

Left To Their Own Devices



The virtually unprotected lives of kids in Ireland



Trends and Usage Report Academic Year 2023-2024

Our Mission

To make online safer for children and children safer online. We do this through education, giving voice to children's online experience and by being a fierce advocate for children's online safety.

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“Children deserve better. They have a legitimate right to participate actively and fully in the digital world around them”

Foreword by Brian O’Neill

As the annual CyberSafeKids Trends & Usage Report shows, children grow up in thoroughly digitalised worlds. The diversity and breadth of digital products and services that young people use and experience is striking. It is clear that the digital environment is a mainstay of young people’s everyday lives. Whether at home, at school, or at play, being connected digitally is unavoidable and an integral part of the world we live in. For many parents and for many young people, this may feel like a double-edged sword: while ever-present digital technologies undoubtedly offer many positive opportunities and benefits, there are also some startling challenges.

As we can see in this report, children experience disturbing and sometimes shocking content on supposedly child-friendly platforms; they receive unwanted contact from strangers whose motives are often suspect; they experience deep anguish about the cyberbullying torment they routinely experience online; and most worryingly, they often don’t know what to do or are afraid to speak up or seek support when bad things happen to them online.

Children deserve better. They have a legitimate right to participate actively and fully in the digital world around them and to expect that digital service providers offer safe and age-appropriate experiences. But clearly, as these indispensable CyberSafeKids findings show, this is not always (or even often) the case.

Major policy initiatives – such as the enhanced protections of the European Union’s Digital Services Act (DSA) or the expected safety standards set out in Ireland’s draft Online Safety Code – are working



to bring about a better digital world, and one that young people deserve. But key to this is hearing from children themselves and understanding the reality of their experiences. Research that tracks where children encounter problems, how they are impacted, and what they believe could best be done about them is vital for developing sustainable and effective solutions. Restricting or eliminating children’s access to digital technologies is neither an adequate nor workable response, and as the report argues, it may leave children ill-prepared and lacking in the very digital skills they need to prosper in the digital world. A better approach is to focus on an all-around safer online environment – the current focus of major policies nationally and around the world – and to equip children appropriately with the skills, literacies and resilience needed for a certain digital future. The vital contribution that CyberSafeKids makes to this challenge is to be commended and merits support from every area of society.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Brian O'Neill'.

Brian O’Neill,
Emeritus Professor,
Technological University Dublin.

Brian O’Neill is a researcher on young people’s use of digital technologies, online safety and policy for the digital environment, and a board advisor to CyberSafeKids.

Key Numbers

In this report, we will provide a comprehensive overview of children’s relationship with the online world and highlight a considerable number of vulnerabilities. A summary of key numbers is included below.

<p>8–12 Year Olds in primary school</p> <p>Have their own smart device</p> <p>94%</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Tablet 59% ● Games console 57% ● Smartphone 49% ● Laptop 21% <hr/> <p>Have their own social media & instant messaging accounts</p> <p>82%</p> <hr/> <p>Spent most of their time online</p> <p>42% Gaming</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Watching videos 25% ● Social media 12% ● Chatting with friends 11% <hr/> <p>Most popular online environments to have own account*</p> <p>75% YouTube</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● WhatsApp 41% ● Roblox 40% ● Snapchat 36% ● TikTok 33% ● Fortnite 30% <hr/> <p>Have experienced cyberbullying</p> <p>25%</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 28% of girls ● 22% of boys 	<p>12–14 Year Olds in secondary school</p> <p>Have their own smart device</p> <p>99%</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Smartphone 97% ● Games console 59% ● Tablet 49% ● Laptop 42% <hr/> <p>Have their own social media & instant messaging accounts</p> <p>100%</p> <hr/> <p>Spent most of their time online</p> <p>41% Social Media</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Gaming 22% ● Chatting with friends 22% ● Watching videos 11% <hr/> <p>Most popular online environments to have own account*</p> <p>86% WhatsApp</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Snapchat 84% ● YouTube 83% ● TikTok 74% ● Instagram 51% ● Pinterest 38% <hr/> <p>Have experienced cyberbullying</p> <p>38%</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 46% of girls ● 30% of boys
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<p>8–12 Year Olds in primary school</p> <p>Have been bothered or upset by something seen or experienced online</p> <p>25%</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 37% on YouTube ● 23% on Roblox <hr/> <p>Kept negative experiences to themselves</p> <p>29% when bullied</p> <p>36% when bothered by something online</p> <hr/> <p>Have unrestricted online access</p> <p>35%</p> <hr/> <p>Rules at home</p> <p>19% have no rules</p> <p>17% restricted use of devices in bedrooms</p> <hr/> <p>Talked to a parent about how to stay safe online in the last year*</p> <p>58% talked to a parent</p>	<p>12–14 Year Olds in secondary school</p> <p>Have been bothered or upset by something seen or experienced online</p> <p>21%</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 41% on Snapchat ● 30% on TikTok <hr/> <p>Kept negative experiences to themselves</p> <p>38% when bullied</p> <p>38% when bothered by something online</p> <hr/> <p>Have unrestricted online access</p> <p>61%</p> <hr/> <p>Rules at home</p> <p>20% have no rules</p> <p>66% needed permission to make online purchases</p> <hr/> <p>Talked to a parent about how to stay safe online in the last year*</p> <p>37% talked to a teacher</p>
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*Note gaming environments are not included for secondary school children

*Study carried out amongst 8–12 year olds only

Introduction

“Somebody was saying creepy things to me on Roblox” *Girl, aged 9*

If a child tells you that they have a lot of negative experiences online then they are not alone. Our latest research shows that only 43% of 8-12 year olds had ‘mostly’ positive experiences online in the last year. Exposure to harmful content and contact were commonplace in the online environments where young children spent so much of their time.

Since 2016 we have highlighted the extent to which children in Ireland are engaging with technology and their resulting experiences. This year we have seen a reduction in parental involvement and a continuing gap in the digital skills of children that leave them far too vulnerable to online harm. This is a real cause for concern.

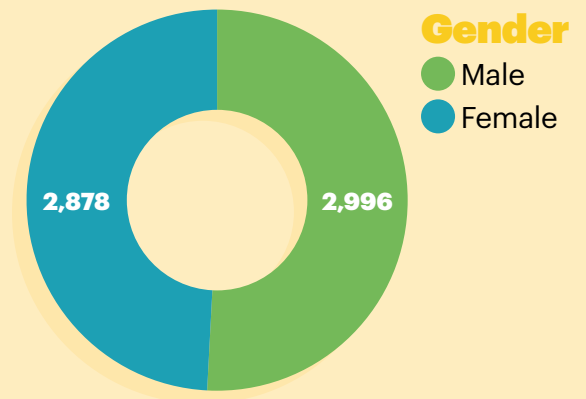
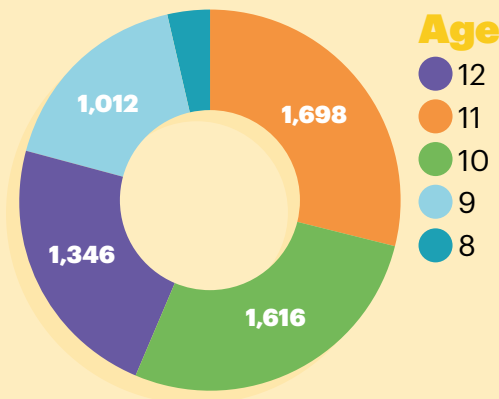
Research Data

During the 2023-2024 academic year we surveyed a total of 7,176 children, aged 8-14 years, in 101 schools across Ireland. Our research data was collected via anonymous online surveys before visiting each school.

Overall, we delivered our education programme to 19,136 children across Ireland in the 2023-24 academic year.

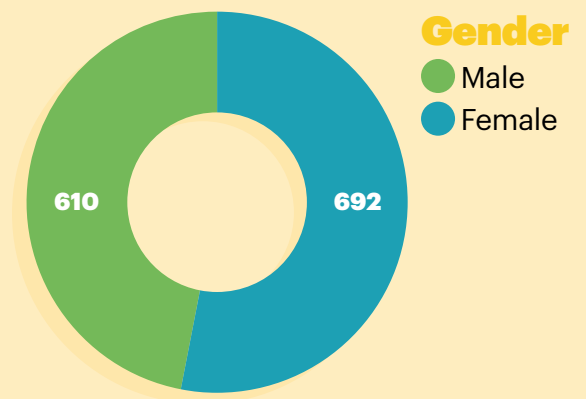
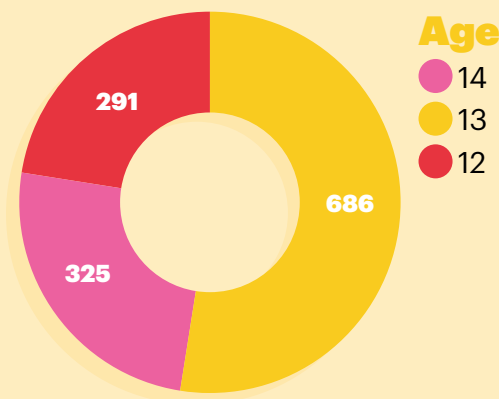
Primary

- 5,874 children
- aged 8–12
- across 84 schools



Secondary

- 1,302 children
- aged 12–14
- across 17 schools



Online Access Too Young

94% of 8-12 year olds owned a smart device (Table 1). Attention of late has focused on banning smartphone ownership for this age group, but smartphones are not the only device (or even the most popular devices) that young children use to access the online world. Tablets and gaming consoles are often the first device children own, and can expose them to the same online harms.

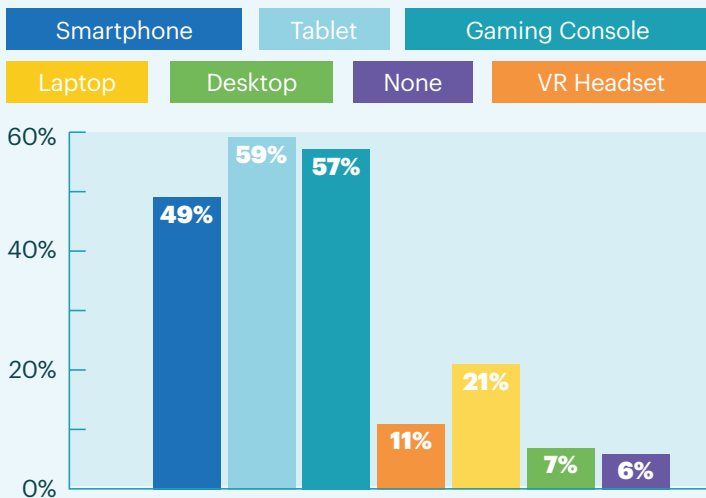


Table 1: Smart device ownership (8-12 year olds)

We have yet to see any impact from childhood smartphone-free initiatives within the school communities that we surveyed. It is actually more common than ever before for an 11 year old to own a smartphone in Ireland. This year 59% owned a smartphone vs 52% of 11 year olds in 2022-2023, and this rises to 74% by the age of 12.

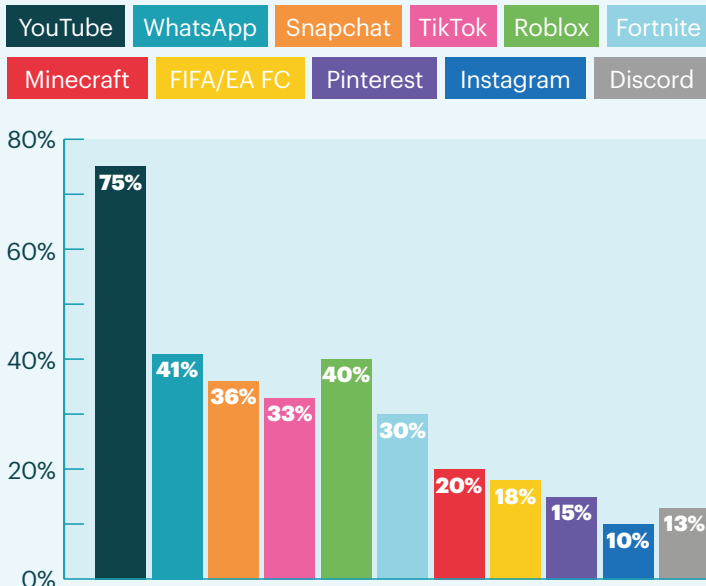


Table 2: Most popular online environments (with 8-12 year olds)

While online, children engaged with a range of popular social environments, including video sharing platform services, games, and instant messaging apps: (Table 2). YouTube continued to be the most popular platform with both boys and girls (8-12 year olds) and watching videos was chosen by 1 in 4 children as the online activity they spent most time on.

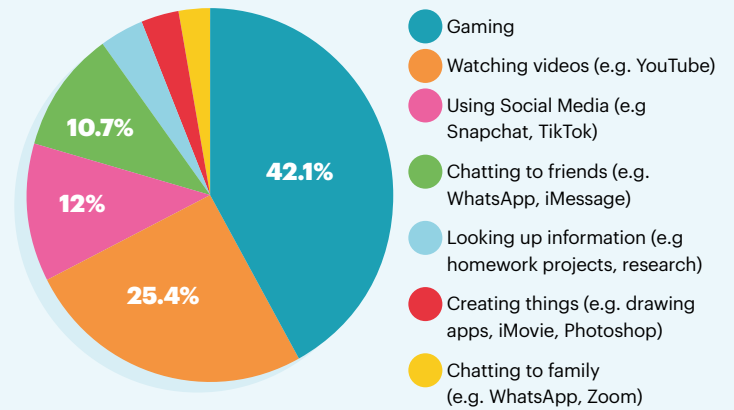


Table 3: I spend most of my time online... (8-12 year olds)

This year children of every age that we surveyed in primary school told us that they spent more time gaming than on other online activities: (Table 3). After YouTube, the most popular environment with girls was Roblox (54% had accounts) and the most popular environment with boys was Fortnite (48% engaging on the platform). These social gaming environments, like video sharing platform services, raise concerns around contact with strangers, cyberbullying, targeting, and harmful content.

As in previous years, 1 in 4 8-12 year olds reported being bothered or upset by something experienced or seen online. Exposure to horror content was the most common negative experience reported on YouTube. A startling 23% of incidents which bothered or upset the children surveyed took place on the Roblox platform. These negative experiences involved anything from threats, scams and harassment, to horror games. Given that gaming environments are where children spend the most time, there is an urgent need to find ways to regulate such environments and also educate children on how to navigate safely through them.

Online Gaming: A Gap in Regulation

We need to ensure children are equipped with the skills and knowledge to avoid and/or report harms as they arise and importantly, we need to ensure that these gaming environments do far more to prevent harms.

Regulating online gaming environments has not received the same attention as other social online environments in which children spend time. These environments were not considered under Ireland’s Online Safety Media Regulation Act. There are some regulatory requirements that the companies involved must meet under the EU’s Digital Services Act (DSA). However, because the number of monthly active users falls below the 45 million threshold required to meet the DSA’s definition of VLOPs (Very Large Online Platforms), regulatory requirements are not as onerous for these platforms. It will also not fall to Coimisiún na Meán to enforce the DSA for these environments because the EU headquarters of most gaming companies are not in Ireland.

“I had a bad experience with people I thought were my friends. They hacked my Snapchat, took my photos, sent bad messages to themselves using my account. They ruined most of my reputation” *Girl, aged 12*

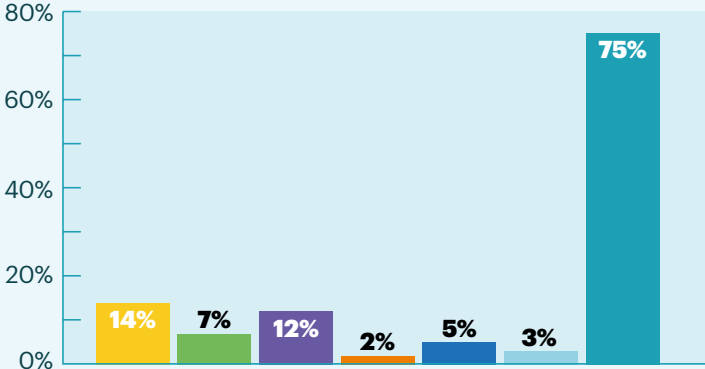
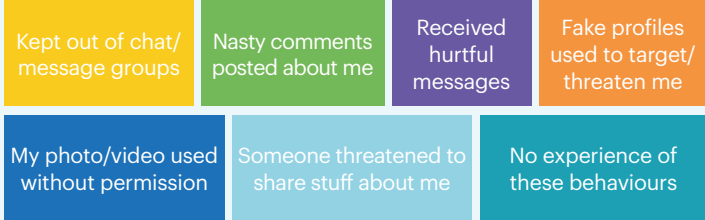


Table 4: Cyberbullying experiences you have had online (8-12 year olds)

“My closest friend posted a harmful video of me, stating how rude I was and photos of me.” *Girl, aged 12*

Children also raised concerns about content viewed on video sharing platform services that bothered or upset them. Advertisements presented on these platforms were also problematic at times for young children, confusing or scaring them.

Cyberbullying continued to affect 1 in 4 8-12 year olds this year, with some children targeted in multiple ways (Table 4).

How online time was spent had a great impact on the likelihood of being cyberbullied (Table 5). Children who spent most of their time on social media platforms were much more likely to have experienced cyberbullying (42%) than those who spent most of their time in gaming environments (24%) or consuming videos (19%).

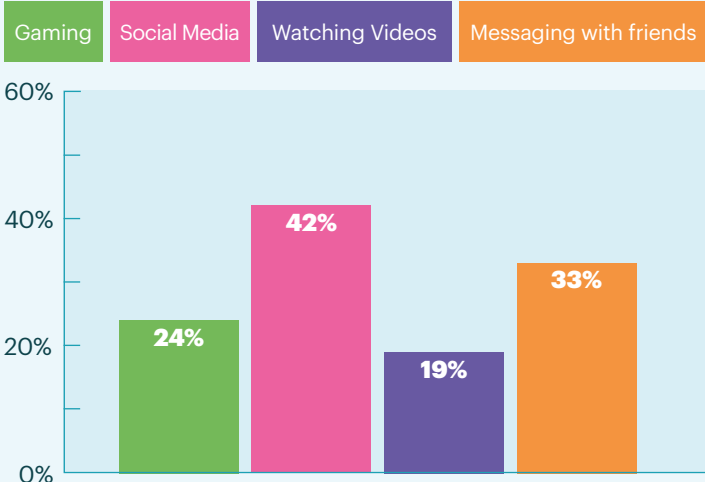


Table 5: I spent most of my time online...and experiences of cyberbullying (8-12 year olds)

Online Access Without Education

The school curriculum currently does little to prepare children for the challenges they face online. This is apparent when we consider some of the poor choices that children made this year when they engaged with games and apps, which exposed them to greater risk of harm than was necessary.

Only 1 in 3 maintained private accounts, a significant reduction from last year's figure of 39% (Table 6). An additional 19% did not know their privacy settings so were very likely unfamiliar with settings that could have provided some protection.

22% accepted friends and followers they do not know on social media (Table 7) and 38% gamed with people they did not know, allowing for interactions with strangers (Table 8).

20% overshared by posting videos of themselves online (58% on TikTok, 37% on Snapchat, 31% on YouTube), that could be accessed or misused by others.

63% participated in group chats (33% on Snapchat and 41% on WhatsApp), where inappropriate communication, cyberbullying amongst peers and the sharing of links to harmful content can occur.

30% of boys and 9% of girls played over-18s games, exposing them to violent, sexually explicit or other harmful content (Table 9). A further 15% said they didn't know the age ratings of the games they had played, indicating that they pay little regard to these.

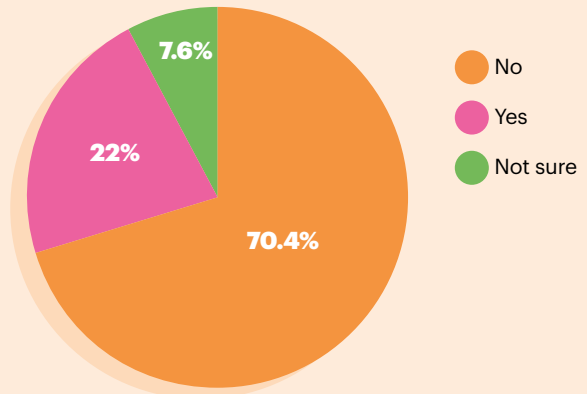


Table 7: Do you have friends and followers you do not know offline? (8-12 year olds)

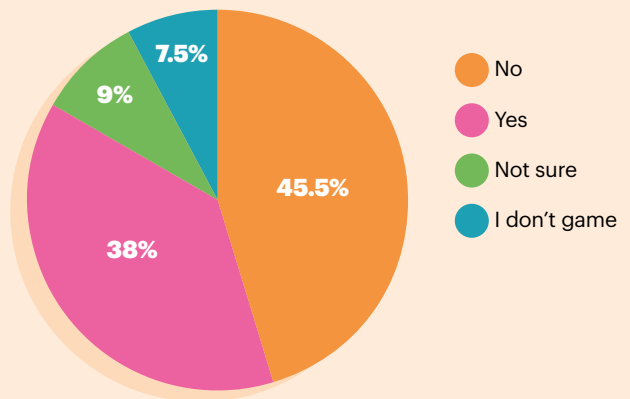


Table 8: Do you game with people you do not know in real life? (8-12 year olds)

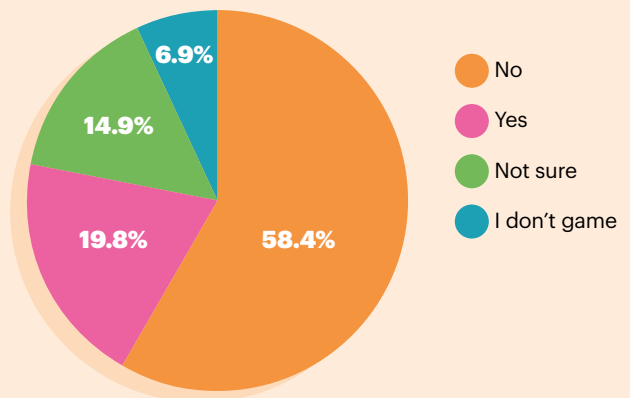


Table 9: Have you played a computer/video game with an age rating of 18+ in the last year? (8-12 year olds)

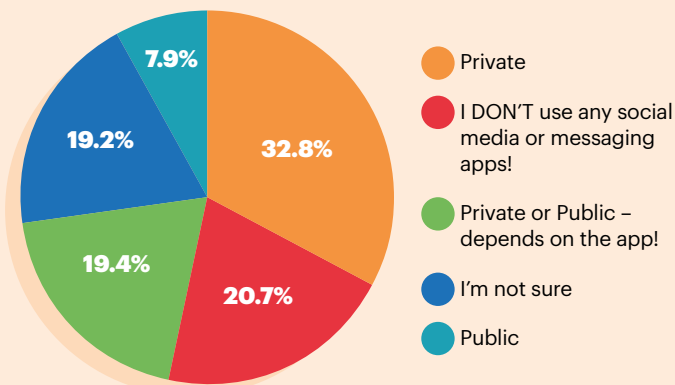


Table 6: The settings on my social media accounts are... (8-12 year olds)

Negative experiences occurred less often for children who made smart choices regarding their privacy, interactions and activities on social media.

Children who said they only held private accounts on social media were less likely to have experienced cyberbullying – 30% vs. 40% of those with public accounts (Table 10).

Children who had friends and followers that they did not know were much more likely to say they had been bullied – 47% vs 19% (Table 11).

Children who posted videos of themselves online were much more likely to say they had experienced bullying – 46% vs 20% (Table 12).

