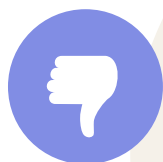




Young children's internet use survey

Methodology Report



July 2026

Acknowledgement of Country

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

Acknowledgements

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

Introduction

This report outlines the methodology used for eSafety's **'Young Children's Internet Use'** research. The research was conducted in September 2025 and comprised an online survey of parents and caregivers of children aged 3 to 10 in Australia. By creating a snapshot of the online lives of young children as seen through parents' and caregivers' eyes, this study provides updated evidence to inform eSafety's online safety resource development, program implementation and regulatory responsibilities.

The research aimed to explore three key questions:

- What is the prevalence and nature of internet and device use among children aged 3 to 10?
- How do parents and caregivers perceive the role of the internet in their family life, and what are the perceived benefits and challenges of internet use for their children?
- How do parents and caregivers help their children stay safe online?

To answer these key research questions, the study set out to identify:

- how young children use the internet outside of formal school or childcare settings
- why young children go online
- the opportunities and benefits associated with being online for young children
- the role the internet plays in the family lives of parents and caregivers of young children
- the safety practices parents and caregivers employ to help keep their young children safe online.

A total of 2,008 parents and caregivers of children aged 3 to 10 years living in Australia were included in the survey. If parents and caregivers had multiple children within this age range, they were asked to answer the survey in relation to one child only.

Ethical considerations

Various steps were taken to address ethical considerations during project development and recruitment. The project was submitted to the Bellberry Human Research Ethics Committee, with approval received on 20 August 2025 (application number 2025-06-896).

eSafety implemented several measures to reduce the risk of harm to participants, ensuring that their best interests were served and that the research supported their safety, emotional and psychological security, and wellbeing (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2018).

Informed consent to participate in the research was obtained from parents and caregivers by providing clear information about the kinds of questions they would be asked and explaining any potential risks associated with participation. Participants were also informed that their involvement in the research was completely voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without consequence. Additionally, participants were given the option to skip potentially sensitive questions by selecting 'I don't want to say' or exiting the survey.

The survey was carefully designed to minimise potential discomfort among participants. This included stating that there were no right or wrong answers and acknowledging that all families differ in their practices around young children's internet use.

Help-seeking and self-support information was available to participants throughout the survey, and links to eSafety's online safety resources for parents and caregivers were provided upon survey completion.

The study

The study comprised a 20-minute online survey completed by parents and caregivers of children aged 3 to 10 in Australia. The survey included questions about:

- parent/caregiver and child demographics
- child device use and engagement in online activities
- the main reasons for young children going online
- perceptions of young children's internet use, including benefits, challenges and the role of the internet in family life
- strategies parents and caregivers may use to help keep their young children safe online.

Learnings from cognitive testing of previous surveys of parents and caregivers were applied to the survey questions to facilitate participant understanding.

Survey sample

To ensure data quality, the survey dataset was cleaned to remove speeders (participants who completed the survey too quickly), suspected bots, and participants who provided nonsense answers to open-ended questions. As a result, a total of 2,008 parents and caregivers of children aged 3 to 10 living in Australia were included.

Participants were recruited from a non-probability-based online panel provider (Octopus Group). To provide a sample that is nationally representative in terms of key demographics, quotas were placed on gender, age, state/territory, location, socio-economic area (Socio-Economic Index for Areas, or SEIFA) and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander identity. Population statistics were sourced from comparable population estimates for children aged 3 to 10 published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Weighting was applied to the sample, to correct for minor deviations from the quota targets.¹ Table 1 shows the quota demographics of children as reported by the parents and caregivers who were included in the survey, before and after weighting was applied.

¹ Average weight = 1 (range: 0.7 to 2.1).

