child to:

- have fun or relax (74%)
- gain skills in using digital technologies (47%)
- connect with others (45%).

Reflecting our finding that a significant minority of parents often used the internet to help their child manage their emotions, almost 3 in 10 parents (29%) reported that being online had helped their child to feel better when they felt bad or to deal with problems they were experiencing.



Figure 8: Parent-reported benefits for their young child of being online



Q: Overall, how, if at all, has being online helped your child? Please select all that apply. Being online has helped my child to ...

Base: Parents of children aged 3 to 10 who had ever used a device to go online (n = 1,939).

Parents of older children report more diverse benefits, but also more challenges associated with their young child being online

Our findings suggest that, as children age, parents are more likely to perceive that being online has helped their child in diverse ways. For example, parents of children aged 9 to 10 who had ever been online were especially likely to report that being online had helped their child feel more connected or supported or to stay in touch with their family (see Table A8 in the Appendix).

On the other hand, parents of younger children were more likely to report that being online had helped their child with foundational skills, such as literacy and numeracy. For example, 61% of parents of children aged 3 to 8 who had ever been online reported that being online had helped their child learn letters, words, numbers or how to read, compared with 47% of parents of children aged 9 to 10.

Parental perceptions of the challenges associated with children being online also increased with child age. Almost 3 in 4 parents of children aged 9 to 10 who had ever been online (73%) reported that being online had caused at least one difficulty for their child (versus 66% of parents of children aged 5 to 8 and 55% of parents of children aged 3 to 4). Parents of older children in our survey (aged 7 to 10) were especially likely to report that being online interfered with other important activities, like homework and sleep (see Table A9 in the Appendix).

Consistent with this finding, parents of children aged 7 to 10 who had ever been online (63%) were more likely to report that, in the past 4 weeks, they were at least somewhat concerned about the amount of time their child spends online (versus 49% of parents of children aged 3 to 6) (see Table A10 in the Appendix).

Discussion

Our findings suggest that, although parents are aware of both the benefits and challenges of being online for their young children, negative feelings and concerns are top of mind. When asked to describe how they felt about their child going online, parents expressed a range of concerns, from exposure to inappropriate content and online predators, to the behavioural and emotional impacts of too much time spent online. When prompted with a list, most parents also indicated that being online had caused difficulties for their child, most commonly that being online had interfered with or caused challenges in transitioning to other activities. A significant minority of parents reported that being online had caused emotional difficulties for their child, such as making them feel more worried, sad, socially isolated or withdrawn.

However, when prompted with a list of potential benefits, almost all parents reported at least one benefit for their child. Most parents identified benefits related to fun and relaxation, learning, or exploration of interests, hobbies and creativity. Smaller, though still significant, proportions of parents reported benefits related to connection, emotional wellbeing or self-expression. These social and emotional benefits became more apparent to parents as their children aged.

With many parents expressing concern about the amount of time their children spend online, our findings highlight the importance of equipping parents with the skills and confidence needed to set age and developmentally appropriate boundaries around online use – boundaries that work for their family and take into consideration both the challenges and benefits of being online for young children. Families should also keep in mind that what children are doing online is more important than the amount of time they spend online. Quality time spent together online, alongside a healthy balance between offline and online activities, should be prioritised. Parents also play a critical role in shaping healthy digital habits through role modelling positive online use, having proactive conversations about online safety, and providing responsive support when challenges arise (American Psychological Association, 2023).

Steps parents take to help keep their young children safe online

As children’s online engagement and experiences evolve, parents play a vital role in helping them learn to navigate and explore online spaces safely. This section of the report explores the strategies parents use to support their young children’s online safety, including parental controls, rules, monitoring practices and open communication. It highlights that, while many parents report finding it challenging to help their child stay safe online, most nevertheless engage in a range of mediation strategies to guide their child’s online experiences and support their online safety.

Parents want safer online environments and greater control over what their young children are exposed to online

We asked parents if there was one thing they could change about the internet for their child, what would it be and why.⁶

Some parents described increasing control over young children’s online participation, whether by improving parental controls, by making it easier for parents to monitor what their children are doing online, or by implementing age assurance to prevent access to certain sites or content.

Make it easier to restrict access to certain programs. We do it using Apple parental control, but it’s a long and laborious process.
(Parent of a girl aged 9)

I would like there to be age restrictions and time restrictions, so I would feel he is safer accessing the internet without my supervision.
(Parent of a boy aged 6)

Better technologies for me to monitor what she accesses online off any of the devices.
(Parent of a girl aged 9)

⁶ To minimise participant burden, a split-sample approach was used for the two free text questions included in the survey: 50% of participants whose children had ever been online 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 there was one thing you could change about the internet for your child, what would it be and why?'; *n* = 973).

Consistent with parents' concerns raised earlier in the report about their young children being exposed to inappropriate content online, some parents described preventing exposure to such content, including sexually explicit material, misinformation, and violent or distressing content.

I'd want algorithms to prioritise healthy, balanced, and age-appropriate content because children are still developing emotionally and cognitively. What they see online shapes how they view themselves, others, and the world. A healthier internet would help them grow with more confidence, empathy, and resilience.
(Parent of a girl aged 4)

Keeping my child away from inappropriate videos on YouTube – especially when there are violent videos that use kids' characters such as Peppa or Paw Patrol.
(Parent of a boy aged 4)

Sexual content that is meant to be funny but not appropriate for a 7-year-old.
(Parent of a boy aged 7)

Some parents mentioned increasing safety from predators online, while others referenced preventing cyberbullying.

I would ensure that people couldn't create different personas online. It terrifies me how accessible children are to predators online.
(Parent of a girl aged 7)

To have less safety risks. Kids should be able to play games and watch videos without the risk of being bullied or groomed.
(Parent of a boy aged 7)

Other parents indicated they would focus on making online experiences safer overall for their child. This included a desire for safe, trustworthy and child-friendly online spaces, with some parents indicating they would limit chat or communication functions.

More options to have a kids' set-up when opening an internet browser for kid-friendly/safe search options, including games.
(Parent of a boy aged 5)

Chat features within games such as Roblox. Making sure it is turned off so my child cannot talk to strangers. But then she can't talk to her friends.
(Parent of a girl aged 10)

I wish the internet was safer for little kids. It would be great if my child could only see videos, games, and apps that are age-appropriate. That way, I'd feel better knowing she can explore and learn online without running into anything harmful.
(Parent of a girl aged 4)

Reflecting parents' concerns highlighted earlier in the report about their child spending too much time online, some parents suggested they would reduce their child's access to the internet or limit the amount of time they spent online, particularly where use was seen as problematic or excessive. Some parents mentioned restricting access to specific platforms, such as social media,⁷ and a few also referenced concerns about AI platforms and AI-generated content.

I would like my daughter to use less of her iPad and use books more instead.
(Parent of a girl aged 8)

Somehow make it less addictive.
(Parent of a boy aged 3)

The growing use of AI-generated video to make mind-numbing attention-grabbing videos aimed at children for retention.
(Parent of a girl aged 4)

Access to social media. It puts them at risk of online bullying, predators and being exposed to graphic material. Peer pressure at school is difficult for children that don't have what other kids have.
(Parent of a girl aged 10)

A number of parents described reducing their young child's exposure to ads online, including those that contain inappropriate content.