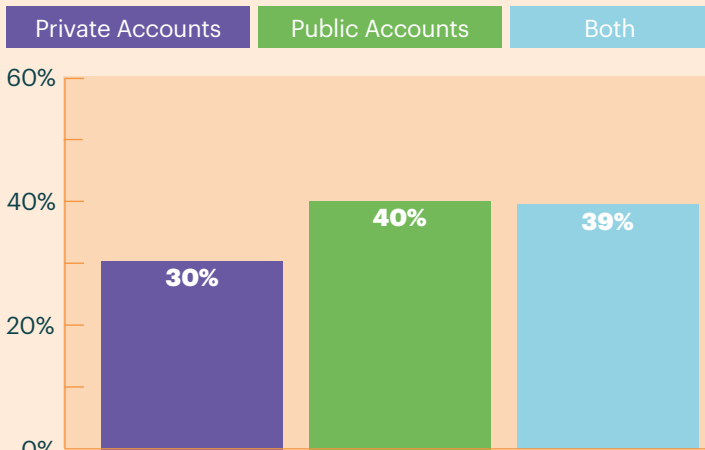


Table 10: Privacy settings and whether cyberbullying has been experienced (8-12 year olds)

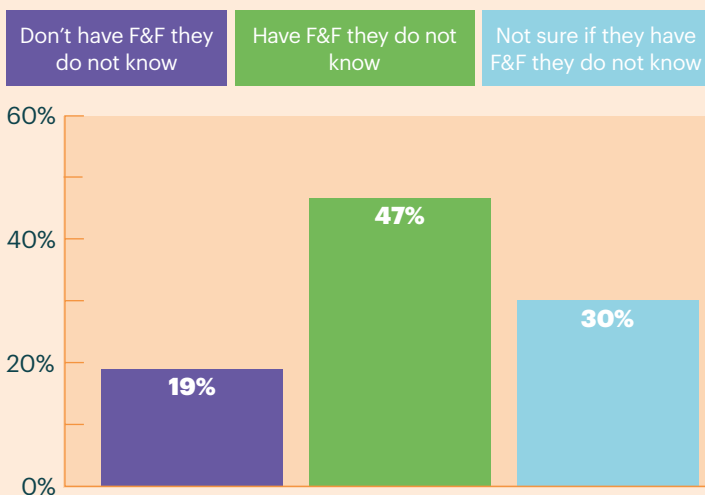


Table 11: Do you have friends and followers you do not know? / Experiences of cyberbullying (8-12 year olds)

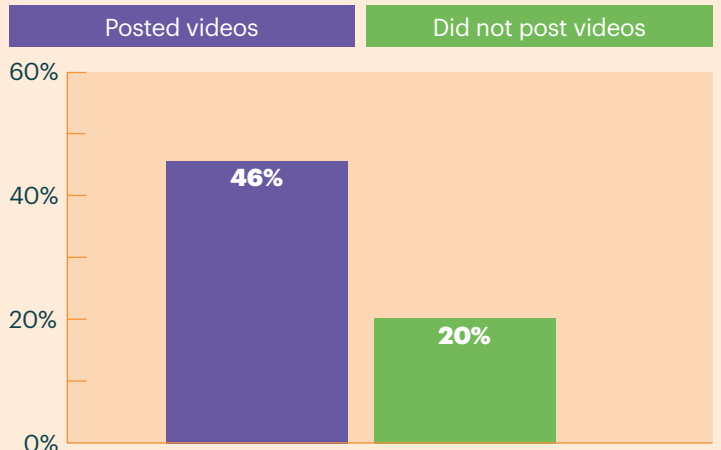


Table 12: Posting videos and whether cyberbullying has been experienced (8-12 year olds)

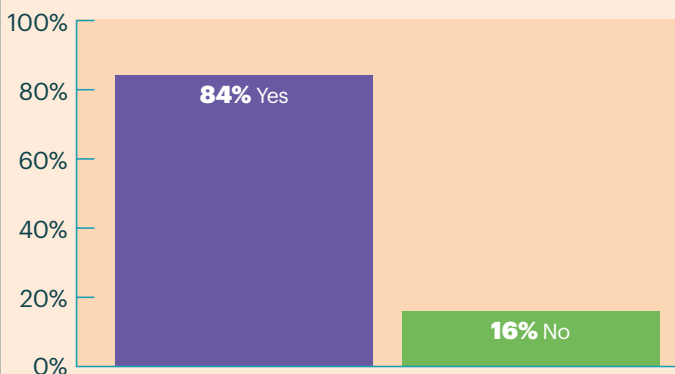
If children were better educated on how to reduce their exposure then they could reduce the likelihood of being cyberbullied. Poor online choices made by children also put pressure on schools, with cybersafety considered a significant issue now in the vast majority of schools. With better education in this area the number of cybersafety incidents should fall and take up less valuable class time.



Impact on Schools: Online Safety Incidents in Schools on the Rise

84% of teachers told us that online safety was a significant issue at their school. This is an increase from 74% last year and 63% the year before. Dealing with these incidents can eat into valuable teaching time and because many of these incidents relate to interactions happening outside of the school day, it can't be addressed solely by restricting the use of smartphones in the school environment. Nearly half (48%) of teachers indicated that they had to deal with multiple cyber safety incidents during the school year, compared to 30% the year before so the frequency of incidents is also on the rise.

Would you consider online safety to be a significant issue in your school/organisation? (Sample: 77 teachers)



Benefits of Education

Media education has become central in policy agendas to provide children with necessary skills to be aware and responsible users of digital technologies (see the European Commission's Strategy for a Better Internet for Kids (BIK)). This emphasizes the importance of education programmes in schools to support children navigating the online environment in a safe and positive way. Moreover, recent research conducted by University College Dublin and CyberSafeKids showed that children can benefit from media education programmes delivered in school to foster their digital skills. Also, the research highlighted the need to support the coordination between families and schools regarding educating children to use digital technology, as alignment between parents and teachers will enhance educational outcomes for children.*

** Messena, M., Everri, M., & O'Brien, V. (submitted 2024), Fostering children's digital skills: The development and effectiveness testing of an e-learning educational programme in primary schools.*

Online Access Without Supervision

Alongside increases in access and failures to adequately educate children, parental involvement has decreased this year leaving many children to navigate online challenges that they faced alone. More children went online whenever they wanted to than we have seen in any previous year. 35% of children had unrestricted access, a 4% increase from last year alone (Table 13).

“I was about to fall asleep and I didn’t see what video was on next on YouTube and a scary video turned on and I woke up” *Girl, aged 9*

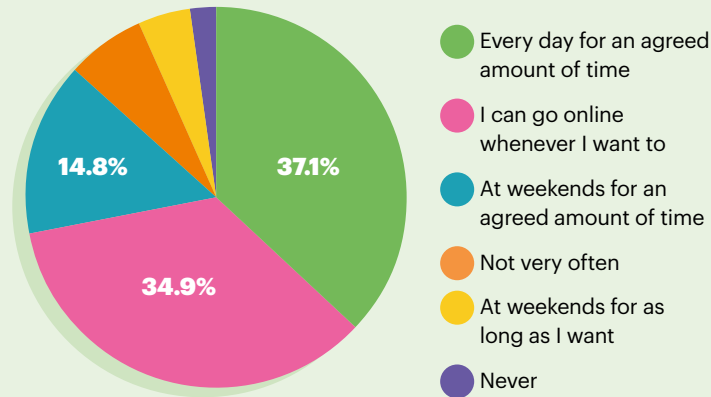


Table 13: When can you go online? (8-12 year olds)

This year children were also more likely to indicate that they had no rules at all around online engagement (19% vs 14% last year). The vast majority were unsupervised by their parents (77%) and could use devices in the privacy of their bedrooms (83%) (Table 14). Interacting with strangers through games and apps was also permitted in many households.

The number of parents setting rules at home continues to decrease, year on year, with a 4% drop in the last year and a 6% drop since the 2020-2021 academic year. This is very concerning because parental involvement can have a significant impact on children’s online experiences. Children granted unlimited time online were more likely to have experienced cyberbullying than those who had restrictions (33% vs 21%), as were those who had no rules at home around their online engagements (34% vs 23%), (Tables 15, 16). They were also much more likely to have been bothered by something online or to have seen something that upset or scared them (Tables 17, 18). Parents need to step up and set rules for virtual engagements, just as they do for activities in the physical world, and it is not necessary for parents to be technical experts in order to do so.

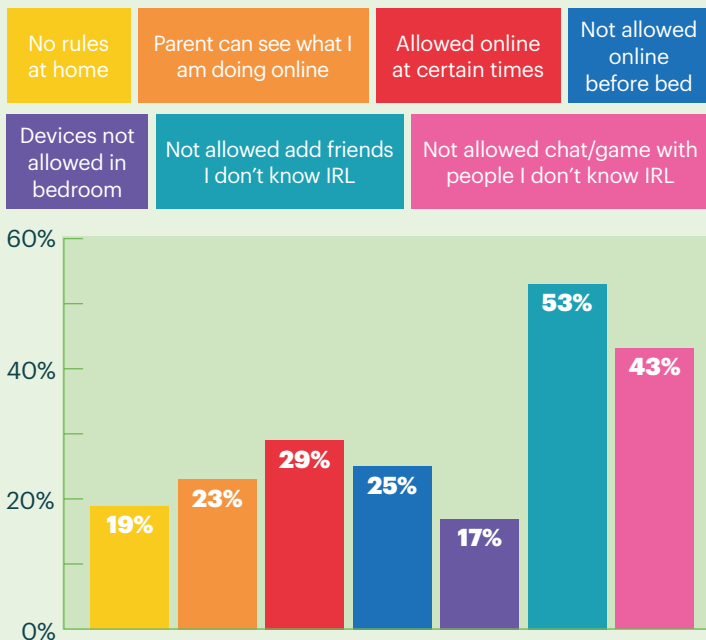


Table 14: What are your rules for going online at home? (8-12 year olds)

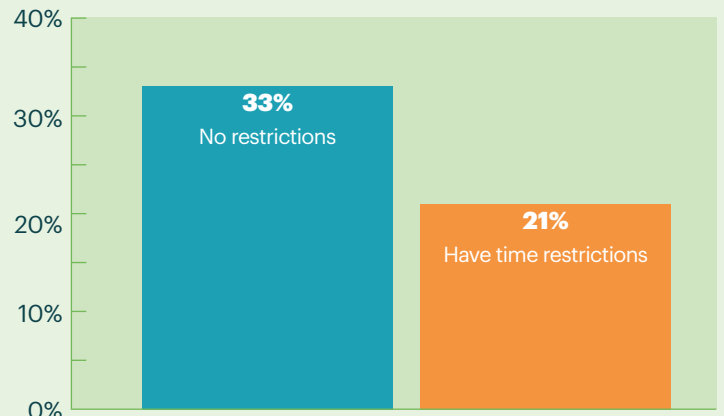


Table 15: Time restrictions and likelihood of having experienced cyberbullying (8-12 year olds)

“I was playing Roblox...and people were being mean and it made me quite upset, but I told my mom and I’m now okay”
Boy, aged 10



With unwanted contact/content so commonplace, it is vital that children have someone to talk to when they encounter problems online, which will lead to much better outcomes. But fewer children talked to their parents about their online activity this year than last – a decrease from 64% in 2022-2023 to just 58% this year (Table 19).

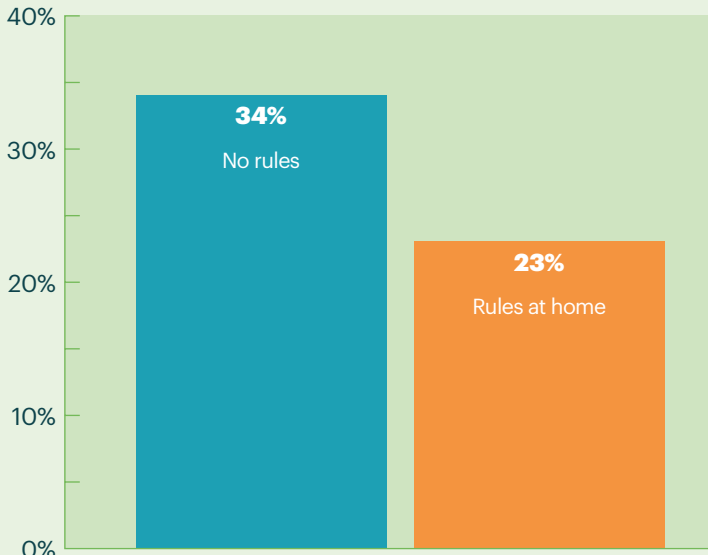


Table 16: Rules at home and likelihood of having experienced cyberbullying (8-12 year olds)

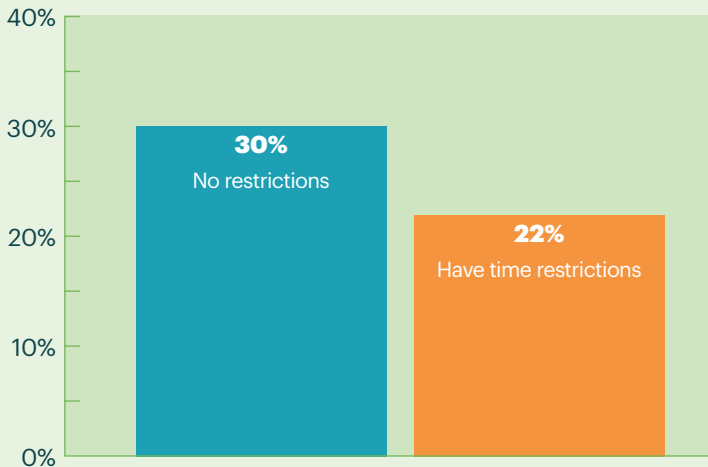


Table 17: Time restrictions and likelihood of being upset/confused/scared by something online (8-12 year olds)

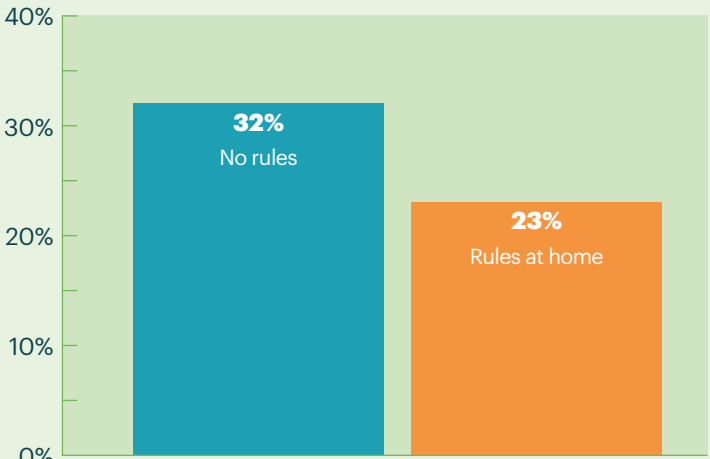


Table 18: Parental supervision and likelihood of being upset/confused/scared by something online (8-12 year olds)

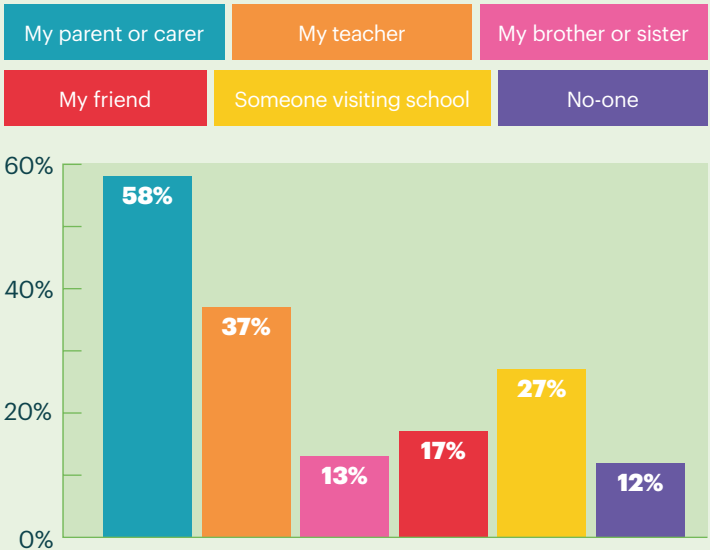


Table 19: Who did you talk to about your online activity in the last year? (8-12 year olds)

There was a marked trend towards greater secrecy and less parental involvement this year when children had a negative experience. Previously we have reported that over half of children (54%) told a parent/trusted adult when bothered or upset by something seen or experienced online. This fell to just 45% this year and 36% of children failed to speak to anyone about this negative experience, an increase of 5% on last year (Table 20).

“So on WhatsApp a person gave my phone number to a guy and he started texting me and then I blocked him and I was scared to tell my mum” *Girl, aged 11*

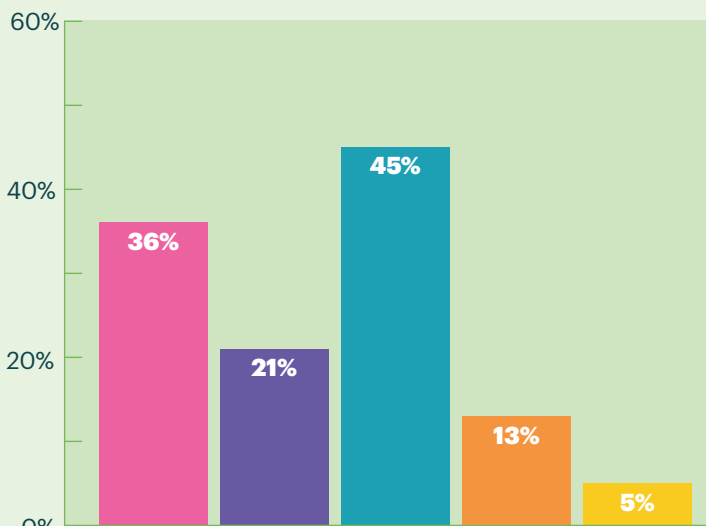
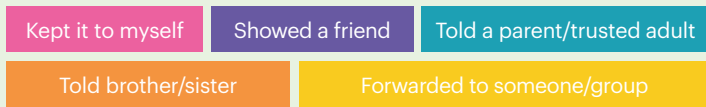


Table 20: If you have seen/experienced something online that bothered you, what did you do about it? (8-12 year olds)

A concerning trend can also be seen when we asked children, who were the victims of cyberbullying, about parental involvement. Less than half involved a parent this year (47%), compared to 52% last year and 60% in both 2021-2022 and 2020-2021 (Table 21).

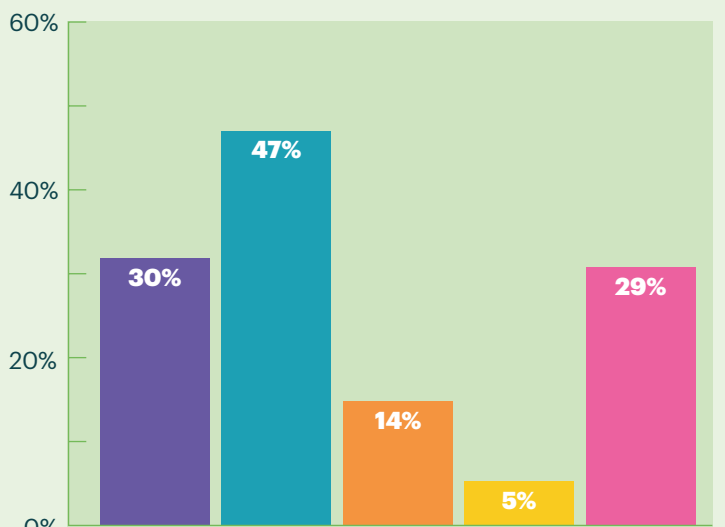
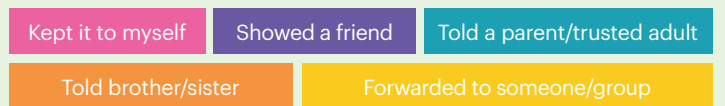


Table 21: If you experienced cyberbullying what did you do about it? (8-12 year olds)

Older, Not Wiser

The situation worsens considerably when children transition into secondary school. Access increases, parental involvement decreases further, and children are clearly ill-prepared.

97% of 12-14 year olds in secondary schools had a smartphone, making it the most popular choice of smart device by far (Table 22) and a huge increase on levels of primary school ownership.

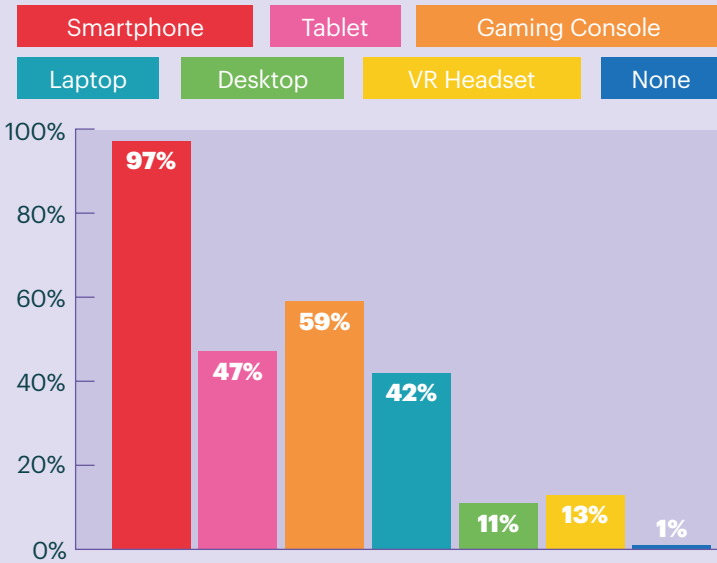


Table 22: Smart device ownership for 12-14 year olds in secondary schools

Children’s focus also shifted significantly to social media and messaging with friends (Table 23). 41% of these children spent most of their time using a range of social media apps (Table 24) vs. 12% of younger children. 22% primarily chatted with friends on WhatsApp and other instant messaging apps compared to 11% of younger children.

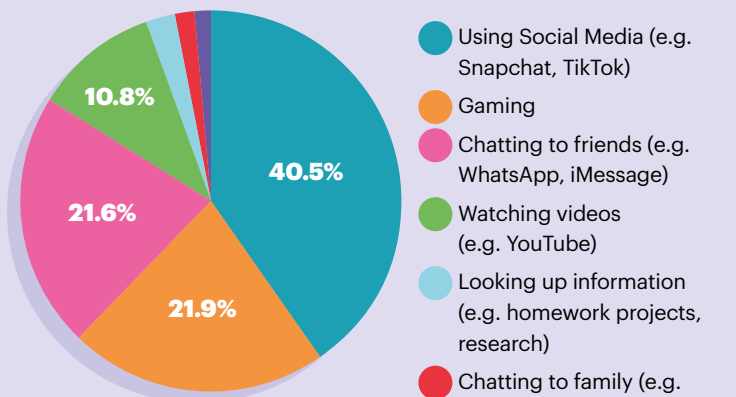


Table 23: What do you do most online? (12-14 year olds in secondary schools)

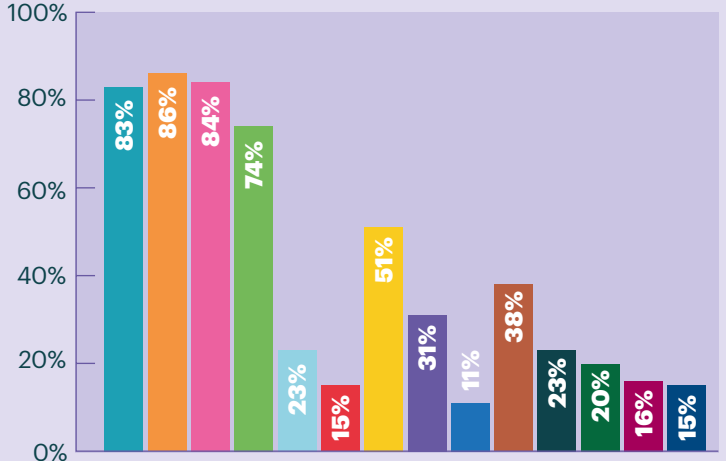
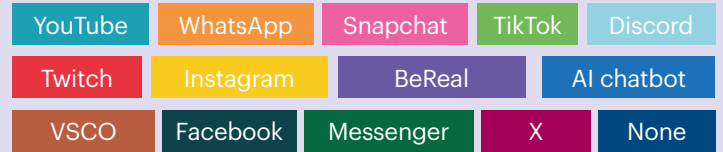
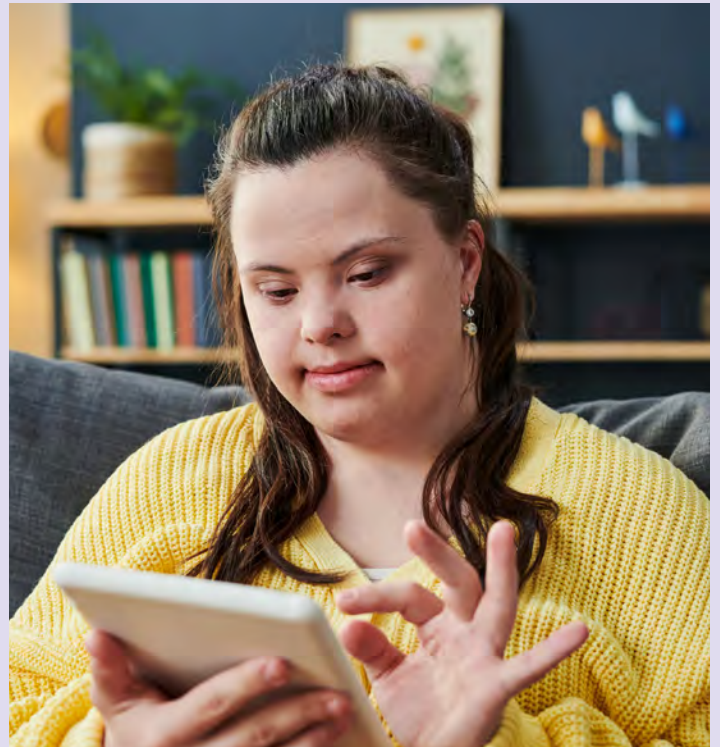


Table 24: Popular online social environments with 12-14 year olds in secondary schools



“Snapchat showed pornography videos to me multiple times and TikTok has showed me lots of stuff related to suicide and self harm.” Girl, aged 12

Where children raised concerns about the content they consumed and negative experiences they had in social online environments, they predominantly identified two apps – Snapchat and TikTok (Table 25). Children were not prepared for the content served to them by the recommender algorithms and/or the interactions they had. These apps failed to provide a safe and enjoyable environment for young people.

