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Who knows? Who helps?

Children's help seeking, parental awareness, and barriers to support after online harm

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Australian Government

eSafetyCommissioner

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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.

The eSafety research program supports, encourages, conducts and evaluates research about online safety for Australians. We do this so that:

- our programs, policies and regulatory functions are evidence-informed
- robust, person-centred evidence on the prevalence and impact of online harms is available to stakeholders
- the evidence base on what works to prevent and remediate online harms continues to grow.

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About this report

The digital world offers significant benefits for children, providing opportunities for connection, learning, entertainment, creativity and self-expression. At the same time, online platforms can expose children to a range of risks, and many digital activities carry the potential for negative experiences, including exposure to harmful content or conduct. Previous findings from our **Keeping kids safe online** snapshot series highlight that such negative experiences are relatively common, with most children having encountered content associated with harm online and a substantial percentage having been personally targeted with harms such as cyberbullying, harassment and online hate.

Understanding how children respond to these experiences, as well as the barriers they face in seeking help, is critical to supporting their online safety. This support is particularly important in the context of Australia's social media minimum age obligation under Part 4A of the ***Online Safety Act 2021* (Cth)**, which requires age-restricted social media platforms to take reasonable steps to prevent children under 16 from creating or maintaining accounts. Despite these measures, children will continue to engage online in a variety of ways, and the risk of negative experiences remains. Strengthening help-seeking behaviours and addressing barriers to support will therefore be essential as children navigate this evolving digital environment.

Shortly after the social media minimum age legislation was passed, between December 2024 and February 2025, eSafety conducted the 'Keeping kids safe online' survey of the online experiences of almost 3,500 children in Australia aged 10 to 17 and their parents and caregivers. The research aimed to build on our understanding of the online experiences of children in Australia and to provide an updated evidence base to inform the development of online safety resources for children and their parents and caregivers. Additionally, having been conducted one year prior to the commencement of the age restrictions, this cross-sectional study provides a valuable contribution to the national evidence base as Australia implements and evaluates the age restrictions.

This report is part of a series that draws on data from the 'Keeping kids safe online' survey. Previous reports have explored children's online participation and experiences, as well as digital parenting practices. 'Who knows? Who helps?' explores children's experiences of responding to online harms and barriers to help seeking. Additionally, it examines parents' awareness of and responses to children's negative online experiences.

Overall, the study found that while most children take some form of self-protective action (for example, blocking or muting) in response to targeted online harm, many keep these experiences to themselves. Fewer than half of the children surveyed told someone, such as a parent, sibling, friend or teacher, about their most recent or impactful negative online experience, suggesting that many children navigate these experiences without support from a parent or other trusted adult. Notably, children were more likely to disclose harmful online experiences when their parents regularly encouraged them to speak up about anything they encountered online that made them feel uncomfortable or unsafe, underscoring the critical role of open, ongoing discussions about online safety within families.

A notable minority of children disclosed their experiences to a sibling, friend or peer, highlighting the important role that peer relationships can play in helping children to cope with online harm. However, relying on peers for support, particularly in cases involving more serious or sensitive harms, may place a significant emotional burden on children who may lack the skills, knowledge or resources needed to effectively support someone through such experiences.

We also found that few children formally reported their most recent or impactful experience either to the platform where it occurred, to eSafety or to the police. These low rates of reporting, together with low levels of disclosure, suggest that children often rely on informal and self-directed coping strategies when responding to online harm, pointing to significant gaps in support.

Children identified a range of barriers to disclosing or formally reporting negative online experiences, including believing they should manage the situation themselves, thinking that telling someone wouldn't help, lacking a trusted person to talk to, and not knowing how or where to make a report. Feelings of fear, shame and self-blame also emerged as significant deterrents to seeking support, especially following more serious and stigmatised online harms, such as grooming-type behaviours and image-based abuse. Together, our findings suggest that further efforts are needed to reduce stigma and normalise help seeking, as well as to provide appropriate and user-friendly reporting pathways to ensure that children are informed and empowered to report online



harms when they occur. Normalising and supporting help seeking is especially important given that evolving technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI), may increase children's exposure to highly personal and distressing forms of online harm.

Our findings also reveal significant gaps in parental awareness of children's negative online experiences, particularly in relation to more sensitive types of harms, including online sexual harassment and grooming-type experiences. These gaps further reinforce the importance of fostering open, supportive and non-judgemental communication about online safety within families, to ensure that children feel comfortable seeking support, without fear of blame or punishment.

Despite these gaps in awareness, parents play a crucial role in helping children to navigate negative online experiences, and many are rising to the challenge. Among parents who were aware of their child's experience of online harm, most responded proactively, typically by providing emotional support or practical guidance. Many also took protective and preventative steps, such as setting new rules or adjusting device or app settings.

Finally, our findings highlight that approaches to digital parenting need to evolve as children grow older and account for the gendered dynamics of online harms. Adopting age- and gender-responsive strategies may help to increase parental awareness of how children experience and navigate the online world. In doing so, this could better equip parents to ensure that all children receive appropriate support when they encounter online harm.

Taken together, our findings demonstrate that, although many children take self-protective steps to manage negative online experiences and many parents provide support and guidance when they are aware of such experiences, significant barriers to help seeking remain and crucial gaps persist in parents' awareness of the online harms children encounter. The report concludes with a discussion of how these findings can inform efforts to strengthen children's online safety, promote help seeking, and support families to respond confidently and effectively to online harms when they arise.





Key terms

Children: Children and teenagers surveyed aged 10 to 17.

Content associated with harm: Includes content seen by children online, such as sexist, misogynistic or hateful content, content depicting dangerous online challenges or fight videos, content that encourages unhealthy eating or exercise habits, sexual content, or content that shows illegal drug taking, extreme real-life violence or self-harm. Doesn't include content seen in TV shows or movies.

Cyberbullying: Refers to when someone uses the internet to purposefully hurt, upset or intimidate a child with the intention of making them feel bad, humiliated or disliked.

Exposure to online hate content: Refers to a child having seen or heard online hate content, excluding content depicted in TV shows or movies.

Image-based abuse: Involves someone creating, sharing or threatening to share an intimate image or video without the consent of the child shown. Note: The creation, sharing or threatened sharing of nude images of children constitutes, in most instances, child sexual exploitation material.

Non-consensual tracking, monitoring or harassment: Behaviours that involve someone using an app or a device to track a child's real-time location without their permission; looking through a child's phone, other devices, social media accounts or messages without their permission; or repeatedly messaging, calling or posting on a child's social media in a way that causes them to feel worried or scared. This behaviour doesn't include situations where a parent monitors their child's online activities for safety reasons and the child is comfortable with this.

Online grooming-type behaviour: Refers to an adult or someone at least four or five years older than a child asking that child for or sending them nude images, offering money or gifts in exchange for nude images, asking them about private body parts online, or doing or saying something creepy or inappropriate online, such as asking them personal questions or to keep secrets, or acting overly friendly. 'Grooming-type behaviour' is used because grooming involves intent and a pattern of behaviour over time, which cannot be fully determined from the survey data. The survey captures behaviours commonly associated with online grooming. However, these indicators alone don't confirm that grooming has taken place.

Online hate: Refers to when someone posts offensive or threatening things online about a person or group because they are hateful of their identity, such as hateful of their race, religion, culture, country of origin, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability or gender.

Online sexual harassment: Refers to a child receiving unwanted sexual comments, sexual questions or sexual messages online, including nude images or being pressured to send nude images of themselves online.

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

Personal experience of online hate: Refers to when a child has personally experienced someone saying or posting offensive or threatening things to or about them because they are hateful of one or more of their identity characteristics.

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.



Key findings



Most children aged 10 to 17 take action after experiencing targeted online harm. Among children who had been personally targeted by the online harms examined in our survey, around two thirds or more (67% to 89%) reported doing something following their most recent or impactful experience. Children typically responded by taking self-protective actions, such as asking the person responsible to stop, or blocking, unfriending or muting them. Children were less likely to take action following content-based harms, including exposure to online hate content (33%) or other content associated with harm online (32%).



While most children take steps to protect themselves after a negative online experience, many don't speak to someone about what happened. Among children who had experienced various online harms, under half said they spoke with someone, such as a parent, sibling, friend, peer or teacher, following their most recent or impactful experience. Around half of the children who had experienced cyberbullying (48%) or grooming-type behaviours (47%) said they told someone about what happened. Fewer children told someone about experiences of image-based abuse (43%), online hate (40%), sexual harassment (39%), non-consensual tracking, monitoring or harassment (34%), or exposure to content associated with harm (24%) or online hate content (17%).



Children who disclose harmful online experiences are most likely to do so to a parent, while some confide in a sibling, friend or peer. Among children who experienced personally targeted online harms, between 28% and 43% told their parent about it. A notable minority of children told a sibling, friend or peer about their experience, especially following image-based abuse (19%), sexual harassment (16%), grooming-type behaviours (16%) or personally targeted online hate (15%).

When parents encourage children to discuss unsafe or uncomfortable online situations, children are more likely to disclose harmful experiences. Children who had experienced online harms were more likely to disclose their most recent or impactful experience to their parents when their parents regularly encouraged them to speak up about anything online that made them feel uncomfortable or unsafe, compared with those whose parents didn't regularly encourage such conversations.



Few children formally report experiences of online harm. Around 1 in 4 children who had experienced image-based abuse (26%) or grooming-type behaviours (23%) said they formally reported their most recent or impactful experience to the platform where it occurred, or to the police or eSafety. Fewer children reported experiences of online sexual harassment (9%), cyberbullying (6%), and non-consensual tracking, monitoring or harassment (6%). When children did report these experiences, they most often reported to the platform, app or game where the harm occurred.



