Children and Parents: Media Use and Attitudes Report

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Foreword

Ofcom has had duties to promote and research media literacy since it was established in 2003. We define media literacy as being the ability to use, understand and create media and communications in a variety of contexts including through online services. Under the Online Safety Act 2023, we now have specific duties to heighten the public's awareness and understanding of ways in which they can protect themselves and others when using regulated services, in particular by helping them to deal with the areas of misinformation and disinformation, content that disproportionately affects particular groups, including women and girls, content of democratic importance, and how people's personal data is being used.

Ofcom's [Making Sense of Media](#) (MSOM) programme fulfils these duties through engagement with the wider media literacy sector, establishing best-practice principles, commissioning pilot initiatives targeting underserved groups, promoting a common approach to the evaluation of initiatives, and undertaking topic-focused research to expand the evidence base.

Our tracker studies – our Adults' and Children's Media Lives qualitative research projects, and our Media Literacy Trackers – are long-established, providing rich insights into the ways in which people's media use, attitudes and understanding have changed over time. This year, we close our reports with an exploration of some of the key changes our surveys show since 2005, to illustrate how media use and attitudes have evolved.

Our tracker questions span a range of issues, from take-up and use of different types of online platforms and services, through to children's attitudes, experiences, and beliefs about an array of media: in other words, providing a rich evidence base to understand what it means for children to be online today. In particular, we focus on children's critical understanding, as such skills are becoming increasingly important in a world where there is growing uncertainty about what is true and what is false. We ask for the first time in this report about children's use of Artificial Intelligence (AI). We paint a picture of the range of ways in which children deal with their personal online worlds. And we ask about benefits and concerns, the positive aspects of being online that they and their parents identify, as well as the extent to which they encounter problematic material and feel able to keep themselves safe online.

As in all our reports, we provide detail about different groups of children, highlighting age, socio-economic background and gender wherever it is useful or possible to do so. And we have much more material accessible in our interactive report and data tables.

It is increasingly vital that children across the UK can develop an appropriate range and depth of media-literate attitudes and behaviours, to enable them to have a positive, active online experience, as well as helping them to navigate and avoid potential harms. This of course needs to be complemented by the need for platforms and services to ensure that they provide this safer and more positive environment. This equates to enabling children to flourish in their increasingly online daily lives.

Overview

Throughout the report, we will refer to 'children' when we are talking about the 96% of children who go online. However, when we refer to '*all* children' we are including the relatively low proportion of predominantly very young children – those aged 3-4, who do not go online. Please note that 96% of children aged 5-7 do go online and once children reach the 12-15 age group, more than 99% of them do so.

The same principle applies when we refer to parents: 'parents of 3-17s' means parents of children who go online. When we refer to 'parents of *all* 3-17s', we include those parents whose children do not go online.

There are other cases where we will refer to a more specific subset of children; for example, children who use a particular type of app or undertake a particular media activity. We will specify these throughout the report.

Key findings

Online access and use

- **A third of all school children don't have continuous access to an appropriate device at home for learning:** 34% of all parents of school-aged children report that their child doesn't have continuous access to a device at home on which they can do their online schoolwork, and this has seen an indicative increase since 2021, (28%).[1] More than one in ten parents (13%) who reported not having an appropriate device for their child all the time (equating to just over 4% of all parents of school-aged children) said that they could not manage this issue, so schoolwork was postponed until a device became available. The same proportion reported that schoolwork or online learning at home was not possible.

Online behaviours

- **Children are more likely to be 'passive' than 'active' users of social media:** Nearly three in ten (28%) social media users aged 8-17 are active users who share, comment, post or like posts, as distinct from more passive users who either 'like' and follow accounts (44%) or read things they see on these sites or apps (27%). The likelihood of being an active user rises with the age of the child. Four in ten (39%) of all 8-17-year-olds upload their own videos to online platforms, with TikTok remaining the most popular app for this purpose.

- **Five-to-seven-year-olds are becoming increasingly present online, which may pose greater risks for them**: Compared to last year, a higher proportion of all 5-7s use apps/sites to do each of these activities: send messages or make voice/video calls (from 59% to 65%), use social media apps or sites (from 30% to 38%), watch livestreaming apps or sites (39% to 50%) or game online (34% to 41%). Children this age are also more likely to use WhatsApp (37% vs 29%), TikTok (30% vs 25%), Instagram (22% vs 14%) and Discord (4% vs. 2%) compared to last year.

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[1] Please note this change is indicative rather than significant on account of the methodology change, in 2021 this question was asked on the Ofcom Media Literacy CATI omnibus

- **This year we have seen an increase in the already high proportion of children who game online:** Video gaming[2] continues to be a key activity for children, rising from 57% in 2022 to 60% of all children aged 3-17. This increase is driven by children at both ends of the age bands in our study. Children often use online gaming as a tool to communicate with their peers, with 64% of 8-17s who game online chatting through the game with friends and/or people they know in real life. However, 31% of children who game online, communicate with strangers as well.

- **Over two in five 16-17s believe that their screentime is too high:** We found that just over a third of 8-17s feel that their own screentime is too high (35%). This was more likely among older children, with 44% of 16-17s agreeing that they felt this way about their own screentime, compared to 31% of 8-11s.

Attitudes and experiences in the online world

- **Children use the online space to foster connections with their peers**: Nearly seven in ten (68%) 8-17-year-olds who use social media, messaging or video or voice calling apps say that using these types of sites helps them feel closer to their friends either all or most of the time, and two-thirds of 12-17s (65%) regard the online space as being beneficial to building or maintaining their friendships.

- **Despite recognising the benefits, many children are aware of the pitfalls of being online**: Two in five (40%) 8-17-year-olds agree that 'people are mean or unkind to each other' on the social media and messaging apps/sites they use, either all or most of the time, and nearly nine in ten (87%) users of these apps of this age agree that there is pressure to be popular on social media and messaging sites/apps, at least some of the time.

- **The right to freedom of speech, regardless of the impact on other people's feelings, is a growing priority for older children:** Over a third (34%) of 12-17s believe it is important that people can say what they want online, even if it upsets or offends others, compared to 30% who felt this way last year.

- **Compared to boys, girls are more likely to say they have experienced 'nasty or hurtful' interactions in some online spaces:** All girls aged 8-17 are more likely than boys of the same age to report having been on the receiving end of nasty or hurtful interactions via text/messaging apps (20% vs 14%) or when using social media (18% vs 13%).

- **Girls are also more likely than boys to use online apps and services to benefit their health and wellbeing:** seven in ten (71%) 12-17s say they use online apps and services to benefit their health and wellbeing to help them relax, check health symptoms or to improve their mood – and this is more likely among girls than boys (76% vs 66%).

Technology and trust

- **Six in ten children are aware of algorithms – increasing with age and the socio-economic background of the child's family – and just under half of this group say they don't mind algorithms using their data:** Fifty-nine percent of children aged 8-17 say they are aware of the use of algorithms to direct specific content to them (and the proportion who are aware rises with the age of the child, from 44% of 8-11s to 72% of 16-17 year olds). Just under half of 8-17s who know about the use of algorithms (46%) agree with the statement that they

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[2] Defined in our survey as playing games via an electronic device.

> *"[are] happy for apps to use information they have collected about me to decide what to show me".*

- **Nearly half of children have used artificial intelligence technology, and they are twice as likely as adults to have done so:** 46% of children aged 8-17 (46%) say they have ever used AI, and this is driven by the teenagers in this cohort (52%, and 59% of 12-15s and 16-17s, compared to a third (33%) of 8-11s). Children this age are more than twice as likely as adults to say they have used AI (46% vs 23%). Over a third of these 8-17-year-olds used AI technology either for fun (45%), to learn (35%) or for school work (37%).

Critical evaluation of content online

- **Sixteen-and seventeen-year-olds are less sure of their ability to distinguish the real from the fake online than they were last year:** Children aged 12-17 were asked if they were confident in their ability to judge if what they see online is real or fake. Seven in ten (69%) said that they were confident. And this claimed confidence was more likely among boys than girls, and among 16-17s than 12-15s. That said, 16-17-year-olds this year are less sure of their ability to distinguish the real from the fake online than they were last year (75% vs 82% in 2022).

- **Children, particularly girls, can be susceptible to influencer marketing**: We presented respondents to our survey with a real Instagram post from actress and model Madelyn Cline and asked why they thought she might share a post about the product shown. A quarter of 12-17s believed that Madelyn Cline had shared this post because she thought the product or brand was cool or good to use (27%). Boys were more likely than girls to give the correct response – that this was a paid-for endorsement of the product shown (62% vs 51%).

- **Many children struggle to recognise online advertising via search engines:** We also presented respondents with a screenshot of a Google search for trainers and asked which of the options given explained why the top three results appeared first in the list shown. Just over half (54%) of children aged 8-17 who used search engines correctly indicated that these were paid-for results. However, nearly four in ten (37%) erroneously believed that these results appeared first because they were the most popular results, and about a quarter (27%) thought it was because they were the best results.

Online safety

- **Children across all age groups perform potentially risky behaviours online:** Forty percent of 8-17s admit to having given a fake age to get access to a new site or app. Fifty-one percent of children aged under 13 – which is commonly the minimum age requirement for many social media platforms – report using social media sites/apps. A higher proportion of 5-7-year-olds have their own profiles on specific social media platforms, compared to last year: YouTube/YouTube Kids (48% vs 39%), WhatsApp (11% vs 7%) and Instagram (9% vs 5%). A subset of 5-7-year-olds are also independently online. We asked parents of 5-7s who use social media how their child uses it, and a third (32%) reported that their child uses social media independently, with a further 42% saying that they used these services with their child.

- **Three in ten children aged over 8 can recall having had regular lessons on online safety in school, and children are more likely to find these lessons useful when they have had more of them.** Over nine in ten children aged 8-17 (93%) can recall having had at least one lesson

about online safety at school, although significantly fewer recall having regular lessons (30%). Three-quarters (76%) of children aged 8-17 who recalled having had one online safety in school said it was useful to them. However, this rises to 97% among those children who had regular lessons. Additionally, 95% of parents of children aged 8-17 say they have talked to their child about staying safe online, and almost half (47%) of these parents do this at least every few weeks.