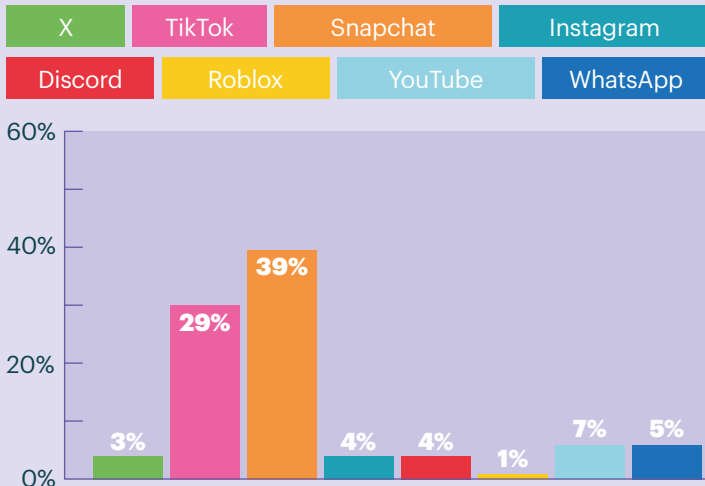


Table 25: What social online environment were you using when you were bothered/upset? (12-14 year olds)

Older children of 12-14 reported that, alongside this greater access, they received much less parental supervision than younger children. A whopping 61% reported being able to go online whenever they wanted to (Table 26) and there was a reduction in the application of each of the rules we considered, when compared to younger children of 8-12 years (Table 27).

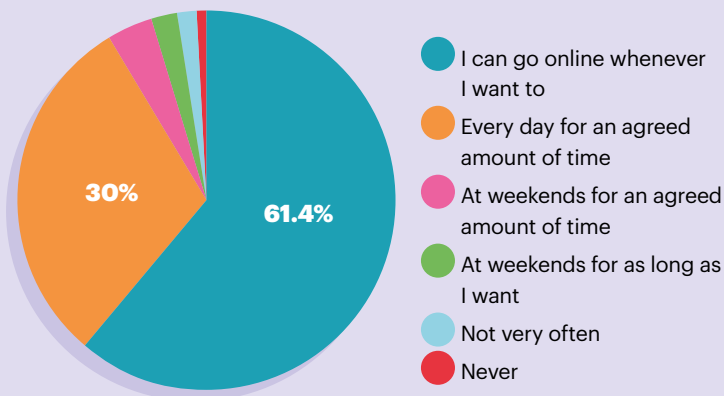


Table 26: When can you go online? (12-14 year olds)

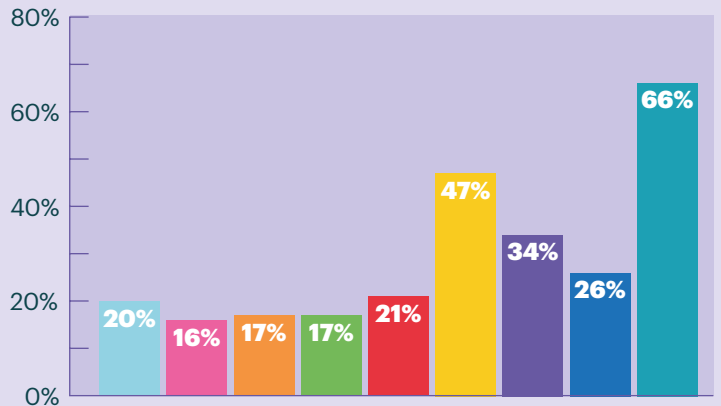


Table 27: What are your rules for going online? (12-14 year olds)

“I was live on TikTok and my friend invited someone to go live with us and he started being racist and said he will come to my house” Girl, aged 12

Reduced parental guidance coupled with a lack of education meant that older children were more likely than younger ones to make poor choices regarding their settings and content shared. Almost half (46%) held some public accounts, compared to 28% of 8-12 year olds. 39% of 12-14 year olds posted videos of themselves online, which is almost double the number we saw among primary school children.

One consequence of this is higher levels of cyberbullying amongst older children of 12-14 years old. 38% experienced cyberbullying (Table 28), a substantial jump from the rate of 25% for younger children. On average, we witnessed a doubling in the incidence rate of each behaviour that we tracked compared to primary school levels, so more children were being targeted in multiple ways. We also saw an increase amongst this age group when compared to last year’s figures across almost all behaviours that we tracked.

“A girl told my friend that I was her gay little girlfriend basically saying me and my friend were dating but we weren’t and she said it in a mean way” *Girl, aged 13*

Older victims of cyberbullying were much less likely to involve a parent than those children still attending primary school, as were those who were bothered/upset by something they saw online. 38% spoke to no-one at all about these negative experiences (Tables 29, 30). Just 36% of cyberbullying victims involved a parent and only 37% told a parent when they were upset by something they saw online. This shows a significant decline in parental involvement when compared to 8-12 year olds (Tables 20, 21), at a critical time when children clearly need support.

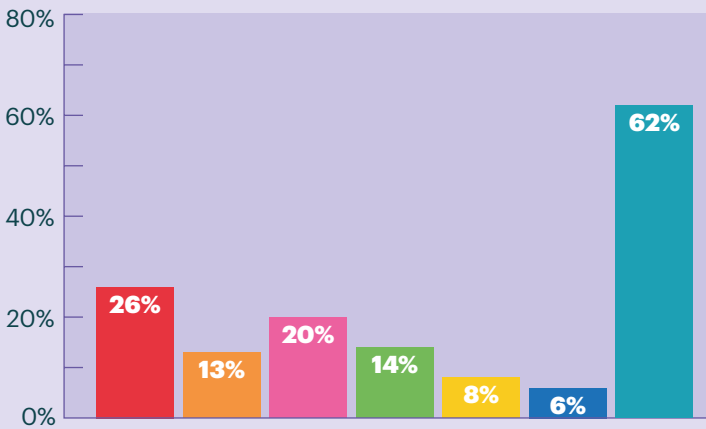
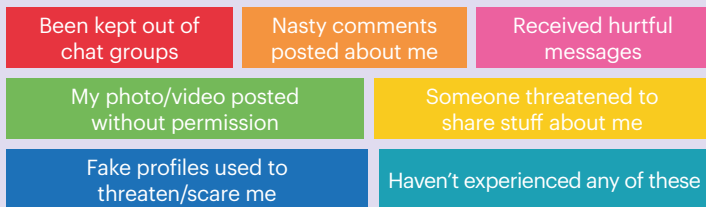


Table 28: Experiences of cyberbullying amongst 12-14 year olds in secondary schools

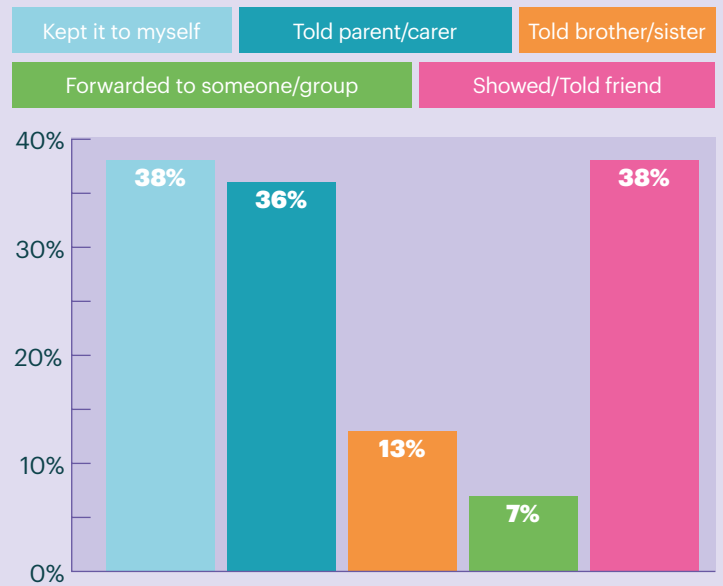


Table 29: Who did you talk to if you were cyberbullied? (12-14 year olds)

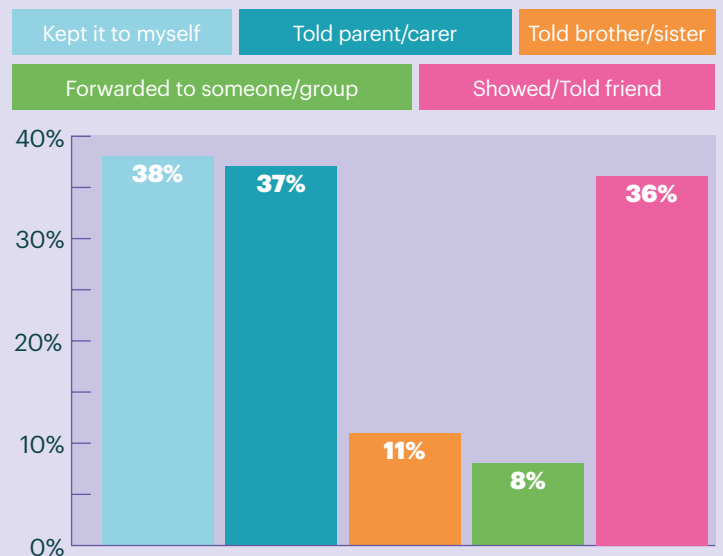


Table 30: Who did you talk to if you saw/experienced something that bothered/upset you? (12-14 year olds)

Recommendations



We need to recognise that a child does not have a 'lightbulb' moment on their 13th birthday or when they graduate primary school that equips them for increased online engagement. The concept of banning smartphones for primary school children as a solution to the problems children face online is quite misleading. We need to prepare children for when they do start to engage online, whatever age that may be, and whatever smart device they may be using.

We know there is no 'silver bullet' solution. It's going to take a range of measures and the involvement of stakeholders across society – parents, educators, policy-makers and the tech industry – all working towards the same goal of children being able to participate in and, crucially, thrive in a digital world. We have seen progress in recent years, particularly with new legislation, the appointment of the Online Safety Commissioner and establishment of Coimisiún na Meán, but progress is still far too slow, and much slower than the warp speed at which the online world moves.

Quite simply, as a society we are failing children every day. We have to do better. Kids want to have fun online and should be allowed to do so, embracing the many benefits that technology has to offer. They can only do this if they are not left to face online challenges alone. If we do not step up to advocate and address the gaps in regulation and education we will continue to see the same negative outcomes for children time and again whenever online access is granted to children and young people in Ireland.

Our recommendations below will help towards achieving a vastly better digital world for children.

1. Make age verification a mandatory requirement for access to online services, and legislate for a minimum age at which online platforms can provide services to children. Define features of online environments in law that are harmful to children and ensure that children are protected from these features by effective age gates, put in place by the online service providers.

2. Make online safety and digital literacy the 4th pillar of the education system, both at primary and secondary levels. These cannot continue to be peripheral subjects, and sufficient time must be allocated to train teachers and the pupils they will educate.

3. Deliver national public awareness campaigns and resources aimed at parents in Ireland to create social norms around online safety, including encouraging smartphone-free environments in schools. Parents must be able to make informed decisions so they can provide the vital guidance that must accompany online access.

Education Programme Impact



This academic year we have delivered impact and support through our education programmes to:

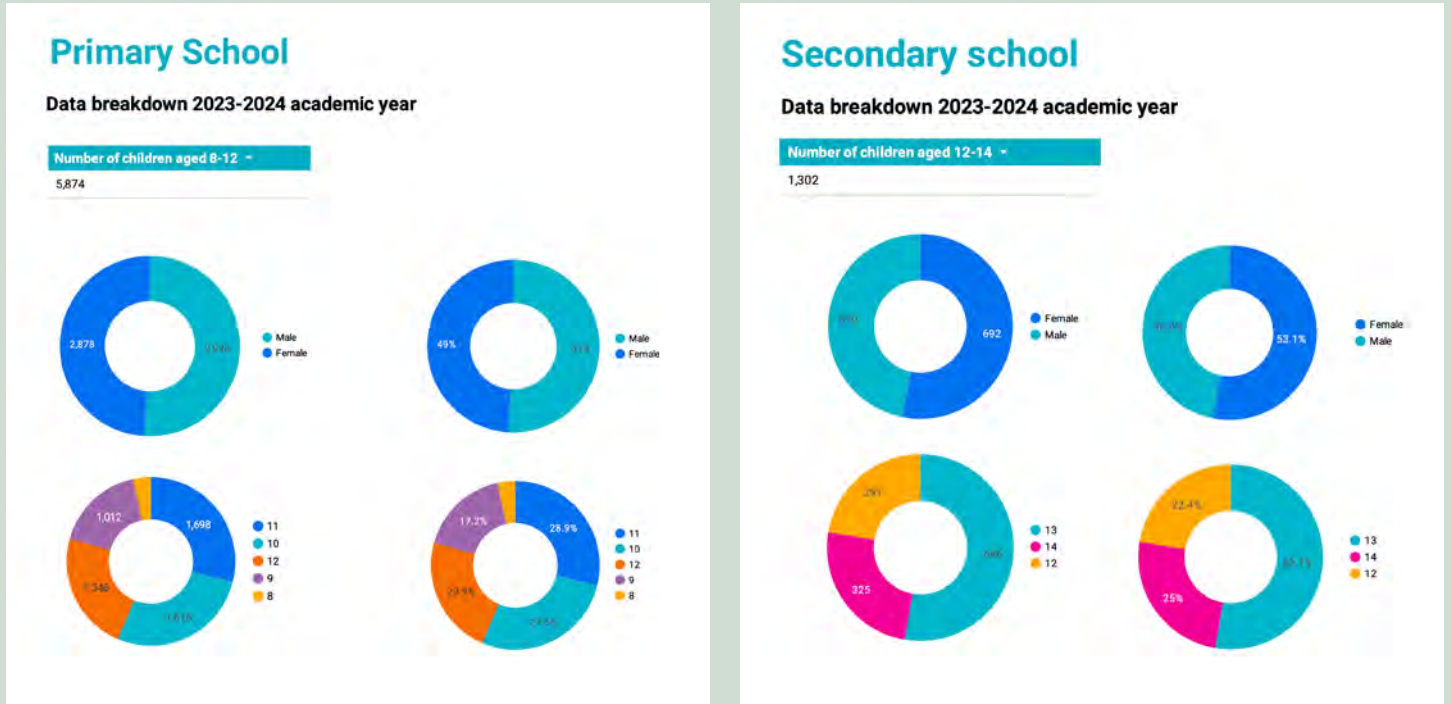
19,136 Children

3,321 Parents

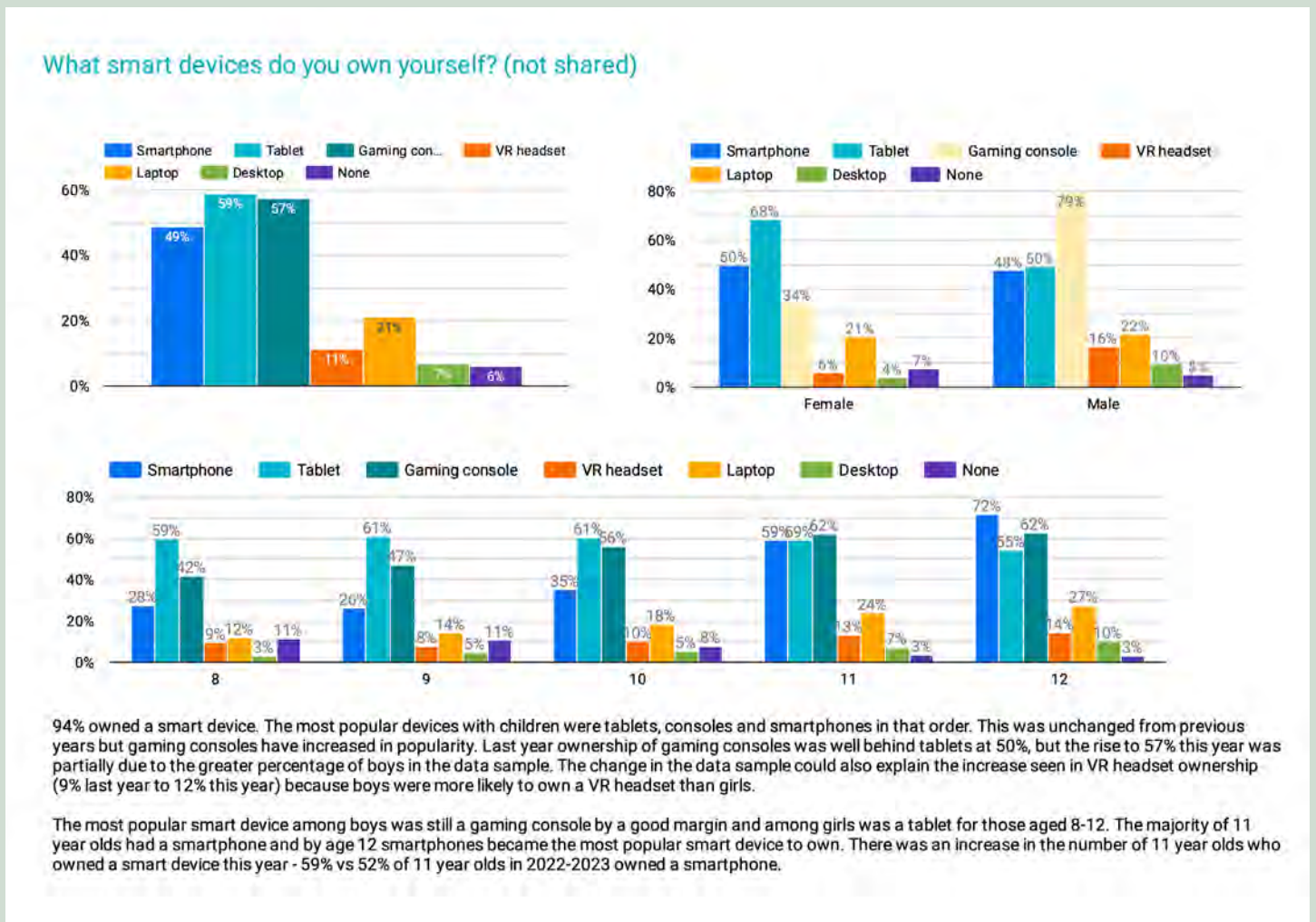
939 Educators

Appendix 1: Full Data Set

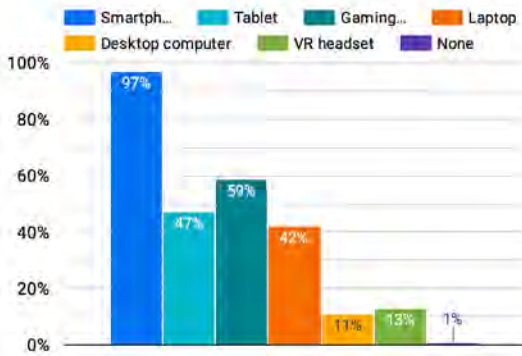
1. Data Breakdown



2. Online Access and Guidance



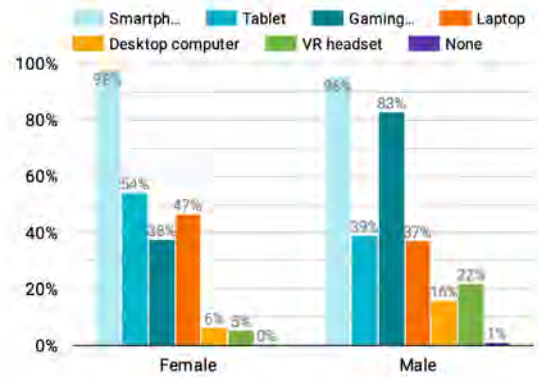
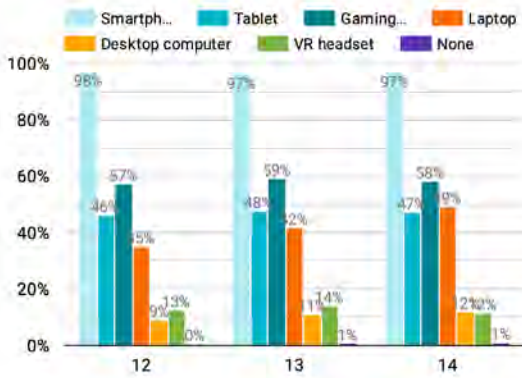
What smart devices do you own yourself? (not shared) for 12-14 year olds



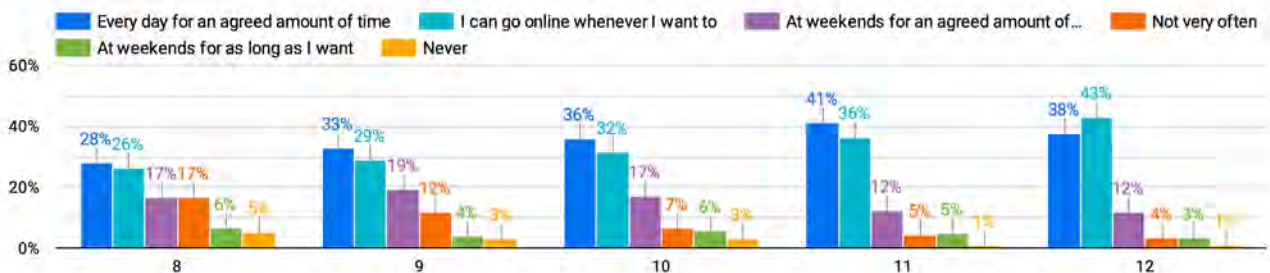
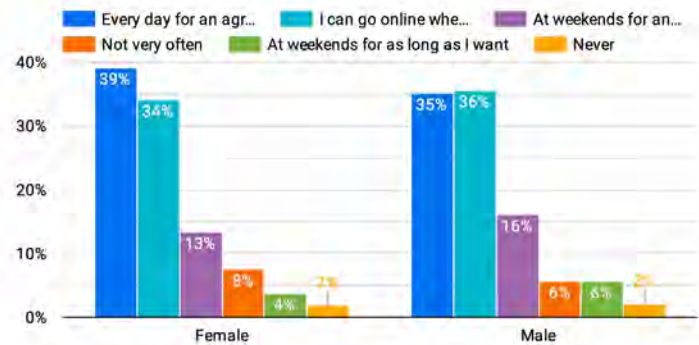
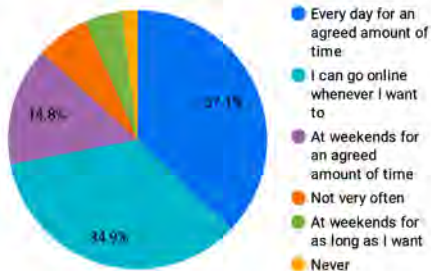
99% of young people, aged 12-14, had a personal smart device. The most popular was a smartphone with just 3% of respondents reporting that they didn't own a smartphone. Gaming consoles were in 2nd place and compared to last year there was a rise from 50% to 59%. VR usage also increased from 9% last year. The higher percentage of boys in the data sample may account for much of this change.

Tablet ownership dropped when compared with usage in primary school and laptop ownership rose, which isn't surprising as many children get a laptop to facilitate schoolwork in secondary school.