Children face a range of barriers to disclosing and reporting negative online experiences. Many children didn't disclose or report their most recent or impactful negative online experience because they weren't 'bothered or upset enough'. This was particularly common following experiences of online sexual harassment, cyberbullying, and non-consensual tracking, monitoring or harassment, as well as following exposure to content associated with harm. Some children also lacked confidence in formal reporting outcomes, didn't know how or where to report, or felt they should ignore the situation or manage it themselves.

Significant proportions of children refrained from disclosing or reporting more serious and stigmatised harms because they felt 'embarrassed or shamed'. For example, among children who had experienced image-based abuse and didn't tell anyone about it (24%) or formally report their most recent or impactful experience (27%), around 1 in 4 refrained from doing so because they felt 'embarrassed or shamed'. Around 1 in 5 children who had experienced grooming-type behaviours and didn't tell anyone about it (19%) or formally report it (18%) refrained from doing so because they felt 'embarrassed or shamed'.

Help-seeking strategies differ by child age and gender. Younger children (aged 10 to 12) were more likely than older teens (aged 16 to 17) to take action in response to certain online harms, such as cyberbullying and exposure to online hate, particularly by telling a parent. Girls were more likely than boys to take action following cyberbullying, sexual harassment and exposure to online hate, including self-protective actions and disclosing to a trusted person.

Children's age and gender also influence barriers to help seeking. Younger children were more likely than teens to perceive certain barriers to help seeking following some negative online experiences, including believing they would no longer be allowed to use the platform or their device. Boys were more likely than girls to say they refrained from taking action after experiences of cyberbullying, online sexual harassment or online hate because they weren't 'bothered or upset enough'.

Many parents aren't aware of their children's negative online experiences. Around 2 in 5 parents weren't aware that their child had experienced online sexual harassment (45%), non-consensual tracking, monitoring or harassment (44%), or grooming-type behaviours (42%). Fewer parents were unaware that their child had experienced cyberbullying (22%) or exposure to content associated with harm (14%).

The vast majority of parents take action in response to their children's negative online experiences. Parents most commonly provided emotional support as well as practical guidance, often helping children to decide how to respond. Many also used technical and restrictive mediation practices, such as setting new rules or adjusting device or app settings. Parents tended to be more likely than children to formally report online harms; however, still only a minority did so for most harm types.

Parental responses to online harms differ, in some respects, by child age as well as child and parent gender. Parents of younger children (10 to 12 years) were more likely than parents of teens (13 to 17 years) to use restrictive and technical mediation strategies following some harmful online experiences. Both parents of boys and of girls engaged in a range of supportive actions, most often by providing emotional support or practical guidance. However, parents of girls were more likely than parents of boys to provide emotional or practical supports following cyberbullying, exposure to content associated with harm, and grooming-type experiences. Women were generally more likely than men[1] to be aware of their child's negative online experiences and to provide supportive responses following certain online harms.

[1] Parents surveyed included men, women, and trans and gender-diverse parents. Due to the small sample size of trans and gender-diverse parents (n = 33), it wasn't possible to separate out their data in analyses where parent gender was required. Future research with a larger sample of trans and gender-diverse parents would be needed to explore their digital parenting practices. See the methodology section for further details.

Methodology

This research draws on data from eSafety's 'Keeping kids safe online' study. The study aimed to build on our understanding of the online experiences of children in Australia and to provide an updated evidence base to inform the development of online safety resources for children and their parents. To achieve these aims, we surveyed a nationally representative sample of almost 3,500 children in Australia aged 10 to 17 and their parents about their online activities and experiences.

Online survey

A total of 3,454 children aged 10 to 17 and one of their parents took part in the survey. Children were recruited from a non-probability-based online panel provider (Octopus Group) via their parent. To provide a sample that is nationally representative in terms of key demographics, quota targets were placed on children's gender, age, state or territory, location type, Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA), Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander identity, and linguistic diversity. Population statistics were sourced from comparable population estimates for children aged 10 to 17 published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. The survey data was weighted to correct for minor differences between the population profile and the final sample profile, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of child survey participants (quota variables)

		Core survey sample (%) (unweighted)	Core survey sample (*n*)	Recontact sample (%) (unweighted)	Recontact sample (*n*)	Final weighted sample (%)
Gender	Boys	50	1,739	50	1,149	50
	Girls	47	1,632	48	1,095	48
	Trans and gender diverse[1]	2	83	3	58	2
Age[2]	10–11	26	892	26	610	26
	12–13	26	883	26	591	26
	14–15	25	854	25	574	25
	16–17	24	825	23	527	24
State	NSW	31	1,060	29	661	32
	VIC	25	875	26	601	25
	QLD	21	732	21	485	22
	WA	11	377	11	225	11
	SA	7	237	8	175	7
	ACT, TAS, NT	5	173	5	125	5
Location	Major	71	2,450	70	1,603	71
	Regional and remote areas	29	1,004	30	699	29
SEIFA[3]	IRSAD Quintile 1[4]	14	473	14	314	15
	IRSAD Quintile 2	15	526	15	335	16
	IRSAD Quintile 3	20	697	22	498	20
	IRSAD Quintile 4	22	743	22	516	21
	IRSAD Quintile 5	29	1,015	28	638	27
First Nations	Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	9	318	9	197	6
Child language	Child speaks a language other than English at home	16	539	14	328	18

Notes:

[1] 'Trans and gender diverse' includes participants who identified as 'trans girl', 'trans boy', 'non-binary', 'brotherboy', 'sistergirl', 'another gender' or 'questioning' their gender.

[2] Age when the core survey was conducted.

[3] The Socio-Economic Indexes 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.

[4] The **Index of Relative Socio-economic Advantage and Disadvantage** (IRSAD) summarises information about the economic and 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.

Table 2 provides additional child and parent demographics (not used for quotas). Just under 3 in 10 children surveyed (28%) had a disability or diagnosis, around 1 in 4 (23%) were from a non-English speaking background, and fewer than 1 in 10 teens aged 13 to 17 (8%) identified as sexually diverse.

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

Table 2: Further demographic characteristics of survey participants (not quotas)

		Core survey sample (%) (unweighted)	Core survey sample (*n*)	Recontact sample (%) (unweighted)	Recontact sample (*n*)	Final weighted sample (%)
Sexual orientation	Sexually diverse[1]	8	169	9	115	8
Language background	Non-English speaking background[2]	21	742	20	461	23
Disability/ diagnosis	Child has a disability[3]	28	974	28	639	28
Parent gender	Men	31	1,055	–	–	30
	Women	68	2,348	–	–	68
	Trans and gender diverse[4]	1	33	–	–	1
Parent language	Parent speaks a language other than English at home	18	632	–	–	20
Proportion of time child spends living with parent	All the time	86	2,961	–	–	86
	More than half the time	8	279	–	–	8
	Around half the time	4	149	–	–	4
	Less than half the time	1	49	–	–	1
	They don't live with me	<1	11	–	–	<1

Notes:

[1] 'Sexually diverse' includes participants who identified their sexual orientation as 'gay or lesbian', 'bisexual', 'queer', 'asexual', 'pansexual' or that they are 'still working it out'. Sexuality was asked only of children aged 13 to 17.

[2] Child and/or their parent(s) speaks a language other than English at home.

[3] 'Disability' includes neurodivergence, diagnosed mental health conditions, cognitive or intellectual disabilities, behavioural disorders, physical disabilities, sensory disabilities, chronic disease (coded from responses written in by participants), and any other disability or diagnosis that has lasted (or is likely to last) for at least six months.

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

The survey was conducted between December 2024 and February 2025 and had three components: a 15-minute parent survey, a 20-minute child core survey and a 10-minute child recontact survey. Informed consent to participate in all components of the study was sought from both parents and children.

The core and recontact surveys included questions about children's online participation and experiences, including negative online experiences such as cyberbullying, non-consensual tracking, monitoring and harassment, online grooming-type behaviour, online sexual harassment, exposure to content associated with harm, image-based abuse and online hate. Children who had experienced each harm type were asked further questions about their most recent or impactful experience of that harm type, including help-seeking strategies and barriers to taking action. To minimise the burden on children who had experienced multiple types of harm, they were asked follow-up questions about only one type of harm. A least-filled approach was used to select the type of harm for follow-up questions, whereby less commonly reported harms were prioritised to maximise sample sizes across harm types.

The parent survey included questions about parents' awareness of and responses to their child's negative online experiences.

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



Data analysis

Survey data was analysed using SPSS Statistics and Q software. Apparent differences between subgroups of children and 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.

Subgroup analysis was only undertaken where each group included at least 50 participants. While a sample size of 50 can be used for comparative analysis, it is relatively small. This means that relatively large percentage point differences need to be observed in order to be statistically significant. As such, an absence of statistically significant differences in the data doesn't necessarily mean there are no differences in the population. This should be considered when interpreting the findings presented throughout this report. Percentages in tables and figures may not sum to 100% due to rounding or to question formats that allowed multiple answers to be given.

Previous reports from the 'Keeping kids safe online' survey have examined in greater detail the specific forms of online harms experienced by children.[2] As this report focuses on children's help-seeking behaviours and parents' awareness and responses, online harms are analysed at a broader level, rather than the specific forms these harms took.

Limitations

We note that our sample of trans and gender-diverse children is relatively small (n = 83), and even smaller for questions asked of only a subset of respondents, such as questions about children's help-seeking strategies in response to online harms. Our sample of trans and gender-diverse children on these filtered questions was too small to allow for comparative analysis, meaning that we were unable to explore separately these children's help-seeking strategies and barriers to taking action. Future research with a larger sample of trans and gender-diverse children would be needed to understand their experiences.