- **Only a third of parents know the correct minimum age requirement for most social media platforms.** Although the majority of parents of all 3-17s (84%) are aware that there are minimum age requirements for using most social media apps or sites, only a third (32%) think, correctly, that the minimum age requirement for most social media sites and apps is 13. However, a further 31% put the minimum age at 14 or above. More than a third (36%) of parents of all 3-17s say they would allow their child to have a profile on sites or apps before they had reached the minimum age required. While this is unchanged at an overall level since 2022, there has been an increase in the proportion of parents of all 5-7s who say they would do this (30% vs 25% in 2022).
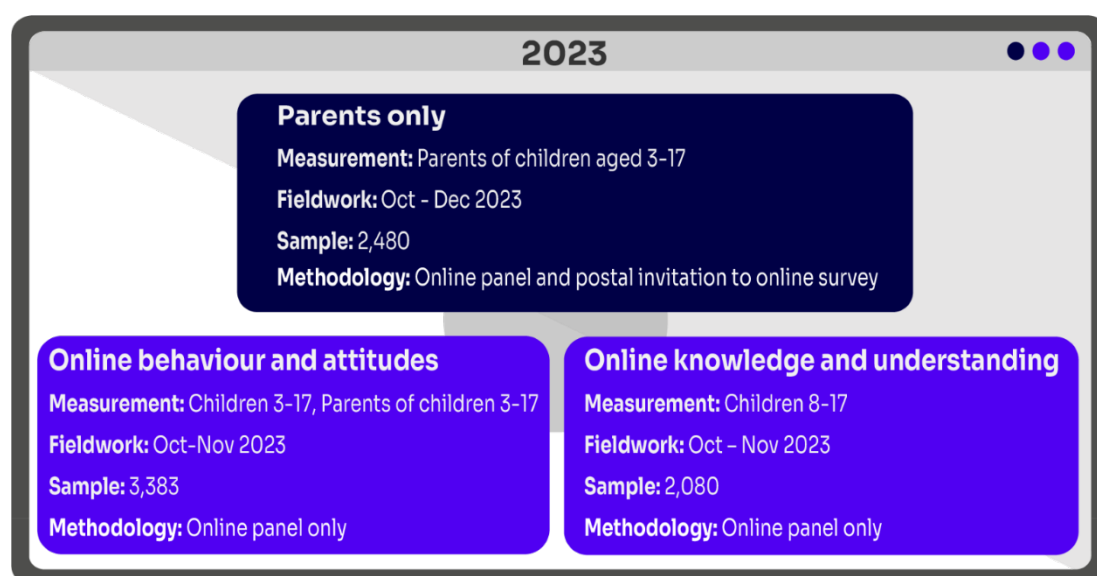
Parental concerns and attitudes

- **Just over half (54%) of all parents agree that the benefits outweigh the risks when their child is using the internet to gather information:** When asked whether the benefits outweighed the risks to their child of using social media, messaging and video-sharing platforms, only 27% of parents of 3-17s agreed that they did. A higher proportion of parents, although still only 40%, agreed when the same question was asked about online gaming. And 54% agreed that the benefits to their child outweighed the risks if their child was using internet to gather information; still a relatively low figure given that the focus was on the information aspects of the internet.

- **Parents' concerns about their child's screentime increases with age:** When asked about their child's screentime, 34% of parents of children aged 3-4 said it was hard to control it, rising to half (49%) of parents of children aged 16-17. Similarly, we asked parents if they thought their child had a good balance between screentime and other things. Three-quarters (74%) of parents aged 3-4 agreed that their child had a good balance, compared to just over half of parents of older children (56% and 55% for parents of children aged 12-15 and 16-17 respectively).

- **Parents of older children are more likely to set rules for their children about being online, compared to last year:** eight in ten (79%) parents of 16-17s have at least one rule about what their child does online, up from 70% last year. The most common type of rule in place for this age group is around spending money online (52%). And this year, we have seen an increase in the proportion of parents of 16-17s implementing rules, both around the information their child can share online (49% vs 39% last year) and the types of websites and apps they can use (41% vs 32%).

Methodology

This report draws its data mainly from our quantitative Children's and Parents' (CaP) Media Literacy Tracker surveys, and discusses media use, attitudes and understanding among children in the UK aged 3-17, and within subsets of this group. Where the data relates to children aged 3-7, this is provided by parents or guardians rather than by the children themselves. More detail, including additional demographic analysis, and responses to the full set of survey questions, can be found in the accompanying interactive report and data tables. A summary of sample sizes and data collection methods is shown in the infographic below. A more detailed description of the data collection and analysis process for these studies can be found in the Technical Report, published alongside the data tables.

To support us in providing an over-arching narrative on the key themes of children's media experience in 2023, this report also draws on our Children's Media Lives (CML) research. The CML study is a qualitative longitudinal, ethnographic project which has been running since 2014 and complements our quantitative survey data to provide an over-arching narrative on children's media experience. As far as possible, the research has followed the same 21[3] children, aged 8-17, over consecutive years, interviewing them on camera each year about their media habits and attitudes.

The Children's and Parents' Media Literacy tracker comprises three surveys: the Parents Only survey, Children's Online Behaviour and Attitudes (COBA) and Children's Online Knowledge and Understanding (COKU).

2023

Parents only

Measurement: Parents of children aged 3-17

Fieldwork: Oct - Dec 2023

Sample: 2,480

Methodology: Online panel and postal invitation to online survey

Online behaviour and attitudes

Measurement: Children 3-17, Parents of children 3-17

Fieldwork: Oct-Nov 2023

Sample: 3,383

Methodology: Online panel only

Online knowledge and understanding

Measurement: Children 8-17

Fieldwork: Oct – Nov 2023

Sample: 2,080

Methodology: Online panel only

Our surveys sought to gauge UK internet users' opinions on a range of aspects about being online. The findings reflect general consumer attitudes. They do not necessarily reflect the views of Ofcom, including in relation to our Online Safety duties.

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[3] In 2021, the CML sample was increased from 18 to 21 to allow us to explore the media lives of children in a wider range of circumstances, including those with additional vulnerabilities.

The media use landscape

Introduction

This section looks at children aged 3-17 and their patterns of media use, how they access different sources of media online, and the types of online activities they are participating in. This includes their behaviours and habits in terms of viewing, playing, learning, and interacting.

Almost all children (96%) of this age went online in 2023, highlighting the centrality of the internet in children's lives.

Proportion who go online, by age

Age 3-4	5-7	8-11	12-15	16-17
84%	96%	98%	100%	100%
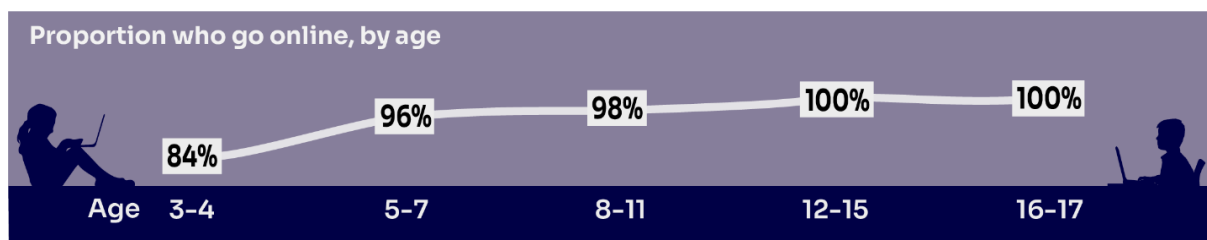
Online access

A third of school children don't have continuous access to a device at home for learning.

As we have noted in previous reports, children's ability to complete homework and learn online depends on their having access to a device that can connect to the internet and which is suitable for learning.

Our adult's media literacy survey found that, concerningly, 34% of parents of school-aged children reported that their child did not have continuous access to an appropriate device at home on which they could do their online schoolwork (equating to 44% of those with primary-school-aged children and 19% with secondary-school-aged children). Parents of these children stated that they managed this issue by sharing devices with others in the household (55%), carrying out an alternative educational activity (15%), borrowing a device from school or another organisation (12%) or by using a less appropriate device (11%).

More than one in ten (13%) parents in this position (those who don't have continuous access to an appropriate device for their child's learning, which equates to just over 4% of all parents of school-aged children), reported that they could not manage this issue, and therefore schoolwork was postponed until a device became available. The same proportion reported that schoolwork or online learning at home was not possible.

44% of primary school aged children, and **19%** of secondary school aged children
don't always have access at home to appropriate devices, which connect to the internet for schooling needs. Of these...

Primary

55% share with others
**13%** carry out an alternative educational activity
13% postpone schoolwork until a device is available
12% are unable to complete their schoolwork
11% borrow a device fom school or elsewhere
10% use a less appropriate device

Secondary

55% share with others
17% postpone schoolwork until a device is available
16% use a less appropriate device
14% carry out an alternative educational activity
13% borrow a device fom school or elsewhere
12% are unable to complete their schoolwork

Media and communication devices used by children

Younger children commonly use tablets to go online, while older children are more likely to use mobile phones

As in 2022, all children aged 12-17 are more likely to use a mobile phone to go online than any other device, while 3-11s are more likely to use a tablet for this purpose. As in previous years, the point at which it becomes more likely that a child will go online using a mobile rather than a tablet closely correlates with the age at which mobile phone ownership among children becomes almost universal. By the age of 11, nine in ten children own their own mobile phone, as distinct from using a family device.

Proportion who have their own mobile phone, by age

Age	3-4	5-7	8-11	12-15	16-17
	27%	26%	61%	96%	99%
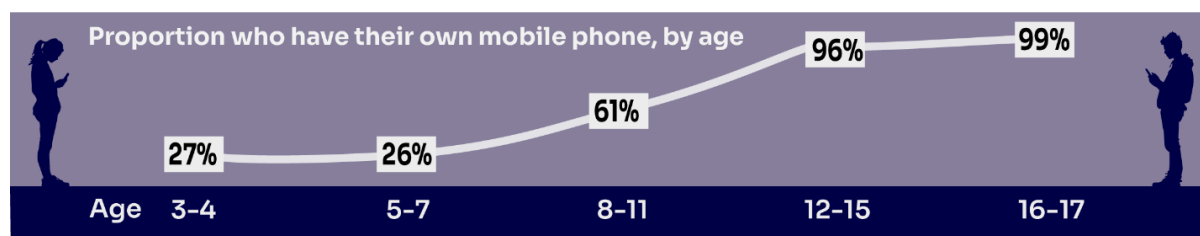
As for the less commonly-used devices for going online, this year we saw a drop in children's use of laptops or netbooks, especially among 8-15s. In 2023 the number of all 8-11-year-olds who used these devices to go online dropped from exactly half to just over a third (36%). This was mirrored among all 12-15s, whose use of these devices to go online decreased from 65% in 2022 to 54% in 2023.

Use of **mobile phone** or **tablet** to go online: by age
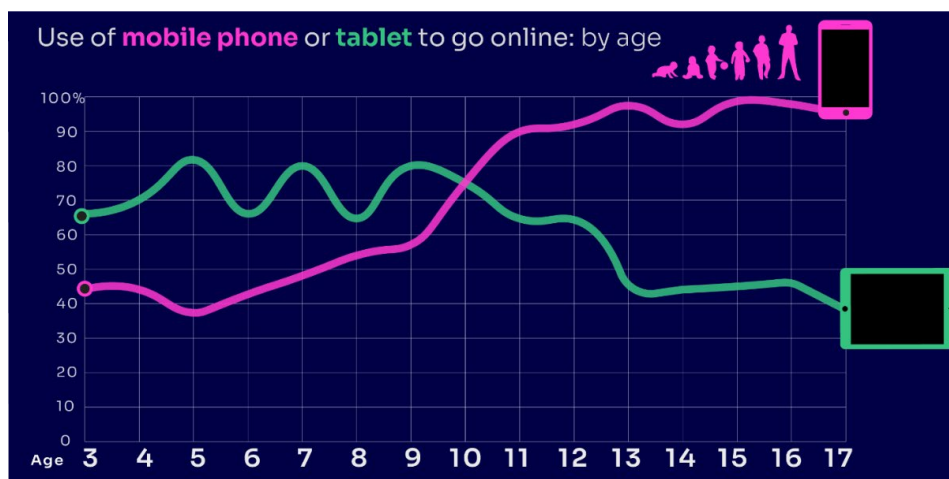
Gaming[4] is a key activity for children, with 90% of parents of all 3-17s telling us that their child games using at least one of the devices we asked about. They also report that younger children (5-11-year-olds) are more likely to use tablets for gaming; more than half of parents of all children this age say they use this device to game. Mobile phones are more popular than tablets for gaming among 12-15s (59%) and games consoles are popular almost across the board, with over 60% of parents of all 8-17s saying their child uses this device to game, and 55% of parents of 5-7s saying the same.