Table 1 Child participants: Quota demographics²

		Survey sample (%) (unweighted)	Survey sample (n)	Final weighted sample (%)
Gender	Boys	51	1022	51
	Girls	49	981	48
	Non-binary and gender diverse ³	<1	5	<1
Age	3–4	24	491	24
	5–6	25	505	25
	7–8	25	510	26
	9–10	25	502	25
State	NSW	32	649	32
	VIC	26	519	25
	QLD	20	410	21
	WA	11	227	11
	SA	7	141	7
	ACT, TAS, NT	3	62	5
Location	Capital cities	67	1343	68
	Other areas	33	665	32
SEIFA⁴⁵	IRSAD Quintile 1 ⁶	13	258	15
	IRSAD Quintile 2	16	314	16
	IRSAD Quintile 3	21	420	21
	IRSAD Quintile 4	22	442	22
	IRSAD Quintile 5	28	564	26

² Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.³ 'Non-binary and gender diverse' includes children identified by their parents as 'non-binary' or 'questioning their gender'.⁴ The Socio-Economic Index for Areas (SEIFA) is a product developed by the Australian Bureau of Statistics that ranks areas in Australia according to relative socio-economic advantage and disadvantage.⁵ Ten participants provided a postcode from which their SEIFA could not be identified. They were classified as invalid.⁶ The [Index of Relative Socio-economic Advantage and Disadvantage](#) (IRSAD) summarises information about the relative social conditions of people and households within an area. A low score indicates relatively greater disadvantage and a lack of advantage in general. A high score indicates a relative lack of disadvantage and greater advantage in general.

	Invalid	<1	10	1
First Nations	Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	6	125	6

Table 2 shows additional demographics of children as reported by parents and caregivers, and Table 3 shows demographic characteristics of parents and caregivers.

Table 2 Child participants: Additional demographics

		Survey sample (%) (unweighted)	Survey sample (n)	Final weighted sample (%)
Language background	Non-English speaking background ⁷	22	432	22
Disability/diagnosis	With disability	21	416	21

Table 3 Demographic characteristics of parents and caregivers

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

⁷ Child and/or their parent(s)/caregiver(s) speaks a language other than English at home.

⁸ '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.

Analysis

Octopus Group hosted, collected and cleaned the survey and provided eSafety with the raw data. eSafety further checked, cleaned and analysed the data using SPSS and Q Research Software (Q).

Apparent differences between subgroups of children whose parents participated in the survey – such as age of the children – were tested for statistical significance using Q and reported on only when the difference was statistically significant.

In cases where only a subset of participants was asked a question, the results may have been 're-based' on all participants, to provide an accurate incidence of behaviours or experiences. Each table and figure included in the report includes a description of the base used for analysis purposes.

Limitations

- The findings from this research are reliant on parent and caregiver reported data about their children's experiences as they have shared them with us at one point in time, rather than being based on independent assessment or observation. Parents and caregivers may not have full knowledge of their children's online experiences. As such, it is possible that children have had online experiences beyond those that were reported to us by their parents and caregivers.
- The survey sample was sourced from online panels of people who have agreed to be invited to participate in online research on a variety of topics. Technically, these are convenience samples. 'Non-probability-based sampling' means that not everyone has an equal chance of being selected to participate in the research. Results may be subject to a range of biases when compared with results from research using probability-based sampling. Although quotas and survey weights were used to control for demographic skews, it is difficult to control for psychographic skews arising from differential approaches to participation attraction.
- Although survey response items were presented in a randomised order, self-report surveys can be subject to social desirability biases. This means that participants may answer survey items in a manner they think is socially desirable or acceptable, as opposed to providing a true reflection of their attitudes or experiences. For example,

parents may underreport internet and device usage by their children, due to negative social perceptions about screentime/device usage.

- To facilitate a consistent understanding of what 'being online' includes, participants were provided with the following definition: "‘Being online’ includes playing video games, using internet-connected smart toys, e-readers, or smart watches, or sending messages, making video calls, using apps like Instagram, WhatsApp or Snapchat, watching videos on TikTok or YouTube, sending emails, searching on Google or Safari, or anything else your child does online. This doesn't include watching subscription TV or movie services like Netflix or Disney+.' Despite this, it is still possible that participants held differing interpretations of what constitutes 'being online', which may have influenced their survey responses.
- The survey was conducted shortly before the [Online Safety Amendment \(Social Media Minimum Age\) Act 2024](#), restricting children under 16 from creating or holding accounts on age-restricted social media platforms, took effect on 10 December 2025. The legislation received significant media attention and generated considerable public discussion and debate, which may have influenced participants' survey responses. For instance, parents may have had heightened awareness of or concerns about their children's online safety.

Note to the reader

Percentages in data tables and figures may not sum to 100% due to rounding or to question formats that allowed multiple answers to be given.

Reference

National Health and Medical Research Council. (2018). *National statement on ethical conduct in human research* (2007, updated 2018). Australian Government.