We also note that our sample of trans and gender-diverse parents (n = 33) is small and that this affects how their data can be used in quantitative analyses. Parents who identified as trans or gender diverse were subsequently asked which of three options would 'best reflect' their gender if we were only able to use three categories for analysis purposes ('man', 'woman' or 'non-binary'). Parents who indicated that 'man' best reflected their gender have been included in the 'Men' group, and those who indicated that 'woman' best reflected their gender have been included in the 'Women' group, for analyses in which parent gender was required. There was insufficient sample to conduct gender analysis for non-binary parents. We note that restricting gender analyses

[2] Our online **snapshot series** from the 'Keeping kids safe online' survey presents findings on children's experiences of a range of online harms

to binary categories means that, in some analyses, trans and gender-diverse parents' digital parenting experiences are lacking. Future research with a larger sample of trans and gender-diverse parents would be required to understand their digital parenting experiences. In addition, the relatively lower proportion of men in our sample may limit the extent to which the findings can be generalised to reflect the experiences of men in parenting or caregiving roles.

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

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, including parents. Our team has expertise in quantitative and qualitative methodologies, online harms and safety, and the lived experiences of people at risk of online harms.



Children's help-seeking strategies and barriers to action following negative online experiences

This section explores the help-seeking strategies children use and the barriers they face in responding to a range of negative online experiences.

Our snapshot series from the 'Keeping kids safe online' survey showed that substantial proportions of children had been personally targeted with a range of online harms. This included:

- **53%** who had ever experienced **cyberbullying**, including having hurtful things said to or about them online or purposely being left out of an online activity
- **27%** who had personally experienced **online hate**, where someone had said or posted offensive or threatening things to or about them because they were hateful of one or more of their identity characteristics
- **25%** who had experienced **non-consensual tracking, monitoring or harassment**
- **29%** who had experienced **online sexual harassment**, including being called offensive sexual names online or being sent unwanted sexual messages
- **17%** who had experienced **online grooming-type behaviour**, including having an adult or someone four to five years older than them do or say something creepy or inappropriate online or ask them about private parts of their body
- **8%** who had experienced **image-based abuse**, including having someone create, share or threaten to share a nude image of them online without their permission.

In addition, many children had been exposed to content-based harms, including:

- **74%** who had ever seen or heard **content associated with harm online**, including sexist, misogynistic or hateful content, content depicting dangerous online challenges or fight videos, or content that encourages unhealthy eating or exercise habits
- **60%** who had **seen or heard online hate**.

Our findings show that children respond in various ways following such experiences, most often by taking self-protective actions (for example, asking the person responsible to stop, or avoiding engagement with the person responsible). While most children take some form of action, under half seek support from a trusted adult and a minority formally report their experience to the platform, app or game where it occurred, to the police, or to eSafety, as detailed below.

Most children take some form of action following targeted online harms, but many don't disclose or formally report their experiences

Among children who had been personally targeted with online harm and answered the follow-up questions about their most recent or impactful experience,[3] around two thirds or more reported taking **some form of action** in response, as shown in Table 3. Actions included self-protective measures, which involved managing or limiting exposure to the harm (for example, asking the person responsible to stop, or unfollowing, unfriending or muting the person or content), and help-seeking actions, which involved seeking support from others or formally reporting the incident.

[3] As noted in the methodology section, to minimise the burden on children who had experienced multiple types of harm, they were only asked follow-up questions about one type of harm.



Table 3: Actions taken by children following negative online experiences (%)

	Cyberbullying	Non-consensual tracking, monitoring or harassment	Grooming-type behaviours	Sexual harassment	Image-based abuse	Personal experiences of online hate	Seeing online hate	Exposure to content associated with harm
Took any kind of action	**69**	**67**	**81**	**68**	**89**	**70**	**33**	**32**
Did something self-protective (combined)	**45**	**50**	**47**	**53**	**72**	**54**	**17**	**10**
Asked them to stop doing it / Asked the person to stop posting or sharing it	20	27	19	19	26	18	3	1
Unfollowed, unfriended, blocked or muted the person	18	12	37	26	30	25	10	4
Took screenshots to record what they had done / Took screenshots to record the content	8	5	13	11	24	14	1	0
Defended myself by doing something similar back / Shared or posted something similar back	6	2	2	5	4	8	2	0
Deleted the posts, messages or emails	6	7	23	13	18	11	2	3
Changed my privacy or contact settings	4	13	19	8	21	9	2	1
Stopped using or deleted the platform, app or game	4	3	11	2	14	3	1	1
Told someone (combined)	**48**	**34**	**47**	**39**	**43**	**40**	**17**	**24**
Told my parent or caregiver about it	43	28	39	28	31	32	15	22
Told a sibling, friend or someone else around my age	13	10	16	16	19	15	4	4
Told someone else (such as a teacher, helpline or another adult)	6	5	4	5	11	9	2	1
Reported it (combined)	**6**	**6**	**23**	**9**	**26**	**15**	**8**	**3**
Reported it to the platform, app or game	5	4	18	7	11	12	6	2
Reported it to the police	2	1	5	1	12	1	0	0
Reported it to eSafety	1	1	6	2	10	4	2	1
Did something else	3	0	1	3	1	2	1	1
Ignored them / Ignored it	44	31	45	54	20	43	69	55
Don't want to say	1	2	1	1	4	1	1	0
Don't know	1	3	1	2	1	2	2	3
Base (*n*): Children aged 10–17 who had experienced each harm type and answered the follow-up questions about their most recent or impactful experience of that harm	**696**	**429**	**327**	**401**	**123**	**448**	**781**	**743**

Q: Think about the last time someone [RECENT EXPERIENCE]. Did you do any of these things afterwards? You can choose more than one answer.

Note: Participants could select multiple responses, and 'Ignored them' or 'Ignored it' could be selected alongside other actions. 'Took any kind of action' combines all actions, including self-protective actions, talking to someone and reporting.

Children were especially likely to take action after experiencing image-based abuse (89%) or grooming-type behaviours (81%), with slightly fewer taking action following personal experiences of online hate (70%), cyberbullying (69%), sexual harassment (68%), or non-consensual tracking, monitoring or harassment (67%).

Across the different types of targeted online harms, children typically took self-protective actions (between 45% and 72%), such as **blocking, unfriending or muting the person** (between 12% and 37%) or **asking the person responsible to stop** (between 18% and 27%).

However, a substantial minority of children didn't report taking any of the actions captured in the survey following their most recent or impactful experience, ranging from 6% of children who had experienced image-based abuse to 30% of children who had experienced online sexual harassment.

Children also tended to be less likely to take action following exposure to content-based harms. For example, only around 1 in 3 children who had seen or heard online hate (33%) or other content associated with harm online (32%) reported taking some form of action following their most recent or impactful exposure.

In addition, many children opted to **ignore the person or people responsible**. Most children reported ignoring their most recent or impactful exposure to online hate (69%) or other content associated with harm (55%), as did almost half of those who had personally experienced online sexual harassment (54%), grooming-type behaviours (45%), cyberbullying (44%) and online hate (43%).

In terms of disclosure, fewer than half of the children said they **spoke with someone**, such as a parent, sibling, friend, peer or teacher, following their most recent or impactful negative online experience. Children who did tell someone were most likely to tell their **parent**, as shown in Table 3.

Around 4 in 10 children who had experienced cyberbullying (43%) or grooming-type behaviours (39%) told their parent about their most recent or impactful experience, while around 3 in 10 told their parent about recent experiences of online hate (32%), image-based abuse (31%), sexual harassment (28%), or non-consensual tracking, monitoring or harassment (28%). Fewer children told their parent about their most recent or impactful exposure to content associated with harm (22%) or online hate (15%).

Notably, children were **more likely to tell a parent** about a negative online experience when their **parent regularly encouraged them to speak up about anything online that made them feel uncomfortable or unsafe**. More specifically, among children who had experienced online harm and said that their parent regularly encouraged them to speak up about uncomfortable or unsafe online situations:[4]

- 49% told their parent about their most recent or impactful cyberbullying experience (versus 31% whose parents didn't regularly encourage such conversations)
- 34% told their parent about their most recent or impactful experience of non-consensual tracking, monitoring or harassment (versus 18%)
- 49% told their parent about their most recent or impactful grooming-type experience (versus 18%)
- 35% told their parent about their most recent or impactful experience of online sexual harassment (versus 13%)
- 27% told their parent about their most recent or impactful exposure to content associated with harm (versus 9%)
- 37% told their parent about their most recent or impactful personal experience of online hate (versus 19%)
- 17% told their parent about their most recent or impactful exposure to online hate (versus 9%).

A substantial minority of children disclosed their most recent or impactful negative online experience to a **sibling, friend or peer**. Children were especially likely to tell a sibling, friend or peer about experiences of image-based abuse (19%), sexual harassment (16%), grooming-type behaviours (16%) or personally targeted online hate (15%).

Formal reporting to platforms, the police or eSafety was uncommon overall, but varied by harm type, as shown in Table 3. Children were most likely to formally report experiences of image-based abuse (26%) or grooming-type behaviours (23%), with around 1 in 4 children who had experienced such harms reporting their most recent or impactful experience to the platform, app or game, the police or eSafety.

Fewer children formally reported experiences of:

- online hate (15%)
- online sexual harassment (9%)
- cyberbullying (6%)
- non-consensual tracking, monitoring or harassment (6%)
- exposure to online hate (8%)
- exposure to content associated with harm (3%).

[4] The sample size was too small to report differences for children who had experienced image-based abuse.

Many children say they don't take action in response to negative online experiences because they don't feel 'bothered or upset enough', while some face barriers to seeking help

As described in the previous section, many children don't disclose negative online experiences to a trusted person, such as a parent, sibling or friend, and few report such experiences through formal channels. Next, we explore the barriers that prevent or discourage children from seeking support, through telling someone about or formally reporting the incident.