Another device commonly used across all age groups is the TV set. As in 2022, 85% of parents of all 3-17s say that their child 'ever' uses a TV set to watch television programmes or films at home or elsewhere, making it the most-used device for this purpose.

The content that children watch

As in previous years, almost all children aged 3-17 watched TV programmes or films in some way. However, viewing habits have continued to evolve. This section focuses on the different ways in which children view content, and how habits have changed since 2022.

Children's viewing habits are continuing to evolve away from watching live broadcast TV

According to industry measurement from Barb, children's viewing of live broadcast TV via TV sets declined again in 2023, falling by 14% for 4-15-year-olds, who went from viewing just under three and a half hours a week in 2022 to just under three hours a week in 2023. In terms of reach, Barb data shows that the proportion of this age group who watched live broadcast TV via TV sets at least once a week on average declined by eight percentage points, from 55% in 2022 to 46% in 2023.[5] When including viewing catch-up TV, either via recordings or a streaming/on-demand player on the TV set, the proportion of children watching broadcaster content at least once a week on average

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[4] Defined in our survey as playing games via an electronic device which may or may not be connected to the internet to allow for the game to be played.

[5] Source: Barb, as-viewed, via TV sets only, live viewing only, 3 or more consecutive minutes average weekly reach.

increases to 69%, and broadcast viewing among 4-15-year-olds increases to over four and three-quarter hours a week in 2023. This is still a decline from just over five hours in 2022.[6]

As we have seen in previous years, children often view broadcaster TV content on devices other than a TV set. If we include all viewing via these other devices, average weekly reach among children aged 4-15 increases to 70% of children aged 4-15, and average viewing per week goes up to just over five hours a week.[7]

Children's average weekly viewing time for broadcaster TV content (including BVoD viewing) in 2023 exceeded their average weekly time spent viewing subscription services (SVoD) and/or advertising-funded services (AVoD) such as Netflix and Amazon Prime Video.

Type of content/service and description	Measure	Children aged 4-15	Children aged 4-11	Children aged 12-15
Broadcaster TV (including BVoD)	% weekly reach	70%	72%	66%
	Average weekly minutes	302	309	286
BVoD	% weekly reach	42%	45%	35%
	Average weekly minutes	77	84	61
SVoD/AVoD	% weekly reach	72%	75%	66%
	Average weekly minutes	293	322	234

Source: Barb, as-viewed, all devices, 3+ consecutive minute average weekly reach

Taking a look at broadcast content, the most-viewed live broadcast programmes in 2023 for children aged 4-11 were the first part of *The Coronation of HM The King and Queen Camilla*, *New Year's Eve Fireworks*, *Eurovision Song Contest* and the Women's World Cup 2023 final between Spain and England (all BBC One). *New Year's Eve Fireworks*, the coronation and *Eurovision Song Contest* were also the most-watched live broadcast programmes among the older age group of 12-17s, followed by reality *show I'm a Celebrity… Get Me Out of Here!* on ITV.[8]

Short-form content continues to be popular among children

Most children in our CML study say they prefer to watch video content on social media rather than watching shows and films on TV. They told researchers that they regularly watched short snippets of content reposted from longer video content, such as films or TV shows. For example, Niamh watched several very short clips (10 seconds or less) taken from different scenes of the TV show *Friends,* which had been compiled on TikTok.

> "I saw, like, all these edits about him [Matthew Perry]. I don't really love Friends that much […] but it's just like seeing all the different clips."
>
> Niamh[9], 14

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[6] Source: Barb, as-viewed, via TV sets only, 3 or more consecutive minutes average weekly reach.

[7] Source: Barb, as-viewed, all devices, 3+ consecutive minutes average weekly reach

[8] Source: Barb, live viewing (including live BVoD) on the TV set only, top programmes by best performing transmission.

[9] The identity of CML participants is protected by the use of pseudonyms.

This aligns with our data on the content children watch on video-sharing platforms (VSP), with longer-form content such as whole programmes or films becoming less popular among 3-17s who watch videos online, down from 35% of those watching this content in 2022 to 30% in 2023. This decrease is mainly driven by the 8-11-year-olds, with a quarter (25%) watching this content this year compared to a third (32%) last year.

As was the case last year, participants in our CML research continue to prefer video content that is loud and dramatic in nature. Content creators use choppy, fast-paced editing styles with overlaid sound effects, animations, and rapid transitions, for both shorter and longer-form videos, to grab and retain children's attention. For example, Alfie enjoyed watching YouTube commentary videos about Pokémon. He particularly liked Sirud (591K subscribers) who made videos of himself playing games and challenges relating to Pokémon:[10]

> "The video wants you to stare at it…then it makes people laugh, and then you want to keep on watching to see if something else funny happens."
>
> Alfie, 9

Alfie went on to reflect on why he thought creators make content like this:

> "They want to get more than 100 subscribers so they can get more money and then it continues… I think they do it [post] for the money and to become famous and for people to like them."
>
> Alfie, 9

Media for interacting

Half of children aged 3–12 use at least one social media app/site despite the minimum age requirement of 13.

Social media, apps and sites enable children to interact with others online, via messaging, calling, gaming and posting their own content on social media accounts and VSPs. Social media use increases with age, rising from a third (34%) of children aged 3-7 to over six in ten (63%) 8-11s and over nine in ten 12-17s (92% of 12-15s and 95% of 16-17s, respectively). Given the 13+ minimum age requirement on most of these social media platforms, it is notable that half (51%) of children under 13 use them.

Children are more likely to be 'passive' than 'active' users of social media

As in 2022, over eight in ten (81%) of all children aged 8-17 use at least one social media app/site for following friends, people and organisations, reading, liking or sharing content. Children are more likely to be 'passive' than 'active' users of social media. Nearly three in ten (28%) social media users

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[10] Pokémon is a game and media franchise featuring creatures or 'Pocket Monsters' which accompany the characters or in-game players in battles and adventures. During his diary task, Alfie watched a video entitled 'GUESS THE POKEMON CHALLENGE (Impossible)', and reflected on the presentation styles used throughout the video.

(aged 8-17) are active users who share, comment, post, or like posts, as distinct from more passive users who either 'like' and follow accounts (44%) or only read things they see on these sites or apps (27%). The likelihood of being an active user rises with the age of the child, as shown in the infographic below.

	Share, comment or post things	'Like' things and follow accounts, but don't share, comment or post	Only really read or watch things
All aged 8-17	28%	44%	27%
Aged 8-11	19%	41%	38%
Aged 12-15	31%	46%	23%
Aged 16-17	36%	44%	20%
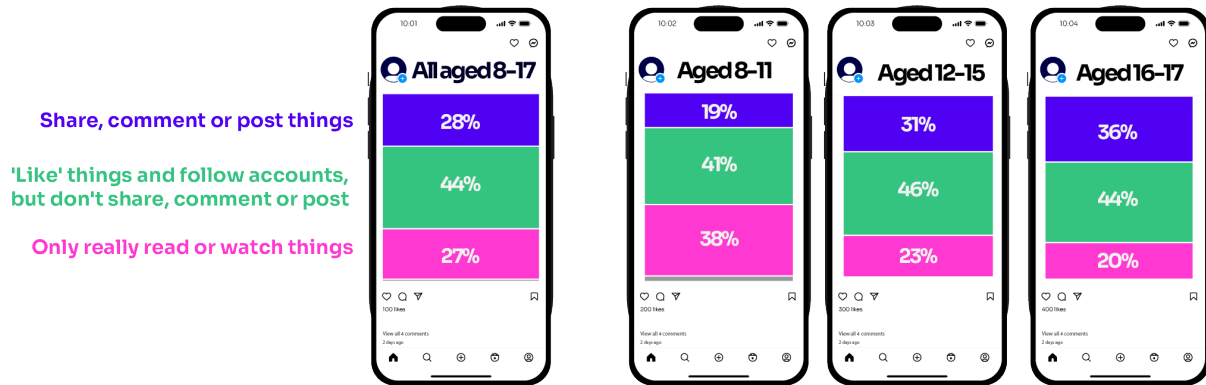
Nearly all (98%) teens (12-17s) use sites or apps to send messages or make voice or video calls. Motivations for using these types of app vary, but a key reason is the desire to connect with peers. Seven in ten (68%) 8-17-year-olds who use social media and/ or messaging sites or apps told us that using these types of sites or apps helped them feel closer to their friends, either all or most of the time.

This is supported by the CML research. Many of the children used sites and apps like TikTok and Instagram to consume content, while Snapchat was the most favoured platform to message and communicate with friends. For example, Suzy mentions:

> "I don't think I could live without Snapchat any more. I used to not be too bothered about it, but I absolutely love it now. I've got all my friends on Snapchat, and we have like group chats where we all call, like, all the time, and we text each other and Snap each other"
>
> Suzy, 12

We also asked the teenagers in our study (12-17s), who used at least one social media or messaging site or app, about the different activities they undertake while using these types of sites. Behaviours among 12-17s include: searching, sharing, or discussing news stories with others (27%), writing their own posts about causes they cared about (20%), following activists and campaigners who talk about causes they care about (19%), and following or interacting with political parties or campaign groups (13%). Girls were more likely than boys to undertake at least one of these activities (78% vs 67%). This gender divide was particularly apparent in sending supportive messages, with 60% of girls doing this compared to 44% of boys.