I wish it was better regulated in regards to the ads presented on websites and YouTube videos.
(Parent of a girl aged 3)

Not have external advertising on kids' platforms where you cannot control what they see. So many not appropriate ads or videos come up when watching YouTube.
(Parent of a boy aged 6)

⁷ This research was conducted before the Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Act 2024, which prevents children under 16 from creating or holding accounts on age-restricted social media platforms, took effect on 10 December 2025.

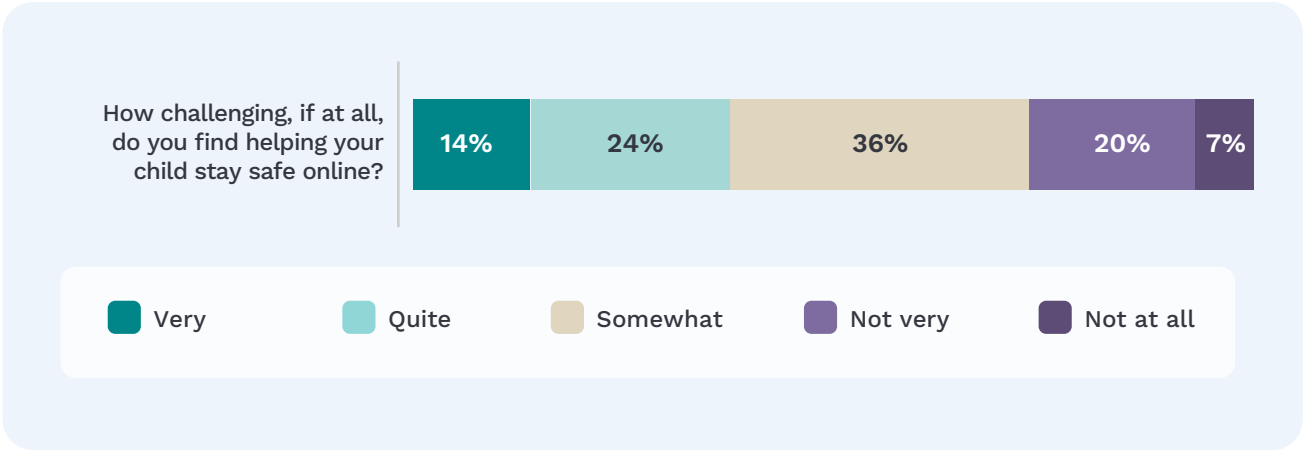
Finally, some parents suggested they would improve the educational content available online or limit their child’s use to primarily educational purposes.

I would like for learning and educational videos to be the main things that show up in their feeds.
(Parent of a girl aged 5)

Many parents find it challenging to help their young child stay safe online

Almost 3 in 4 parents of children who had ever used a device to go online (73%) reported that they find it at least **somewhat challenging** to help their child stay safe online. As shown in Figure 9, 1 in 7 (14%) reported finding this **very challenging**.

Figure 9: Parent-reported level of challenge in supporting their young child’s online safety (%)



Base: Parents of children aged 3 to 10 who had ever used a device to go online (*n* = 1,939).

Most parents use parental controls on the devices their children have access to at home

Despite most parents reporting that they find it a challenge to help their young child stay safe online, most are actively engaged in supporting their child’s online safety. Among parents of children who had access to an internet-connected device at home, over 3 in 4 (77%) indicated that they used **technical mediation** to support their child’s online safety, having at least one parental control on the devices their child has access to at home.

As shown in Table 7:

- 50% used controls so that they had to approve any in-app or in-game purchases
- 48% used controls so that they had to approve any app downloads
- 42% used controls to stop their child seeing or using certain websites, apps or content
- 42% used controls to prevent their child from accessing devices without their permission
- 35% used controls to restrict who their child can talk to or message online
- 34% used controls to limit the amount of time their child spends online.

Table 7: Use of parental controls on devices young children have access to at home

	Total
Any parental control	77
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)	50
Controls so that any apps they download must be approved by me (e.g. via password protection on the App or Google Play store)	48
Controls to stop my child seeing or using some websites, apps or content	42
Controls to prevent my child from accessing device(s) without my permission (e.g. devices are protected with passwords/passcodes)	42
Controls to restrict who my child can talk to or message online	35
Controls to limit the time my child spends on certain websites, apps or games (e.g. Screen Time on iPhone)	34
Another type of online parental control	1
None – there are no parental controls on any device(s), apps or games my child has access to at home	20
Base: Parents of children aged 3–10 who owned, shared or had access to a family member’s internet-connected device	1,935

Q: Which, if any, of these parental controls do you (or another parent or caregiver) have on the device(s), apps or games your child has access to at your 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+. Please select all that apply.

Almost all parents have rules in place to guide their children's online activities

We found that almost all parents of children who owned, shared or had access to a family member's internet-connected device (95%) also used **restrictive mediation**, having at least one rule in place to guide their child's use of internet-connected devices.

Most parents (85%) had set rules about **when, where** or for **how long** their child can go online. For example:

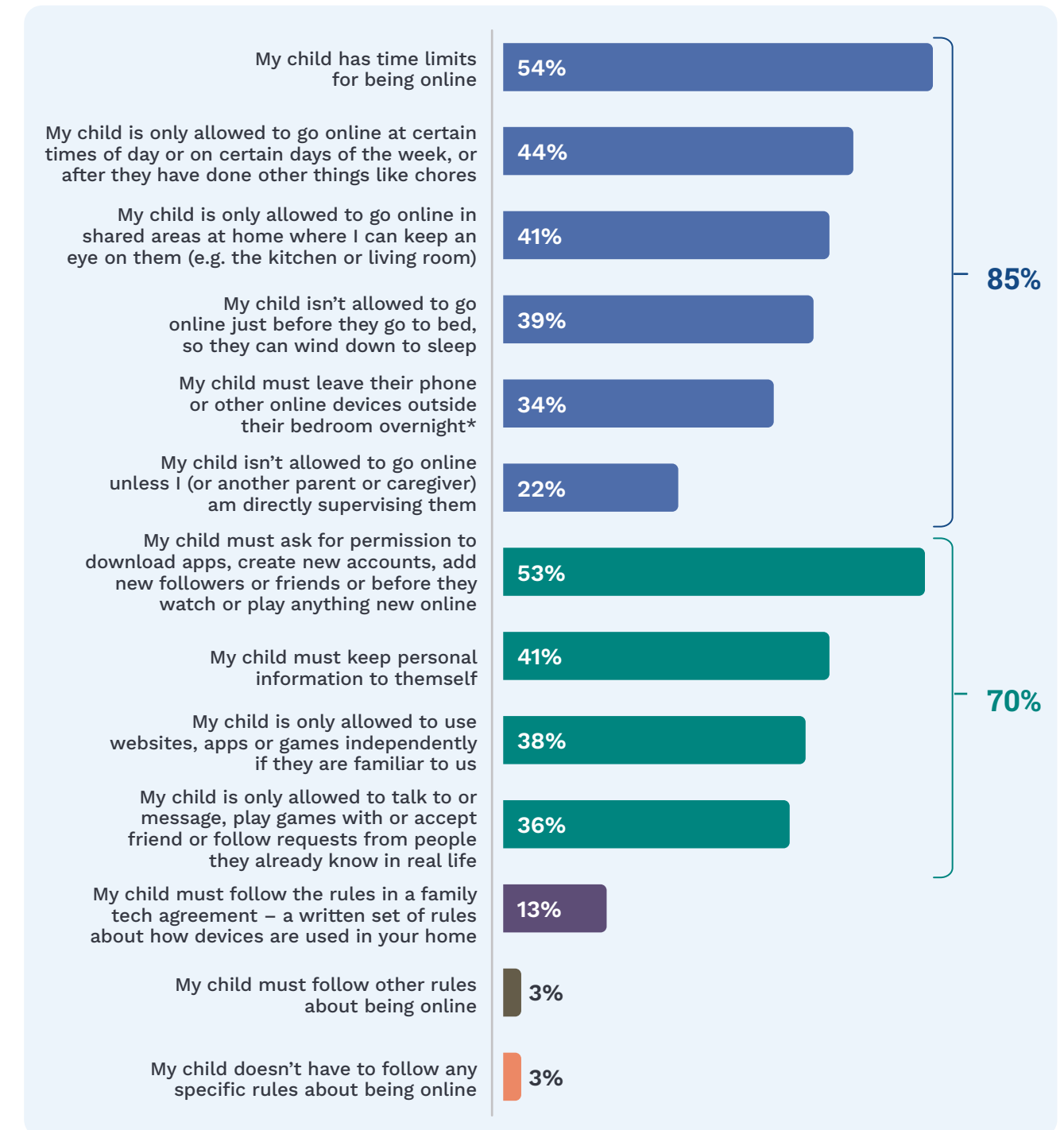
- 54% said their child had time limits for being online
- 44% said their child is only allowed to go online at certain times of day or on certain days of the week or after they have done other things such as chores
- 41% said their child is only allowed to go online in shared areas at home, where they can keep an eye on them
- 39% said their child isn't allowed to go online just before they go to bed
- 34% said their child must leave their phone or other online device outside their bedroom overnight
- 22% said their child isn't allowed to go online unless they are directly supervised by a parent.

As shown in Figure 10, many parents (70%) also had rules about **what** their child was allowed to do online. For example:

- 53% said their child has to ask permission to download apps, create new accounts, add new friends or followers, or before they watch or play anything new online
- 41% said their child must keep their personal information to themselves
- 38% said their child is only allowed to use websites, apps or games independently if they are familiar with them
- 36% said their child is only allowed to interact with people online if they already know them in real life.

In addition, 13% of parents said they had a family tech agreement in place, which their child was required to follow.

Figure 10: Parental rules on devices young children have access to at home



Q: Think about all the online devices your child has access to at your home, which of the following rules, if any, do you have for your child? Remember, being online includes playing video games, using social media, and anything else your child does online. If your child is not the right age for any of these rules, that's ok, just choose any that do apply to your child. IMPORTANT: we are not asking if any of these rules apply to your child's use of TV or movie streaming services like Netflix or Disney+. Please select all that apply.

Base: Parents of children aged 3 to 10 who owned, shared or had access to a family member's internet-connected device ($n = 1,935$).

Note: * Only shown to parents who reported that their child had their own device or shared a device with a sibling or another child in the family (base: $n = 1,395$).

Many parents monitor their children’s online activities to support their online safety

In addition to having parental controls and rules in place, many parents of children who owned, shared or had access to a family member’s internet-connected device (74%) also used **passive mediation**, by monitoring their child’s online activities.

Parents commonly did this by:

- checking which apps their child had downloaded (59%)
- checking their child’s online search or viewing history (53%)
- checking which in-app or in-game purchases their child had made (46%).

In addition, most parents of children who owned or shared a device with camera functionality (73%) said they had looked at photos their child had taken on their phone or other device. A similar proportion of parents of children with social media accounts (72%) said they had checked or looked at their child’s social media profile. Likewise, most parents of children who had ever used a messaging platform or app (58%) said they had checked messages in their child’s messaging apps.

As shown in Table 8, many parents had engaged in these passive mediation strategies recently.

Table 8: Passive mediation strategies used by parents (%)

	Ever	Past 4 weeks
Any passive mediation strategy	74	64
Checked your child’s online search history (e.g. on Google) or viewing history (e.g. on YouTube)	53	39
Checked which apps your child has downloaded	59	46
Checked which in-app or in-game purchases (e.g. paying to unlock extra levels) your child has made	46	36
Looked at photos your child has taken on their phone or other device ¹	73	56
Checked or looked at your child’s social media profile (e.g. looked at friends they have added or followed or what they have posted) ²	72	54
Checked messages in your child’s email or other apps they use for communicating with others online ³	58	44
Base: Parents of children aged 3–10 who owned, shared or had access to a family member’s internet-connected device		1,935

Q: Some parents or caregivers closely monitor their child online; other families are more relaxed. Have you (or another parent or caregiver) ever done any of the following? If yes, was this in the past 4 weeks, more than 4 weeks ago, or both?

Notes: ¹ This item was only shown to parents who indicated their child owned, or shared with another child in the family, a device with camera functionality (that is, phone, tablet, games console, laptop or desktop computer) (base: *n* = 1,320). ² This item was only shown to parents who reported that their child had their own social media profile or account (base: *n* = 113). ³ This item was only shown to parents who reported that their child had ever used a messaging platform or app to message, email, call or video call someone (base: *n* = 747).

Most parents talk with their children about online safety and risks

We found that **active mediation** was also a common strategy used by parents whose children had ever used a device to go online. Nearly 9 in 10 of these parents (87%) indicated that they, or another parent, had ever talked to their child about an online safety topic or what to do if things go wrong online.

Most parents (69%) had ever encouraged their child to talk to them if anything were to happen online that made them feel uncomfortable or unsafe. A similar proportion of parents (70%) had ever talked to their child about what they have been doing online.

As shown in Table 9, parents reported having discussed a range of online safety topics with their child, including:

- that what they see on social media isn’t always realistic or true (77%)
- who is safe to talk to online (63%)
- what to do if they see or experience things online that they are unsure about or that make them feel uncomfortable, scared or upset (62%)
- how they can be safer online (57%)
- which information is personal (for example, age and address) and what personal information should be shared or kept private online (57%).

In addition, over half of parents had discussed with their child:

- how to interact safely with people online who they don’t know in real life (53%)
- the risks of unsafe people or situations online (or of online ‘grooming’) (53%)
- what ‘being online’ means or what ‘the internet’ is (51%)
- what online bullying, or ‘cyberbullying’, is or how to deal with it (46%).