Among children who had experienced online harm and refrained from telling someone about their most recent or impactful experience, the most common reason was that they **weren't 'bothered or upset enough'**. This reason was notably common for experiences of online sexual harassment (65%), cyberbullying (50%), or non-consensual tracking, monitoring or harassment (45%), as well as for exposure to content associated with harm (61%). A similar pattern emerged among children who didn't formally report their experience to the platform, eSafety or the police, with significant proportions of children saying they didn't feel 'bothered or upset enough', especially following exposure to content associated with harm (51%) or experiences of sexual harassment (54%), cyberbullying (40%), or non-consensual tracking, monitoring or harassment (40%), as shown in Table 4.

However, a significant proportion of children refrained from disclosing or reporting negative online experiences because they thought it was **best to ignore it** or that they should **manage the situation themselves**. For example:

- Around 1 in 4 to 1 in 5 children who had experienced online hate and didn't tell anyone (24%) or formally report it (21%) said they felt they should ignore such experiences.
- Around 1 in 4 to 1 in 5 children who had seen online hate and didn't tell anyone (27%) or formally report it (20%) said they felt such content should be ignored.
- Around 1 in 5 children who had experienced image-based abuse and didn't tell anyone (21%) or formally report it (22%) said they felt they should deal with the situation themselves.

Some children felt that **telling someone wouldn't help**, while others said they **didn't know who to talk to** or **didn't have anyone they could trust**. For example:

- Among children who had seen or personally experienced online hate and didn't tell anyone about it, 15% said they didn't think telling someone would help.
- Among children who had experienced grooming-type behaviours and didn't tell anyone about it, 8% said they didn't know who to talk to or didn't have anyone they could trust.

Likewise, some children believed that **formally reporting their experience wouldn't help**, while others didn't **know how or where to report** such experiences. For example:

- Around 1 in 6 children who had experienced image-based abuse (16%) or online hate (16%), or had seen online hate (16%), and didn't formally report it said they didn't think anything would be done about it.
- Across all harms, around 1 in 10 children reported not knowing how or where to report negative online experiences, ranging from 8% of children who refrained from reporting experiences of cyberbullying or online sexual harassment to 13% of children who refrained from reporting image-based abuse or exposure to online hate, as shown in Table 5.



Table 4: Reasons children didn't tell someone about their most recent or impactful negative online experience, by type of harm (%)

	Cyberbullying	Non-consensual tracking, monitoring or harassment	Grooming-type behaviours	Sexual harassment	Image-based abuse	Personal experiences of online hate	Seeing online hate	Exposure to content associated with harm
It didn't bother me or upset me enough	50	45	34	65	22	41	37	61
It wasn't aimed at me*	–	–	–	–	–	–	28	17
I thought I should deal with it myself	17	16	13	10	21	13	5	4
You just have to ignore it	21	14	18	15	11	24	27	21
I didn't think telling someone would help	11	7	11	12	11	15	15	10
I didn't want the person who did it to get into trouble	7	7	11	5	7	4	2	1
I thought I would get into trouble or be blamed	4	6	15	5	19	3	3	3
I didn't think they were doing anything wrong / I didn't think there was anything wrong with what I saw	2	5	3	4	8	3	1	5
I felt scared or thought it might make the problem worse	6	5	11	5	18	7	2	1
I felt embarrassed or shamed	8	5	19	8	24	12	1	2
I didn't know who to talk to or didn't have anyone I could trust	2	5	8	2	6	3	1	1
I thought I wouldn't be allowed to use that platform, be online or use my device anymore	5	4	18	6	11	6	4	3
I felt it was at least partly my fault (like I had got myself into the situation)	2	4	10	2	7	4	1	0
There was another reason	2	2	0	3	0	3	4	1
I don't want to say	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	1
I don't know	4	6	2	3	2	2	6	5
Base (*n*): Children aged 10–17 who had experienced each harm type, answered the follow-up questions about their most recent or impactful experience of that harm, and reported not telling anyone about it.	**343**	**259**	**164**	**239**	**64**	**256**	**628**	**542**

Q: What are the main reasons why you didn't tell anyone the last time someone [RECENT EXPERIENCE]? You can choose up to three answers.

Note: 'It wasn't aimed at me' was only a possible response item for questions related to exposure to content associated with harm and seeing online hate.

Table 5: Reasons children didn't formally report their most recent or impactful negative online experience, by type of harm (%)

	Cyberbullying	Non-consensual tracking, monitoring or harassment	Grooming-type behaviours	Sexual harassment	Image-based abuse	Personal experiences of online hate	Seeing online hate	Exposure to content associated with harm
It didn't bother me or upset me enough	40	40	30	54	15	33	34	51
It wasn't aimed at me*	–	–	–	–	–	–	22	18
You just have to ignore it	16	11	16	15	14	21	20	14
I thought I should deal with it myself	12	12	15	13	22	18	4	3
I didn't think anything would be done about it	10	8	14	13	16	16	16	8
I didn't know how or where to report it	8	10	12	8	13	9	13	9
I felt embarrassed or shamed	6	5	18	9	27	12	2	1
I felt scared or thought it might make the problem worse	6	6	11	7	21	9	3	2
I didn't want the person who did it to get into trouble	6	6	7	7	14	8	3	3
I thought I would get into trouble or be blamed	6	6	11	8	14	6	3	3
I thought I wouldn't be allowed to use that platform, be online or use my device anymore	5	4	15	7	14	5	4	4
I felt it was at least partly my fault (like I had got myself into the situation)	4	5	9	4	16	4	0	1
I didn't think they were doing anything wrong / I didn't think there was anything wrong with what I saw	3	8	3	4	4	3	1	5
I didn't have anyone I could trust to help me report it	1	2	4	2	7	3	1	1
There was another reason	5	3	3	3	2	1	3	3
I don't want to say	1	1	2	1	1	0	1	1
I don't know	10	6	5	3	3	6	10	10
Base (*n*): Children aged 10–17 who had experienced each harm type, answered the follow-up questions about their most recent or impactful experience of that harm, and said they didn't report it.	**634**	**382**	**242**	**354**	**85**	**368**	**701**	**697**

Q: Why didn't you report it the last time someone [RECENT EXPERIENCE]? You can choose more than one answer.

Note: 'It wasn't aimed at me' was only a possible response item for questions related to exposure to content associated with harm and seeing online hate.

Fear-, shame- and blame-based barriers to help seeking are more prominent for more serious and stigmatised harms

Our findings suggest that feelings of fear, shame and self-blame can deter children from seeking support following negative online experiences. These barriers were more commonly reported by children following certain, more serious and stigmatised online harms, including **grooming-type behaviours** and **image-based abuse**.

For example, around 1 in 4 children who had experienced image-based abuse and didn't tell someone about it (24%) or formally report their most recent or impactful experience (27%) said they refrained from doing so because they **felt 'embarrassed or shamed'**. Similarly, around 1 in 5 children who had experienced grooming-type behaviours and didn't tell anyone about (19%) or formally report their most recent or impactful experience (18%) said they didn't do so because they felt 'embarrassed or shamed'.

Other common barriers to disclosing or formally reporting experiences of image-based abuse or grooming-type behaviours included:

- **feeling scared or thinking it might make the problem worse** (11% of children who didn't disclose or report grooming-type behaviours; 18% of children who didn't disclose and 21% of children who didn't report image-based abuse)
- thinking they **would get into trouble or be blamed** (15% who didn't disclose and 11% who didn't report grooming-type behaviours; 19% who didn't disclose and 14% who didn't report image-based abuse)
- thinking they **wouldn't be allowed to use that platform or their device anymore** (18% who didn't disclose and 15% who didn't report grooming-type behaviours; 11% who didn't disclose and 14% who didn't report image-based abuse)
- thinking it was **at least partly their fault** (10% who didn't disclose and 9% who didn't report grooming-type behaviours; 7% who didn't disclose and 16% who didn't report image-based abuse).

Children's help-seeking strategies and barriers to action differ, in some respects, according to their age and gender

Children's responses to online harms are neither uniform nor static; they are shaped by multiple factors and evolve as children age. Our findings suggest that the way in which children respond to negative online experiences, and the barriers they face to seeking help, vary according to the type of harm they experience, their age and their gender.

As children grow older, they are less likely to disclose certain negative online experiences to a trusted person

Our results show that help-seeking behaviours in response to certain online harms decrease with age. For example:

- **Older teens** (aged 16 to 17) were **less likely** than younger children (aged 10 to 12) to take action following cyberbullying experiences (60% versus 72%).
- **Teens** (aged 13 to 17) were also **less likely** than younger children to take action following exposure to online hate (29% versus 40%).

Additionally, **younger children** were **more likely** than older teens to **tell someone**, especially a parent, about a recent experience of:

- cyberbullying (53% versus 40%)
- seeing content associated with harm (28% versus 18%)
- seeing online hate (25% versus 12%).

Likewise, **younger children and younger teens** (aged 10 to 15) were **more likely** than older teens (aged 16 to 17) to tell a parent about their most recent online sexual harassment experience (34% versus 19%).

Conversely, **older teens** were **more likely** than younger children to take action after recent experiences of non-consensual tracking, monitoring or harassment (76% versus 59%), particularly unfollowing, unfriending, blocking or muting the person responsible (19% versus 8%).

We found little difference between rates of formally reporting online harms among children of varying ages. However, **younger children** were **more likely** than older teens to **formally report** their most recent or impactful experience of online sexual harassment (18% versus 6%).