Activities undertaken
% 12–17s who use social media or messaging

↑ Statistically higher than boys

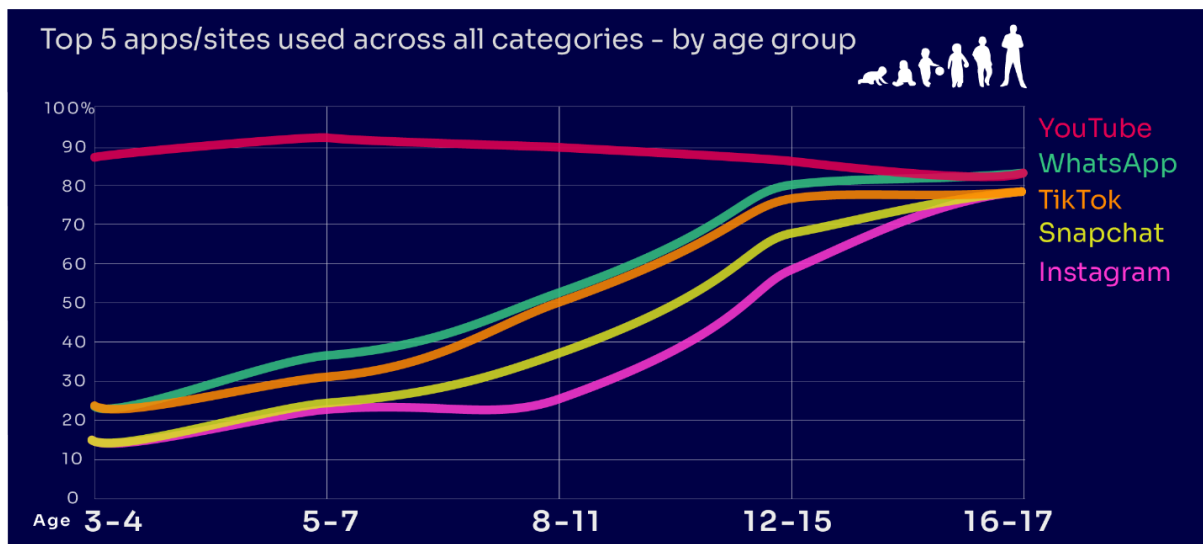| Activity	Boys	Girls
Send supportive messages to friends if they are having a hard time	44	60 ↑
Search out, share or discuss news stories with others on these apps and sites	24	30 ↑
Write my own posts about causes I care about	19	21
Follow activists and campaigners who talk about causes I care about	17	22
Follow or interact with political parties or campaign groups	11	15

Any listed

Boys 67

Girls 78 ↑

Nearly six in ten 8–17s use multiple profiles on at least one social media platform

We also looked at the number of social media accounts children have. Nearly six in ten (58%) 8-17s with profiles on social media, VSPs or messaging platforms said they used more than one profile on any particular social media app/site. When asked why this was, just under a quarter of these children (23%) said it was because one account was just for parents/family to see, while a similar proportion said one account was for close friends and one was for everyone else (21%). Meanwhile, 13% of 8-17s who had more than one profile said one account was for the 'real me' and another contained edited/filtered posts or photos. This demonstrates that at least some children feel the need to present distinct aspects of themselves on social media, depending on the audience.

Children's use of apps and sites

While YouTube is universally popular, the appeal of many social media platforms varies by the age of the child

YouTube is the most-used app or site among the children in our study, with more than eight in ten 3-17-year-olds using it. However, while YouTube is a popular app across all age bands, some sites or apps grow in popularity with age. For example, just under two in ten of all 3-4-year-olds use Instagram and/or Snapchat (17% in each case) but this rises to eight in ten among 16-17s (for both apps). Similarly, just under a quarter (23%) of all 3-4-year-olds use WhatsApp, and this rises to over eight in ten (83%) of all 16-17-year-olds. This underlines the more interconnected and social nature of older children's online behaviours; indeed, half (49%) of all 16-17-year-olds use all five of the top apps/sites (YouTube, WhatsApp, TikTok, Snapchat and Instagram).

Top 5 apps/sites used across all categories – by age group

YouTube
WhatsApp
TikTok
Snapchat
Instagram

Age: 3–4, 5–7, 8–11, 12–15, 16–17

Five-to-seven-year-olds are becoming increasingly present online, which may pose greater risks for them

This year several findings indicate that younger children are becoming increasingly present online.

Compared to last year, a higher proportion of all 5-7s use apps/sites to do the following things online: to send messages or make voice/video calls (from 59% to 65%), use social media sites/apps (from 30% to 38%), watch livestreaming apps or sites (39% to 50%) or game online (34% to 41%). Children this age are also more likely than they were last year to use WhatsApp (from 29% to 37% TikTok (25% to 30%), Instagram (14% to 22%) and Discord (2% to 4%).

It is not just use of these sites/apps that has increased among 5-7-year-olds. Compared to 2022, a higher proportion of these children have their own profiles on several social media platforms: YouTube/YouTube Kids (from 39% to 48%), WhatsApp (from 7% to 11%) and Instagram (5% to 9%). Linked to this, we ask parents of children who use social media apps/sites whether their child uses these independently or not, and 32% of parents of 5-7s in this category reported that their child does use them on their own, with a further 42% of parents saying they use social media with their child. Therefore, 5-7-year-olds are not only increasingly present online, but some are also independent in their use of certain sites/apps.

Parents of all 5-7s are also increasingly likely to say they would allow their child to have a social media profile, with three in ten (30%) agreeing that they 'would allow [their] child to have a profile on these sites or apps before they had reached the minimum age required by that site or app' compared to a quarter (25%) last year.

Children's experience of the online world: risks, rewards and parental concerns

Introduction

This section provides a holistic view of children's experience of being online, considering both the risks and rewards of the online space. Children continue to use social media and VSPs to explore their interests, learn about things, and amuse themselves. This year, for the first time, we asked the older children in our study if they had used online apps or services to help them with their mental and physical wellbeing, and as set out below, seven in ten said they go online for this type of help. Of course, the online world also contains various hazards and inappropriate content. With this in mind, we look at parents' concerns, particularly around their child being exposed to age-inappropriate content.

Reaping the benefits

Access to the online world provides children with strong opportunities for socialising and connecting with their friends, especially as they get older

Almost all (99%) 12-17-year-olds see the benefits of being online. These benefits include help with their school/homework (80%), finding useful information about any problems they may have (59%) and learning a new skill (52%).

For example, Ben from our CML study said he watched videos on TikTok to pick up tips for playing basketball, as well as drills to improve his technique. He said that he followed a lot of people on TikTok who make this type of content, such as Hans Stone (143.2K followers) and Coach Ross (485.7K followers).

> "They post tips and tricks. They've played at a certain level, so they have more of an understanding and want to help."
>
> Ben, 16

It is perhaps unsurprising that two-thirds (67%) of 8-17-year-olds who use social media or messaging apps/sites agree that using these make them happy all or most of the time. The section below illustrates how the online world can enrich children's lives by enabling connections with their peers and giving them the opportunity to explore their creative sides.

Being online can help children foster connections. Eight in ten (81%) of all 3-17-year-olds use apps for messaging and voice/video calls, indicating a strong affinity for interacting with others in the online world. This increases with age, rising from half (51%) of all 3-4-year-olds to almost all 12-17s (98% and 99% for 12-15s and 16-17s respectively).

Two-thirds (66%) of all children (aged 3-17) use apps for social media, and again, this is considerably higher among children over 12, with 47% of 3-11s using them compared to 93% of 12-17-year-olds. Nearly seven in ten (68%) 8-17-year-olds who use social media, messaging or video or voice calling apps say that using these types of sites helps them feel closer to their friends all or most of the time. Two-thirds of 12-17s (65%) regard the online space as being beneficial for building or maintaining friendships.

Ofcom's research into online communication among children found that 11-18-year-olds[11] were more likely to say they felt confident communicating online (71%) than in person (53%), painting the online world as a place where children feel able to interact with others, including their peers, and develop their relationships. This was particularly the case for 11-18-year-olds identifying as LGBTQ+, who were far more likely to feel confident communicating online (69%) than in person (38%). This may in part be due to their ability to find communities of like-minded people online. In the same study, we found that those identifying as LGBTQ+ were more likely than average to reply to messages from someone they did not know personally, because the other person liked similar things or they seemed similar to them (28% vs 17% average), or because of the kind of things that they posted (27% vs 19%).

In addition to the more obvious forms of interaction online, many children use gaming to connect with their peers. This is explored in the section on gaming below.

As well as helping children to connect with each other, being online can encourage their creativity; just over half (54%) of parents of 3-17s feel that being online helps their child develop creative skills. Four in five (80%) 3-17s participate in at least one of the range of creative activities online that we asked about, falling from 91% of 5-7s to 71% of 16-17s. For example, about four in ten children add funny filters to photos (41%) or make drawings or pictures online (38%).

When we looked specifically at what children aged 8 and over said about their own creative activities online, we found that three in ten (30%) 8-17-year-olds say they find images online to use in creative/homework tasks, 27% follow an online 'how-to' tutorial to create or do something, and 19% edit photos to improve how they look.

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[11] 18-year-olds in the Online Communications among Children study were asked to reflect on their experiences before they were 18.

Creative activities undertaken on devices by children aged 8–17 (%).

Add funny filters to a photo	38
Find images online to use in creative or homework tasks	30
Follow an online 'how to' tutorial to create or do something	27
Make a drawing or picture online, or use colouring apps	23
Make changes to a photo to improve how it looks	19
Make an animation, meme or gif	16
Coding/ programming	12
Make or edit music online	10
Create an online scrapbook of ideas on sites like Pinterest	9
Create an online photo book or calendar	8

Editing, curating and posting one's own content is a popular way of being creative online. This year a third (32%) of all 3-17-year-olds said they uploaded their own videos to online platforms, with TikTok remaining the most popular app for this purpose (60% of those who upload videos use TikTok to do so), followed by YouTube/YouTube Kids (40%). The popularity of uploading videos increases with age from 15% of all 3-4-year-olds to 39% of 8-17s.

Two of the participants in our CML study described how they had each built up a small following on social media by posting content that built on their existing passions, dance and horse-riding. This appeared to have encouraged these participants to think creatively about how best to share their interests with, and win engagement from, the wider world.

However, we have also seen children in the study become more cautious when posting online. Mirroring the findings from previous waves, the participants who did sometimes post content were cautious about sharing self-created content with a wide circle of people because they were concerned about how they would be perceived by others. Instead, they found ways to share content in more selective or strategic ways; for example, sharing posts only temporarily, among smaller circles, or sticking to re-sharing other people's posts.

> "It [Instagram Stories] disappears after 24 hours, so that's why I prefer it to posting stuff. I don't have to worry making mistakes or anything. It's not there forever, only for a couple of hours."
>
> Terri, 14

This is reflected in our quantitative findings which show that nearly nine in ten (87%) children aged 8-17 who use social media or messaging apps agree that there is pressure to be popular on these apps, at least some of the time.

Learning online

Parents recognise the online space as beneficial to their children's learning

As in 2022, we asked parents of 3-17s if they saw the benefits of being online for their child's learning. Almost all (96%) these parents believed that going online helped their child in at least one of the nine ways we outlined to them. About half agreed that being online helped their children with developing skills with reading and numbers (54%) or to learn a new skill (48%), and seven in ten (71%) felt that that being online helped their children with their schoolwork/homework.

96% of parents of 3-17s believe that going online has at least one of the following benefits

Being online helps them...

with schoolwork / homework **71%**	to develop creative skills **54%**	to develop skills with reading and numbers **54%**
to learn a new skill **48%**	to build or maintain friendships **41%**	to find useful info about personal issues **33%**
to find out about the news **32%**	to understand what other people think and feel **23%**	to find out more about, or to support causes **15%**

We were keen to understand the extent to which parents felt that the benefits to their child of being online outweighed the risks. Parents of 3-17s were twice as likely to agree that the benefits to their child of going online outweighed the risks when they were gathering information (i.e. learning about something) compared to using social media (54% vs 27%), and both measures are unchanged since 2022.

AI is emerging as a source for learning among children alongside more established online education sources.

When asked about using apps or sites like BBC Bitesize or other teacher-recommended sites, 34% of 8-17s who used these apps/sites for school or homework thought that all the information on these sites was true, 40% thought most of it was true, 23% thought some was true and 3% were not sure.

While apps and sites such as BBC Bitesize are still trusted sources, AI technology is emerging as an aid for learning. This year we asked about the use of AI for learning or for school. Over a third (35%) of 8-17-year-old users of AI said they used the technology to learn, and 37% reported using AI for school, with minimal differences by age. We discuss the use of AI in further detail in the Technology and Trust section.