Change by age was not significant. Gender affects gaming console numbers the most. Boys were a lot less likely to have owned a laptop or tablet and a lot more likely to own a gaming console, desktop computer and VR headset. This is likely down to boys having a greater interest in gaming. Girls, when they game, tend to use a mobile device, while boys use a console, PC or headset.

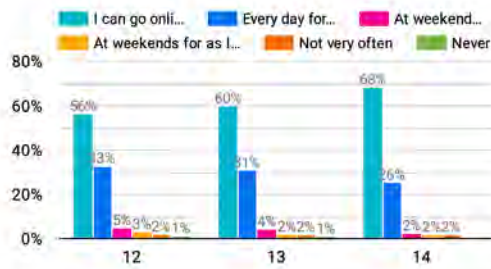
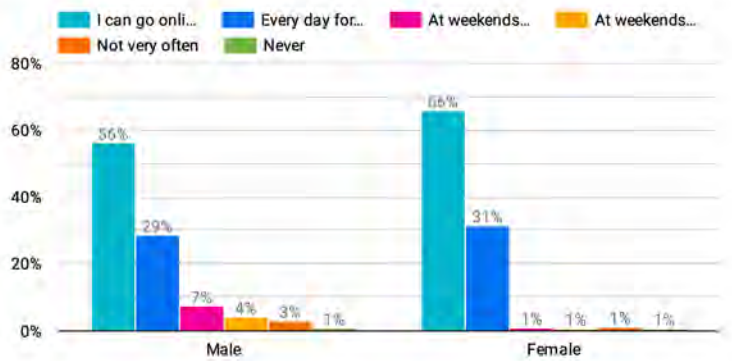
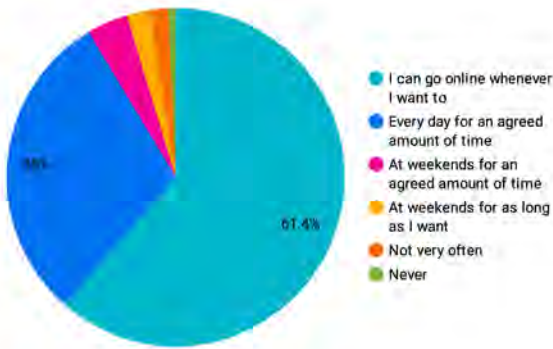


When can you go online?



More children could go online whenever they wanted to this year than last - an increase of nearly 4% from 31% in the 2022-2023 academic year. The four year trend is 30-35%. Very few children had no access and rules around weekend vs weekday usage was not chosen by many. Boys indicated fewer time restrictions than girls, with the most popular response recorded for boys "I can go online whenever I want". Older children were more likely to have unrestricted time online than younger and by age 12 that is the most popular response.

When can you go online? for 12-14 year olds

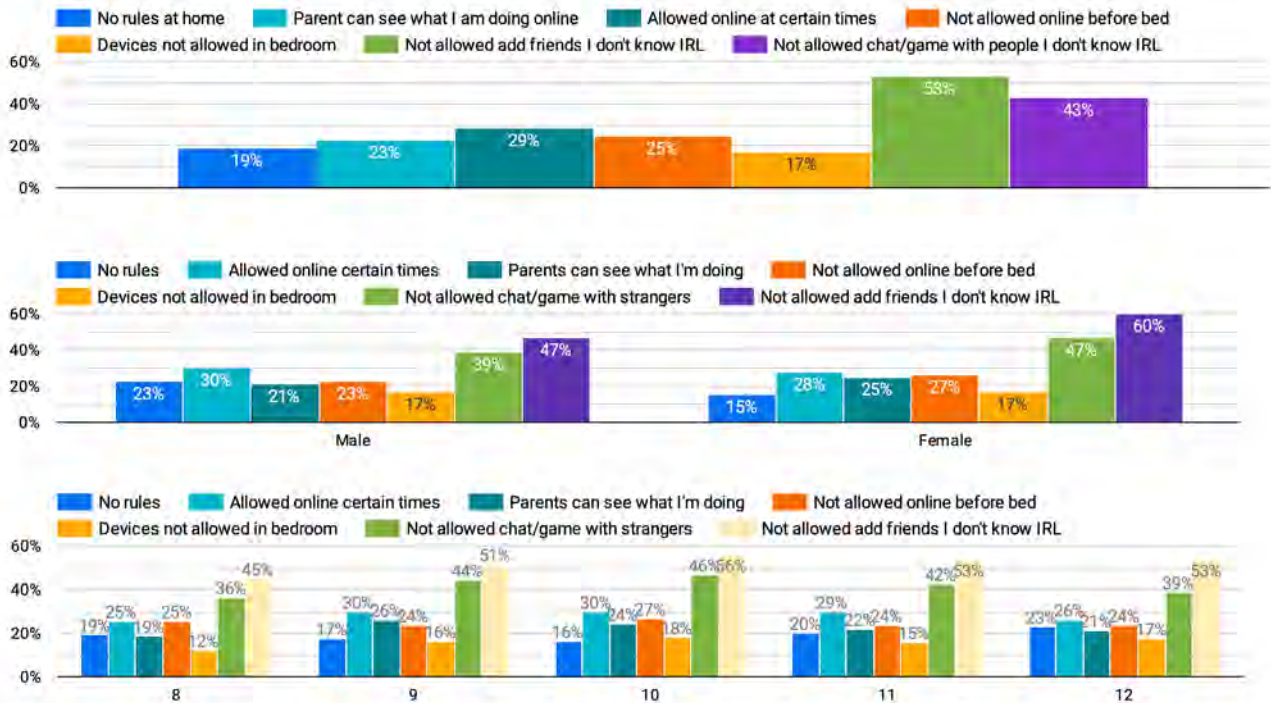


Following the move to secondary school the majority of children (61%) could go online whenever they wanted to, compared with 35% at primary school. A further 30% had set time limits per day and very few children chose any other options.

The number reporting unlimited time increased with age. It was also more common for girls than boys to have had no limits.

Last year 68% reported being able to go online whenever they wanted to so there was a decrease this year. This is true for both genders and all ages.

What are your rules for going online at home?

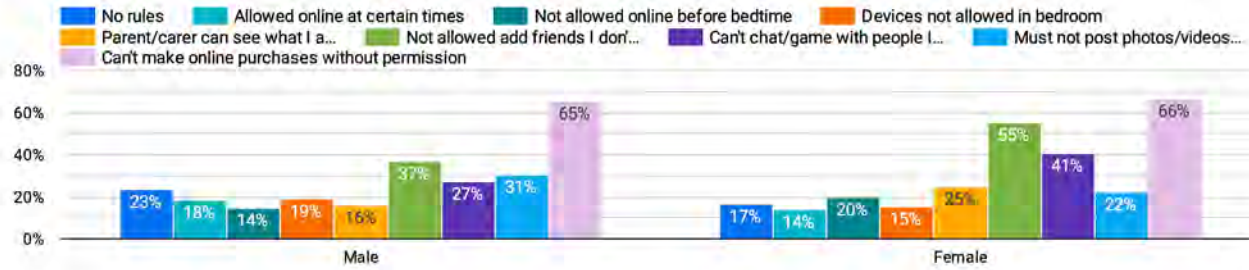
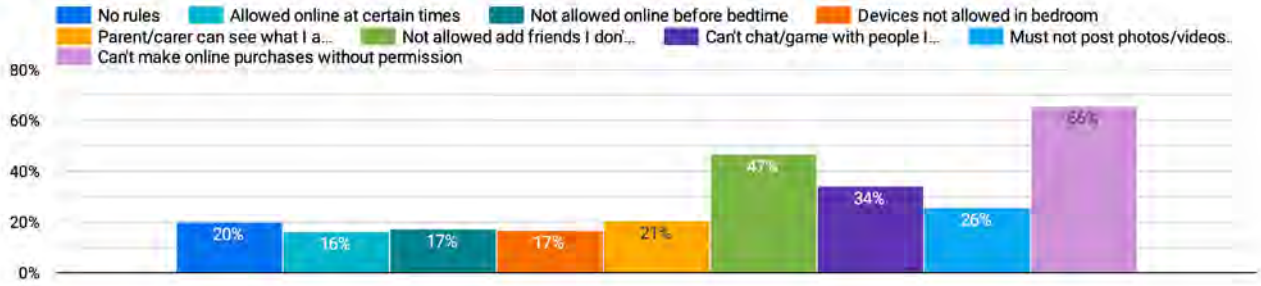


More children had no rules around their online activity this year than last - increased from 15% to 19%. This is a figure that has trended upwards over a 4 year period from 13% in 2020-2021. Application of all rules tracked is down.

Potential exposure to strangers was up, with 53% this year not allowed to add friends they don't know vs 61% last year and just 42% not allowed to chat/game with strangers vs 48%.

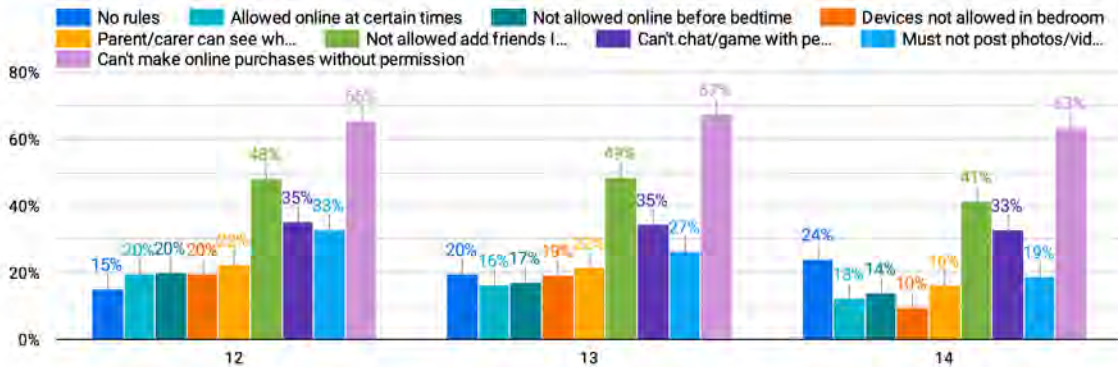
Boys reported having fewer rules than girls. The vast majority (83%) of children we surveyed were allowed access devices in their bedrooms, where they were not being supervised. Last year this figure was 79%. This is consistent across both genders and true for all ages, even those of only 8 and 9 years.

What your rules for going online at home? for 12-14 year olds



20% of 12-14 year olds had *no rules* when it came to online usage and activity which is similar to last year's finding of 19%. Boys were more likely than girls to have had no rules. For those who did have rules at home the most common restriction related to online shopping, which was the same last year. The next most common involved restricting interactions with strangers through either chat groups, gaming or friends/followers on social media. These are down slightly from last year. Girls were far more likely to have reported these restrictions than boys.

83% of these children could access devices in their bedroom and go online before trying to sleep, a slight decrease on last year. Only 1 in 5 were supervised by parent/carer when online. Just 26% weren't allowed post their image online and girls were less likely to have had restrictions around sharing their image online than boys.

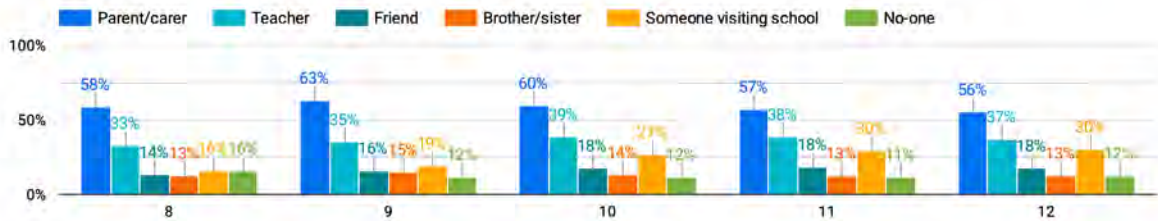
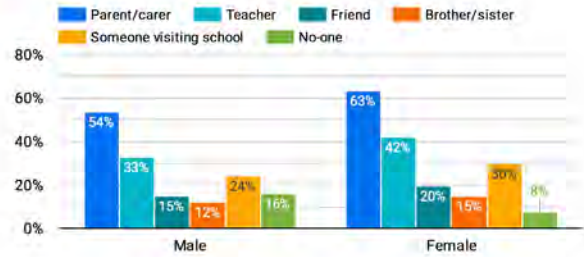
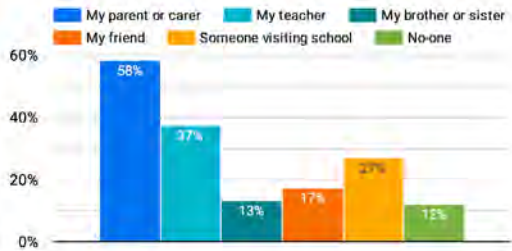


Younger children of 12 were more likely to have had rules than older children of 13 or 14. Rules around interactions with strangers fell by age and 90% of 14 year olds could have devices in the bedroom. Just 16% of 14 years olds were monitored by a parent/carer, in spite of the digital age of consent being set at 16 in Ireland. While we have limited data for older age groups that trend continued for 15 and 16 year olds having fewer rules and less supervision.

Comparing to primary school children, aged 8-12 53% couldn't add friends they didn't know in real life vs 47% for 12-14 year olds and 43% of 8-12 year olds couldn't chat/game with strangers vs 34%. So parental involvement in setting rules decreases significantly for children when they enter secondary school.

The use of devices in the bedroom was not a concern for parents across all ages, regardless of the school setting. Just 17% of 8-12 year olds and 17% of 12-14 year olds said that they couldn't use devices in their bedroom.

Who have you talked to in the last year about your online activity?

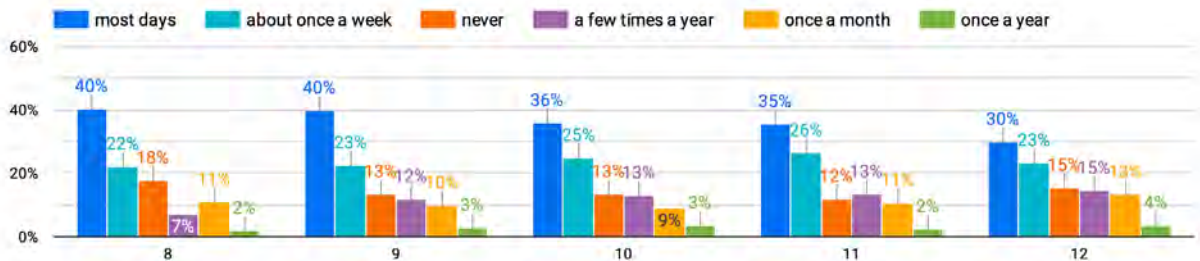
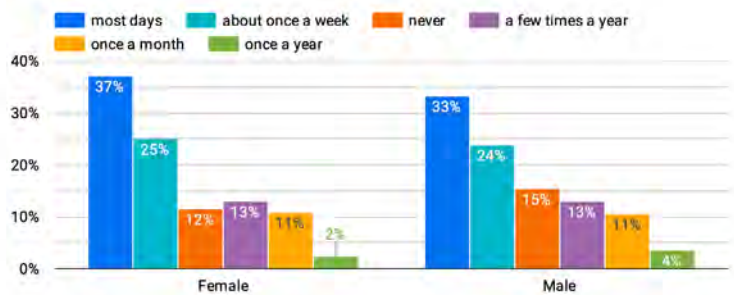
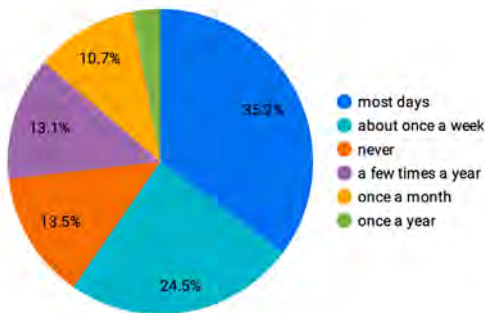


The number of children who talked to their parent in the last year about their online activity has dropped from 64% to 58%. Children response regarding their teacher were similar - this was 39% last year.

Girls were more likely to have talked about online activity than boys. Boys were twice as likely to have said that they talked to no-one at all about online activity.

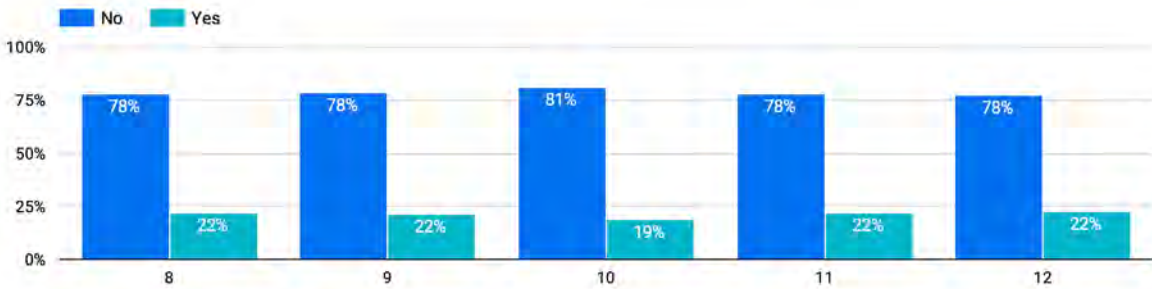
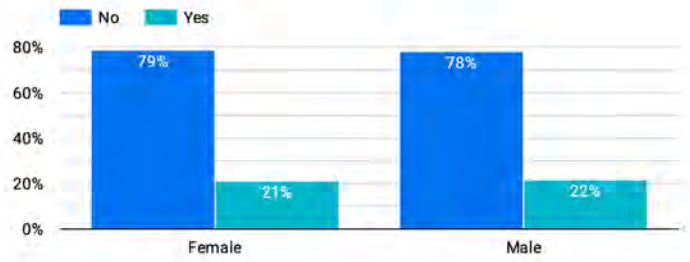
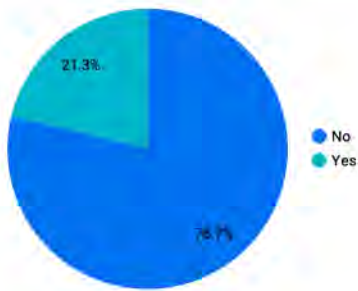
Engagement with parents decreased slightly with age.

How often do you talk to your parents about what you see and do online?



Children talked to their parents less often about online activity this year than last year but there is not a marked decrease. Boys remain less likely to frequently talk to parents than girls.

Have you seen something online you wouldn't want your parents to know about?



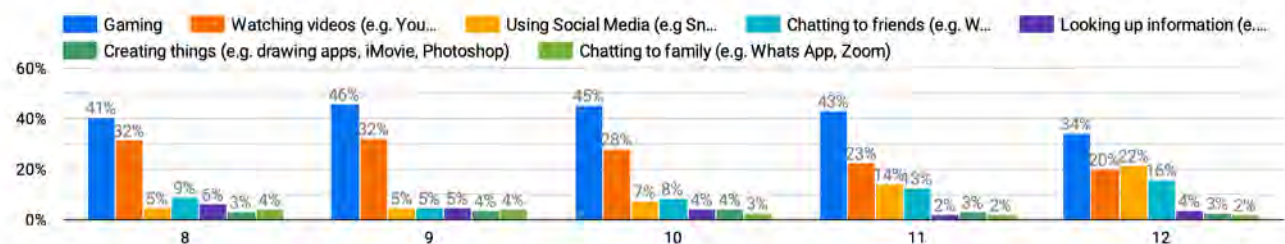
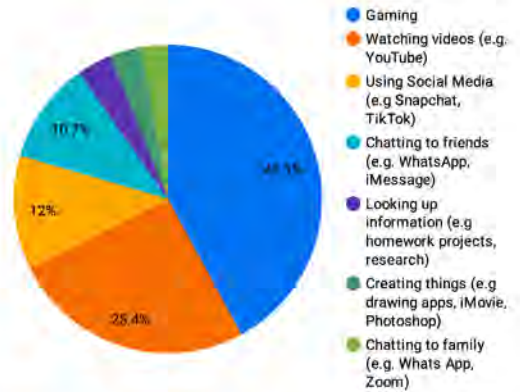
There was no notable shift in overall numbers since last year and across ages and genders there was not a significant change.

3. Online Activity and Exposure

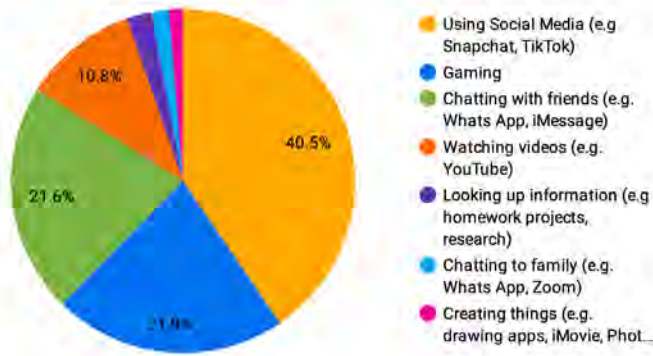
I spent most of my time online

Gaming and watching videos are how the majority of 8-12 year olds spent most of their online time. Only a small minority of boys chose any of the other options, with 6 out of 10 picking gaming.

This year children of every age that we surveyed in primary school told us that they spent more time on gaming platforms than in other social environments. Last year 33% of 11 year olds chose gaming vs 43% this year and 17% chose social media vs 14% this year. That difference can't be solely explained away by the difference in data sample (higher percentage of boys this year). At age 12 gaming continued to be the most popular choice (34%). This is a change from last year where children were almost equally likely to choose gaming (25%) and social media (26%). Older children of 11 and 12 were more likely to have chosen social media and messaging apps than younger children, with social media chosen by more than 1 in 5 12 year olds so usage was rising with age.



I spent most of my time online ... for 12-14 year olds

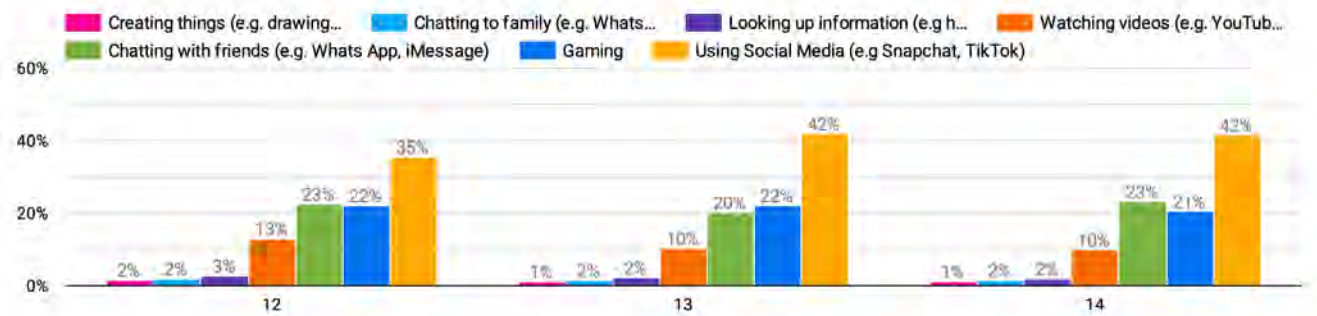
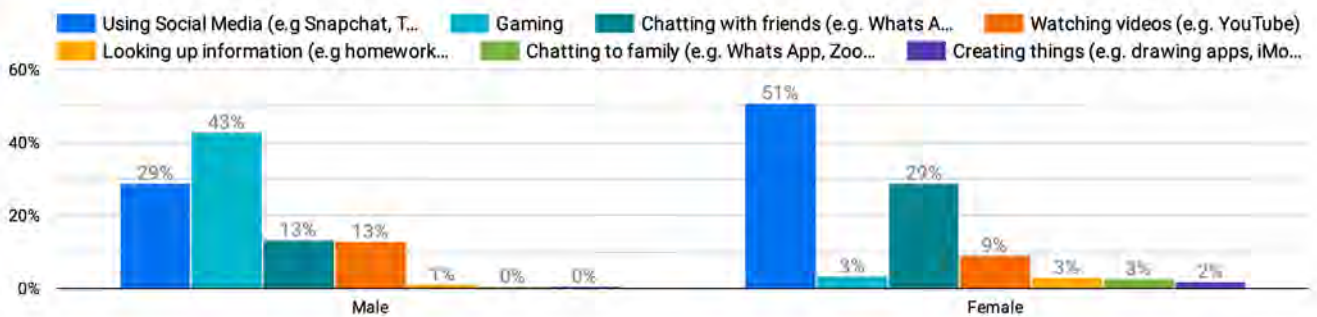


Social media was the most popular option with this age group of 12-14 years. When children entered secondary school there was a very significant increase in the number choosing to say that they spent most of their time on Social Media apps, like Snapchat and TikTok. This was just 12% for 8-12 year olds vs 41% for 12-14 year olds in secondary or 21% for 12 year olds in primary school vs 35% for 12 year olds in secondary school. Last year 46% of 12-14 year olds in a secondary setting chose the option Social Media so there has been a drop off, while the number who chose gaming is similar to last year at 22%.