Some barriers to help seeking are more prominent for younger children

Despite **younger children** being more likely to take action following certain online harms, they were also more likely to report **fear-related barriers to help seeking** following certain negative online experiences, including fear of device removal. For example:

- Younger children were more likely than older teens to refrain from telling someone about a **cyberbullying** experience because they thought they wouldn't be allowed to use the platform or their device anymore (8% versus 0%), because they felt scared or thought they might make the problem worse (6% versus 0%), or because they were worried about the person responsible getting into trouble (10% versus 1%).
- Younger children were more likely than teens to refrain from formally reporting an encounter with **content associated with harm** (7% versus 1% of teens) or **online hate** (5% of younger children and younger teens versus 0% of older teens) because they thought they wouldn't be allowed to use the platform or their device anymore. They were also more likely than younger teens to refrain from reporting encounters with content associated with harm because they felt scared or thought it might make the problem worse (6% of younger children versus 1% of younger teens).
- On the other hand, **teens** were more likely than younger children to refrain from reporting **personal experiences of online hate** because it didn't 'bother or upset them enough' (39% versus 19%), while younger children and younger teens were more likely to say they didn't know how or where to report it (11% versus 3%).



Girls are generally more likely than boys to take action after experiencing online harm

We also found that **girls** were generally more likely than boys to take some form of action following negative online experiences, including self-protective actions and disclosing to a trusted person. For example, girls were more likely than boys to **take action** following their most recent or impactful experience of cyberbullying (76% versus 62%), online sexual harassment (75% versus 62%) and exposure to online hate (38% versus 29%).
More specifically:

- Girls were more likely than boys to report having **unfollowed, unfriended, blocked or muted** the person responsible after their most recent or impactful experience of cyberbullying (23% versus 14%), non-consensual monitoring, tracking or harassment (16% versus 8%), online sexual harassment (36% versus 15%) or online hate (29% versus 18%).
- Girls were also more likely than boys to **ask the person responsible** for their most recent or impactful sexual harassment experience **to stop doing it** (25% versus 14%).
- Additionally, girls were more likely than boys to **tell someone** about their most recent or impactful cyberbullying experience (57% versus 39%), especially a parent (53% versus 34%). They were also more likely to tell a sibling, friend or someone else their age following their most recent or impactful sexual harassment experience (20% versus 10%).

Our findings additionally show that **boys** were less likely than girls to disclose or report certain negative online experiences because they said they **weren't 'bothered or upset enough'** by the experience. For example:

- Among boys and girls who had experienced online sexual harassment or online hate and **didn't tell anyone** about their most recent or impactful experience, boys were more likely than girls to say the experience didn't 'bother or upset them enough' (online sexual harassment: 73% versus 57%; online hate: 48% versus 32%).
- Boys were also more likely than girls to say they **didn't formally report** experiences of cyberbullying (47% versus 34%) or sexual harassment (61% versus 47%) because they weren't 'bothered or upset enough'.
- However, **girls** were more likely than boys to report not telling someone about a recent online **grooming-type experience** because they thought they should **ignore it** (25% versus 7%).

Discussion

Our findings suggest that, while most children take some form of action following negative online experiences, especially in response to more targeted online harms, many children don't disclose or formally report such experiences. Notably, across all forms of harm examined in the survey, under half of children reported disclosing their most recent or impactful experience to a trusted person, such as a parent, friend or teacher, suggesting that many children attempt to navigate harmful online experiences without support from a parent or trusted adult. Importantly, children were significantly more likely to tell their parent about their experience when their parents regularly encouraged them to talk about any unsafe or uncomfortable online situations. This finding reinforces the crucial role parents play in shaping children's help seeking and suggests that ongoing family communication about online safety may be a key protective factor in ensuring children receive appropriate and timely support when online harms occur.

Additionally, a substantial minority of children disclosed harmful online experiences to a sibling, friend or peer. While this finding highlights the important role that peers can play in navigating such experiences, it also raises questions about the extent to which young people are being left to navigate or support others through situations that often require adult guidance, intervention and support.

Children in our study were most likely to take some form of action following personally targeted online harms. On the other hand, children were more likely to ignore content-based harms, including encountering online hate or other content associated with harm. This finding may suggest that harms which are less direct or personally targeted may be less readily recognised by children as requiring a response or may be perceived as more difficult to address through available support or reporting mechanisms. Additionally, these experiences may become normalised with high levels of exposure, which may further impact children's perceptions of the harm and feasibility of reporting multiple incidents.

Further, relatively few children formally reported negative online experiences to the platform, app or game where it occurred, or to external authorities such as the police or eSafety. The relatively low rates of disclosure and formal reporting suggest that children rely primarily on informal and self-directed coping strategies when responding to online harm. This finding may suggest that children perceive online harms as issues they need to deal with independently, or that they don't view adults and formal systems as necessary, helpful or accessible until the harm reaches a particular threshold. Consistent with this, children identified a range of barriers to disclosing or reporting negative online experiences. While many said the experience didn't 'bother or upset them enough', others said they lacked understanding of how to report or confidence in

reporting outcomes. Children also identified emotional barriers to disclosing or reporting, such as embarrassment, shame, fear and self-blame. Notably, these barriers were most prominent for certain, more sensitive online harms, including image-based abuse and grooming-type behaviours.

These findings indicate that help seeking is influenced not only by awareness of available support, but also by how children interpret and feel about an experience. Feelings of shame and self-blame can shift perceived responsibility from the perpetrator to the child, creating additional barriers to seeking support. The prominence of these barriers for online harms such as image-based abuse and grooming-type behaviours reinforces the need for prevention and response strategies that address stigma and ensure that children know they will be supported rather than blamed following such experiences. The need for such strategies is underscored by the growing risks associated with evolving technologies such as artificial intelligence – in particular, the potential for these platforms to be used to facilitate or augment deeply personal, sensitive and distressing harms, such as through AI-generated imagery.

Strategies to support children's help seeking will also need to consider how AI may be used by children seeking support or guidance following harmful online experiences, and how this could impact access to appropriate support. This is an important consideration in light of recent evidence that some children are turning to AI tools for support with personal or sensitive issues (eSafety Commissioner, 2026d), including following experiences of online harm (Thorn, 2026). Another recent study found that children, especially boys, were more likely to disclose experiences of online sexual victimisation to an AI than to an authority such as a teacher, doctor, counsellor, the police or a reporting service (Cubitt et al., 2026). Alongside this evidence, our findings highlight the need for interventions that actively encourage help seeking from trusted adults and services that are equipped to provide appropriate guidance and support.

Our findings also indicate that responses to online harms are influenced by children's age, developmental stage and gender. Younger children were generally more likely than teens to take action following negative online experiences, particularly following cyberbullying and exposure to online hate. At the same time, younger children were more likely than teens to report certain barriers to help seeking, including believing they wouldn't be allowed to use that platform or their device anymore, or because they felt scared or thought they might make the problem worse. This finding may suggest that while younger children may be more inclined to seek help from adults, they may also be more concerned about potential consequences.

We also found that girls were generally more likely than boys to take some form of action following negative online experiences, including self-protective actions and

disclosing their experience to a trusted person. By contrast, boys were more likely than girls to say they refrained from taking action after experiences of cyberbullying, sexual harassment or online hate because the experience didn't 'bother or upset them enough'. However, gendered patterns weren't uniform across all types of online harms. For example, girls were more likely than boys to refrain from disclosing their most recent or impactful online grooming-type experience because they believed it was something they should ignore. This finding could reflect a potential normalisation of such experiences among girls, driven by higher levels of exposure to these types of harms. Overall, these findings may reflect gendered differences in how online harms are perceived, interpreted and responded to, as well as broader gendered social norms relating to emotional expression, help seeking, and tolerance of harmful behaviour.

Taken together, our findings suggest that children's help seeking is shaped by a range of factors, including how online harms may be perceived and normalised, children's expectations of available support, and the emotional, social and practical barriers associated with disclosure and reporting, especially for more serious and stigmatised online harms. Our results point to a need for prevention and response efforts to address and reduce these barriers to ensure that children have access to appropriate forms of support, and that they aren't left to manage harmful online experiences alone. Our findings also demonstrate that online harms may be experienced and responded to differently by boys and girls and by children of different ages, underscoring the importance of targeted education and prevention efforts, for both parents and children, to enable all children to navigate the digital world safely and with appropriate and timely support when needed.



Parental awareness of and responses to children's negative online experiences

Parents play a vital role in helping children to safely navigate online spaces and in providing support and guidance when challenges arise. This section explores parental awareness of children's negative online experiences, as well as the various strategies parents use to support their children following experiences of online harm.

Many parents are unaware of their children's negative online experiences

Among parents of children who experienced a range of online harms, fewer than half were aware of their child's experience, reflecting our finding that fewer than half of the children surveyed reported telling anyone about negative online experiences. However, parental awareness varied considerably by the type of online harm experienced (see Table 6).[5] Awareness was highest among parents of children who experienced cyberbullying (49%) and exposure to content associated with harm (49%), with almost half of parents reporting that they were aware their child had experienced these harms.

Fewer parents were aware of their children's experiences of other forms of online harm, with a substantial proportion unaware that their child had experienced online sexual harassment (45%), non-consensual tracking, monitoring or harassment (44%), and grooming-type behaviours (42%).

Across all harm types, a notable proportion of parents reported that they suspected their child had experienced harm but weren't certain, ranging from 1 in 4 parents whose children had experienced non-consensual tracking, monitoring or harassment (25%) to more than 1 in 3 whose children had been exposed to content associated with harm (37%).

[5] The parent survey included questions about the parent's awareness of their children's experiences of cyberbullying, non-consensual tracking, monitoring and harassment, grooming-type behaviours, sexual harassment, and exposure to content associated with harm, corresponding to the harms assessed in the child core survey. The recontact survey, which assessed children's experiences of image-based abuse and online hate, was completed by children only; as such, we don't report on parental awareness of or responses to children's experiences of image-based abuse or online hate.