Gaming

More children are gaming online compared to last year

Gaming is a central part of many children's lives, and this year we have seen an increase in the already high proportion of children who game online, rising from 57% of all 3-17s in 2022 to 60% this year. This increase is driven by children at both ends of the age bands in our study: since 2022, we have seen increases in the proportion who play games online among 3-4s (23% vs 18%) and 5-7s (41% vs 34%) as well as among 16-17s (79% vs 72%). As in previous years, more boys aged 3-17 game online than girls of the same age (71% vs 58%).

Many children game regularly too. Our research into online communication among children indicates that nine in ten (89%) 11-18 year olds reported gaming at least weekly on one or more of the gaming platforms that we asked about.

Looking at the genres of video games[12] children play, creative and building games such as Minecraft remain the most popular, with 45% of 3-17s who game playing this genre, although this falls to a third (33%) of 16-17-year-olds, who prefer multi-player games such as Fortnite (48%) or shooter games like Call of Duty (41%).

While there have been no changes since 2022 in overall preferences for playing particular types of games, if we look at the 5-7-year-old group specifically, a higher proportion of these children now play shooter games than last year (15% vs 10% in 2022). This may raise concerns about how age-appropriate the games favoured by some younger children actually are.

There are some differences when comparing the genres that boys and girls like to play. For example, sporting games are far more popular among boys aged 3-17 who game than girls (39% vs 13%). The converse is true for puzzle games or quizzes, like Candy Crush, Sudoku or Trivia 360, which are more popular with girls than boys (43% vs 24%).

Looking at who children interact with when gaming, there has been an increase since last year in the proportion of children aged 3-17 who game online and who play games on their own, for example, by playing against the computer (67% vs 64% in 2022). Conversely, there have been decreases in the proportions of children who game online, both with or against someone they know in person (70% vs 73% in 2022) and with or against someone they don't know or haven't met in person (29% vs 32% in 2022).

Once children reach 8 years old, they are more likely than their younger counterparts to play games online, both against someone they know (74% of 8-17s who online game vs. 51% of 3-7s), and against strangers (32% vs 16% of 3-7s who game online), with no variation by age within the 8-17 age band. Worryingly, the proportion of online gamers aged 8-11 who play against strangers is not dissimilar to the proportion of 16-17-year-old online gamers who do this (30% and 36%).

Three-quarters (76%) of children aged 8-17 who game online chat through the game when playing, and this increases with age, with 70% of 8-11s saying this compared to 79% of 12-15s and 16-17s.

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[12] By this we mean games played via an electronic device which may or may not need to be connected to the internet for the game to be played.

Boys in this group are more likely than girls to communicate with others while gaming (82% vs. 67%). When we asked who they chatted with, the most common response was that they chat with people they know or are friends with already (64%). But nearly a third (31%) of 8-17-year-old children who game online say they chat with strangers while gaming. Many parents worry about this, with 60% of those with children aged 3-17 who game online saying they worry about their child talking to strangers while gaming.[13]

The infographic below shows the total proportion of 8-17-year-old online gamers who game against others and/or chat through the game:

Online Gaming: 8-17s

Playing games with others

74%
Played against or with someone else **they know**

32%
Played against or with someone **they don't know** outside game

In-game chat (messaging or headset)

64%
Chat to people **they know**

31%
Chat to people **they don't know** outside the game

Several children in our CML study game less now than in previous waves. However, those who still game enjoy the social aspect of it, with a number indicating that this is a greater motivator than the game itself.

> "I've never really played it [Fortnite14] much before but I've been pretty much playing it once or twice a day with my friends. Sometimes I'll play for like 15 minutes… to practise. When I'm playing with them [her friends] I'm on call with them for like an hour or two. … I'm not attached to the game. When everyone else stops playing I'll stop playing"
>
> Taylor, 15

As part of a separate qualitative Ofcom study in which we spoke to 22 participants aged 11-18, we asked these children about how they communicated online while gaming. A clear benefit of gaming interactions, for a lot of these children, was to feel part of a team, e.g. being in a 'squad' in Fortnite. These teams could consist of friends and/or people they had met online. For some children, playing with people they met online felt risky and so they avoided it. But others did not consider this to be a problem as they took precautions such as hiding their identity on their gaming profile while playing.

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[13] Fortnite is an online combat video game, with six different game modes. Players can fight or co-operate with other players, collect and upgrade items, and build structures and fortifications.

Nearly four in ten parents are uncertain whether the benefits of gaming outweigh the risks for their child

Another potential risk to children from video gaming is the content of the games themselves. For example, as reported above, more 5-7s are playing shooter games this year, and this raises the issue of whether the content of these games is appropriate for children of this age. And concern among parents is not restricted to those who have younger children. In fact, half of parents of 3-17-year-olds who game (50%) say they are concerned about the content of the games their child plays in terms of violence, bad language and disturbing content.

Consequently, it is unsurprising that almost four in ten (37%) parents are uncertain whether the benefits outweigh the risks of their children gaming. Twenty-three percent do not think the benefits outweigh the risks, while 40% believe that the benefits outweigh the risks. Although gaming evidently provides a vehicle for children to stay entertained and connect with their friends, there are clear risks.

Potentially harmful contact or content online

A third of 8–17–year–old children are being exposed to content online that they find worrying or nasty

Despite the positive finding that over seven in ten (72%) 8-17-year-olds who use messaging/social media sites or apps feel safe when using these apps/online sites, either all or most of the time, the online space is a risky environment for children. Our study reveals the proportion of children, and specific sub-groups among them, who have seen potentially harmful content or who have experienced nasty or hurtful interactions online.

A third (32%) of 8-17s say they have seen something worrying or nasty online in the past 12 months, but only 20% of parents of children in this age group report their child telling them they had seen something online that scared or upset them in the same time frame. The likelihood of children seeing this type of content increases with age; just over a third of 12-17s say they have been exposed to this type of content in the past year (34%) compared to 28% of 8-11-year-olds.

Children aged 8-17 who live with at least one impacting condition are more likely than those without such a condition to say they have seen this type of content (40% vs 29%). This indicates that particular groups of children may be more vulnerable than others to being exposed to potentially harmful content.

In the past 12 months, have you seen anything online that you found worrying or nasty in some way that you didn't like?

All aged 8-17	8-11	12-15	16-17	Any limiting conditions	No limiting conditions
32%	28%	34%	35%	40%	29%
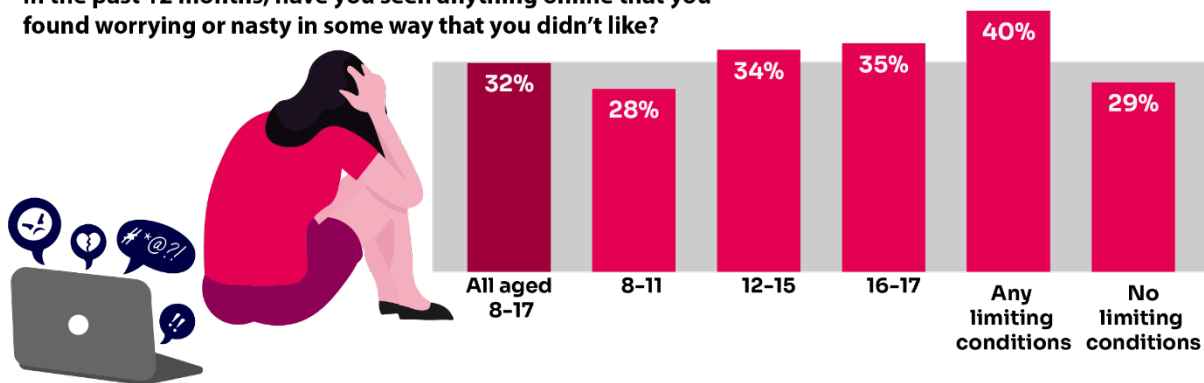
Girls are more likely than boys to experience bullying via social media

Turning now to contact rather than content, there has been a decrease since last year in the proportion of 8-17s who report people being nasty or hurtful to someone they know (53% vs 57%). However, this is not the case for children who have experienced people being nasty or hurtful to them *personally;* this proportion remains unchanged since last year (34%).

The interactions discussed above may have occurred either online or offline. However, when we examine the data further, we see that three in ten of all 8-17s (31%) have experienced bullying via communications technology, compared to less than two in ten (18%) who have experienced it face-to-face. These two experiences are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and some bullying may be carried over between the online and offline worlds. While we have not seen any movement in these overall proportions since last year, we have noticed an increase in the proportion of all 8-17s who have experienced bullying via social media apps/sites (18% vs 15% in 2022).

Not all children seem to experience negative online interactions to the same extent. All girls aged 8-17 are more likely than boys of the same age to report having been on the receiving end of nasty or hurtful interactions, both via text/messaging apps (20% vs 14%) and when using social media (18% vs 13%).

And our online communication among children quantitative research backs this up. In this study we found that older girls (aged 16-18) were more likely than boys of the same age to have ever been exposed to all ten of the potentially uncomfortable or unwanted types of contact about which we asked. These include receiving pictures or videos of naked/half-dressed people (32% vs 11%) and being asked to share naked/half-dressed pictures of themselves (24% vs 9%).

The experience of one of the participants in two previous waves of our CML study illustrates the kind of experiences girls may have when interacting online. In wave 8 of CML (early 2022), Taylor, who was 13 at the time, told researchers that she sometimes received messages from people she did not know that included nude images or inappropriate messages.

> "I'd probably get one or two messages a month. They want [to add you on Snapchat] because on Snapchat, you can send pictures that you can't get away with on Instagram."
>
> Taylor, 13 (CML wave 8)

By the time wave 9 of CML took place (end 2022), Taylor had taken steps to reduce the likelihood of this happening to her. She said that she no longer added people on Snapchat after they had messaged her on Instagram, or used Snapchat's Quick Add feature to talk to strangers.

"It [receiving an inappropriate message from a stranger] hasn't happened in a long time. Maybe once in the last year… It doesn't happen much anymore because I don't really talk to people I don't know any more."

Taylor, 14 (CML wave 9)

Received nasty or hurtful interactions through

	Boys 8-17	Girls 8-17
text or messaging apps	14%	20%
Social media	13%	18%
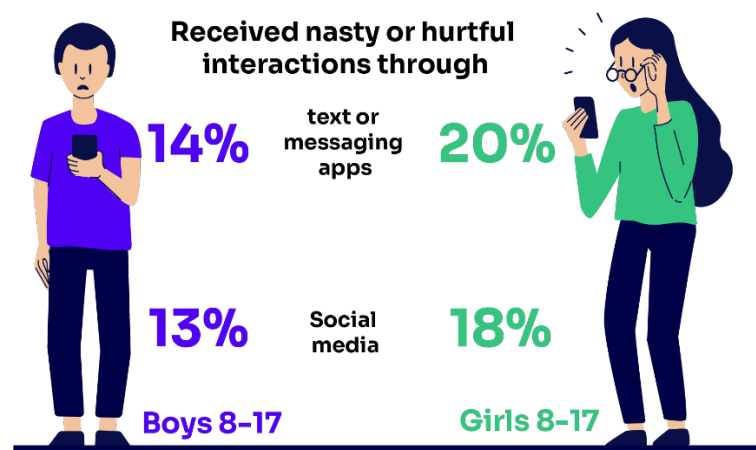
The online communication among children research also indicated that older children (aged 11-18) who live with at least one impacting or limiting condition were more likely than average to experience several of the potentially uncomfortable or unwanted types of online contact about which we asked, including being asked to share naked/half-dressed photos or videos of themselves (19% vs an average of 10%). The same was true for children in the study who identified as LGBTQ+ (28% vs 10%).