More sensitive or emerging topics were less likely to be discussed, including:

- what to do if they see sexual images or sexual videos online (for example, pornography) (33%)
- how what they see online is affected by algorithms (31%).

Our findings also suggest that some parents may see these conversations as occasional or one-off. As shown in Table 9, only some parents had discussed these topics with their child in the past 4 weeks.

Table 9: Active mediation strategies used by parents (%)

	Ever	Past 4 weeks
Any active mediation strategy	87	73
Encouraged your child to talk to you if anything were to happen online that made them feel uncomfortable or unsafe	69	44
Talked to your child about what they have been doing online	70	51
Talked to your child about who is safe to talk to online, like family and friends	63	36
Talked to your child about what to do if they see or experience things online that they are unsure about or that make them feel uncomfortable, scared or upset	62	33
Talked to your child about how they can be safer online	57	31
Talked to your child about what ‘personal information’ (e.g. age and address) is and what personal information should be shared or kept private online	57	30
Talked to your child about how to interact safely with people online who they don’t know in real life	53	28
Talked to your child about the risks of unsafe people or situations online (or of online ‘grooming’)	53	27
Talked to your child about what ‘being online’ means or what ‘the internet’ is	51	24
Talked to your child about what online bullying, or ‘cyberbullying’, is or how to deal with it	46	22
Talked to your child about what to do if they see sexual images or sexual videos online (e.g. pornography)	33	16
Talked to your child about how what they see online is affected by algorithms	31	17
Talked to your child about how what they see on social media isn’t always realistic or true*	77	49
Base: Parents of children aged 3–10 who had ever used a device to go online	1,939	

Q: Have you (or another parent or caregiver) ever done any of the following? If yes, was this in the past 4 weeks, more than 4 weeks ago, or both?

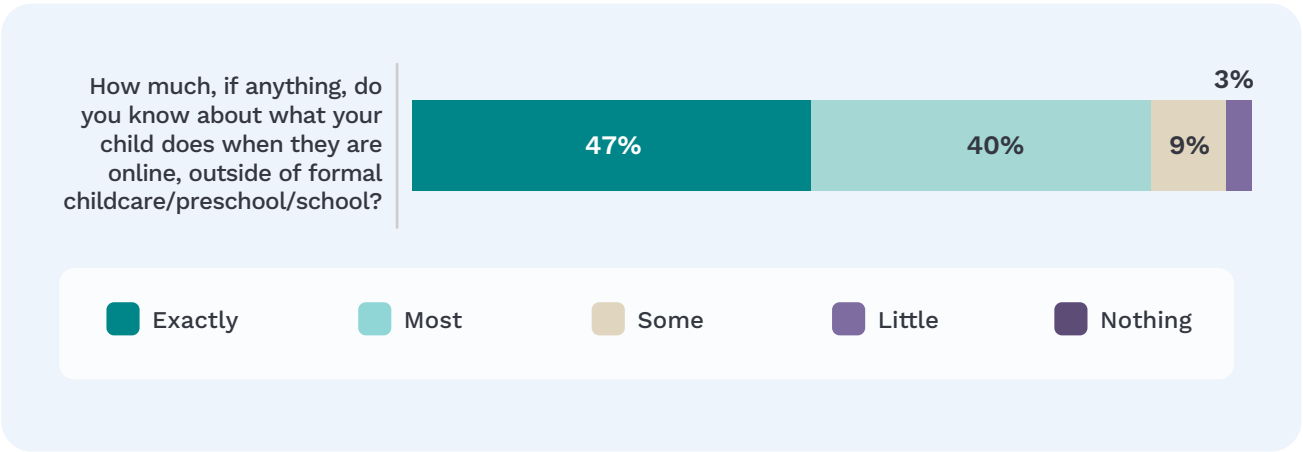
Note: *This item was only shown to parents who indicated their child had used social media (base: *n* = 622).

Parents believe they have high levels of knowledge about their children’s online activities

Our findings suggest that the mediation strategies parents engage in, including monitoring their children’s online activities and talking with them about what they have been doing online, instil in parents a high degree of confidence regarding their awareness of their children’s online activities.

As shown in Figure 11, among parents of children who had ever been online, 87% stated that they know exactly or most of what their child does online. Around 1 in 10 (9%) felt they knew some of what their child does when online, while a minority (3%) thought they knew little of their child’s online activities.

Figure 11: Parents’ perceived awareness of their young child’s online activities (%)



Base: Parents of children aged 3 to 10 who had ever used a device to go online (*n* = 1,939).

Parents of older children use more mediation strategies, despite finding it more challenging to keep their child safe online

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the increased duration and diversity of online engagement as children age, our findings suggest that both the extent to which parents struggle to keep their children safe online and the strategies they use to do so increase as the child gets older.

Parents of children aged 7 to 10 in our survey who had ever been online (79%) were more likely to report that they found it at least somewhat challenging to help their child stay safe online, compared with parents of younger children (71% of parents of children aged 5 to 6, and 62% of parents of children aged 3 to 4) (see Table A11 in the Appendix).

The range of mediation strategies parents used to support their children’s online safety also increased with child age. For example, parents of children aged 5 to 10 who had access to an internet-connected device at home were more likely to report using parental controls, compared with parents of children aged 3 to 4 (82% versus 62%). This trend was consistent across various parental controls examined in the survey (see Table A12 in the Appendix).

Likewise, parents of children aged 5 to 10 who had access to an internet-connected device at home were more likely to report having at least one rule in place for their child’s online activities (97%), although most parents of children aged 3 to 4 (89%) also had at least one rule in place (see Table A13 in the Appendix). Parents of children aged 9 to 10 were especially likely to have rules around what their child was allowed to do online, such as requiring their child to ask their permission in certain circumstances (for example, when downloading apps or creating new accounts), or only allowing their child to interact with people they know in real life. Rules regarding when, where or for how long children can go online were broadly consistent among parents of children of all ages, although they were more common among parents of children aged 5 to 10.

Use of passive and active mediation strategies also increased with child age. For example:

- **Nine in 10 parents of children aged 9 to 10 who had access to an internet-connected device at home (91%) reported having used passive mediation strategies at some point, such as checking their child’s messages or online search history (versus 83% of parents of children aged 7 to 8, 70% of parents of children aged 5 to 6, and 48% of parents of children aged 3 to 4) (see Table A14 in the Appendix).**
- **Almost all parents of children aged 7 to 10 who had ever been online (98%) reported having used active mediation strategies at some point, such as encouraging their child to talk to them whenever things go wrong online or discussing various online safety topics with them (versus 87% of parents of children aged 5 to 6, and 60% of parents of children aged 3 to 4) (see Table A15 in the Appendix).**

On the other hand, parents of children aged 3 to 4 tended to rely more on direct supervision to support their child’s online safety – for example, 37% said their child wasn’t allowed to go online unless a parent was directly supervising them (see Table A13 in the Appendix).