Table 6: Parental awareness of harms experienced by children online (%)

	Cyberbullying	Non-consensual tracking, monitoring or harassment	Grooming-type behaviours	Sexual harassment	Exposure to content associated with harm
Aware ('Yes, definitely')	49	31	24	28	49
Suspect, but not certain ('I think so')	29	25	32	27	37
Not aware ('Not that I'm aware of' / 'No, definitely not')	22	44	42	45	14
Base (*n*): Parents of children aged 10–17 who ever experienced each type of online harm	**1,863**	**871**	**437**	**713**	**2,554**

Note: Parents were asked a series of questions about their awareness of their children's negative online experiences, including cyberbullying, grooming-type behaviours, sexual harassment, non-consensual tracking, monitoring or harassment, and exposure to content associated with harm. Parents could respond to each question by selecting: 'Yes, definitely', 'I think so', 'Not that I'm aware of', 'No, definitely not' or 'I don't want to say'. In the table, 'Not aware' combines 'Not that I'm aware of' and 'No, definitely not'. Responses were included in the analysis only where the child had reported experiencing the corresponding harm.

When parents are aware of their child's negative online experience, most respond proactively

Among parents who were aware that their child had experienced online harm, most took some form of action, as shown in Table 7. Responses included: supportive actions, such as providing emotional support and helping their child decide what to do; implementing technical and restrictive mediation strategies, such as updating device settings or restricting access to devices; intervening directly, such as by contacting the school, or reporting the incident to the platform, the police or eSafety; and (though uncommon) retaliatory or defensive actions, such as publicly posting about the incident online. Across all types of harm, between 90% and 100% of parents reported taking some form of action, most commonly following children's experiences of online sexual harassment (100%), grooming-type behaviours (99%) and cyberbullying (97%).

Table 7: Parent responses to children's negative online experiences (%)

	Cyberbullying	Non-consensual tracking, monitoring or harassment	Grooming-type behaviours	Sexual harassment	Exposure to content associated with harm
Took any kind of action (combined)	**97**	**90**	**99**	**100**	**90**
Give your child emotional support	67	45	54	64	53
Help your child decide what to do about it	54	34	35	43	42
Put some new rules in place for your child to follow online	37	36	46	43	34
Encourage your child to stand up for themself, without retaliating (e.g. asking the person to stop)	31	21	16	32	–
Contact the school	26	24	17	33	7
Collect evidence (e.g. took screenshots)	22	20	31	35	7
Update your child's or family's device, app or game settings (e.g. parental controls)	18	25	34	22	19
Contact the parents/carers of the person who targeted your child	17	21	12	21	3
Seek support for your child (e.g. counselling)	13	16	20	19	4
Take away your child's device or ban them from using the platform, app or game	9	16	17	14	9
Defend your child by directly messaging the person responsible (e.g. telling them to stop)	8	14	23	14	4
Encourage your child to defend themself by doing or saying something similar back	4	4	3	3	–
Do something else	3	3	9	6	6
Defend your child by publicly posting about the situation on social media or in a group chat	2	8	9	4	–
Defend your child by doing or saying something similar back	1	3	2	3	–
Reported it (combined)	**23**	**27**	**52**	**43**	**20**
Report it to the platform, app or game	17	14	34	27	18
Report it to the police	6	14	23	17	1
Report it to eSafety	4	11	19	9	4
Ignore it	4	4	2	2	6
I don't want to say	0	4	0	0	1
Base (*n*): Parents who reported that children had experienced online harm and who answered the follow-up questions about their child's most recent or impactful experience of that harm	**510**	**278**	**174**	**200**	**547**

Q: Think about the last time someone [RECENT EXPERIENCE]. After this happened, did you (and/or your child's other parent or caregiver) ...? You can choose more than one answer.

Most parents provide emotional support and practical guidance following children's negative online experiences

Parents most commonly responded to their child's negative online experience by providing emotional and practical support. Around half to two thirds of parents (45% to 67%) provided **emotional support** to their child following their most recent or impactful negative online experience, particularly following experiences of cyberbullying (67%) or online sexual harassment (64%).

Parents also played a supportive and active role in decision making by:

- helping their child decide **how to respond** (ranging from 34% of parents who helped their child decide how to respond following non-consensual tracking, monitoring or harassment to 54% of parents who helped their child decide how to respond following cyberbullying)
- encouraging their child to **stand up for themselves** without escalating the situation (ranging from 16% of parents who encouraged their child to stand up for themselves without escalation following grooming-type behaviours to 32% of parents who did so following online sexual harassment)
- **collecting evidence** such as screenshots (ranging from 7% of parents who collected evidence following their child's exposure to content associated with harm to 35% of parents who did so following online sexual harassment)
- **contacting the school or the parents** of the person responsible (ranging from 3% of parents who contacted the parent of the person responsible following their child's exposure to content associated with harm to 33% of parents who contacted the school following their child's recent experience of online sexual harassment)
- **seeking support** for their child (ranging from 4% of parents who sought support following their child's recent exposure to content associated with harm to 20% who did so following their child's recent experience of grooming-type behaviours).

Parents tended to be more likely to take these actions in response to online harms directly targeting their child, such as online sexual harassment, grooming-type behaviours and cyberbullying, rather than content-based harms.

Many parents implement new rules or restrictions following children's experiences of online harm

In addition to providing support and helping their child decide how to respond, many parents put new rules or restrictions in place following their child's most recent or impactful negative online experience. For example:

- Around one third to nearly half of parents put **new rules** in place for their child to follow online (ranging from 34% of parents who put new rules in place following exposure to content associated with harm to 46% who did so following experiences of grooming-type behaviours).
- Some parents **adjusted device, app or game settings** (ranging from 18% of parents who adjusted settings following cyberbullying to 34% who did so following experiences of grooming-type behaviours).
- Some parents **restricted their child's access to devices or platforms** (ranging from 9% following their child's recent experience of cyberbullying and exposure to content associated with harm to 17% following experiences of grooming-type behaviours).

Parents were especially likely to implement new rules or restrictions following children's experiences of grooming-type behaviours, non-consensual tracking, monitoring or harassment, and online sexual harassment.

Significant proportions of parents formally report their child's negative online experiences

Significant proportions of parents said they **formally reported** their child's most recent or impactful negative online experience, ranging from 20% following their child's exposure to content associated with harm to 52% following their child's experience of grooming-type behaviours, as shown in Table 7. However, for most harm types, still only a minority of parents formally reported their child's experiences of online harms.

Parents who did report their child's negative online experiences mostly reported to the platform, app or game where the harm occurred, ranging from 14% who did so following their child's most recent or impactful experience of non-consensual monitoring, tracking or harassment to 34% who did so following their child's most recent or impactful experience of online grooming-type behaviours.

Parental responses to negative online experiences are influenced by children's age and gender

Overall, parental awareness of children's negative online experiences was broadly similar among children of varying ages and genders. The only exception was that parents of younger children (aged 10 to 12) were more likely to be unaware that their child had experienced non-consensual tracking, monitoring or harassment compared to parents of younger teens (aged 13 to 15) (50% versus 40%).

In addition, most parents of both girls and boys, and of children of varying ages, took some form of action following their child's most recent or impactful negative online experience, typically by providing emotional support, implementing restrictive or technical mediation strategies, or helping their child decide how to respond. However, for some online harms, the actions parents took in response differed by the age and gender of the child, as well as by the parent's gender.

Parental responses to online harms varied according to children's age and gender

- Among parents who were aware that their child had experienced online harm, parents of **younger children and younger teens** (aged 10 to 15) were **more likely** than parents of older teens (aged 16 to 17) to **take action** following their child's most recent or impactful encounter with **content associated with harm** (92% versus 84%). More specifically, parents of younger children were the most likely to put new rules in place for their child to follow online (47%), update device, app or game settings (31%), or take away their child's device or ban them from using the platform, app or game (15%). These responses were less common among parents of younger teens (33%, 18% and 8%, respectively) and least common among parents of older teens (21%, 7% and 3%, respectively).
- Parents of **younger children** were also **more likely** than parents of teens (aged 13 to 17) to implement **restrictive and technical mediation** strategies following their child's experiences of **cyberbullying**, such as putting new rules in place (49% versus 28%), updating device and app settings (26% versus 13%), or restricting their child's device or internet access (14% versus 5%).
- Parents of **girls** were **more likely** than parents of boys to take certain actions in response to some types of negative experiences. Specifically, parents of girls were more likely to:
  - **help their child decide what to do** following a **cyberbullying** experience (60% versus 46%)
  - give their child **emotional support** following **exposure to content associated with harm** (60% versus 46%)
  - **collect evidence** following a recent experience of online **grooming-type behaviour** (41% versus 19%).

Parental awareness of and responses to online harms differed by parents' gender

Among parents, **women** tended to be more likely than men to be **aware** if their child had experienced various online harms and to **take various actions** in response to many online harms.

- Among parents of children who had experienced online harm, **men** were more likely than women to be **unaware** that their child had experienced **cyberbullying** (27% versus 19%), **online sexual harassment** (51% versus 42%) and **exposure to content associated with harm** (18% versus 12%).
- On the other hand, **women** were more likely than men to be **unaware** that their child had experienced **non-consensual tracking, monitoring or harassment** (47% versus 38%).
- Among parents who were aware that their child had experienced online harm, **women** were more likely than men to provide **emotional support** to their child following experiences of cyberbullying (69% versus 55%), non-consensual tracking, monitoring and harassment (50% versus 36%), grooming-type behaviours (67% versus 30%) and online sexual harassment (68% versus 49%).
- **Women** were also more likely than men to help their child **decide what to do** following experiences of online sexual harassment (49% versus 26%) and cyberbullying (57% versus 43%), and to put in place new rules for their child to adhere to online following cyberbullying experiences (40% versus 23%).
- Additionally, **women** were more likely than men to **collect evidence** of experiences of cyberbullying (24% versus 13%) and online sexual harassment (39% versus 20%). They were also more likely than men to contact the school (38% versus 17%) or to encourage their child to stand up for themselves, without retaliating (37% versus 14%), following experiences of online sexual harassment.
- On the other hand, following cyberbullying experiences, **men** were more likely than women to **take away their child's device or ban them** from using the platform, app or game where the cyberbullying occurred (16% versus 7%) or to **ignore it** (8% versus 3%).