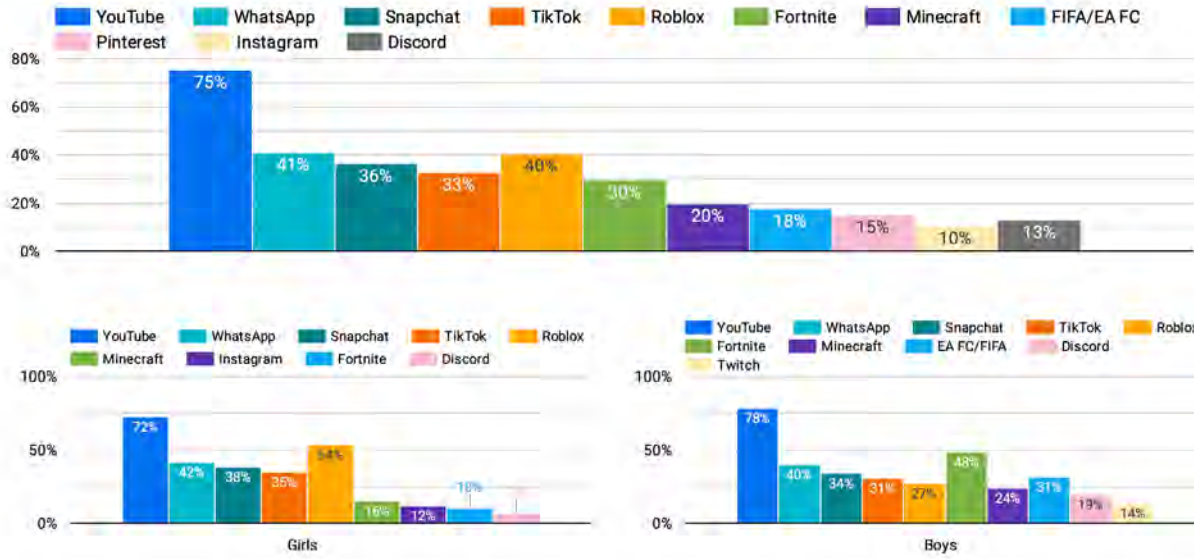
The number who chose watching videos as their primary interest dropped significantly from primary to secondary, from 25% of 8-12 year olds to just 11% of 12-14 year olds. With the latter age group watching videos was the 4th most popular choice when it was the 2nd most popular choice in primary school.

Gaming interest also waned significantly - 42% in primary school for 8-12 year olds compared to 22% with this older age group. While 1 in 4 boys said that they spent most of their time on social media apps, far more still chose gaming (43%). The drop in gaming interest was significant for both girls and boys. Girl fell from 21% in primary school to just 3% for this age group, so while girls may have gamed still it was likely on mobile with apps that consumed less of their time. There was a big drop off for boys as well, from 62% of 8-12 year olds to 43% for 12-14 in secondary school.

More children in secondary school than primary were saying they spend most of their time chatting to friends on apps like WhatsApp and iMessage - up from 11% to 22%. Girls were more likely to have said this than boys. The number who chose chatting with friends was just 16% last year so we have seen an increase this year.



Top online environments where children spent time

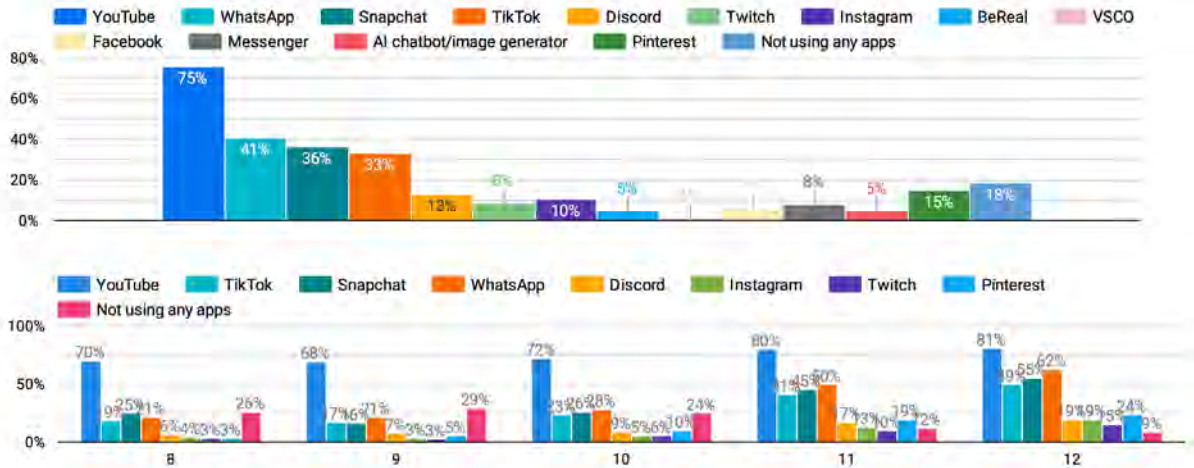


Gaming platforms continue to grow in popularity, while fewer children of this age are accessing social media apps like Snapchat and TikTok, than in previous years.

The impact of gaming platforms that allow for socialising online for this age group was really significant. When you combine this with the fact that 42% of children said they spent most of their online time gaming, the importance of keeping them safe while on multiplayer, online gaming platforms can't be overlooked.

Roblox continues to grow in popularity each year, up from 19% in the academic year 2019-2020 to 41% in 2023-2024. Roblox was the second most popular online environment with girls aged 8-12 years olds, surpassed only by YouTube. Fortnite is the second most popular online environment with boys.

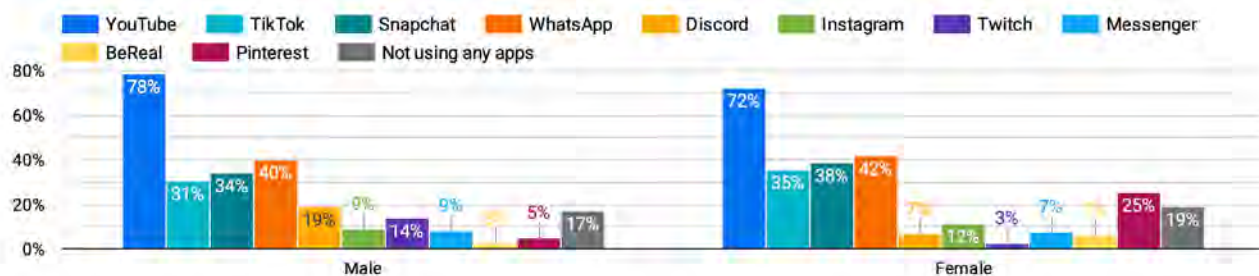
What Social Media and Messaging apps do you have your own account on?



The top four social media and instant messaging apps remain unchanged this year. We continue to see a drop in the numbers having accounts on Snapchat and TikTok. The biggest decrease seen relates to TikTok, which was down to 33% from a high of 47% in the academic year 2021-2022 (37% last year). Snapchat usage also declined but more slowly, from 41% in 2021-2022 to 37% last year and 36% this academic year. Pinterest was more popular with this age group than Instagram, Twitch or Discord. This is the first year that we asked specifically about this app. We also captured AI usage for the first time this year referencing chatbots and image generators.

The chart by age shows the top 8 apps. Unsurprisingly the numbers signing up to social media apps increased with age. The age we saw the biggest jump was between 10 and 11 years old, which is also when we see the greatest jump in smartphone ownership. Nearly a quarter of 10 year olds were not using any apps but by age 11 that number dropped to 12%.

Comparing this year to last year there was a significant drop in both TikTok and Snapchat accounts among 12 year olds. TikTok is down from 55% to 47% and Snapchat has dropped from 59% to 52%. The number indicating that they had a TikTok account also fell for 10 and 11 years olds but there were only small decreases in Snapchat usage for this age group. 9 year olds had not changed much at all. If we look back a few years to the 2020-2021 academic year then we see a clear trend in TikTok usage - for 12 year olds it is down from 60% to 47% this year and for 11 years olds it is down from 53% to 39% this year.



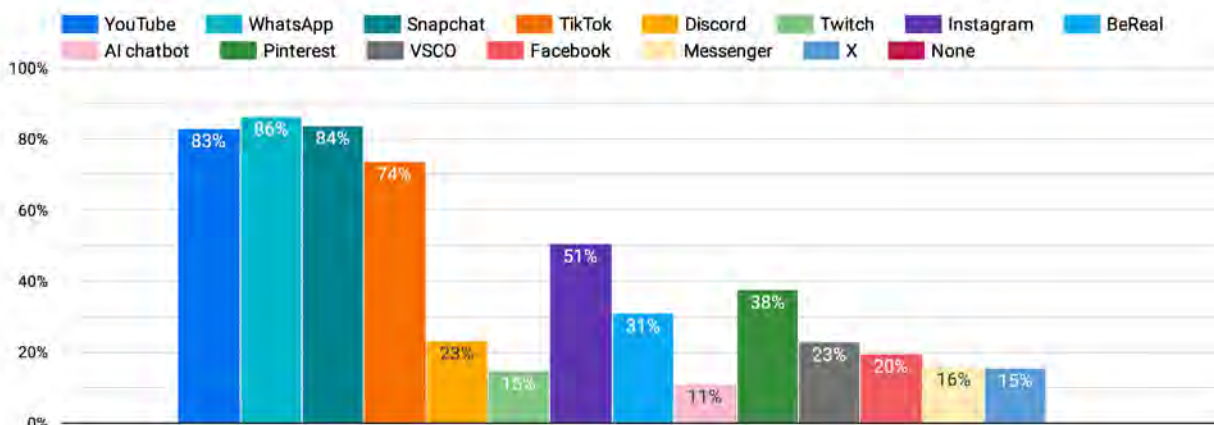
The chart shows the top 10 Social Media and Messaging apps by gender. The top 4 apps were the same across both genders.

The popularity of Discord and Twitch with boys was not matched by girls in the same numbers, which is unsurprising as both these apps are associated with a higher interest in gaming. Discord was still popular with girls, perhaps combined with Roblox usage, so they could chat in a private group while gaming. Although Roblox does feature voice chat, users must verify age before accessing this feature. Interest in BeReal continued to decline.

Pinterest was hugely popular with girls with 1 in 4 says they had signed up to use Pinterest. This places it firmly in 5th place, behind the top 4 for girls. Boys did not sign up in these large numbers with 8 other apps of more interest than Pinterest to boys.

When children were asked if they were using other apps some indicated that they were but not in great numbers. Most common would be messaging via native apps or use of Netflix and Disney+ apps. In some school communities child friendly apps were also used, such as JusTalkKids (3%) and Stars (1%).

What Social Media and Messaging apps do you have your own account on? for 12-14 year olds



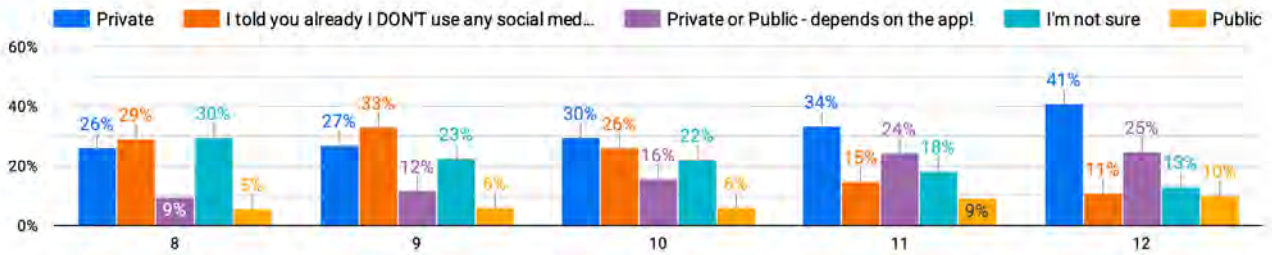
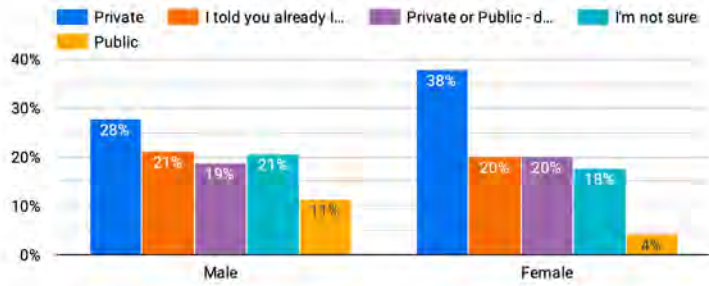
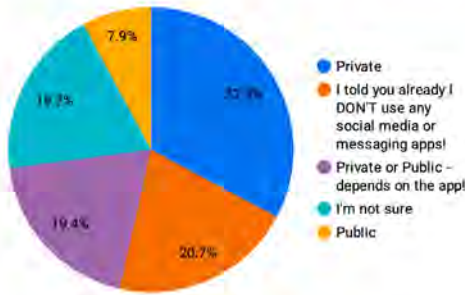
Older children were likely to hold accounts on a larger range of apps.

YouTube was replaced as the most popular app following a transition to secondary school, with both WhatsApp and Snapchat shown to have been more popular. Sign ups to Instagram, Pinterest, ReReal and VSCO saw the biggest increases (for 8-12 year olds in primary BeReal was at 5%, Instagram at 10%, Facebook was 6%, VSCO was just 1%).

Sign ups to TikTok and Snapchat also increased between the ages of 12 and 14. There was a jump in usage of X, Facebook and Messenger also. Apps popular with the gaming community - Twitch and Discord - saw the smallest increases.

For the first time this year we asked about AI and in particular chatbots or image generators children may have used. Usage was greater for older children (5% in primary school vs 11% in secondary school). Older children may be adopting AI for school work, e.g. ChatGPT in particular is popular. Snapchat also added MyAI this year so that could have impacted this answer given so many children were using Snapchat.

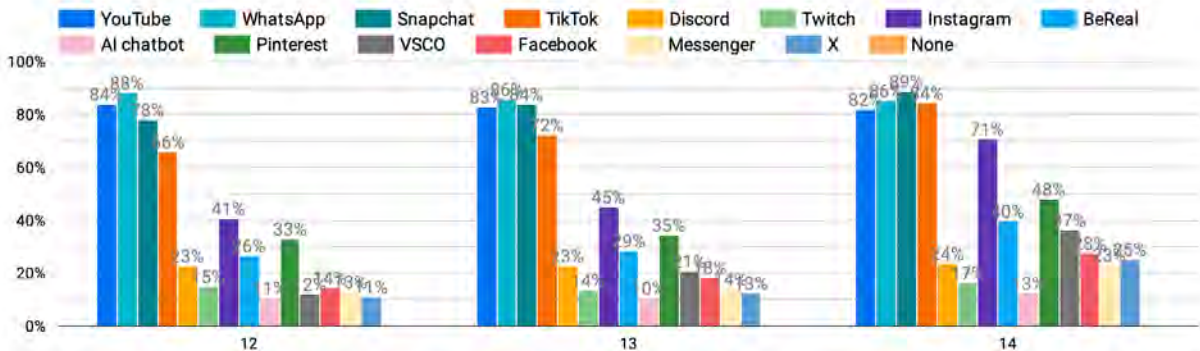
The settings on my social media accounts are ...



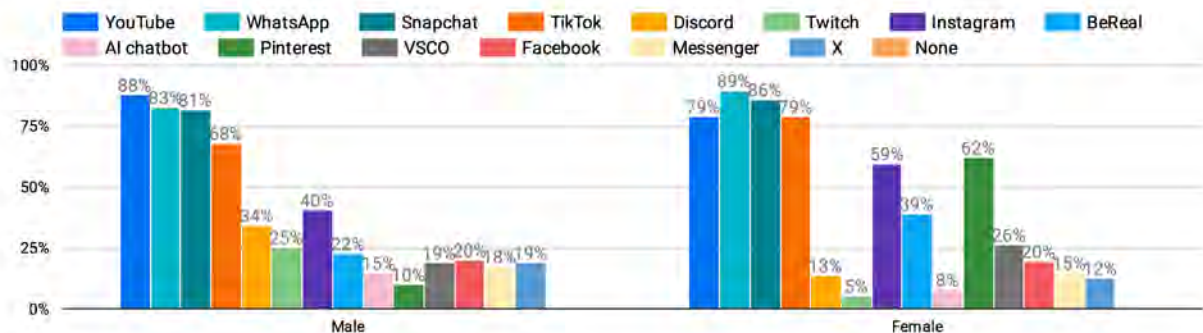
The number of children who said they held private accounts was down significantly this year to 33%. Last year 39% indicated that their accounts were set to private. This could expose many of them to harmful contact from strangers.

Younger children of 8 or 9 years were less likely than older children to hold private accounts. High numbers indicated that they were unsure so default settings were likely in use and they failed to access privacy settings in the apps they were using. By age 12 children valued their privacy more. Although the number of 12 year olds who held private accounts was still down on last year, a drop to 41% from 49%.

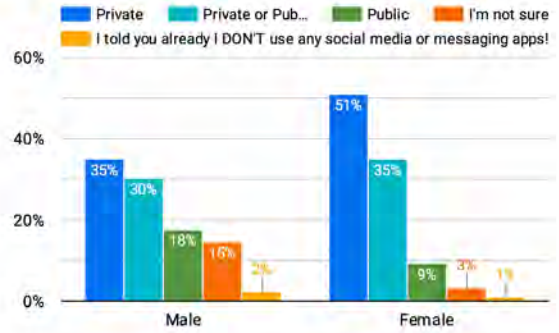
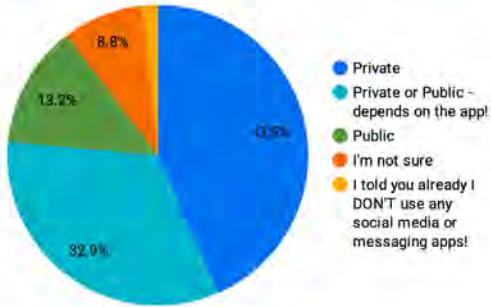
Girls were more likely to have held private accounts than boys. This was also true last year but the number indicating they had private accounts has fallen for both girls and boys since last year when 45% of girls and 31% of boys said they held private accounts.



With age most apps increased in popularity. Sign ups to Instagram, Pinterest, ReReal and VSCO saw the biggest increases. Sign ups to TikTok and Snapchat also increased between the ages of 12 and 14, but so many were on the app before the age of 12 that increases were smaller. There was a jump in usage of X, Facebook and Messenger also. Apps popular with the gaming community, Twitch and Discord, were more likely to be used by boys. Girls were far more likely than boys to have held an account on Pinterest and more likely to have had an account on Instagram, VSCO and BeReal.

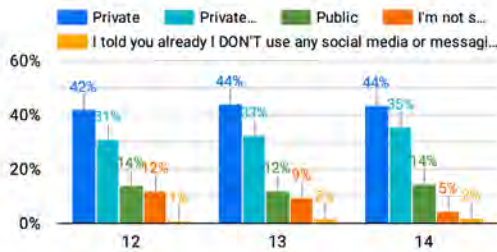


The settings on my social media accounts are... for 12-14 year olds

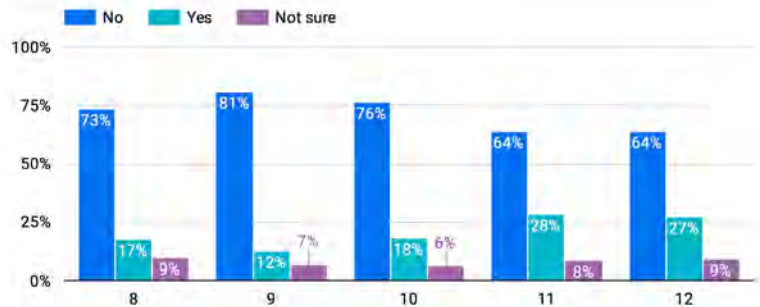
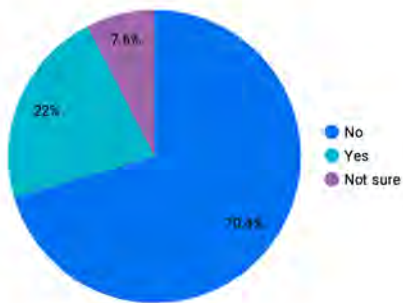


Only 44% of 12-14 year olds reported that they held private accounts only. That is a decrease from last year when this was 48%. The gender difference is quite significant with over half of girls reporting that they held only private accounts, compared to just 35% of boys.

At least 46% hold some public accounts (chose *public* or *private* or *public*), which is consistent with last year's findings. This is much higher than the numbers reported by 8-12 year olds (28%). Boys were far more likely than girls to maintain only public accounts (18% vs 9%).

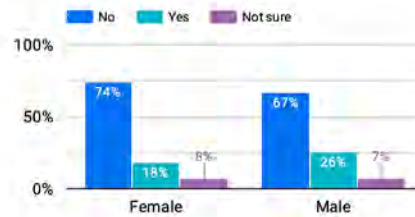


Do you have friends and followers on social media apps that you have not met in real life?

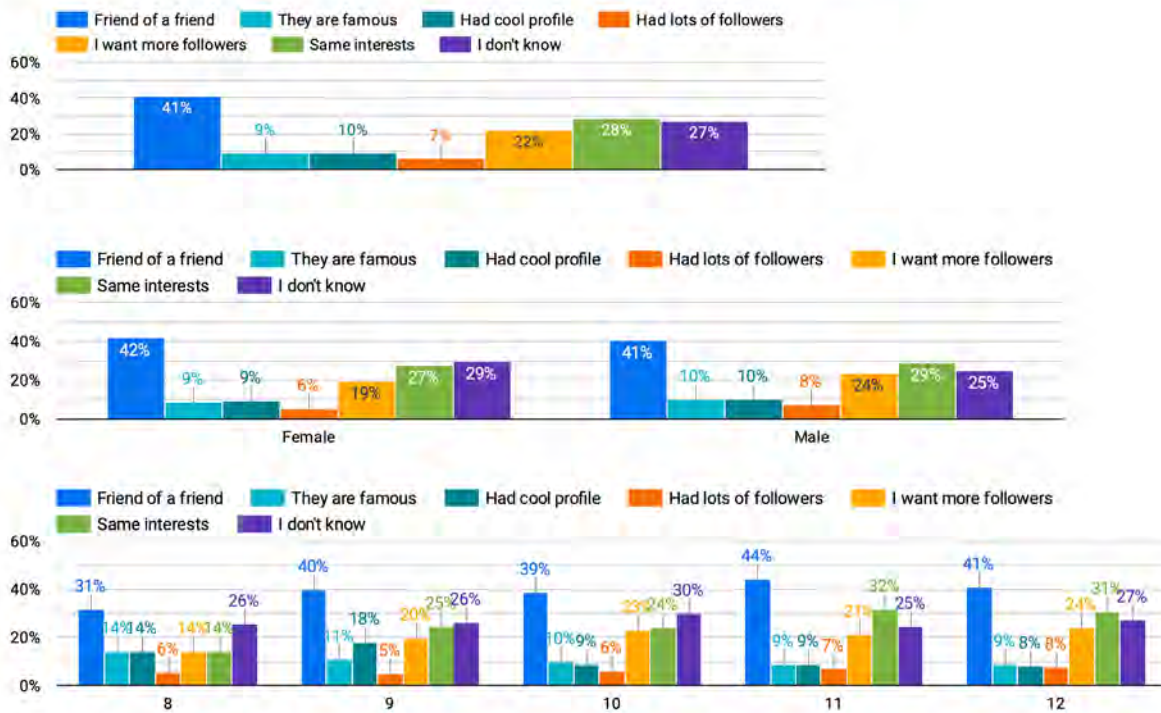


Last year 20% had friends and followers they did not know on social media but the small shift upward to 22% this year could be as the result of the data sample featuring more boys. Boys were more likely than girls to have friends they do not know in real life and we know too that they are more likely to have public accounts so privacy is less of a concern to boys.

Older children of 11 and 12 are more likely to have friends and followers they do not know.