Given the findings set out above, it is unsurprising that two in five (40%) 8-17-year-olds who use social media and/or message sites agree that 'people are mean or unkind to each other on these sorts of apps or sites' either all or most of the time. Having this viewpoint is more likely among older children, with a third (34%) of 8-11-year-olds in this group saying they feel this way compared to over four in ten 12-17s (44% of 12-15s and 42% 16-17s respectively).

Nevertheless, the right to freedom of speech, regardless of the impact on other people's feelings, is a growing priority for older children (12-17s). A third (34%) say they believe it is important that people can say what they want online, even if it upsets or offends others, compared to 30% who felt this way last year.

Wellbeing

Seven in ten 12–17s use online apps and services to benefit their health and wellbeing

As mentioned previously, two-thirds (67%) of children aged 8-17 who use social media and/or messaging/video calling sites or apps say these make them feel happy, all or most of the time. This

year, we have introduced a new question for 12-17-year-olds exploring their use of online apps or services for the purpose of helping their wellbeing, both physical and mental.

Before we outline our findings, we acknowledge that there may be times when a child's use of health- or wellbeing-related content online may not actually be helpful to them. And although we understand that the children themselves may characterise some sites or apps as 'helpful' to them, their attitudes can change over time, as they did for Alice (17) in our CML study last year. As set out in the CML 2023 Report, Alice told researchers that she had engaged with accounts on social media platforms that showed eating disorder content which was tagged as 'recovery' but which, in her opinion, were not about recovery. She added that, while she might once have engaged with these accounts, but "this year" (i.e., in 2022) she did not want to see them. Instead, she actively avoided posts from these accounts if they came up on her feed.

In addition, we, as adults, may not regard the content on some of these apps/sites in the same potentially benign light as the child who uses them. For example, Ben, a participant in this year's wave of the CML study, has been watching TikTok videos posted by the creator Frankie (238K followers) – a 17-year-old American who posts step-by-step advice videos on relationships and self-improvement.

In particular, Ben watches videos in which Frankie tells his viewers 'how to grow taller' or 'how to get a defined jaw'. While Ben says that he enjoys these videos, and values the advice they give, an adult viewing the same material might question the efficacy of the advice, or think that watching these videos could have a negative impact on some children's confidence or the way they feel about their body.

Turning back to our quantitative findings, seven in ten (71%) children aged 12-17 say they have used apps and services to help them with several specific aspects of their health and wellbeing. The most commonly-cited purpose for visiting these sites or apps was to help the child relax (43%) or to improve their mood (34%), with lower proportions using them to look up health symptoms (16%), or to help them sleep (16%), eat healthily (15%) or follow a fitness programme (14%).

A clear gender difference emerges, with girls much more likely than boys to use online apps and services for their wellbeing. As set out in the infographic below, this is the case both at an overall level (76% for girls vs 66% for boys aged 12-17) and with regard to six of the eight specific functions about which we asked.

A subset of these 12-17s, those who live with at least one limiting or impacting health condition, rely on these apps/services to support their wellbeing more than their counterparts (77% vs 69%). Specifically, this group is more likely than those without such conditions to use online content to help them improve their mood (40% vs 32%), get support when feeling anxious (26% vs 12%) or look after their mental health (24% vs 13%).

% of online 12–17s who use websites or apps to help...

↑ Statistically higher than boys

	Boys	Girls
Relax	38	49 ↑
Improve my mood	31	38 ↑
Look up health symptoms	13	21 ↑
Sleep	14	18
Get support when feeling anxious	12	20 ↑
Healthy eating	13	18 ↑
Look after my mental health	11	19 ↑
Follow a fitness programme	14	13

Any listed

Boys 66

Girls 76 ↑
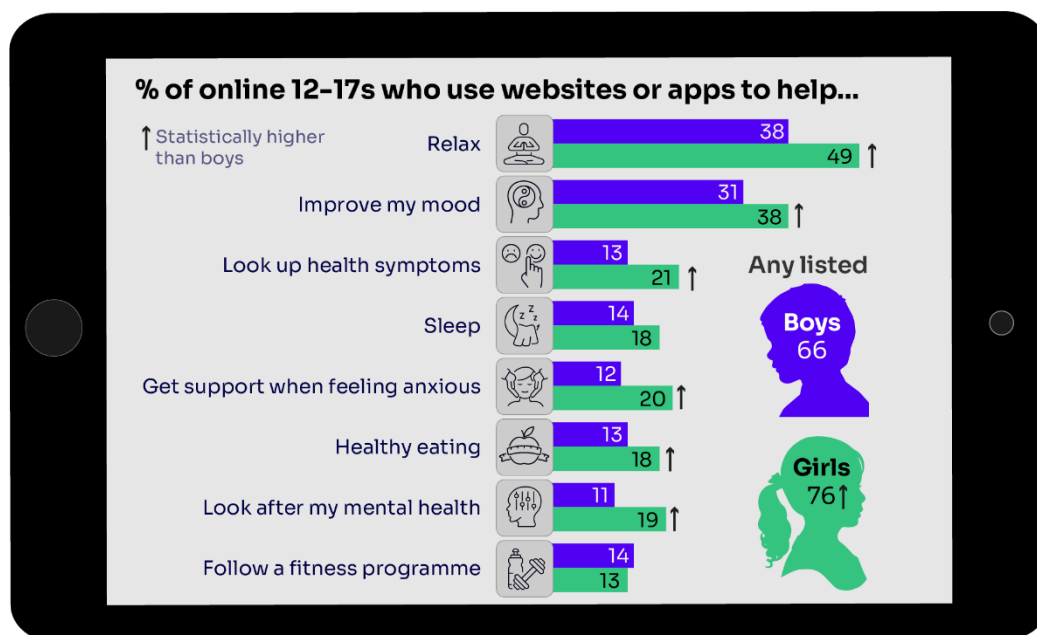
Our CML research found that several girls in the study were watching TikTok videos which described behaviours that the content creators said were associated with conditions such as ADHD and anxiety. For example, one participant, Bryony, reported deciding to seek a diagnosis for ADHD after having watched one of these videos.

> "There was this one girl and she had ADHD and she did a TikTok of, like, 'signs of ADHD' and all that in girls. I was watching the TikTok and I was like ticking off everything she said. So then that's when I was like, maybe ADHD."
>
> Bryony, 15

Many of the girls in the CML study also watched Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response (ASMR) videos[14] which they said made them feel calm and relaxed. For example, Amira enjoyed ASMR videos of content creators organising their stationery, or small business owners packing up an order, while Niamh liked videos of different materials being mixed together in a bowl.

> "There's like different textures and different sounds they make that I like. I like the wooden soups. It's like little wooden balls in water and they mix it around."
>
> Niamh, 14

Among the girls in the CML study who enjoyed watching ASMR, a number were watching 'personal attention-style' ASMR, extending beyond sensory content to more 'social' themes. This content involved people directly addressing the viewer in a soft, gentle and caring manner. One participant, Terri, claimed to know others who liked this content because they felt it was an easy way for them to feel as though they had company.

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[14] ASMR (Autonomous sensory meridian response) content usually involves sensory ASMR tropes like watching hands playing with slime with very crisp clear audio of the resulting sounds.

Parental concerns about their children's online activities

Less than three in ten parents believe that the benefits to their child of using either social media or VSPs outweigh the risks

As explored above, parents of 3-17s see benefits to their child being online, with 96% indicating that going online helps their child in at least one of the nine ways we outlined to them. However, recognising these benefits does not alleviate parental concerns about their child's presence online. As mentioned in the Learning Online section above, only about a quarter of parents of 3-17s (27%) believe that the benefits to their child of using social media, messaging and video-sharing apps or sites outweigh the risks. This proportion does increase as the child reaches their teens; 43% of parents of children aged 16-17 and 33% of parents of 12-15s believe the benefits outweigh the risks of their child using these sorts of apps, compared with 18% and 22% of parents with children aged 5-7 and 8-11 respectively.

While a greater proportion of parents (54%) believe that the benefits to their child of using the internet to gather information outweigh the risks, this still means that when asked to balance the potential risks versus the rewards for their child, only just over half of parents feel that the scales tip towards the rewards. Again, the proportion who feel this way is higher among parents of older children than parents of younger ones. Over six in ten parents of 12-15s (64%) and 16-17s (63%) agree that the benefits outweigh the risks on this measure, compared to about half of parents of 5-11s (52% of parents of 5-7s and 49% of parents of 8-11s respectively) and four in ten parents of 3-4s (41%). Despite this, using the internet as a tool for information-gathering and learning appears to be a significant benefit in the eyes of parents. Seven in ten (71%) agree that being online helps their child with their schoolwork/homework, 54% say it helps their child to develop skills with reading and numbers, and just under half (48%) say that it helps their child learn a new skill.

% of parents whose child aged 3-17 goes online
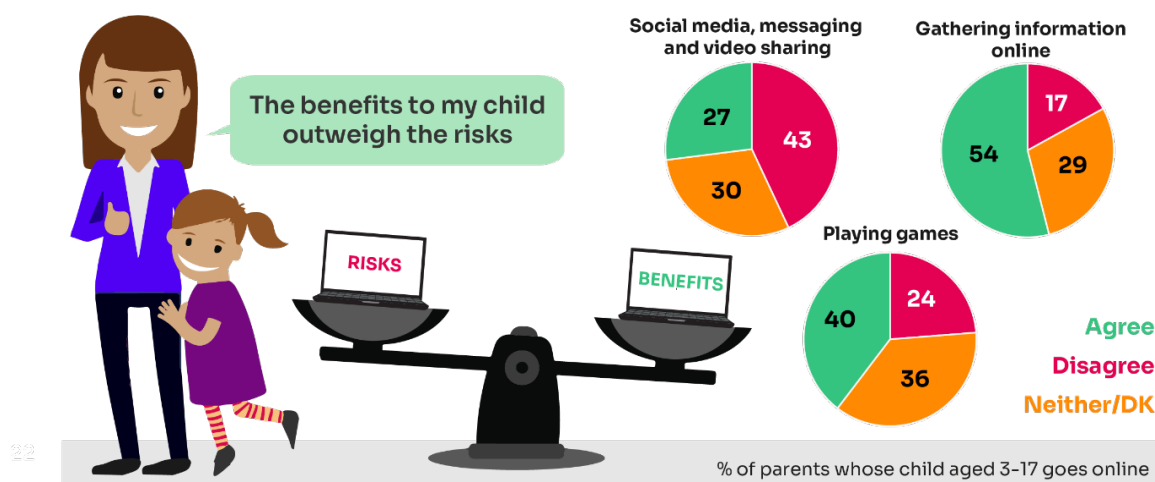
When prompted, many parents indicate that they have concerns around various aspects of their children's online activities. The primary concern among parents of 3-17s is that their child will be exposed to inappropriate content for their age group (77% of parents were either very or fairly concerned about this aspect of their child's online use) or see adult/sexual content (75% of parents).