Discussion

Our findings highlight a substantial gap in parental awareness of children's experiences of online harm. Among parents whose child had experienced various types of online harm, less than half were aware that their child had experienced such harm. Parental awareness varied according to the nature of the harm, being highest for cyberbullying and exposure to content associated with harm and lowest for experiences of non-consensual tracking, monitoring or harassment, sexual harassment, and grooming-type behaviours.

This pattern broadly mirrors children's disclosure behaviour. Children were more likely to report telling a parent about experiences of cyberbullying than about experiences involving non-consensual tracking, monitoring or harassment, sexual harassment, or grooming-type behaviours. Although children were less likely to disclose exposure to content associated with harm, these experiences may nevertheless be more visible or recognisable to parents. Alternatively, parents may be more likely to assume that their child has encountered such content, given the relatively high prevalence of these exposures (eSafety Commissioner, 2026c).

The notable gaps in parental awareness of more serious and stigmatised experiences, such as grooming-type behaviours and sexual harassment, are particularly important in light of our finding that children report significant emotional barriers to disclosing and reporting these experiences. These barriers, including feelings of shame, embarrassment and self-blame, may limit children's willingness to seek help and can make such harms less visible to parents and other trusted adults. As a result, these experiences may be more difficult for parents to identify and address. Interventions that target these emotional barriers are critical in ensuring that children feel safe and supported in disclosing sensitive online harms. By fostering disclosure, parents and other trusted adults are better positioned to intervene and provide timely support when needed.

In addition, a notable proportion of parents reported that they suspected, but weren't certain, that their child had experienced an online harm. This finding suggests that some parents may recognise indicators that something has occurred, such as behavioural change, but lack information to understand the nature of the experience. Some parents may feel unsure about how to raise their concerns with their child, or they may have had conversations about their suspicions without gaining a clear understanding of what occurred. Together, these findings underscore the importance of fostering open communication within families so that children feel comfortable sharing negative online experiences, no matter their nature, and can access timely and appropriate support when harm occurs. The findings also suggest a need to support parents to develop the confidence and skills to engage in conversations about online safety, especially in

relation to serious and stigmatised harms, to identify potential indicators of harm, and to respond effectively when concerns arise.

Indeed, our findings show that when parents are aware of their child's negative online experience, almost all of them take some form of action. Most commonly, this involves providing emotional support and practical guidance, which highlights the important role parents play in helping their children to navigate online harms. Many parents, especially parents of younger children, also implement technical or restrictive mediation strategies, such as introducing new rules, changing device or app settings, or limiting access to devices. While these measures may be appropriate in some circumstances, our findings suggest that concerns about losing device or internet access can discourage some children, particularly younger children, from disclosing experiences of online harm. Again, this finding highlights the importance of fostering open and honest communication within families, particularly as an initial response, to ensure that children feel comfortable seeking support when needed.

Consistent with this finding, in the previous section we showed that children were more likely to disclose a negative online experience to a parent when their parent regularly encouraged them to speak up about unsafe or uncomfortable online situations. These findings may also point to the value of approaches that move beyond rule setting alone towards shared family expectations and agreements about technology use, which can be reviewed and adapted as children grow and the nature of their online experiences change.

A notable proportion of parents also engaged with formal reporting mechanisms, especially following experiences of grooming-type behaviours or online sexual harassment, suggesting that these harms may be perceived as more serious or high-risk, or more likely to be acted upon. Parents were more likely to report children's negative online experiences to the app or platform directly than to the police or eSafety. This may reflect greater familiarity with or perceived accessibility of platform reporting tools, potential reluctance to engage with law enforcement or government agencies, or uncertainty about the types of online behaviours that would be acted upon by these entities. However, there is a need to better understand parents' decision making in this area, including the factors that influence whether, where and how they report online harms. Improving this understanding could help in identifying barriers to formal reporting and in informing strategies to increase the uptake of available reporting pathways.

As reported in '**Balancing risk and reward**', parents of teens generally had greater awareness of the technologies their children used, and of the broad activities they engaged in online, than parents of younger children, such as their use of social media (eSafety Commissioner, 2026a). In contrast, the present findings indicate that parental awareness of children's negative online experiences is broadly similar across age groups

for most types of online harm. However, parents of younger children were more likely than parents of younger teens to be unaware that their child had experienced non-consensual tracking, monitoring or harassment. Notably, we showed in 'Balancing risk and reward' that parents of younger children were also less likely to know that their child had used a location-sharing app to share their live location with someone outside the family, a behaviour that may increase their vulnerability to harms such as non-consensual tracking, monitoring or harassment (eSafety Commissioner, 2026a). Taken together, these findings highlight the importance of increasing parental awareness of the diverse ways children, particularly younger children, engage with digital technologies, the risks that can accompany these activities, and the available pathways to mitigate them.

Finally, our findings suggest that both child and parent gender may influence parental awareness of and responses to children's experiences of online harms. Although both parents of boys and girls engaged in a range of supportive responses, most commonly providing emotional support and guidance to their child, parents of girls were more likely to report using certain responses to specific online harms, including helping their child decide what to do following a cyberbullying experience, providing emotional support after exposure to content associated with harm, and collecting evidence following grooming-type experiences.



In addition, women were generally more likely than men to be aware of their child's negative online experiences and to provide various types of support and assistance to their child following such experiences. These findings mirror those reported in 'Balancing risk and reward', where we showed that women used a wider range of mediation strategies and had more frequent online safety conversations with their children than did men (eSafety Commissioner, 2026a). These differences may reflect broader patterns of caregiving and communication within families. Women may have more frequent discussions with their children about their wellbeing and online experiences, creating additional opportunities for disclosure and support. Further research is needed to better understand how these dynamics influence children's willingness to disclose online harms and seek support.

Together, these findings highlight the importance of parental awareness and communication in supporting children affected by online harms. At the same time, they point to significant gaps in parents' awareness of the harms their children may be experiencing online, particularly more serious and stigmatised harms, raising concerns about the extent to which many children may be navigating these experiences without parental knowledge and support. Overall, the findings point to a need for accessible, inclusive resources that support all parents to recognise and respond appropriately to a range of online harms, and for parents to have open and ongoing conversations with their children about their online experiences, regardless of their gender. They also suggest that approaches to digital parenting may need to evolve, rather than retreat, as children grow older, to ensure that children continue to receive developmentally appropriate support to help them prevent and respond to online harms.





Conclusions and implications

This report explores how families in Australia are navigating children's negative online experiences. For many children, digital technologies are embedded in everyday life. Far from being passive consumers of digital content, many children actively participate in the online world, using the internet to connect, explore their interests, have fun and express themselves (eSafety Commissioner, 2026b). At the same time, digital participation can expose children to a range of online harms. These experiences are common and diverse, and their impacts can vary considerably depending on the nature of the harm, the child involved and the support available to them.

Our findings indicate that while children often take self-protective steps to manage these negative online experiences, significant barriers to help seeking remain, and many children don't disclose harmful experiences to a parent or other trusted adult. In addition, many parents are unaware of the harms their children face online, limiting their ability to provide them with timely support and guidance.

Together, these findings point to a need to strengthen parental awareness of online risks, to equip and encourage families to discuss online experiences openly and routinely, and to improve access to clear, practical guidance to help children and parents navigate negative experiences and access support when needed.

It is also crucial that industry provides clear pathways for users to report safety issues and responds effectively to user reports – to mitigate further harm, to meet community and regulatory expectations, and to build confidence in reporting mechanisms.

Below, we outline some of the ways this response might be achieved.

Children should be ensured access to support following negative online experiences to foster help-seeking behaviours

Our findings highlight the active role that many children play in navigating negative online experiences, including by taking self-protective actions such as blocking or muting the person or people responsible. However, they also show that a substantial proportion of children don't disclose or formally report negative online experiences, citing a range of barriers to help seeking.

Many children reported that they didn't disclose or seek help because they felt the experience **didn't bother or upset them enough**. However, this response doesn't necessarily indicate an absence of harm. Existing research demonstrates that online harm can have immediate and long-term emotional, psychological and social consequences for children Page et al., 2025; Lee et al., 2026). However, children may not always recognise the effects of negative online experiences, may minimise their impact, or may view them as a normal part of being online.

Similarly, evidence indicates that exposure to harmful online content can negatively impact children's wellbeing (Biswas et al., 2025; eSafety Commissioner, 2026c). However, our findings suggest that **content-based harms may be less recognised by children as needing a response**. These findings suggest there may be value in strengthening children's understanding of the impacts of negative online experiences, as well as the benefits of seeking support, to encourage help seeking. Targeted resources may be especially needed for boys, who may be more likely to minimise the impacts of online harms.

Our findings also show that **fear-, shame- and blame-based barriers** to disclosing or reporting are more prominent for serious and stigmatised harms such as **grooming-type behaviours** and **image-based abuse**. This is consistent with existing research indicating that experiences of sexual victimisation are often associated with feelings of shame, self-blame, embarrassment and fear of negative consequences, which can prevent disclosure and help seeking (Lemaigre, Taylor & Gittoes, 2017; Thorn, 2026). Together, these findings suggest that interventions should address reducing stigma, reinforcing that children will be believed and supported, and providing safe and confidential pathways for disclosure and reporting. Further, in an evolving digital environment where children may increasingly turn to AI tools for advice or support, it will also be important to ensure that children are guided towards trusted adults and appropriate support services, particularly following more sensitive harms where emotional barriers to disclosure may already be elevated.