This active oversight appears to have provided parents of younger children a higher degree of confidence in their awareness of their children’s online activities. Nearly three quarters of parents of children aged 3 to 4 who had ever been online (73%) said they knew exactly what their child does online (versus 55% of parents of children aged 5 to 6, 36% of parents of children aged 7 to 8, and 29% of parents of children aged 9 to 10) (see Table A16 in the Appendix).

In summary, our findings suggest that as young children grow older, spend more time online, engage in a greater variety of activities, and gain greater independence and autonomy, parents tend to increase their use of mediation strategies to support their child’s online safety.

Discussion

Our findings suggest that supporting children’s online safety is a significant challenge for many parents from early in their children’s lives. This is an understandable challenge, given the pervasiveness of internet access in young children’s lives and the rapid evolution of online technologies. Parents reported wanting to change the internet in various ways to improve their children’s safety, from preventing exposure to inappropriate content, online predators and cyberbullying, to limiting the amount of time their children spend online.

Despite these concerns, most parents reported actively supporting their children’s online safety. This included setting parental controls on the devices young children access, monitoring online activities or implementing rules to guide use, and having conversations with their children about online safety and risks. Notably, however, not all parents had discussed online safety topics with their young children recently, and certain sensitive or emerging topics, such as exposure to sexual content and algorithmic influence, were less likely to be discussed.

Our findings also suggest that these mediation strategies have equipped parents with a relatively high degree of confidence regarding their awareness of their children’s online activities. This was especially the case for parents of younger children, who tended to rely more on direct supervision to support their children’s online safety.

Collectively, these findings point to a need for accessible and practical resources to support parents in keeping their children safe online, encouraging positive uses of the internet, and having open, ongoing and age-appropriate conversations about all aspects of online safety, especially as children grow older and engage more independently online. Given the concerns many parents expressed about the amount of time their child spends online, and some parents’ desire to limit internet access, it’s important that parents feel equipped to set age and developmentally appropriate boundaries around online use that work for their family. There is also a need for effective and user-friendly technical mediation tools that limit young children’s exposure to inappropriate content, both to alleviate parental concerns about age-inappropriate exposure and to implement and maintain these tools effectively.



Conclusion and implications

This report explores the online lives of young children in Australia from a parent's perspective. Our findings show that internet use is now widespread in the lives of young children, consistent with previous research (Mann et al., 2025; Ofcom, 2025; Pew Research Center, 2025). Most parents reported having strategies in place to guide their young child's internet use, with many allowing online access only when a parent is present. While many parents recognised the benefits for their young children of being online, concerns dominated their views of their child's online experiences. Parents frequently reported concerns about excessive screen time and the displacement of other activities, alongside anxieties about children's exposure online to age-inappropriate material or harmful people. These concerns echo findings from previous studies (Internet Matters, 2025; Mann et al., 2025).

At the same time, parents today face more stressors and demands than ever before (Office of the Surgeon General, 2024). Many are time-poor and have little choice but to turn to the internet to support their parenting and household needs. This means parents are often making decisions under pressure and balancing caregiving with competing day-to-day responsibilities, which can contribute to feelings of overwhelm or uncertainty. Given that most parents report struggling to keep their children safe online, our findings highlight the need for more supportive, accessible and non-judgemental guidance to help parents navigate this challenge, especially as their children age and engage more independently online.

Non-judgemental and digestible resources are needed to help parents support their young children's online safety

Our results show that parents use a diverse range of strategies to support their young children's online safety. These include setting parental controls on devices their child can access, implementing rules to guide online participation, monitoring their child's online activities, and having conversations with them about online safety and risks. These findings align with previous research showing that most parents of young children use various mediation strategies to help keep their children safe online (Ofcom, 2025; Pew Research Center, 2025).

However, while many parents reported using a range of strategies to support their child's online safety, most also indicated that they find this challenging. With negative feelings and concerns dominating parents' perceptions of their young children's online experiences, our findings highlight the need for accessible and targeted guidance to better support parents.

With previous research suggesting that a significant minority of parents feel at least some judgement by others about how they manage their children's screen use (Hendry et al., 2025; Mallawaarachchi et al., 2022; Pew Research Center, 2025), it's important that resources for parents adopt a non-judgemental tone and acknowledge the many competing demands and priorities parents face today. This includes normalising the challenges of online safety and reinforcing that there is no single 'right way', in order to help reduce guilt and encourage uptake of guidance from parents.

Open and ongoing conversations are key to promoting young children's safety online

Previous eSafety research has shown that children are more likely to seek help from their parents after a negative online experience when parents regularly encourage them to do so (eSafety Commissioner, 2026). Encouragingly, most parents in this survey reported engaging in active mediation strategies, by discussing various online safety topics with their child or encouraging them to speak up if things go wrong online.

Parents should revisit these online safety conversations regularly with their young children. Emphasis should be placed not only on risk, but also on early digital resilience skills – helping children to name feelings linked to their online experiences and to practise coping strategies, and reinforcing help-seeking, so that as children age and engage more independently online, they have the confidence and skills to navigate any online challenges that may arise.

Our findings underscore the importance of resources that support parents in having these online safety conversations in age-appropriate ways, as well as resources that build children's online safety knowledge and skills, digital literacy, resilience and help-seeking behaviour.

Parents should be encouraged to explore and engage online with their young children

Research suggests that when parents actively engage with their children on screens, through co-viewing, co-playing or open communication, the quality of children's digital experiences is enhanced (Mallawaarachchi et al., 2024). Co-engagement was widely reported by parents in our survey, with most reporting they used the internet regularly to have fun or connect with their child, such as by playing video games or looking at content together.

By regularly engaging with their young children online, parents can also foster richer learning and create more opportunities for conversations about online safety, which may encourage children to speak up in future if something goes wrong online.

Increasing parents' awareness and understanding of newer and emerging technologies is essential as these technologies become more widespread

Our findings, together with recent research (Mann et al., 2025; Ofcom, 2025; Pew Research Center, 2025), suggest that use of newer and emerging technologies, including AI assistants and companions, is becoming increasingly common in children's lives. A significant proportion of parents in our survey reported that their children had ever used AI assistants or companions, internet-connected smart toys or virtual reality.

Equipping parents with an understanding of the range of technologies young children may be using, and of the potential risks, harms and benefits that may manifest on these platforms, is essential to ensure that parents have the knowledge, confidence and skills required to support their child's online safety. Encouraging parents to have open and ongoing conversations with their children about their online experiences will also help to ensure parents have an awareness of the kinds of platforms and technologies their children are using.

Further targeted research on the use of newer and emerging technologies among children in Australia, and on the perceived benefits and potential harms associated with these technologies, is also warranted.

Guidance and resources should be carefully tailored for parents of children of different ages

Our findings demonstrate that children’s online engagement evolves with age, with parents of older children in our survey more likely to report that their child had used a range of devices to go online and engaged in a greater variety of online activities. Accordingly, parents of older children were more likely to report using a greater range of mediation strategies to support their child’s online safety, whereas parents of younger children were more likely to rely on direct supervision to keep their child safe online – results that are consistent with previous research (Ofcom, 2025).