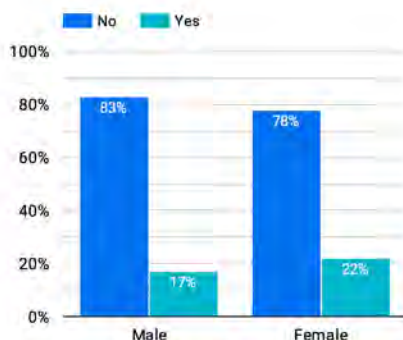
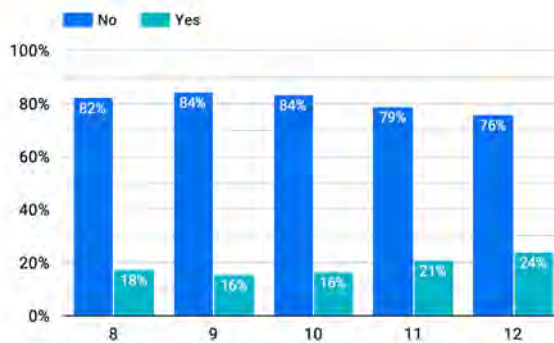
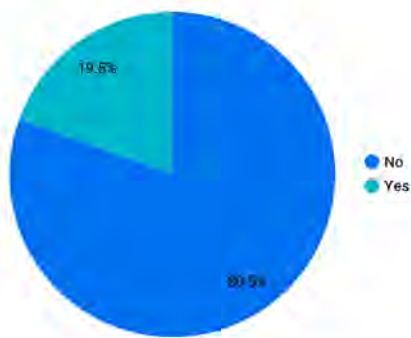


If you have friends and followers you did not know then why did you accept them?



There was little difference year on year for the reasons given. This year children were less likely to have said they did not know (down to 30% from 33% last year). The most popular reasons given were still *They are a friend of a friend*, 41%, and other popular reasons are *They have the same interests*, 28%, and *I want more followers*, 27%. Even children who are reluctant to allow unknown people to follow them may willingly accept friends or family members of someone they do know. There was nothing noteworthy when broken down by gender.

Do you post videos of yourself online?

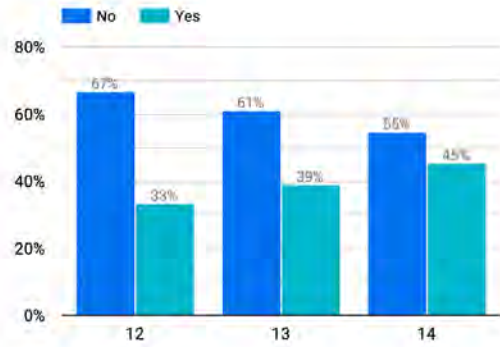
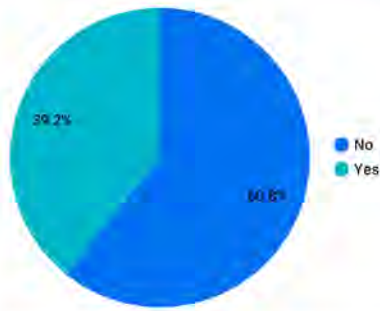


There is a marked trend downwards year on year in the numbers who said they posted videos of themselves online - four year trend has been 32%, 27%, 23%, 20%.

This downward trend is seen across both genders but is much more apparent for girls than boys. Girls are down from 41% in 2020-2021 to 21% this year but boys have fallen just 5% in the years from 2020-2021.

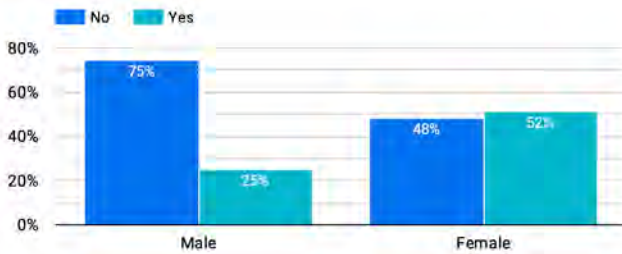
Older children were more likely than younger ones to post videos of themselves and this number is trending down across all ages versus last year.

Do you post videos of yourself online? for 12-14 year olds

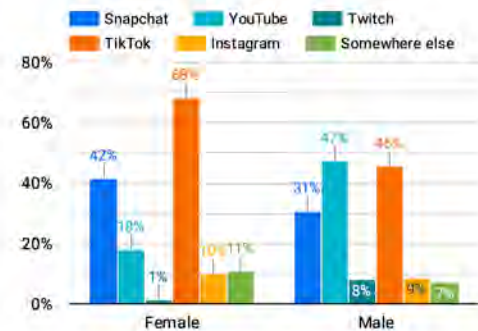
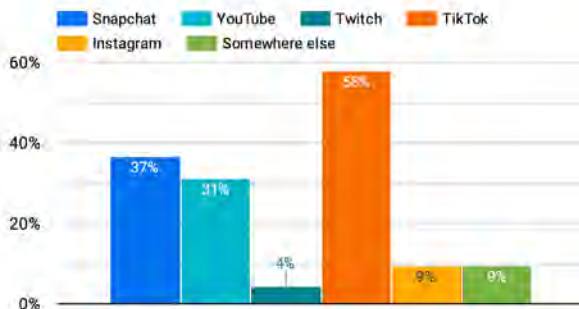


39% of 12-14 year olds posted videos of themselves online which does not differ from last year's findings. This is almost double the number we saw in primary schools. It appears that young people were more likely to post videos of themselves as they got older with 45% of 14 year olds saying they did so.

Girls were more likely to post videos of themselves than boys - more than half of girls but just one quarter of boys posted videos of themselves. We noted this behavioural difference last year also.



If you post videos of yourself then where do you post them?



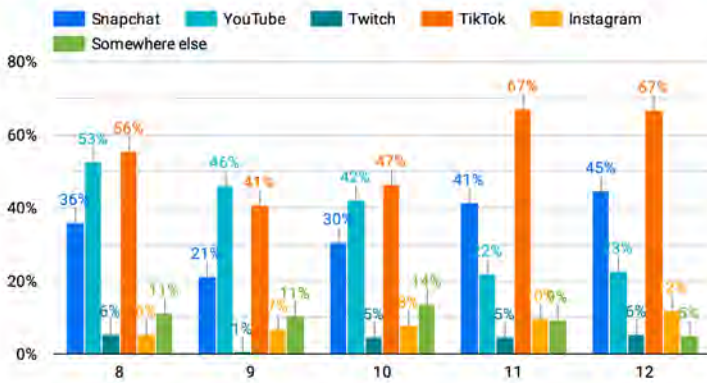
For those who post videos TikTok remained the most popular app at 57% but there was a significant decrease in those choosing TikTok over the last few years (80% in 2020-2021, 74% in 2021-2022, 71% in 2022-2023). This ties in with TikTok usage dropping in general.

Snapchat had also decreased from 46% last year.

YouTube continued to increase in popularity. There was a 10% increase this year over last and a 14% increase over the last few years (just 16% chose YouTube in 2020-2021). YouTube has maintained its number one position, while social media apps usage has dropped, and it would seem that more children have chosen to post videos to the platform too. Boys were actually more likely to post to YouTube than TikTok.

Relatively small numbers posted to Twitch (creating channels and posting) and this was the first year we tracked this platform. Twitch was more popular with boys and more often associated with streamed gameplay.

By age - If you post videos of yourself then where do you post them?



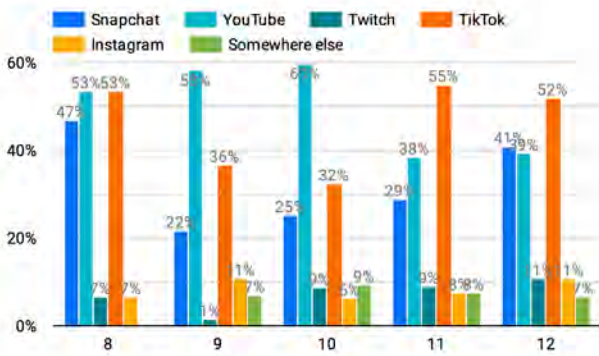
As TikTok account ownership rose with age it was no surprise to see more older children posting videos to TikTok of themselves.

Older children were less likely to have posted to YouTube than younger but it remained very popular with boys, with 39% of 12 year old boys still saying they posted to YouTube. The decrease by age for girls was very steep.

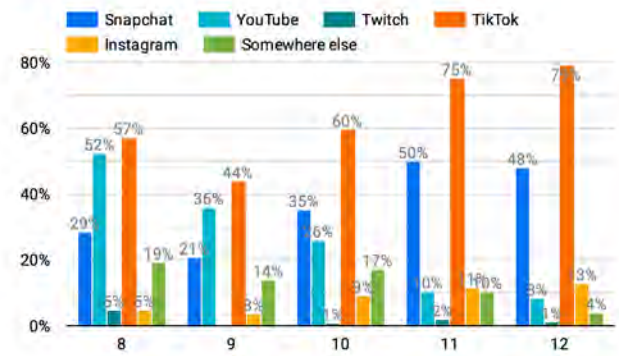
Snapchat numbers increased also with 11 and 12 year olds much more likely to have posted videos there than younger children, which is in line with Snapchat account ownership increasing at that age.

Relatively small numbers posted to Twitch (creating channels and posting) and this was the first year we tracked this platform. Twitch was more popular with boys and more often associated with streamed gameplay.

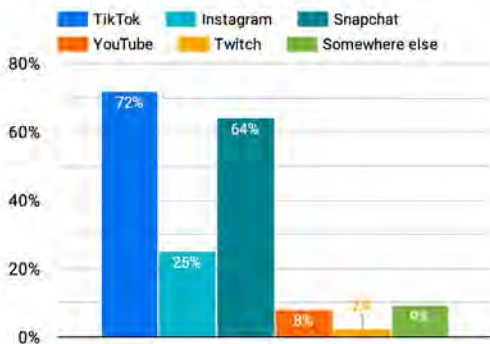
Boys only



Girls only

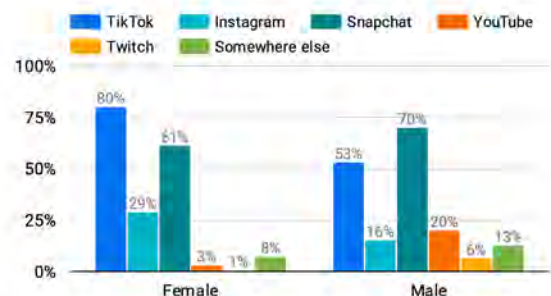
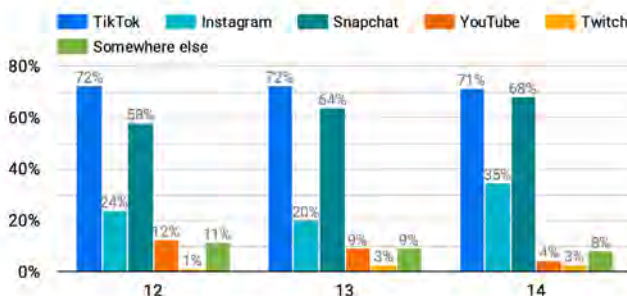


If you post videos then where do you post them? for 12-14 year olds

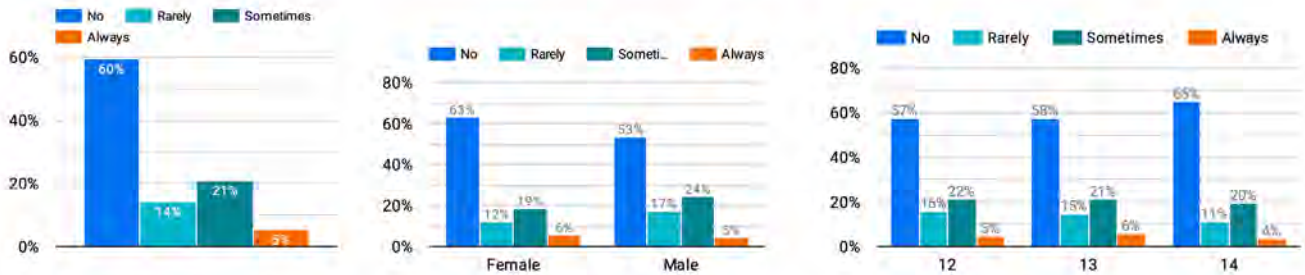


TikTok remained the most popular app to use to post videos. Snapchat was not that far behind and well ahead of other apps suggested.

Instagram was used more by older children than younger. Snapchat was used almost as much as TikTok by the age of 14. Boys were actually much more likely to have posted on Snapchat than TikTok and also made use of YouTube which was not at all popular with girls for posting of videos.

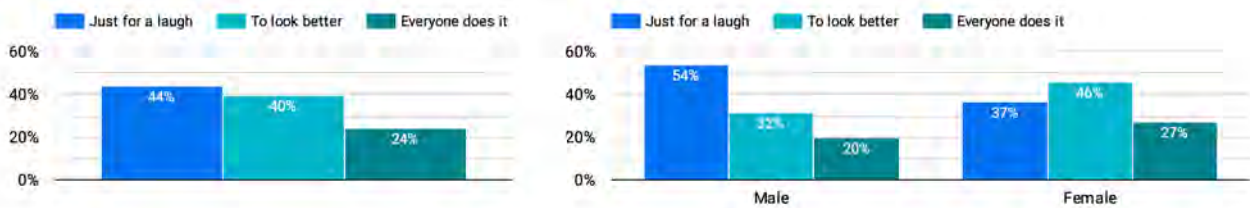


If you post videos/photos online do you alter your image before posting? for 12-14 year olds



This year we asked this question for the first time so no trend can be reported. 40% indicated that they had altered their image but just 5% indicated that they did this everytime. Boys were more likely to have made changes than girls and younger children were more likely to have altered their image than older ones but with this question motivation matters a great deal so we asked a follow up question on why they alter their image - is it for fun or is there a social pressure component. The sample size for the follow up question is smaller as it involved only those that said they altered their image.

Why do you alter your image?

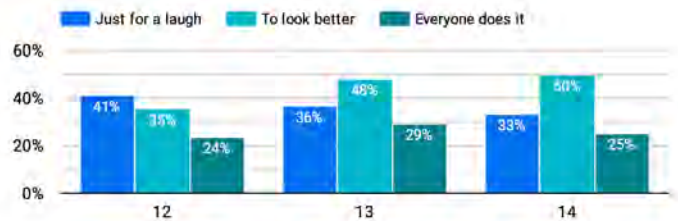
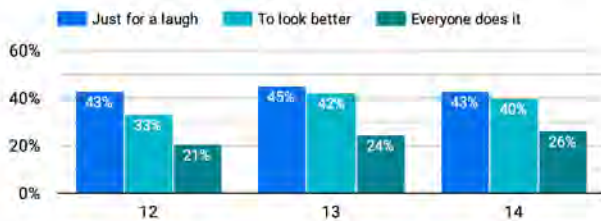


Boys were much more likely than girls to have done this *Just for a laugh* with the majority of them doing so for fun and having fun with built in filters and editing software is not a cause for concern. But nearly half of girls did it *To look better* vs just under a third of boys. Girls were also more likely than boys to have said that they believe that *Everyone does it* so felt pressure to follow suit as "improving" image before posting was the norm.

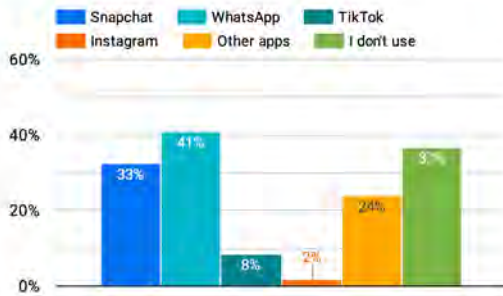
The number of girls altering their image *To look better* or because *Everyone does it* increased with age indicating that it was becoming normalised for older children to do so. 13 and 14 year old girls were more likely to give these answers than 12 year olds so older girls may be feeling more social pressure. We had a small sample of 15 year olds who said they altered their image (43 young people) with more than half of those (53%) saying they did so *To look better*.

Boys only

Girls only



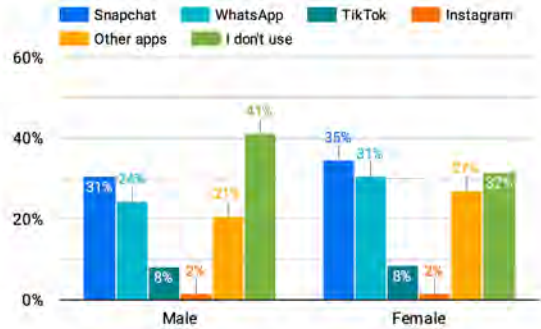
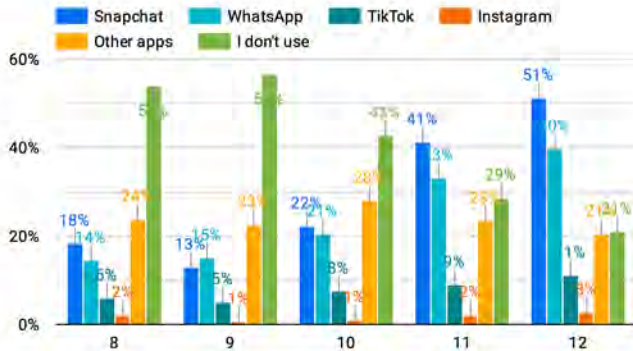
Which apps do they use for group chats with classmates and friends?



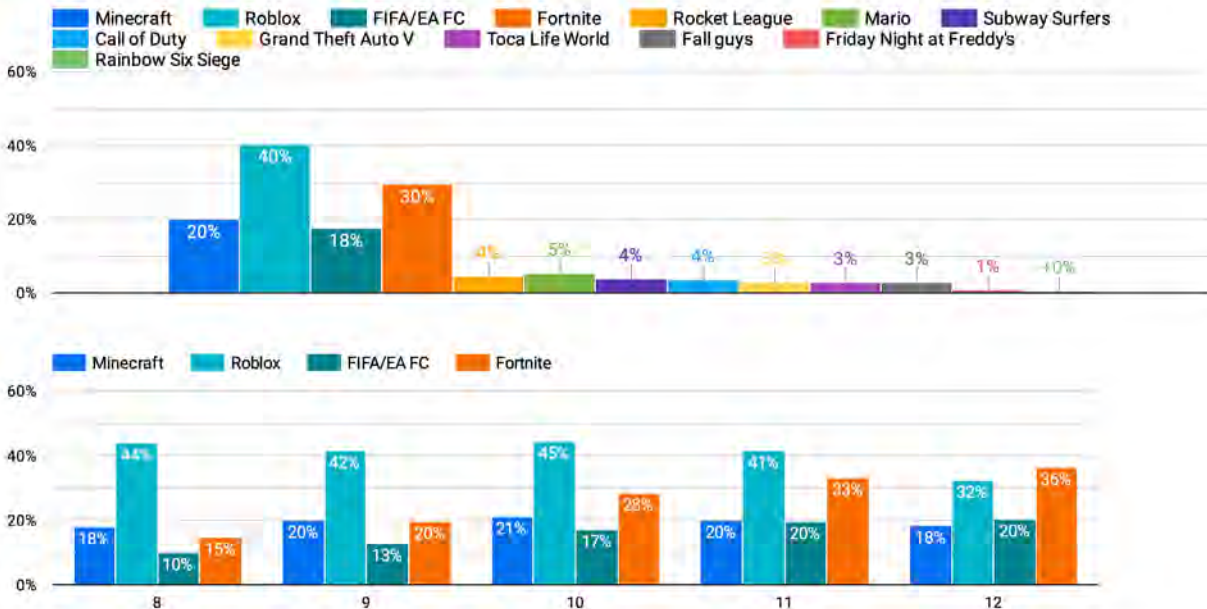
This year for the first time we asked 8-12 year olds did they participate in group chats and if so what apps did they use. Cyberbullying behaviours are common in group chats, as are the sharing of links or images involving mature or upsetting content.

Based on classroom discussions with children we were not surprised that group chats most often took place on Snapchat and WhatsApp. Disappearing messages and locked or hidden chats on these two platforms make the job of monitoring content more difficult. Other apps used may have included JusTalkKids.

Girls were more likely than boys to have participated in group chats. This participation increased with age with 78% of 12 year olds saying they participated.



Most popular video games identified

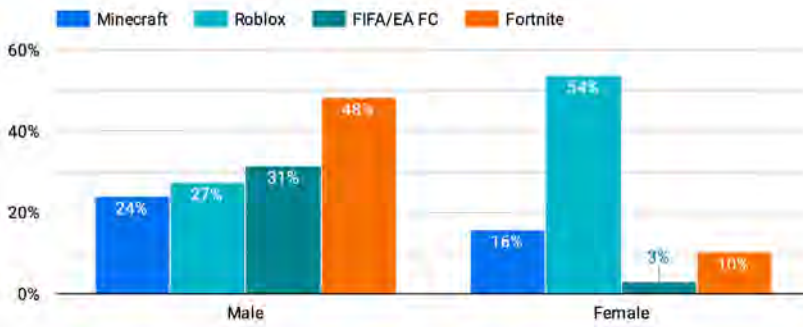


The top 4 gaming platforms have not changed in recent years, although the order of preference did change. All of these popular platforms allow for multiplayer, online gaming. This lack of change in the top titles is in line with worldwide usage, as is growth seen on the Fortnite platform.

- Roblox continued to grow in popularity year on year - up from 32% in 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 to 40% this year.
- Fortnite has seen a big jump this year - up from 16% last year and 19% in 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 to 30% this year.
- Interest in Minecraft continued to decline this year - down from 30% in 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 to 22% in last year to 20% this year.

As we saw in previous years Roblox dropped in popularity as children got older. It may very well be the first online environment where children socialise but as girls access social media apps in greater numbers as they get older their interest in Roblox declines. This year other games like EA FC and Fortnite became more popular with age.

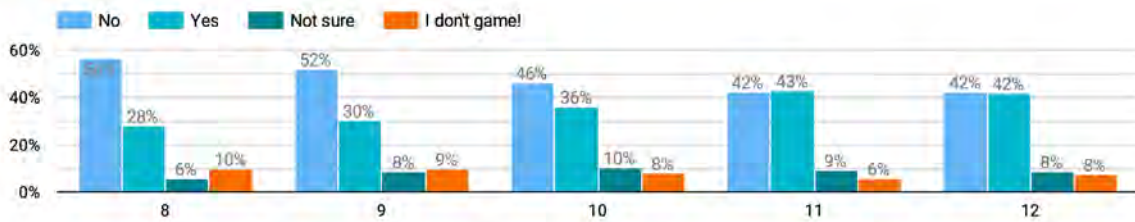
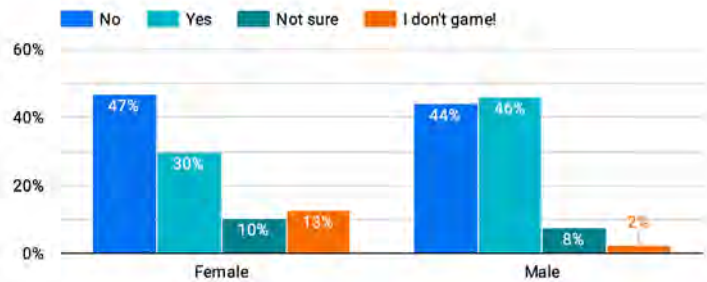
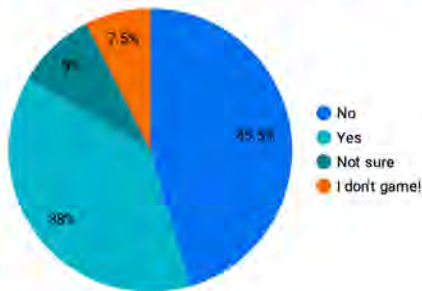
Top 4 games by gender



Boys and girls differed greatly in their preferences. Girls opted primarily for Roblox which is more social, Minecraft in smaller numbers for creativity and lots of simple mobile apps like Toca Life World and Subway Surfers. Fewer girls gamed on PC or consoles than boys, with mobile gaming on tablets and phones the favoured approach.