Another common concern among these parents is that their child will experience some sort of harm or detriment while online; for example, seven in ten parents are concerned that their child will be bullied online (70%) or will see content which encourages them to hurt or harm themselves (68%). Three in five (59%)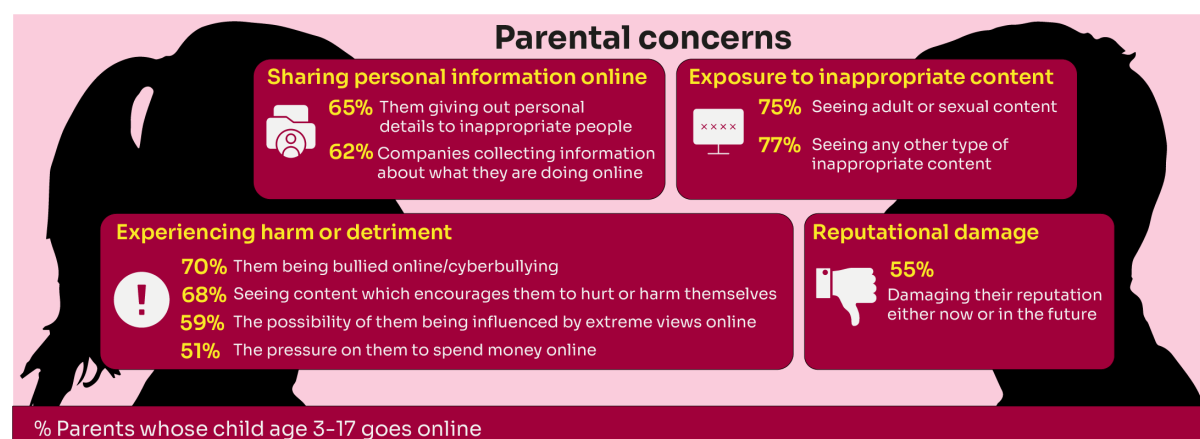 parents are concerned that there is a possibility of their child being influenced by extreme views online, and half (51%) worry about the pressure on their child to spend money online.

More than three in five parents are also concerned about their children giving away their personal data. Sixty-five percent are worried about the personal details the child themself may give out to inappropriate people, as well as 62% of parents who worry about companies collecting information about what their child is doing online. Finally, we asked parents about whether they were concerned that their child's online use might damage their reputation, either now or in the future, and over half (55%) said they were concerned about this.

There is relatively little difference by age in the concerns held by parents of children aged 3-15. However, parents of older children, those aged 16-17, are less likely to be concerned than those with younger children about several of these online activities. For example, parents of 16-17s are less concerned than those with children aged 12-15 about: their child seeing adult or sexual content (60% vs 81%), their child seeing any other type of age-inappropriate content (59% vs 80%) and their child being influenced by extreme views online (48% vs 59%).

Parental concerns

Sharing personal information online
65% Them giving out personal details to inappropriate people
62% Companies collecting information about what they are doing online

Exposure to inappropriate content
75% Seeing adult or sexual content
77% Seeing any other type of inappropriate content

Experiencing harm or detriment
70% Them being bullied online/cyberbullying
68% Seeing content which encourages them to hurt or harm themselves
59% The possibility of them being influenced by extreme views online
51% The pressure on them to spend money online

Reputational damage
55% Damaging their reputation either now or in the future

% Parents whose child age 3–17 goes online

Parents' concerns about their child's screentime increases with age

Ofcom's children's online passive measurement research, which measured online use among 162 8–12-year-olds in the UK, found that on average they spent 3 hours 5 minutes per day accessing the internet, across smartphones, tablets and computers.[15]

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[15] Ofcom Ipsos Children's Online Passive Measurement 2023, age: 8-12, UK. Base: 162. Time spent based on 17 children's online use over a three-week measurement period in January-February 2023 combined with results from 145 children measured for four weeks during April-July 2023. Exact dates varied by participant, but all fieldwork fell within the dates 12 January – 26 February (phase 1) and 11 April – 18 July (phase 2).

In our own study, we explored children's and parents' perceptions of their own and each other's screentime. When looking at the children's perceptions, we found that just over a third of 8-17s feel that their own screentime is too high (35%). This was more likely among older children, with 44% of 16-17s agreeing that they felt this way about their own screentime, compared to 31% of 8-11s. Conversely, younger children, those aged 8-11, are more likely than their older counterparts to feel that their parent's screentime is too high (45% of 8-11s compared to 37% of 12-15s and 33% of 16-17-year-olds).

Turning to parents' perceptions of their child's screentime, their concerns deepen as their child gets older. Overall, four in ten (39%) parents of children aged 3-17 report finding it hard to control their child's screentime. This increases with age, going from a third (34%) for parents of 3-4-year-olds to half (49%) of parents of 16-17-year-olds.

We also asked parents if they think their child has a good balance between screen time and doing other things. On a positive note, nearly two-thirds of parents of 3-17s (62%) agree that this is the case. However, there is a pattern of increasing concern as children grow older. Three-quarters (74%) of parents of children aged 3-4 agree that their child has a good balance between screen time and doing other things, compared to just over half of parents of older children (56% and 55% for parents of children aged 12-15 and 16-17 respectively).

Parents of 3-17-year-olds

39% Agree   44% Disagree

"I find it hard to control my child's screen time"

Agreement by age of child

34%	32%	37%	46%	49%
3-4	5-7	8-11	12-15	16-17

62% Agree   22% Disagree

"I think my child has a good balance between screen time and doing other things"

Agreement by age of child

74%	68%	63%	56%	55%
3-4	5-7	8-11	12-15	16-17
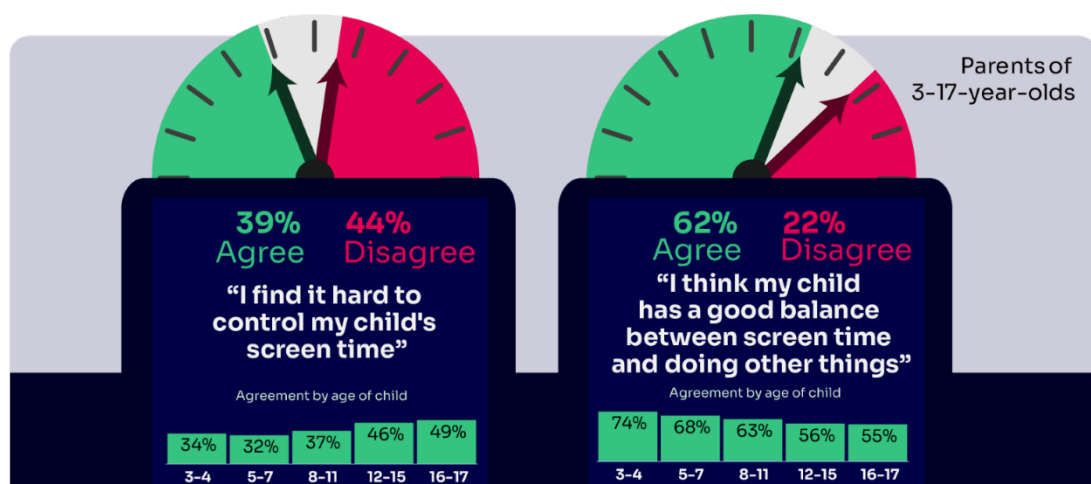
Technology and trust

Introduction

The ways in which children understand and assess the information they are exposed to online and across other media is central to their media literacy. The ability to apply critical understanding to the information presented to them allows children to fully realise the benefits of being online while also lessening the associated risks.

In this section we examine children's knowledge about, and attitudes towards, the information they see, and in the next section we explore their confidence in judging online content. Here, we consider the extent to which older children[16] are aware of and recognise the use of technology to determine or even create the information they see [algorithms and AI]. We also consider how they consume news and the other sources of information they use (especially social media) and think about the trust they place in it.

Awareness of algorithms

Awareness of algorithms is high, and is even higher for older children and those in more affluent families

This year, for the first time, we asked children if they were aware that some apps or sites use technical tools (algorithms) to deliver content that they believe will appeal to the user, based on information they already hold about them, such as what they have looked at before and their user age.

Six in ten children aged 8-17 say they are aware of the use of algorithms to direct specific content to them, and the proportion who are aware rises with the age of the child from 44% of 8-11s to 72% of 16-17s.

Just under half of 8-17s who know about the use of algorithms (46%) agree with the statement that they *"[are] happy for apps to use information they have collected about me to decide what to show me"*. However, attitudes about this differ by age, perhaps indicating a higher level of awareness of the value of personal data among older children. About four in ten 12-15s and 16-17s who know about algorithms agree that they are happy for their data to be used in this way, compared to more than half of 8-11s (43% and 38% among 12-15s and 16-17s who are aware of algorithms, respectively, compared to 55% of 8-11s).

Quite a high proportion of children are not sure how they feel about their information being used for this purpose: over a third (34%) of 8-17s who know about algorithms neither agree nor disagree with

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[16] The data in this section is sourced from either our 'Children's Online Knowledge and Understanding' (COKU) study or our 'Children's Online Behaviour and Attitudes' (COBA) study, unless otherwise stated, and the ages of the children concerned are specified under each data point. Additionally, data in this section is drawn from children aged either 8 and over, or 12 and over, who were able to think and respond for themselves.

the statement above; and again, this is higher among older children (36% and 39% of 12-15s and 16-17s who are aware of algorithms, respectively, vs 25% of 8-11s).

Awareness of online algorithms

	All aged 8-17	8-11	12-15	16-17	ABC1	C2DE
	59%	44%	67%	72%	62%	55%
% who agree	46%	55%	43%	38%	50%	39%

"I'm happy for apps to use information they have collected about me to decide what to show me"
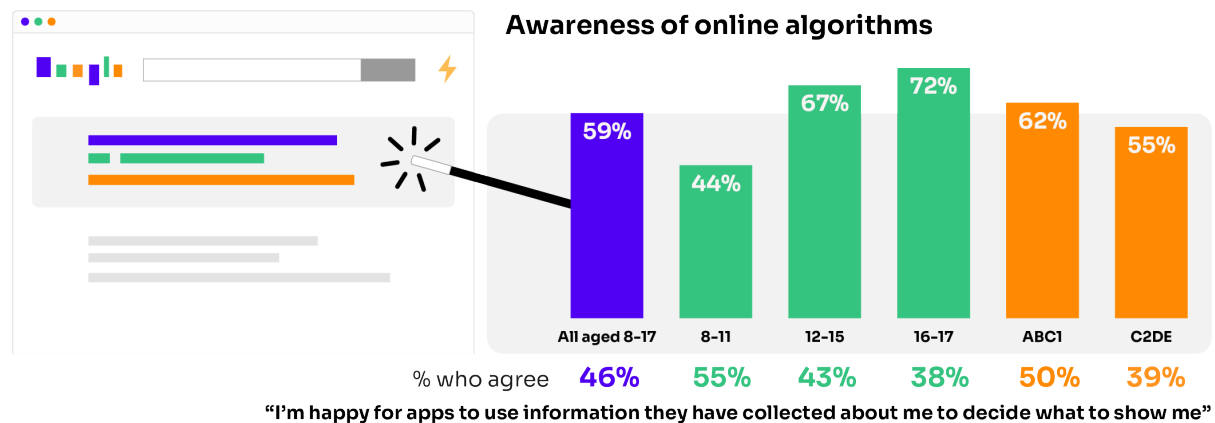
Use of artificial intelligence (AI)

Almost half of children have used artificial intelligence tools and they do so for a variety of reasons

We also introduced two new questions to gauge children's use of artificial intelligence.