It is important that resources for parents are carefully tailored to address the needs and experiences of children of varying ages and developmental stages, particularly when providing guidance on setting appropriate boundaries for online use. For example, for preschool-aged children, direct supervision, joint engagement, clear rules and predictable routines may be most beneficial. As children reach their middle childhood years and begin to engage more independently online, they may benefit from being more actively involved in learning how to find balance online, alongside receiving informed guidance from parents on healthy digital habits and help-seeking strategies.

Guidance and resources for parents around online use should also acknowledge that some children, such as those with disability or additional support needs, may use devices differently or more frequently than others, and may require alternative approaches to digital parenting that are both safe and developmentally supportive.

Parents should not be solely responsible for supporting young children’s online safety

Our findings demonstrate that many parents want stronger parental controls, feel overwhelmed by the challenge of keeping their children safe online, and are concerned about their child’s exposure to age-inappropriate content or harmful behaviour. In response, it is essential that technology companies and online services continuously improve parental control features and moderation practices while also providing clear, accessible guidelines and resources for parents.

Opportunities to simplify and streamline parental controls, thereby reducing the burden on parents to have in-depth technical knowledge across a broad range of applications, should also be explored. Ensuring that these tools are clear, accessible and easy for all parents to use is increasingly important as the technologies children are exposed to continue to develop rapidly. Indeed, past research has shown a gap between parental awareness of technical mediation tools and their actual use (Internet Matters, 2025; Ofcom, 2025), suggesting that barriers to implementation remain, such as feeling overwhelmed by the

range of options available or lacking knowledge about how to set up these tools.

While parental controls are a helpful tool, and their use by parents, alongside continued improvement by industry, should be encouraged, parents should be careful not to rely on them in isolation, especially as their children grow older. Engaging children in age-appropriate conversations about online safety and giving them a sense of ownership over the strategies they use to stay safe online, especially as they approach their teen years, can increase children’s commitment to following such strategies. Resources such as family tech agreements can further support this approach.

To further reduce the burden on parents, platforms and devices should default to the highest privacy and safety settings for children.

Ultimately, responsibility for keeping children safe online should not rest with parents alone. The technology industry has a central role in reducing risk by designing platforms and services that are safe by default for children. Embedding Safety by Design principles from the outset, especially in digital environments used by young children, is critical, alongside regulatory frameworks, including the Online Safety Codes and Standards and Basic Online Safety Expectations, that hold industry accountable





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Appendix: Additional data tables

Table A1: Children’s lifetime use of devices to go online, by child age (%)

	Child age			
	3–4	5–6	7–8	9–10
Any device	90	97	99	100
Tablet (e.g. iPad)	65	82	90	93
Smart TV (e.g. to watch YouTube videos – not free-to-air or subscription TV or movie services like Netflix or Disney+)	75	83	83	88
Smartphone (e.g. iPhone, Samsung Galaxy)	65	73	75	71
Gaming console or handheld gaming device (e.g. Xbox, PlayStation, Nintendo Switch)	24	53	70	80
Laptop computer	20	37	57	67
Smart home device (e.g. Google Home, Amazon Alexa)	22	36	44	40
Desktop computer	12	28	38	47
Internet-connected smart toy (e.g. coding robots like Sphero or Poe the AI Story Bear)	13	16	15	18
Smart watch (e.g. Apple Watch)	7	13	15	21
e-reader (e.g. Kindle)	5	10	14	11
Base: Parents of children aged 3–10	491	505	510	502

Q: Has your child ever used any of these devices to go online, outside of formal childcare, preschool or school settings? By ‘used’ we mean the child has been operating the device, possibly with some help, but not just looking at what an adult or another child is doing online. Remember, this could be at home, at another family member or friend’s house, at a public place or anywhere else they go online other than formal childcare/preschool/school settings.

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

Table A2: Devices children used to go online in past 4 weeks, by child age (%)

	Child age			
	3–4	5–6	7–8	9–10
Any device	85	94	98	99
Tablet (e.g. iPad)	49	68	80	83
Smart TV (e.g. to watch YouTube videos – not free-to-air or subscription TV or movie services like Netflix or Disney+)	67	74	76	79
Smartphone (e.g. iPhone, Samsung Galaxy)	53	59	65	60
Gaming console or handheld gaming device (e.g. Xbox, PlayStation, Nintendo Switch)	14	39	53	61
Laptop computer	11	22	36	47
Smart home device (e.g. Google Home, Amazon Alexa)	15	25	30	27
Desktop computer	6	17	21	26
Internet-connected smart toy (e.g. coding robots like Sphero or Poe the AI Story Bear)	9	8	8	7
Smart watch (e.g. Apple Watch)	2	7	9	12
e-reader (e.g. Kindle)	2	6	6	4
Base: Parents of children aged 3–10	491	505	510	502

Q: Has your child used any of these devices to go online, outside of formal childcare, preschool or school settings in the past four weeks? By ‘used’ we mean the child has been operating the device, possibly with some help, but not just looking at what an adult or another child is doing online. Remember, this could be at home, at another family member or friend’s house, at a public place or anywhere else they go online other than formal childcare/preschool/school settings.

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

Table A3: Children’s device ownership, by child age (%)

	Child age			
	3–4	5–6	7–8	9–10
Any device	29	50	64	83
Tablet (e.g. iPad)	22	37	50	63
Smart TV	2	8	7	12
Smartphone (e.g. iPhone, Samsung Galaxy)	2	7	10	22
Gaming console or handheld gaming device (e.g. Xbox, PlayStation, Nintendo Switch)	1	13	19	32
Laptop computer	1	5	6	17
Smart home device (e.g. Google Home, Amazon Alexa)	2	6	7	11
Desktop computer	0	3	2	5 ^a
Internet-connected smart toy (e.g. coding robots like Sphero or Poe the AI Story Bear)	7	7	5	5
Smart watch (e.g. Apple Watch)	1	5	8	13
e-reader (e.g. Kindle)	2	3	4	3
Base: Parents of children aged 3–10	491	505	510	502

Q: Does your child have their own [DEVICE], do they share it, or do they use a [DEVICE] somewhere else?
Note: Different colour shading indicates that differences are statistically significant within a subgroup. White shading indicates that differences are not statistically significant.
a Significantly higher than children aged 7 to 8.

Table A4: Main reasons children go online, by child age (%)

	Child age			
	3–4	5–6	7–8	9–10
For entertainment and fun	93	96	97	96
For learning	59	71	75	75
For information	14	35	53	61
For homework	5	30	57	69
For supporting household routines	37	33	30	30
For communication with me or their other parent	14	25	32	51
For maintaining social connections	17	23	31	50
For safety purposes	4	11	14	24
For overall management of child’s disability or diagnosis*	16	20	12	18
For another reason	2	2	2	3
Base: Parents of children aged 3–10 who had ever been online	442	491	506	500

Q: What are the main reasons why your child uses (or has used) a [DEVICE] to go online outside of formal childcare, preschool or school settings?

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

* Only shown to parents of children with a disability or diagnosis (base: children aged 3 to 4, *n* = 69; children aged 5 to 6, *n* = 96; children aged 7 to 8, *n* = 116; children aged 9 to 10, *n* = 129).