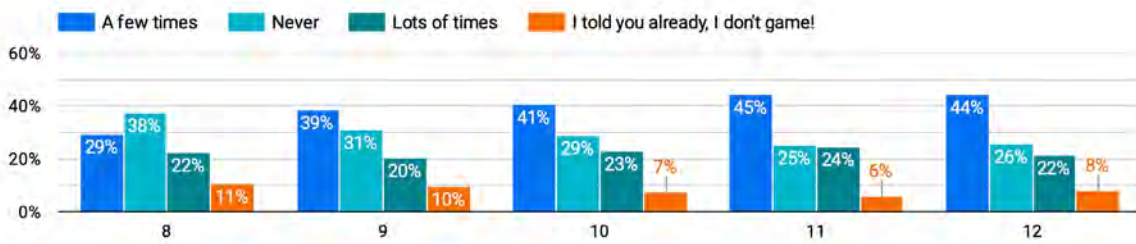
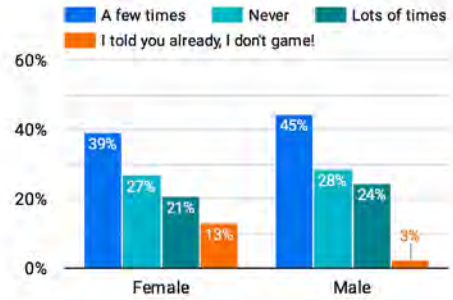
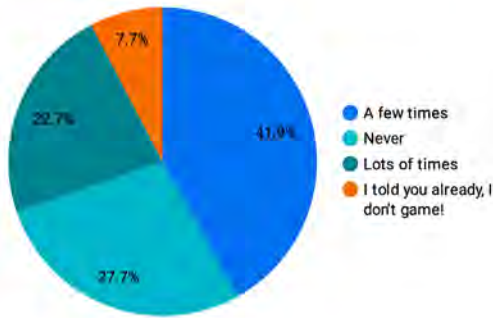
Boys played more competitive games - usually either sports themed games or shooter and to a lesser extent action-adventure games. Fortnite really dominated for boys this year, up from 31% last year to 48% this year. FIFA was the most popular game with boys last year and has dropped 3% and Minecraft is also down by 5%, while Roblox has risen by 4%. The increased interest in Fortnite is a worldwide trend, much of it attributed to the OG update. Epic also released Lego Fortnite, Rocket Racing and there are many custom maps available built using Unreal Engine for Fortnite, e.g. horror maps.

Do you ever game with people you have not met in real life?



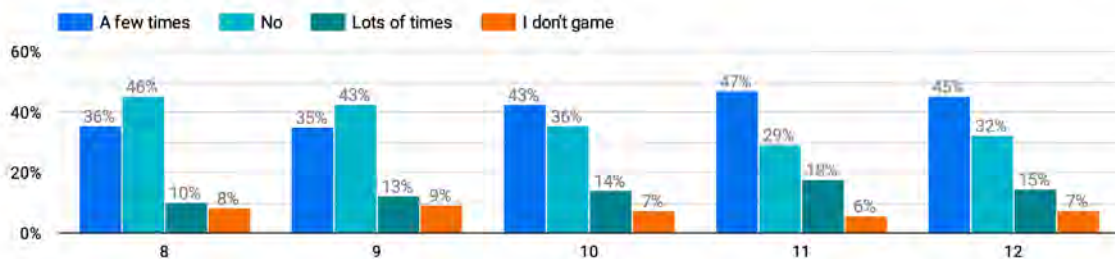
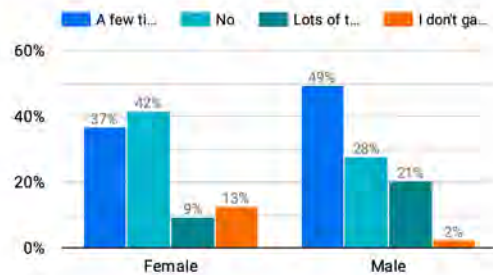
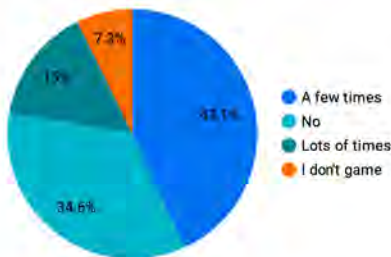
38% of children gamed with people they did not know. The number is up on last year when 33% indicated they gamed with people unknown to them in real life. How much they interact with these people is unclear. Boys were more likely than girls to have gamed with people they did not know. Children of all ages gamed in environments that facilitated contact with strangers but children of age 11 and 12 were more likely to game with strangers than younger children.

Has anyone ever tried to chat with you or add you as a friend in a game that you have never met in real life?



It was common while gaming to be prompted to add an online friend, with boys a little more likely to have experienced this than girls. Older children were more likely to be approached than younger. This probably had to do with game choices and the settings on the platforms/consoles they were using. There was no notable trend upwards or downwards in the last few years.

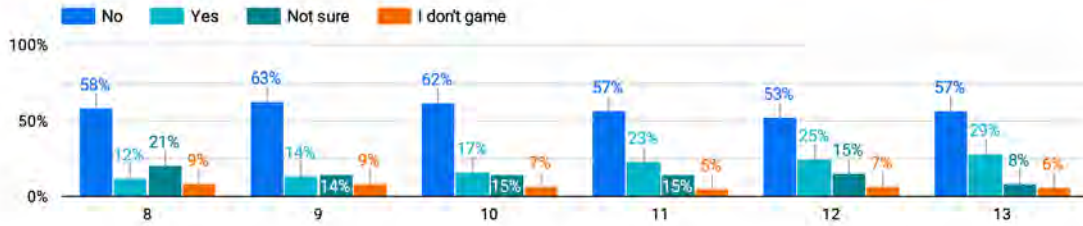
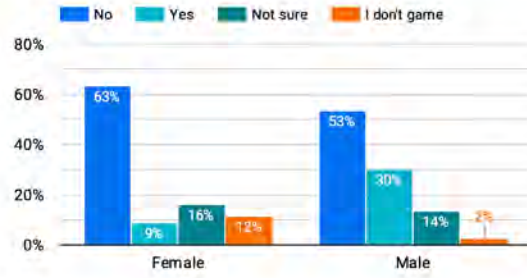
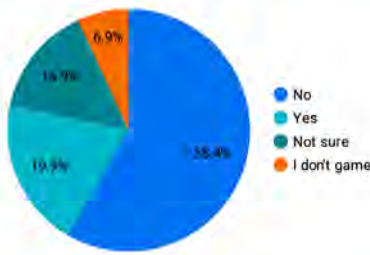
In the last year did they buy things in games, e.g. skins, packs/lootboxes, virtual currency?



This is a new query this year, added to the survey because one of the risks with gaming is the presence of in-game consumable purchases. Children can get carried away with purchasing and may also avail of randomised purchases that have been linked to problematic gambling habits in later life.

Boys were more likely than girls to have made in-game purchases or to have done so lots of times. That could be to do with the games they played, some of which could be described as pay to win (P2W), e.g. FIFA Ultimate Team card packs, or purchases like Fortnite battlepasses and skins. We can see from the responses that it is difficult to avoid spending in games entirely, with just 35% saying they did not make purchases in games.

Have you played a computer or video game that has an age rating of over 18s in the last year?



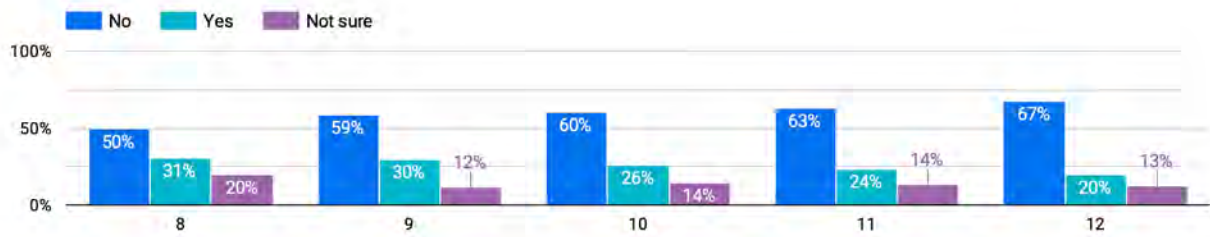
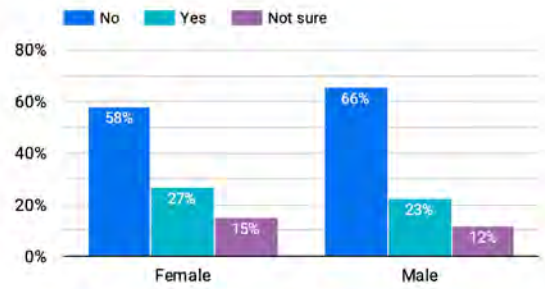
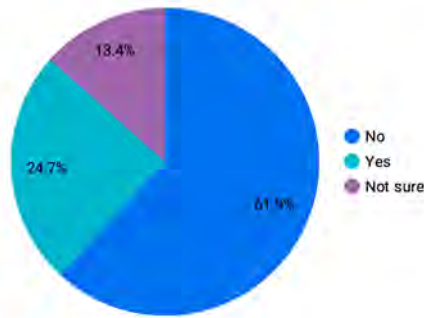
Boys were more likely to have played over 18s titles than girls and the numbers who played over 18s titles rose with age. The gender bias is not surprising as shooter and action adventure genre games, which appealed more to boys than to girls, were more likely to feature actions/dialogue/imagery deemed unsuitable to those under 18. The 18s titles most commonly played are from the Call of Duty range and Grand Theft Auto Online. There are many others, including Rainbow Six Siege, Halo, Red Dead Redemption, Counter Strike:Global Offensive, Warframe, The Last of Us, Dead Island. Some boys may also have gamed on PC accessing games through Steam, which does not have the same concept of age ratings.

Many children said they were "not sure" so age ratings were often ignored or not understood. This was more true for younger users of 8 years than older children, which is in line with last year's findings.

The changes seen over the last 4 years can largely be accounted for by the changes in data sample (greater percentage of boys this year) so there is no obvious trend up or down.

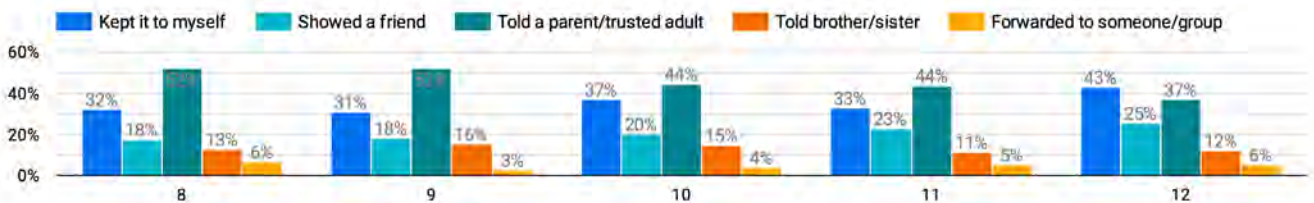
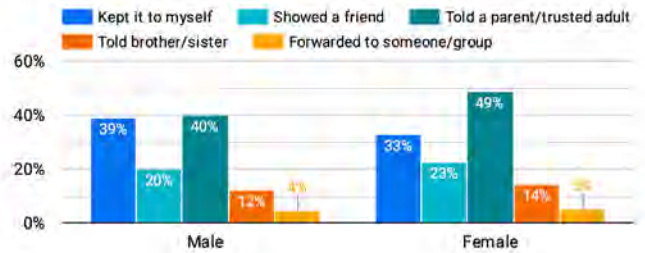
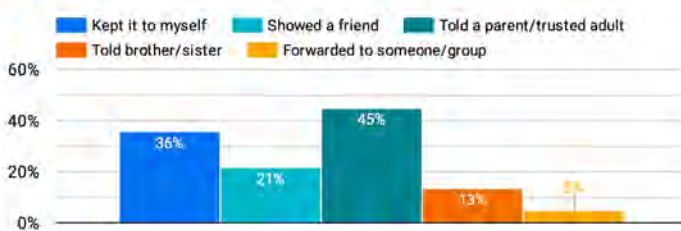
4. Online Experiences

In the last year, have they seen or experienced something online that bothered them? (e.g. made them upset, or scared, or wish they had never seen it)



Children reported seeing something that bothered them in much the same numbers that we have seen in the previous years (25%/26% over a 4 year period). There was also little change across genders, with girls continuing to experience this in slightly higher numbers than boys. As we found in previous years younger users were more likely than older to indicate that they had been bothered. This is not surprising as the content presented to younger users is the same as that presented to older users and they are likely less equipped to handle more mature or distressing content.

If you have seen/experienced something online that bothered you, what did you do about it?

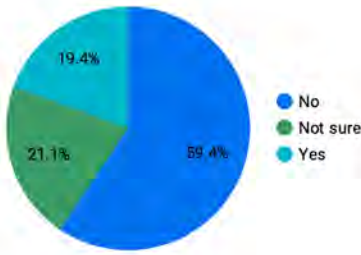


There has been a jump this year in the numbers keeping it to themselves - 30% in 2020-2021, 29% 2021-2022, 31% in 2022-2023. This is more than changes in the data sample can account for. The most common answer remained reaching out to a parent or another trusted adult but there was a decline in the number of children opening up to that trusted adult. In recent years we have reported 54% of children telling a parent/trusted adult when bothered. This has fallen to just 45% this year.

Boys were more likely than girls to have kept it to themselves when they had negative experiences online. Just 41% of boys reached out to a trusted adult/parent compared with 47% over the previous 3 years. The drop is even more pronounced for girls. We reported 58-60% over the last few years but less than half of girls this year reported talking to a parent/trusted adult.

Older children were less likely to have told a parent/trusted adult and more likely to have shown a friend than younger children and this trend is in line with previous years' findings.

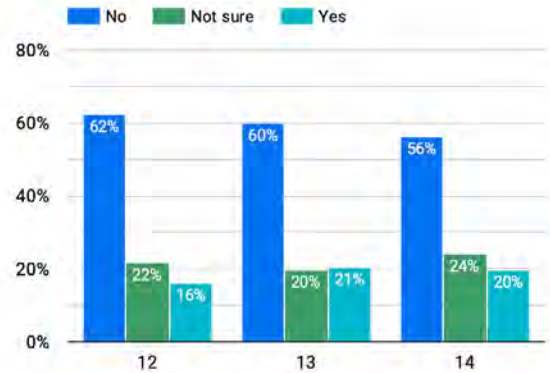
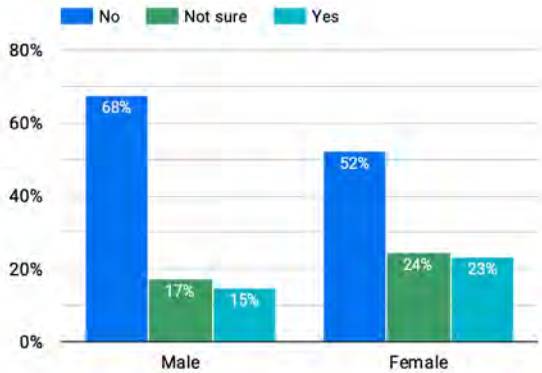
In the last year, have you seen or experienced something online that bothered you? (e.g. made you upset, or scared, or wish you had never seen it) - for 12-14 year olds



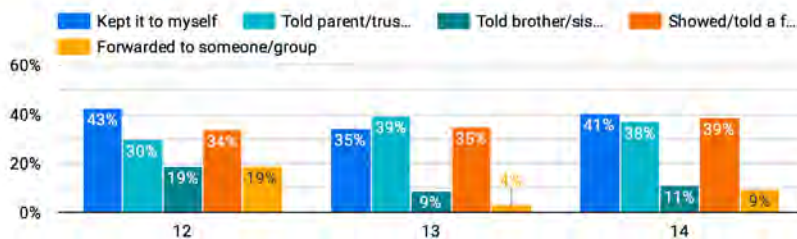
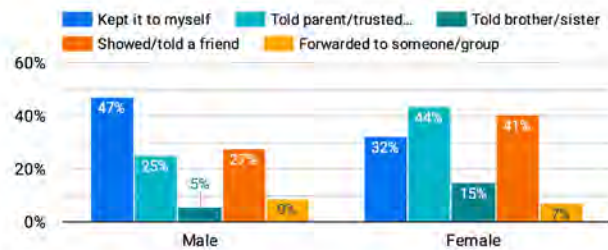
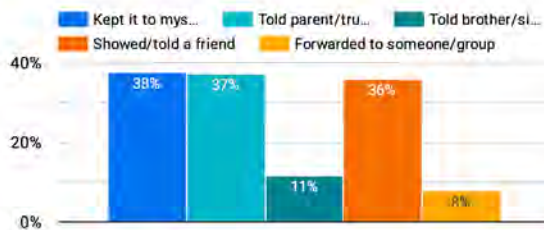
19% of young people said they had been "bothered" but a further 21% said that they were not sure. This is a decrease on the number reported by primary school children (25%) so older children may be desensitised through exposure.

Girls reported being bothered in far higher numbers than boys. The number who said *no* decreased with age with more saying *not sure*.

These numbers are similar to last year's findings.



If you have seen or experienced something online that bothered you, what did you do about it? for 12-14 year olds



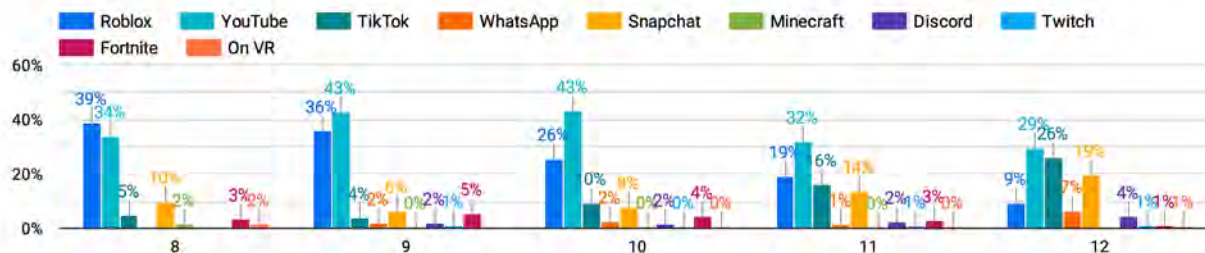
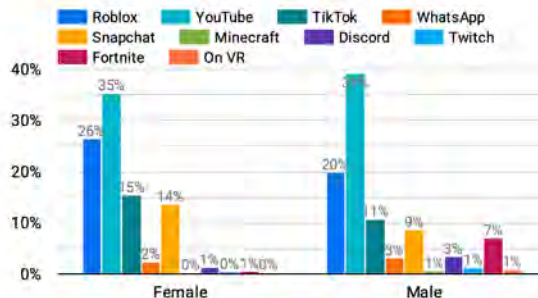
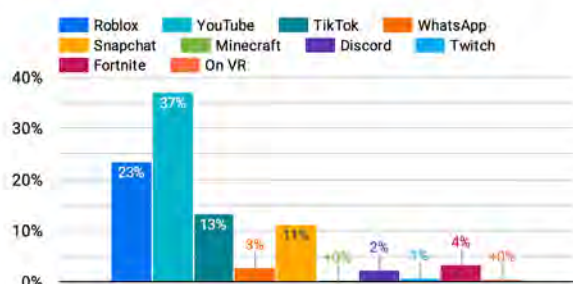
This question could involve difficulties with contact or content - videos/images/live streams/chatrooms, scams, ads, messages, comments.

Almost 4 in 10 (38%) 12-14 years olds *kept it to themselves* when they saw/experienced something that bothered or upset them or that they wished they had never seen. There is a marked difference by gender with this question - boys were much more likely to keep it to themselves (almost half of them at 47%) when they had a negative experience than girls (32%) and less likely to have talked to a parent or friend.

Younger children of 8-12 years were more likely to have told a parent (45% vs the 37% of 12-14 year olds) and less likely to have told a friend (22% vs 37% of 12-14 year olds). We had similar findings last year.

Similar numbers told a parent or trusted adult (37%), as told/showed a friend (36%). Just 8% forwarded on to someone/group.

If you answered "yes" above where did it happen (e.g. TikTok, WhatsApp, YouTube, Snapchat, Discord, Roblox, Twitch)?



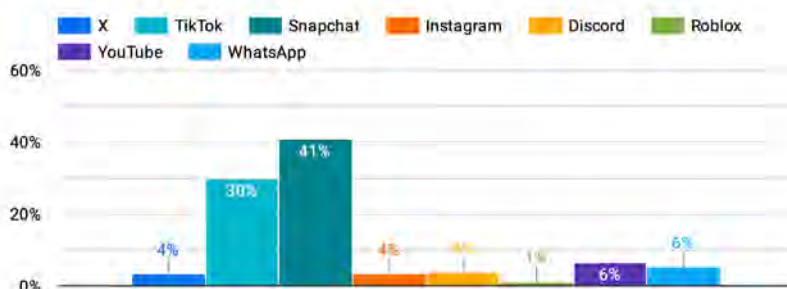
This was a new query this year so there are no trends to report upon. Unsurprisingly children input popular games/apps they spent the most time on.

After YouTube, Roblox was the most common environment identified. On YouTube children most often mentioned horror/jumpscares as the experience that upset them. Roblox experiences involved scams, trades gone bad, cyberbullying and horror games. YouTube usage and Fortnite engagement is higher amongst boys and Roblox lower so that could account for differences seen there by gender.

Few children reported having seen/experienced something that bothered or upset them in popular games EA FC and Minecraft. 18s games titles and VR were not mentioned.

Older children were more likely to have spent time on TikTok and Snapchat and less on YouTube and Roblox so that could account for the changes by age.

If you were bothered, what were you using at the time, (i.e. what social media app, streaming service, messaging app or game)? for 12-14 year olds

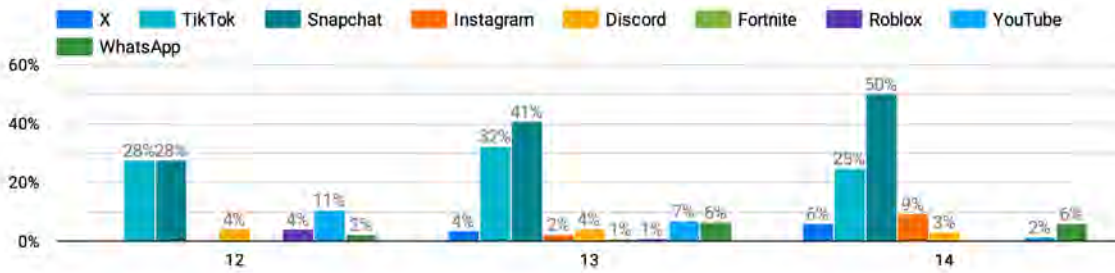
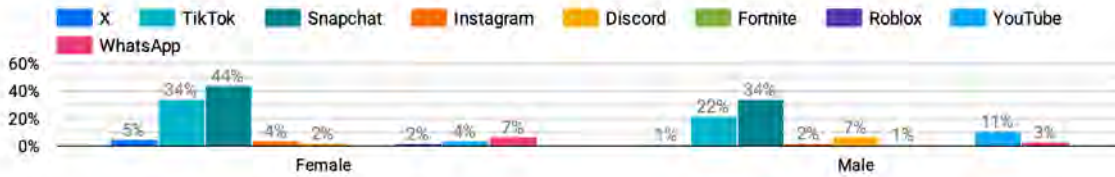


The numbers who reported Facebook, Pinterest, VSCO, Twitch, Fortnite and other platforms were too small to include in the graph. There is no trend to comment on because this is a new question in this year's survey. The answers we received from primary school children were very different with YouTube and Roblox significantly ahead of other platforms.

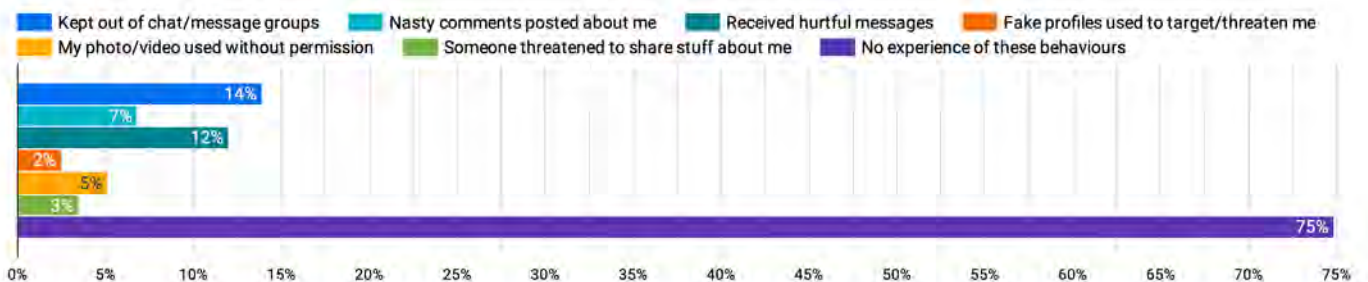
There were two online environments where children most often had negative experiences - Snapchat at 41% and TikTok at 30%. There were more children this year using Snapchat than TikTok (84% vs 74%) but young people are using WhatsApp and YouTube in similar numbers to Snapchat (83% on YouTube and 86% on WhatsApp) but not reporting as many problems. Significant numbers have accounts on Instagram and Pinterest too but very, very few reported being "bothered" when using these apps.