Access to support following experiences of online harm is a key protective factor that can promote online safety and mitigate the impacts of harm (Lee & Hancock, 2023). However, this study highlights that a barrier to children disclosing or reporting online harms is the perception that doing so **may not help resolve the problem** or could potentially make it worse. Given the low rates of disclosure observed across harms, our findings highlight the importance of ensuring that children can access appropriate support when needed. Importantly, interventions should be tailored to the specific support needs associated with different forms of online harm and designed to reflect children's varying needs and experiences across age and gender (Fergert & Melchior, 2026).

It is important to consider how these barriers and factors influencing children's help seeking may be experienced in the context of the social media minimum age restrictions. Although the restrictions are intended to promote children's online safety by limiting social media account ownership to those aged 16 years and over, they may have potential unintended consequences for help seeking among some children. As we found, some children, especially younger children, who may have concerns about losing access to a platform or device may choose not to disclose or report certain online harms. In the context of the social media age restrictions, children may be less likely to disclose or report negative online experiences if they **fear being blamed, getting in trouble, or losing access to social media or other online activities**.

This finding highlights the importance of ensuring that children feel able to seek support without fear of punishment or judgement. Supporting open, non-judgemental communication within families about children's online activities and experiences will continue to be paramount as children and parents adjust to the age restrictions. These findings reinforce the need for resources to support parents to respond calmly and supportively when children disclose online harms, which may help to reduce their fears of blame or negative consequences and encourage them to seek help from a trusted person.

Open communication within families about online safety should start early and be ongoing

Our findings highlight substantial **gaps in parental awareness** of children's negative online experiences, especially in relation to more serious and stigmatised online harms. These gaps reduce opportunities for parents to provide timely guidance, support and intervention when harms occur. Given the pivotal role that parents play in supporting their children's online safety, these findings underscore the need to support parents in facilitating open conversations with their children about online risks and experiences, in turn fostering children's disclosure behaviours.

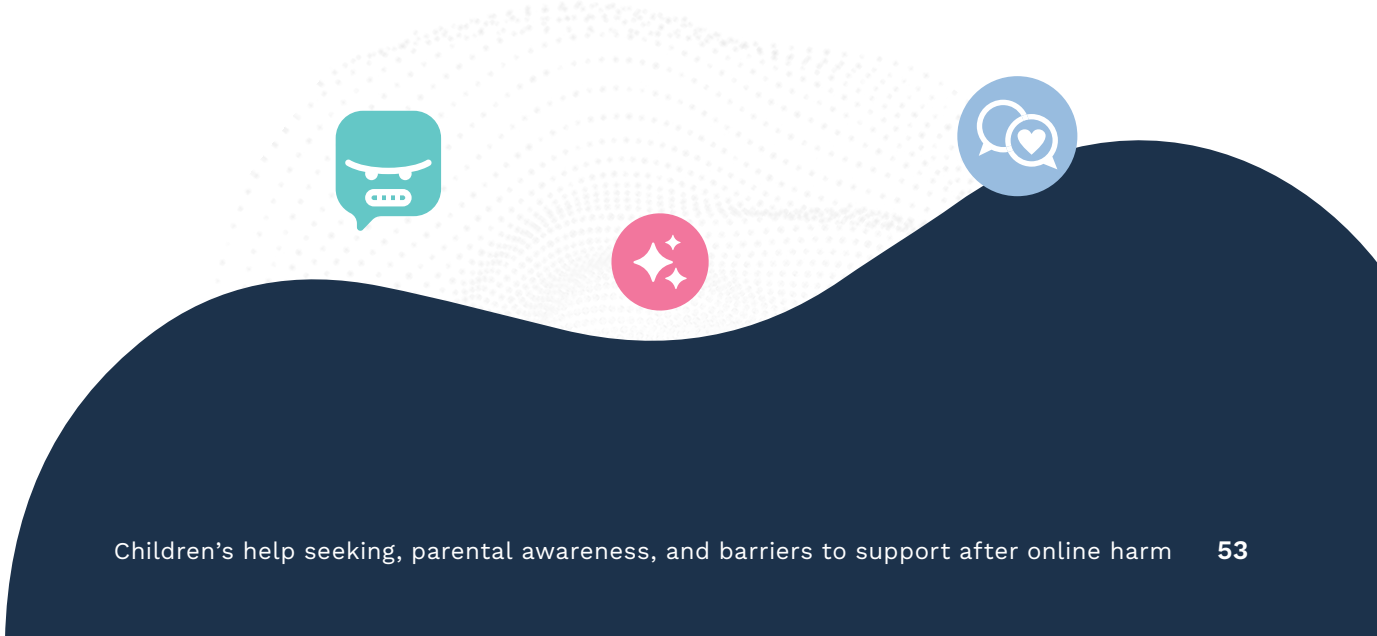
Indeed, children were more likely to tell a parent about a negative online experience when their parent regularly encouraged them to talk about anything that made them feel uncomfortable or unsafe online. This finding reinforces the critical importance of open dialogue between parents and children. It may also point to the value of establishing shared family expectations and agreements regarding technology use and online safety. Reviewing these expectations as children grow and their online engagement evolves may help to maintain trust, encourage disclosure and support positive online safety behaviours.

Broadly reflecting children's disclosure behaviours, we found the greatest gaps in parents' awareness were observed for experiences involving online sexual harassment or grooming-type behaviours. These **serious and stigmatised experiences** may be less visible to parents, particularly as children reported fear-, shame- and blame-based barriers to telling someone about these harms.

Targeted and accessible resources may help parents both to recognise these risks and to discuss them with children in an age-appropriate, supportive way. Resources should focus on increasing parents' emotional readiness and confidence to have these conversations, and on helping families to feel prepared to talk about these risks early, often and in a non-judgemental way.

Additionally, our findings suggest that particular attention may be needed to ensure that men feel encouraged and equipped to engage in conversations about children's online experiences and safety. Men were generally less likely than women to be aware of some forms of online harm and to provide certain forms of support following children's negative online experiences. While these differences may reflect broader patterns of parental responsibilities and communication within families, they suggest there may be value in ensuring that resources are designed to engage all caregivers and that both men and women are encouraged and empowered to support their children following experiences of online harm.

In addition, many parents suspected, but weren't certain, that their child had experienced online harm. This finding suggests that parental awareness is often partial rather than absent. Resources that help parents to recognise warning signs and to initiate supportive conversations may therefore help to bridge the gap between suspicion and understanding.



Families need guidance and resources to identify and access appropriate reporting pathways

Our findings show that a notable proportion of parents and children reported children's experiences of online harms through formal channels. However, many families did not access these reporting pathways. While reporting may not always be required or appropriate, depending on the circumstance, these findings suggest that some **families may face barriers to reporting** incidences of online harm through these channels.

It remains important to build both parents' and children's knowledge of the resources and reporting pathways available to them, including eSafety's reporting schemes. Improving awareness of these resources may help to increase uptake and ensure that parents are equipped to support their children if online harms do occur.



Tailored resources could help to ensure that children of all ages and genders are supported to stay safe online

Our findings highlight the importance of supporting parents to understand how online risks evolve over childhood and adolescence. Younger children were generally more likely to seek support following negative online experiences, while parents of younger children were more likely to respond with restrictive and technical mediation strategies. In contrast, parents of older teens appeared less likely to intervene directly, potentially reflecting greater expectations of teens' capacity to manage online challenges without parental guidance. While older teens may also increasingly seek to manage such challenges independently, serious online harms often require adult guidance, support and intervention. As children mature, parents may need to shift from monitoring and direct management towards approaches that preserve trust, encourage disclosure, and ensure young people know that support is available when needed. Resources should therefore support families to adapt their approaches as children mature, balancing children's safety, and their being willing to ask a trusted adult for support if needed, with their growing autonomy and independence online.

Our findings also showed that parents of girls were more likely than parents of boys to report using certain responses following their children's experiences of some online harms. This difference reflects broader patterns identified in 'Balancing risk and reward', where parents of girls were more likely than parents of boys to implement a wider range of mediation strategies and to discuss more online safety subjects with their children (eSafety Commissioner, 2026a). Consistent with research showing that parents of girls tend to express greater concerns about their children encountering online harms than parents of boys (Internet Matters, 2026), these findings suggest there may be a **heightened perception of online risk among parents of girls**.

These findings highlight the value of providing parents with resources that address different parental perceptions of online risk. These resources should be grounded in the understanding that girls and boys of all ages can experience serious online harms, and that all children benefit from emotional, practical and age-appropriate support when harm occurs.

Industry has a key role in promoting children's online safety

Alongside other barriers to help seeking, we found that some children refrained from reporting negative online experiences because they lacked **understanding of how to report** or had **low confidence in reporting outcomes**. This finding aligns with recent research indicating that children may face barriers to reporting harmful online experiences even when they are aware of reporting tools, including uncertainty about reporting processes and lack of trust in reporting outcomes (Internet Matters, 2025; Ofcom, 2024). Coupled with the low prevalence of reporting among children in our survey, these findings suggest that there may be a need for targeted interventions aimed at improving accessibility of appropriate reporting pathways for children experiencing online harms. Such reporting avenues must be tailored to children's diverse needs to improve uptake and ensure that when children do report, their experiences are taken seriously, and they receive safe and appropriate child-friendly assistance.

Industry must ensure that online services comply with their regulatory obligations under the Online Safety Act 2021 (Cth), including the **Basic Online Safety Expectations** and **Online Safety Codes and Standards**. This includes ensuring that users can make reports about unlawful or harmful material or conduct via user-friendly and accessible pathways and that these reports are responded to. Our findings also reinforce the need for industry to adopt **Safety by Design** approaches to ensure that when children disclose or report harmful online experiences, they can access safe and appropriate support and are not exposed to further harm. Consistent with a Safety by Design approach, digital services should be designed with safety built in from the outset, reducing the burden on parents and children to identify, manage and respond to online risks on their own.





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