Table A5: Activities children engage in online, by child age (%)

	Child age			
	3–4	5–6	7–8	9–10
Used an educational game, website or app (e.g. ABC Reading Eggs, Duolingo, Epic, Khan Academy, Mathletics)	50	70	84	86
Listened to music, podcasts or audiobooks online (e.g. on Spotify)	53	58	66	71
Looked for information about things they are interested in online (e.g. Google, Wikipedia)	10	33	69	87
Used a social media or messaging platform or app specifically designed for children (e.g. YouTube Kids, Messenger Kids)	26	37	52	68
Used a messaging platform or app to message, email, call or video call someone (e.g. via WhatsApp, Messenger (full version), Gmail, iMessage, Discord, FaceTime)	22	33	41	50
Used an online learning platform to do and submit schoolwork (e.g. Seesaw, Google Classroom)	5	25	45	69
Used a social media platform or app (e.g. TikTok, the full version of YouTube, the teen or full version of Instagram, Snapchat)	16	28	37	41
Used an AI assistant (e.g. Chat GPT or Gemini) or an AI companion (e.g. My AI or Character AI)	6	13	16	25
Used a virtual reality headset to enter a VR environment (e.g. Meta Quest, Apple Vision Pro)	4	10	12	15 ^a
Used an online help website or chat service (e.g. Kids Helpline)	3	8	7	12
Base: Parents of children aged 3–10	491	505	510	502

Q: Has your child ever done any of the following, anywhere other than formal childcare/preschool/school (for example, at your home or at a friend or relative’s home)? This could be by themselves or with some help (but not just looking at what someone else is doing online).

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

^a Significantly higher than children aged 5 to 6.

Table A6: Social media account ownership among children, by child age (%)

	Child age			
	3–4	5–6	7–8	9–10
Child has own profile or account(s)	1	4	6	10
Child uses or looks at a parent’s or other people’s account (e.g. their other parent’s/caregiver’s or a friend’s account)	9	15	19	18
Child looks at social media without using a profile or account	5	8	11a	13
Base: Parents of children aged 3–10	491	505	510	502

Q: Does your child currently have their own profile or account on any social media platform or app (for example, their own Snapchat, TikTok, Instagram (teen or full version) or YouTube (full version) account)? IMPORTANT: This doesn't include accounts on messaging platforms like Messenger or WhatsApp, or accounts on children's versions of social media like YouTube Kids.

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

a Significantly higher than children aged 3 to 4 only.

Table A7: Parents’ use of the internet to have fun or connect with their child, by child age (%)

	Child age			
	3–4	5–6	7–8	9–10
At least once or twice a day	10	13	13	13
A few times a week but not every day	27	29	32	31
About once a week	19	25	26	25
Less than once a week	20	18	17	18
Never	23	15	12	12
Base: Parents of children aged 3–10 who had ever been online	442	491	506	500

Q: In the past 4 weeks, how often, if at all, have you used the internet (including gaming, YouTube, searching online, etc.) to support your family’s parenting or household needs, such as ...? To have fun or connect with your child (for example, play video games with them, look at content together)?

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

Table A8: Parent-reported benefits for their child of being online, by child age (%)

	Child age			
	3–4	5–6	7–8	9–10
Any benefit	95	96	97	97
Have fun or relax	68	72	79	76 ^a
Learn letters, words, numbers or how to read	63	64 ^b	57	47
Explore things they are interested in	44	51	60	65
Learn about the world	41	47	55	53 ^a
Gain skills in using digital technologies	29	43	55	56
Learn skills or hobbies or get better at them	29	37	49	48
Use their imagination or creativity	34	42	41	42
Stay in contact with people in their family or feel more connected to them	31	36	41 ^a	49
Feel better if they’re feeling bad (e.g. happier, calmer)	31	26	24	27
Feel more connected or supported	3	9	18	31
Feel more accepting or positive about themselves	4	7	9	8
Express their culture, gender, disability, diagnosis, religion or be themselves	4	6	5	8
Deal with problems they are experiencing	5	5	5	7
Get involved in helping other people	1	4	5	5
Being online has helped my child in other ways	2	5	5	7
Being online has not helped my child	3	3	2	2
Base: Parents of children aged 3–10 who had ever been online	442	491	506	500

Q: Overall, how, if at all, has being online helped your child? Please select all that apply. Being online has helped my child to ...

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

a Significantly higher than children aged 3 to 4 only.

b Significantly higher than children aged 7 to 8.

Table A9: Parent-reported challenges for their child of being online, by child age (%)

	Child age			
	3–4	5–6	7–8	9–10
Any challenge	55	64	68	73 ^a
Caused challenges in my child stopping internet use or transitioning to other activities	23	23	28	29
Created conflict between my child and myself/other family members	14	19	28	26
Exposed my child to content that’s inappropriate for their age	13	22	24	27
Stopped my child participating in other activities	13	17	22 ^b	23
Got in the way of my child’s homework or study	4	9	21	24
Stopped my child getting enough sleep	9	11	15 ^b	20
Made my child want to buy things that are inappropriate for their age	9	15	11	11
Influenced my child with values that don’t align with my values, worldview or culture	7	10	11 ^b	16
Made my child feel worried or sad	6	8	7	9
Made my child more socially isolated or withdrawn	6	6	5	8
Made my child feel bad about their body, their weight or how they look	2	5 ^b	2	5
Resulted in my child doing things they don’t feel comfortable with, due to peer pressure	1	5	2	4
Caused my child other difficulties	7	5	5	5
Being online has not caused my child any difficulties	31	23	23	21
Base: Parents of children aged 3–10 who had ever been online	442	491	506	500

Q: How, if at all, has being online caused difficulties or challenges for your child? Please select all that apply. Being online has ...

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

a Significantly higher than children aged 5 to 6.

b Significantly higher than children aged 3 to 4 only.

Table A10: Parent-reported level of concern about the amount of time their child spends online, by child age (%)

	Child age			
	3–4	5–6	7–8	9–10
Very concerned	8	6	9	13
Quite concerned	11	14	18	17
Somewhat concerned	27	31	34	35
Not very concerned	29	29	26	24
Not at all concerned	23	20	13	10
Base: Parents of children aged 3–10 who had ever been online	442	491	506	500

Q: Over the past 4 weeks, how concerned, if at all, have you been about the amount of time your child spends online outside of formal childcare, preschool or school settings?

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

Table A11: Parent-reported level of challenge in supporting their child’s online safety, by child age (%)

	Child age			
	3–4	5–6	7–8	9–10
Very challenging	11	14	16	14
Quite challenging	18	22	27	26
Somewhat challenging	33	35	37	38
Not very challenging	25	21	16	19
Not at all challenging	11	9	4	3
Base: Parents of children aged 3–10 who have ever used a device to go online	442	491	506	500

Q: How challenging, if at all, do you find helping your child stay safe online?