Snapchat likes to distinguish itself from social media apps like TikTok and Instagram, with their primary focus being communication and connection, more than delivery of content. If we compare them to WhatsApp, the other popular app used for messaging and group chats, just 6% of children reported being "bothered" on WhatsApp this year. Snapchat is certainly standing out as a problematic online environment where children have lots of negative experiences.

Girls were more likely to have reported being bothered on Snapchat and TikTok than boys. Boys reported higher numbers than girls on apps like Discord and YouTube. This could be attributed to usage levels so commenting by gender may not be useful in the report. Commenting by age is much more interesting. Snapchat rose by age and was flagged by more than half of the 14 year olds. 27% said TikTok was an online environment where they were "bothered" (respondents can mention more than one app/service) and Instagram was in third place at 12%. At 14 user numbers on TikTok were similar (83/84%) and Instagram was close enough at 71%. Snapchat really stands out as a problematic environment for this age.

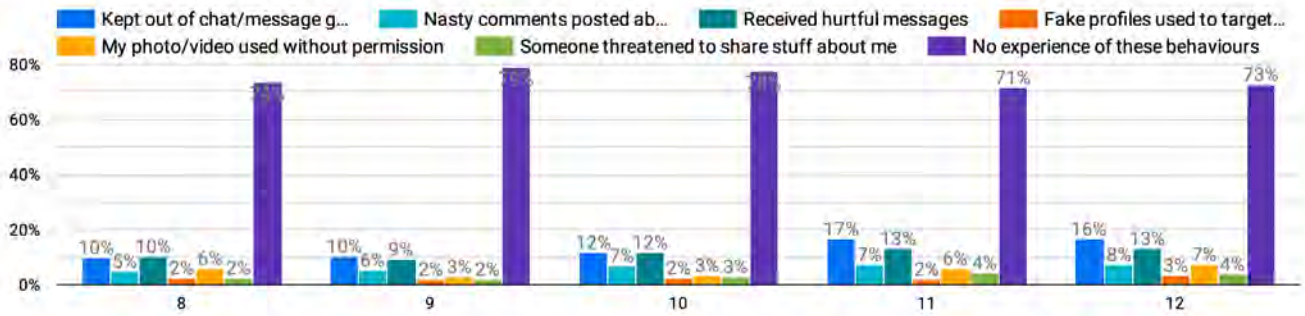


Cyberbullying – Tick any of these experiences that you have had online

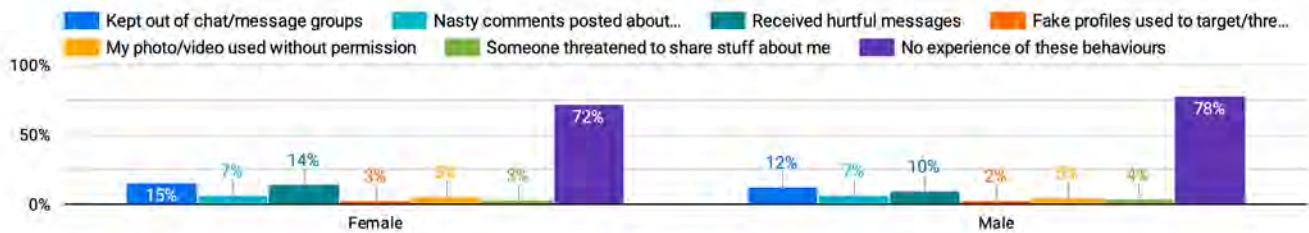


1 in 4 children, aged 8-12, reported being cyberbullied and in many cases multiple behaviours were experienced by the same child. The most common responses were being excluded from chat or messaging groups or being the recipient of hurtful messages. The figures are similar to last year and down slightly from 28% in 2021-2022 and 29% in 2020-2021. The order of these cyberbullying behaviours remains consistent over the 4 years.

Cyberbullying - Tick any of these experiences that you have had online

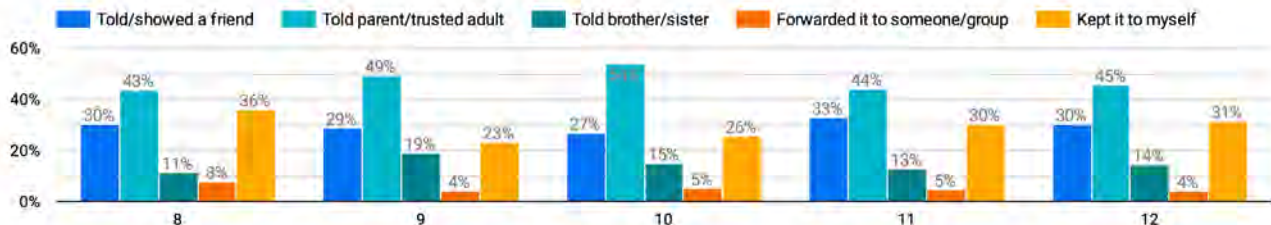
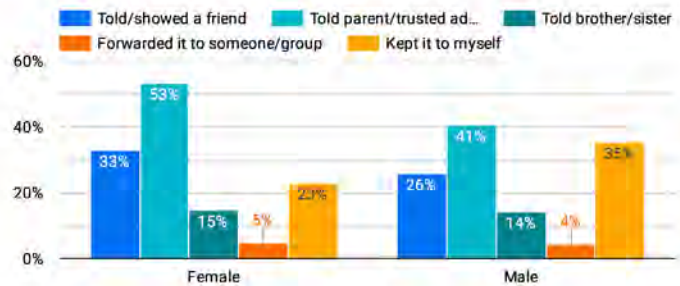
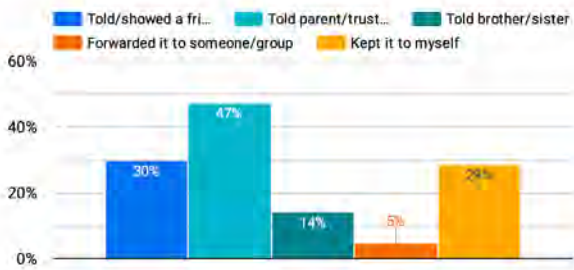


Cyberbullying peaked this year at age 11. This was also the age at which more children got access to a smart phone and signed up to social media so there was likely a steep learning curve at this age where access increased but children were not adequately prepared on how to behave online.



Girls were more likely than boys to have been cyberbullied and in particular to have received hurtful messages.

What did you do about it? (If you experienced any of these cyberbullying behaviours)

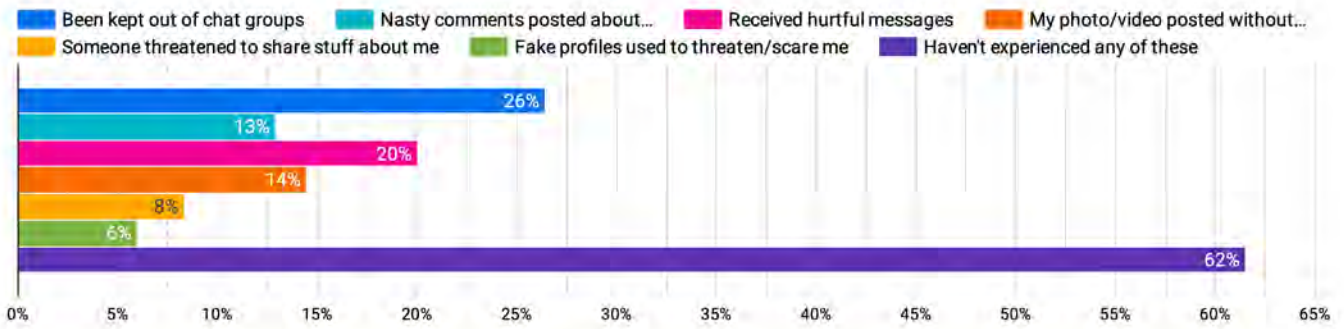


Less than half of children who experienced cyberbullying told a parent or trusted adult and far too many kept it to themselves (29%). Boys were more likely to have kept it to themselves (35%) than girls (23%). They were less likely to tell a parent but more likely to turn to their siblings.

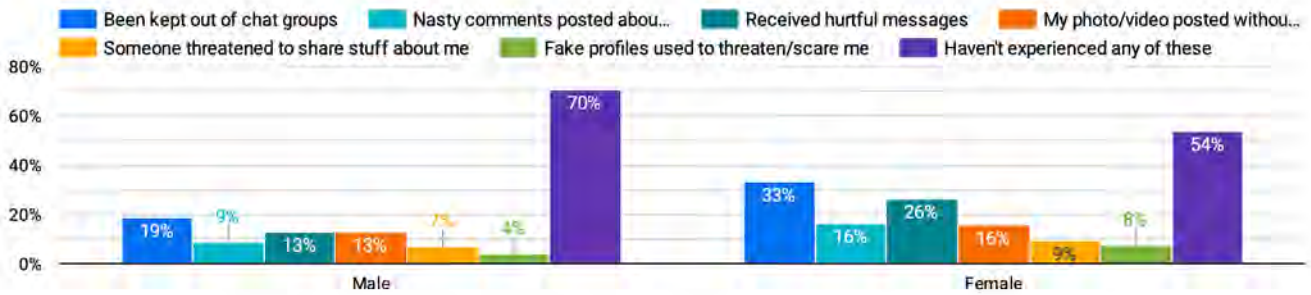
Older children were less likely to tell a parent or trusted adult. We know that cyberbullying numbers were higher for 11 year olds than other age groups so it is not good to see that at this age they were least likely to seek guidance from a parent.

The 4 year trend shows that children are turning to their parent/trusted adult less now than in previous years (60% in 2020-2021 and 2021-2022, down to 52% last year and just 47% this year).

Cyberbullying - Tick any of these experiences that you have had online: for 12-14 year olds

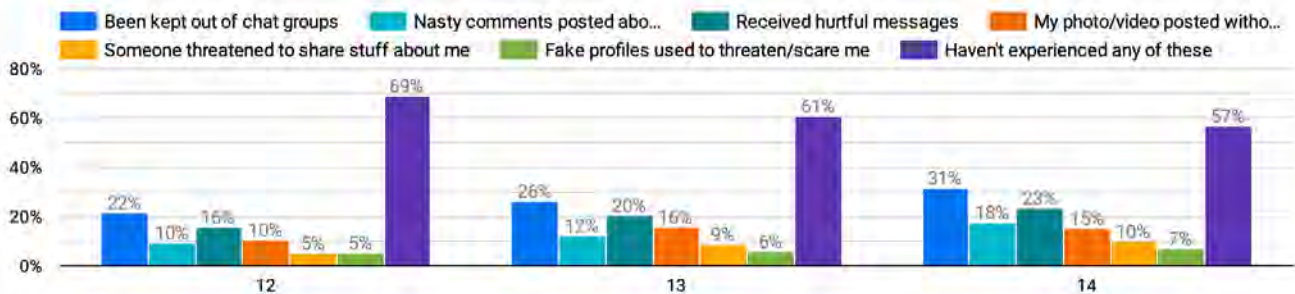


The number of children, aged 12-14, that had experienced cyberbullying in the last year was 38%. This is similar to last year's finding of 37% but given the change in the data sample (i.e. boys make up a larger portion this year than last and report experiencing bullying less than girls) the trend seems to be that cyberbullying is slightly more common this year. The increase can be seen across all behaviours that we track, bar the receipt of hurtful messages which is the same.



30% of boys of 12-14 years reported experiencing bullying and this is similar to last year when 31% reported this kind of harassment. The reporting by girls is more worrying because, while 40% of 12-14 year old girls reported bullying last year, the number this year is 46%. This significant increase was seen across all behaviours that we track - exclusion (been kept out of groups) is up by 5% and we've seen a doubling in numbers reporting feeling threatened through fake profiles or someone saying they would share stuff online.

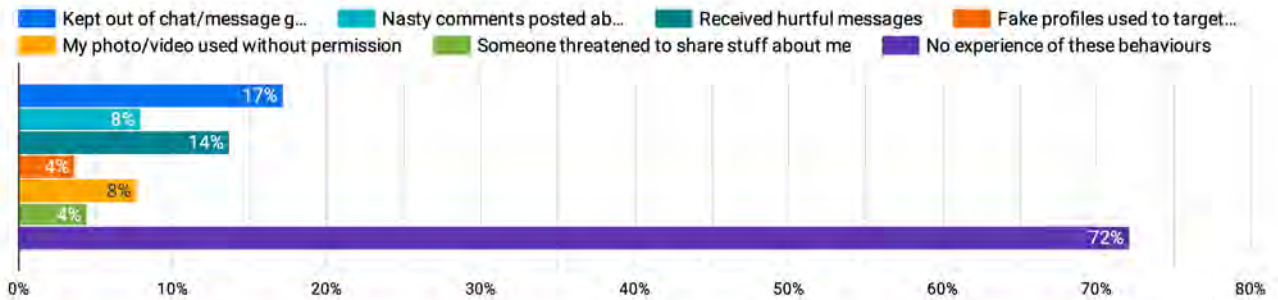
The numbers who reported encountering these problems increased with age. By the age of 14 almost a third reported being excluded and almost a quarter reported receiving hurtful messages. The school setting has an effect, with 27% of 12 years olds in primary school reporting cyberbullying versus 31% in secondary.



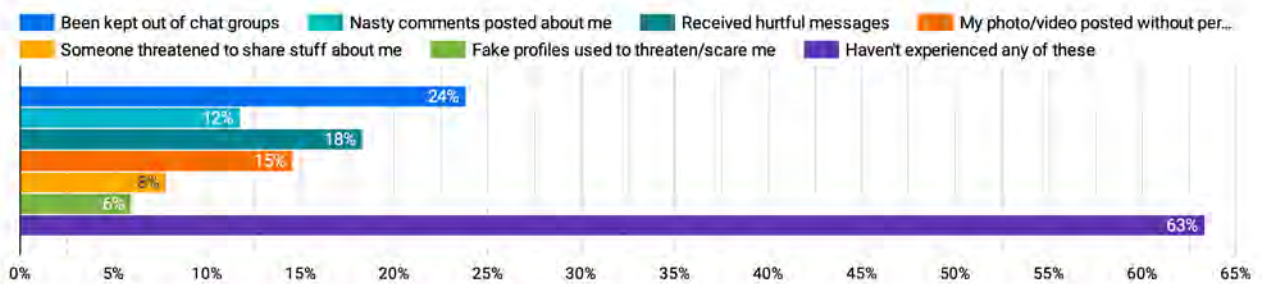
Cyberbullying - Tick any of these experiences that you have had online:

While we don't report by class/year group in the trends and usage report it is interesting to see the impact that the school setting has. 28% of 6th class students reported experiencing one or more of these cyberbullying behaviours vs 37% of first years. This is the most significant jump across class/year groups, highlighting that the change of school and new friends, combined with the likely increase in access and drop in supervision, led to significantly increased levels of cyberbullying. The biggest increases were seen for *my photo/video was posted without my permission* and *been kept out of chat/message groups*.

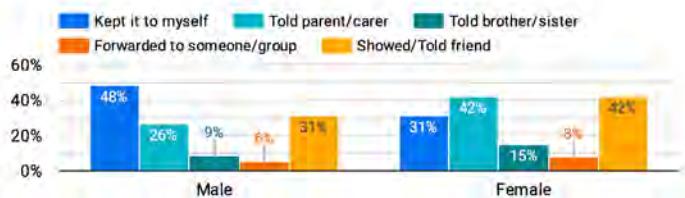
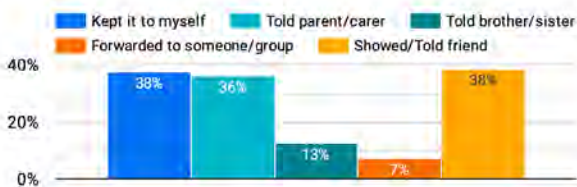
6th class students (1766)



1st year students (879)



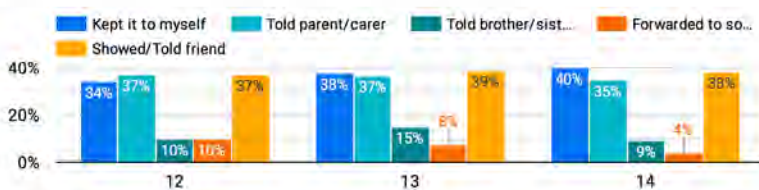
If cyberbullied what did you do about it? For 12-14 year olds



38% of children who experienced cyberbullying did not tell anyone about it and almost 1 in 2 boys kept this negative experience to themselves. That figure of 38% is a 2% increase on last year's findings but the data sample contains more boys this year and boys, we know, are less likely to talk to anyone, so the trend is not significant. It is 1% lower for boys at 48% this year vs 49% last year.

12-14 year olds were only slightly more likely to tell a friend than a parent/trusted adult. Girls were much more likely to have told a parent or a friend. Boys were more likely to tell a friend than a parent. Girls were also more likely to have forwarded on to someone/group or to have shared with a sibling.

Nothing noteworthy comes up when viewing responses by age. It is worth making a comparison to primary school children, where 47% of 8-12 year olds (44% still at 6th class) spoke to parents about their negative experiences vs just 36% of 12-14 year olds in secondary.



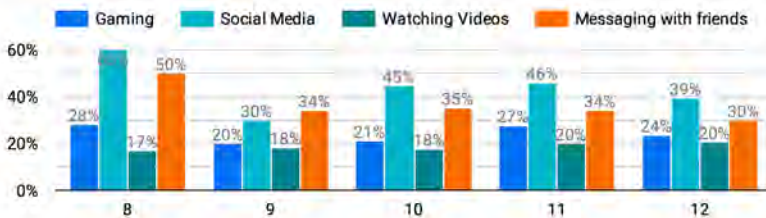
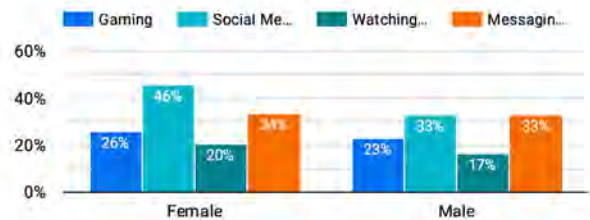
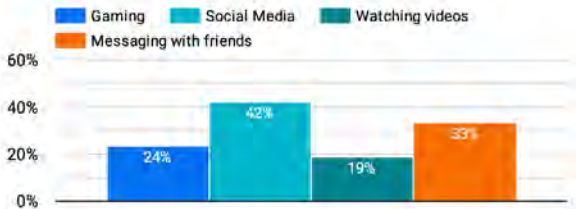
Cyberbullying and the link to how children spend their online time

We can see a link between how children chose to spend most of their online time and the likelihood of them being bullied. Those who were spending the majority of their time on social media were most likely to have experienced bullying, with messaging with friends the next most likely activity.

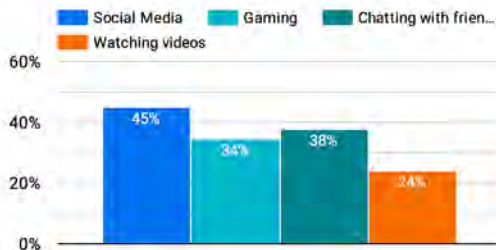
Girls were far more likely than boys to have experienced bullying when they had spent their time on social media.

For those who selected gaming, girls were a bit more likely than boys to have experienced bullying. This is not surprising because girls tend to game more on platforms like Roblox, where the primary motivation is still to connect/socialise. For those girls who do play in more competitive environments, e.g. Fortnite, then gender based bullying is unfortunately understood to be a problem for girls (international research into gaming shows girls will be targeted more, so much so that some female gamers adopt a male avatar and persona online).

10 and 11 years were the peak ages for encountering problems on social media and when messaging with friends.



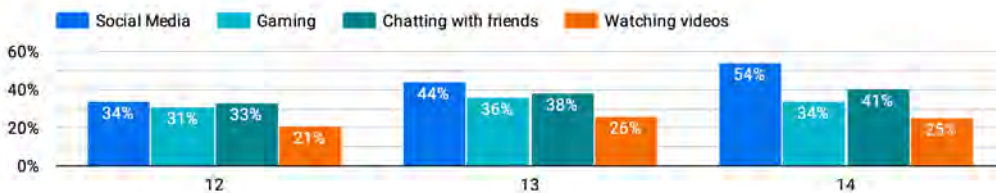
Cyberbullying and the link to how children spend most of their time online for 12-14 year olds



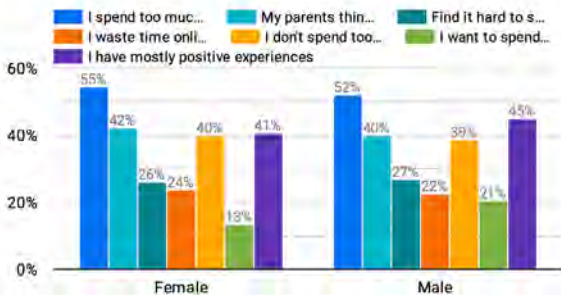
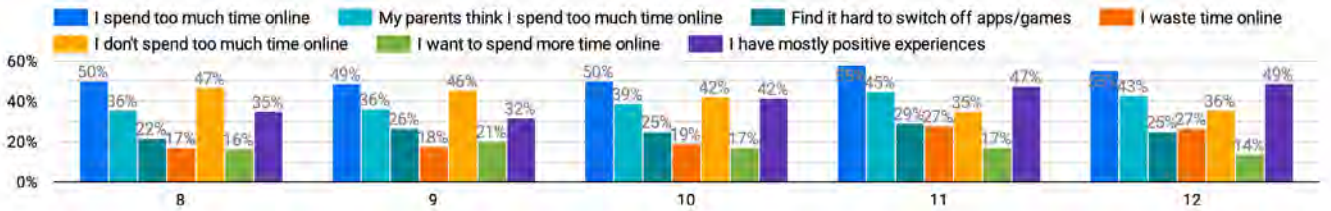
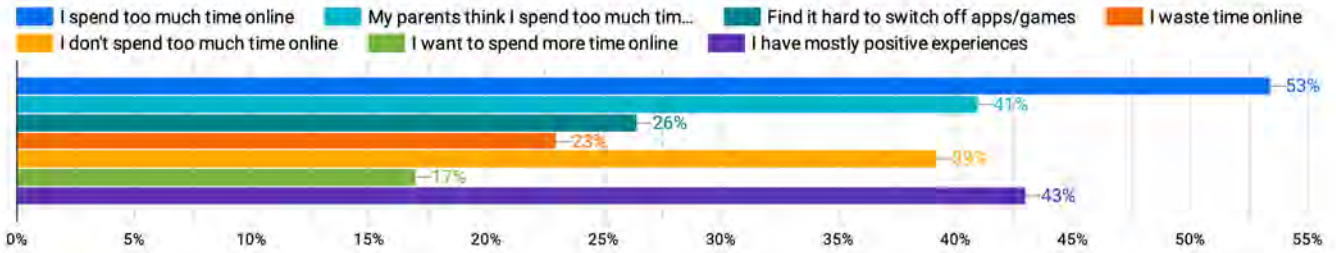
We can draw from this that the activities that a child chooses to spend the most time on has an impact on the likelihood that they will have experienced cyberbullying.

Those who spent most of their time on social media, like Snapchat and TikTok, were more likely to have said they experienced cyberbullying than those who spent most of their time gaming. Messaging with friends on apps like WhatsApp and iMessage was in second place. This is the same order as we saw for 8-12 year olds.

Social media stands out more year on year from 12-14. Chatting with friends also increases but gaming does not.



Childrens' views on their online activity



More than half of children reported that they think they spend too much time online. This is more than reported that their parents think they spend too much time online. Girls were slightly more likely to say this than boys. 11 years olds were the most likely to report this. Across genders and ages only a small minority of children reported wanting to spend more time online.

More than a quarter of children reported finding it hard to switch off games/apps and this peaks again at age 11 when smart phone and social media sign ups jump up.

Less than half of children reported having mostly positive experiences when online, with younger children of 8 and 9 years the least likely to have chosen this answer.

Findings were similar to last year.

We would like to thank the supporters who make our work possible:



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