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

Table A12: Use of parental controls on devices children have access to at home, by child age (%)

	Child age			
	3–4	5–6	7–8	9–10
Any parental control	62	78	84	83
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)	33	48	57	60
Controls so that any apps they download must be approved by me (e.g. via password protection on the app or Google Play store)	32	48	54	57a
Controls to stop my child seeing or using some websites, apps or content	29	43	46	50
Controls to prevent my child from accessing device(s) without my permission (e.g. devices are protected with passwords/passcodes)	43	46	40	41
Controls to restrict who my child can talk to or message online	17	31	39	48
Controls to limit the time my child spends on certain websites, apps or games (e.g. Screen Time on iPhone)	25	29	40	41
Another type of online parental control	1	0	1	1
None – there are no parental controls on any device(s), apps or games my child has access to at home	34	19	15	15
Base: Parents of children aged 3–10 who owned, shared or had access to a family member’s internet-connected device	439	491	505	500

Q: Which, if any, of these parental controls do you (or another parent or caregiver) have on the device(s), apps or games your child has access to at your 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+. Please select all that apply.

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

a Significantly higher than children aged 5 to 6.

Table A13: Parental rules on devices children have access to at home, by child age (%)

	Child age			
	3–4	5–6	7–8	9–10
Any rule	89	96	97	97
My child has time limits for being online	43	56	58	58
My child must ask for permission to download apps, create new accounts, add new followers or friends, or before they watch or play anything new online	24	49	61	72
My child 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	29	43	50	50
My child must keep personal information to themselves	15	32	52	61
My child is only allowed to go online in shared areas at home where I can keep an eye on them (e.g. the kitchen or living room)	37	41	47	36
My child isn’t allowed to go online just before they go to bed, so they can wind down to sleep	31	36	47	42 ^a
My child is only allowed to use websites, apps or games independently if they are familiar to us	27	40	43	42
My child is only allowed to talk to or message, play games with or accept friend or follow requests from people they already know in real life	12	27	42	60
My child must leave their phone or other online devices outside their bedroom overnight*	18	28	38	41
My child isn’t allowed to go online unless I (or another parent or caregiver) am directly supervising them	37	29	16	10
My child must follow the rules in a family tech agreement (a written set of rules about how devices are used in your home)	9	11	15 ^a	18
My child doesn’t have to follow any specific rules about being online	6	2	2	2
Base: Parents of children aged 3–10 who owned, shared or had access to a family member’s internet-connected device	439	491	505	500

Q: Think about all the online devices your child has access to at your home, which of the following rules, if any, do you have for your child? Remember, being online includes playing video games, using social media, and anything else your child does online. If your child is not the right age for any of these rules, that’s ok, just choose any that do apply to your child. IMPORTANT: we are not asking if any of these rules apply to your child’s use of TV or movie streaming services like Netflix or Disney+. Please select all that apply.

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

* Only shown to parents who reported that their child had their own device or shared a device with a sibling or another child in the family (base: children aged 3 to 4, *n* = 194; children aged 5 to 6, *n* = 336; children aged 7 to 8, *n* = 404; children aged 9 to 10, *n* = 461).

a Significantly higher than children aged 3 to 4 only.

Table A14: Passive mediation strategies used by parents, by child age (%)

	Child age			
	3–4	5–6	7–8	9–10
Any passive mediation strategy	48	70	83	91
Checked your child’s online search history (e.g. on Google) or viewing history (e.g. on YouTube)	33	49	58	70
Checked which apps your child has downloaded	33	54	70	76
Checked which in-app or in-game purchases (e.g. paying to unlock extra levels) your child has made	27	40	53	60
Looked at photos your child has taken on their phone or other device ¹	67	72	75	74
Checked messages in your child’s email or other apps they use for communicating with others online ²	27	42	66	75
Base: Parents of children aged 3–10 who owned, shared or had access to a family member’s internet-connected device	439	491	505	500

Q: Some parents or caregivers closely monitor their child online; other families are more relaxed. Have you (or another parent or caregiver) ever done any of the following? If yes, was this in the past 4 weeks, more than 4 weeks ago, or both?

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

¹This item was only shown to parents who indicated that their child owned, or shared with another child in the family, a device with camera functionality (such as a phone, tablet, games console, laptop or desktop computer) (base: children aged 3 to 4, *n* = 158; children aged 5 to 6, *n* = 313; children aged 7 to 8, *n* = 391; children aged 9 to 10, *n* = 458).

² This item was only shown to parents who reported that their child had ever used a messaging platform or app to message, email, call or video call someone (base: children aged 3 to 4, *n* = 111; children aged 5 to 6, *n* = 170; children aged 7 to 8, *n* = 213; children aged 9 to 10, *n* = 253).

Table A15: Active mediation strategies used by parents, by child age (%)

	Child age			
	3–4	5–6	7–8	9–10
Any active mediation strategy	60	87	98	98
Encouraged your child to talk to you if anything were to happen online that made them feel uncomfortable or unsafe	40	63	79	88
Talked to your child about what they have been doing online	35	64	84	89
Talked to your child about who is safe to talk to online, like family and friends	28	56	76	88
Talked to your child about what to do if they see or experience things online that they are unsure about or that make them feel uncomfortable, scared or upset	36	57	74	78
Talked to your child about how they can be safer online	25	47	72	79
Talked to your child about what ‘personal information’ (e.g. age and address) is and what personal information should be shared or kept private online	21	44	73	82
Talked to your child about how to interact safely with people online who they don’t know in real life	24	42	64	78
Talked to your child about the risks of unsafe people or situations online (or of online ‘grooming’)	19	43	65	79
Talked to your child about what ‘being online’ means or what ‘the internet’ is	23	48	59	71
Talked to your child about what online bullying, or ‘cyberbullying’, is or how to deal with it	17	34	53	75
Talked to your child about what to do if they see sexual images or sexual videos online (e.g. pornography)	15	27	36	50
Talked to your child about how what they see online is affected by algorithms	15	26	36	44
Talked to your child about how what they see on social media isn’t always realistic or true*	45	74	82	86 ^a
Base: Parents of children aged 3–10 who had ever been online	442	491	506	500

Q: Have you (or another parent or caregiver) ever done any of the following? If yes, was this in the past 4 weeks, more than 4 weeks ago, or both?

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

* This item was only shown to parents who indicated that their child had used social media (base: children aged 3 to 4, *n* = 82; children aged 5 to 6, *n* = 140; children aged 7 to 8, *n* = 190; children aged 9 to 10, *n* = 210).

^a Significantly higher than children aged 5 to 6.

Table A16: Parents’ perceived awareness of their child’s online activities, by child age (%)

	Child age			
	3–4	5–6	7–8	9–10
I know exactly what my child does online	73	55	36	29
I know most of what my child does online	19	34	50	54
I know some of what my child does online	5	8	9 ^a	14
I know little of what my child does online	2	3	4	3
I know nothing about what my child does online	0	0	0	0
Base: Parents of children aged 3–10 who had ever been online	442	491	506	500

Q: How much, if anything, do you know about what your child does when they are online outside of formal childcare, preschool or school settings?

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

^a Significantly higher than children aged 3 to 4 only.