The likelihood of a child having used AI rises with age; from 33% of 8-11s, through 52% of 12-15s to 59% of 16-17s, and it is more likely both among boys and children from ABC1 households (boys 49% vs girls 42%); (ABC1 49% vs C2DE 41%). Children are twice as likely as adults to have used AI (46% vs 23%).[17]

We prompted 8-17s who had used AI technology with several potential reasons for doing so. The most common response was that that they had used AI 'for fun' (45%). Other responses were fairly evenly split, with over a third of these children saying they had used it 'for school' (37%), 'to learn' (35%) or simply 'to try it' (34%). Among AI users, children from ABC1 households are also more likely than those from C2DE households to say they have used AI to learn (39% vs 30%).

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[17] Ofcom Adult Media Literacy Tracker 2023: Core survey. Question A8. Have you ever used AI models such as ChatGPT or Bard? (single coded)

Have you ever used Artificial Intelligence or AI technology like ChatGPT or Bard or My AI?

All aged 8-17	8-11	12-15	16-17
46%	33%	52%	59%

What have you used the AI technology for?

45%	37%	35%	34%
For fun	For school	To learn	To try it
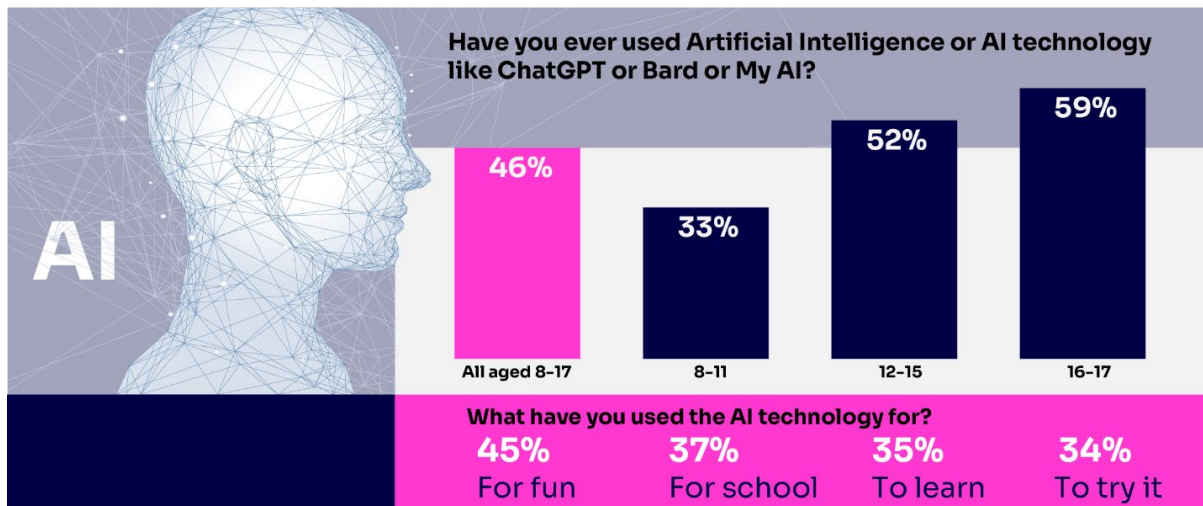
Learning about the world and assessing online information

TikTok is the most-used single source for news among 12-15-year-old news consumers

As set out in more detail in the 'Reaping the benefits' section above, we asked children aged 12-17 about a range of potential benefits to them of being online, and found that they do see many benefits. One of the specific benefits was 'to find out about the news', with just over four in ten (42%) 12-17s saying that being online helped them with this. However, this is lower than the 48% of 12-17s who felt this way in 2022 – a decrease driven by 16-17-year-olds.

Ofcom's News Consumption Survey includes an assessment of how younger teens (12-15s) access and assess news. As in previous years, in 2023 just under half (45%) of 12-15s claimed not to be interested in news; and among those who did access news, social media came relatively high in the list of their most commonly-used news sources. While talking with family remained the most common way for this age group to find out about news (68% of all 12-15s said they had ever done this), followed by TV (57%) and talking with friends (56%), social media was also a commonly-cited source of news, with over half (54%) of 12-15s saying they had ever sourced news this way.[18]

When we looked at the use of individually named sources for news (i.e. specific channels, sites or media publications)[19] among news consumers aged 12-15, TikTok, YouTube and Instagram took the top three spots; 28% look to TikTok and 25% turn to YouTube or Instagram for this purpose.

Younger teens who consume news via social media were more likely to use these sites for lighter news topics rather than what might be described as 'hard news'; news about 'celebrities' and 'music' were popular among the types of stories accessed by 12-15s who use TikTok, Instagram, Facebook or Snapchat for news.

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[18] NCS Teens Survey, QC1 and QC2

[19] The combined reach for news among younger teens (12–15s) of all BBC sources (39%) remains higher than that for any single named source including TikTok.

These findings chime with what we have learned from our CML study. Most of the children in the sample showed little interest in keeping up with news and current affairs. For example, when asked about this topic, one participant said:

> "It would be nice to know what is happening in the world, but I mean, it's not like it's a big deal or whatever. As long as it doesn't affect me then whatever".

<div align="right">Bryony, 15</div>

The few who did engage with news said that it typically came via their social media feeds in the form of clips cut and reposted without their original context, often with layers of commentary and reactions by different online figures added on top. These children often struggled to distinguish between real and fake in relation to this news content. And even the few who were sometimes motivated to check the veracity of the stories they saw, or seek an alternative viewpoint, often did not know where to look for this information.

Children's trust in the information they see online

Teens have a nuanced approach to trusting what they see online, but aren't always as savvy as they think they are

Twelve-to-fifteen-year-olds showed some signs of distinguishing between sources in the context of the trust they placed in the news they read or saw. Among 12-15s who ever consumed news via the following types of media, a third (33%) said that news on social media sites or apps was always, or mostly, reported truthfully. This compares to over seven in ten who said the same about news they saw or read on TV, radio or in newspapers (70%, 76% and 74% respectively). The only news source that outstripped these more traditional news sources in terms of trustworthiness for young teens were news stories from their family; 81% of 12-15s who had ever heard news stories from this source said that they were always or mostly accurate.[20]

Our own study reflects the above findings, showing that the trust which children (aged 8-17) place in the information they see online differs by the type of site or app they are using. Children are more sceptical about the information they see on social media than they are about information on either news or educational sites. Only a third (34%) say that all or most of the information they see on social media is true, compared to two-thirds (66%) who say this about the information found on news sites, and three-quarters (74%) who feel this way about information they see on schools and homework sites. This is unchanged on all measures since 2022.

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[20] Ofcom's News Consumption Survey, Questions put to 12-15s, QC4, QC5 and QC6

Assessment of whether info on an app/site is accurate and true (among children aged 8–17)

Social media
- All 11%
- Most 24%
- Some 63%

News apps or sites
- All 20%
- Most 46%
- Some 29%

Apps or sites used for schoolwork or homework
- All 34%
- Most 40%
- Some 23%
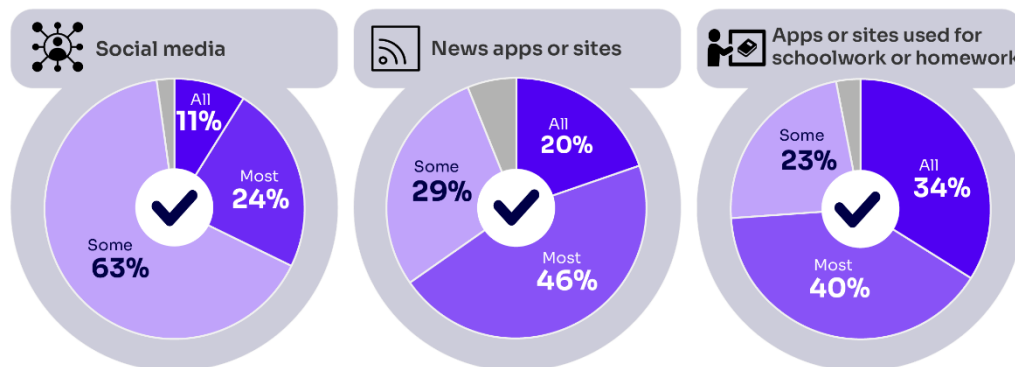
When asked about seeking information online more generally (as distinct from their attitude towards specific types of sites or app), nine in ten 12-17s who go online say they 'ever' think about whether they can trust the information they see on websites and apps to be true and accurate.

However, when given a list of checks they might carry out to verify the accuracy of the information they see online, we find much lower proportions of children who claim to ever make these checks. The most popularly cited check among these teens was to ask someone else if they had used the website or app in question (exactly half of 12-17s say they ever do this). A similar proportion (47%) said they had ever considered whether a company mentioned on a site or app was familiar to them. But other, perhaps more active or time-consuming, forms of verification were less popular. A third (33%) of these children say they ever check the information they see online across a number of websites, and only a quarter (24%) claim to ever use fact-checking websites or apps.

While a high proportion of children tell us that they think about the accuracy of the online information they see, we don't know how regularly they do so, and they are not always very shrewd in actually judging that information. For example, a quarter (24%) of children aged 8-17 who ever use search engines say they believe that if a website has been listed by a search engine it can be trusted – unchanged since 2022. However, critical thinking on this point appears to develop with age; 71% of both 12-15s and 16-17s say they think that some of the listed websites can be trusted while some can't, compared to just over half (55%) of 8-11s.

Critical evaluation of online content

Introduction

'Critical understanding' is a core element of media literacy. It allows users to understand, question and manage their media environment. This is important if they are to explore the benefits that the internet and other media can offer, while avoiding potential harms or risks.

This section of the report looks at confidence and the interaction it has with critical understanding. Confidence does not just follow from good media literacy skills but intersects with it in a way which can either strengthen or undermine critical understanding. Someone whose confidence is not matched by ability in practice may be more likely to make mistakes, which could lead to harm. Conversely, someone who has good critical understanding skills but is not confident in them may not trust their own good judgment, which could lead them to feel unsure or unsafe online.

This year, we continue to see high levels of critical understanding among teenagers, when they are asked to identify whether a social media post is genuine or fake, or are presented with an example of influencer marketing. However, they are less likely to be able to identify advertising in search engine results.

Identifying what is fake and what is real on social media

Almost all 12-17s were able to recognise a genuine Instagram post from the NHS

This year, we again presented children aged 12-17 with several scenarios designed to allow us to assess various aspects of their ability to judge what they see online. The first of these was a genuine NHS Instagram post featuring tips to help people improve their mental wellbeing.[21]

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[21] NHS Instagram account, 26th June 2023 (NHS on Instagram – Top tips to improve your mental wellbeing)
Contains public sector information licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0. Please note, sources were shown at the end of the survey during fieldwork.
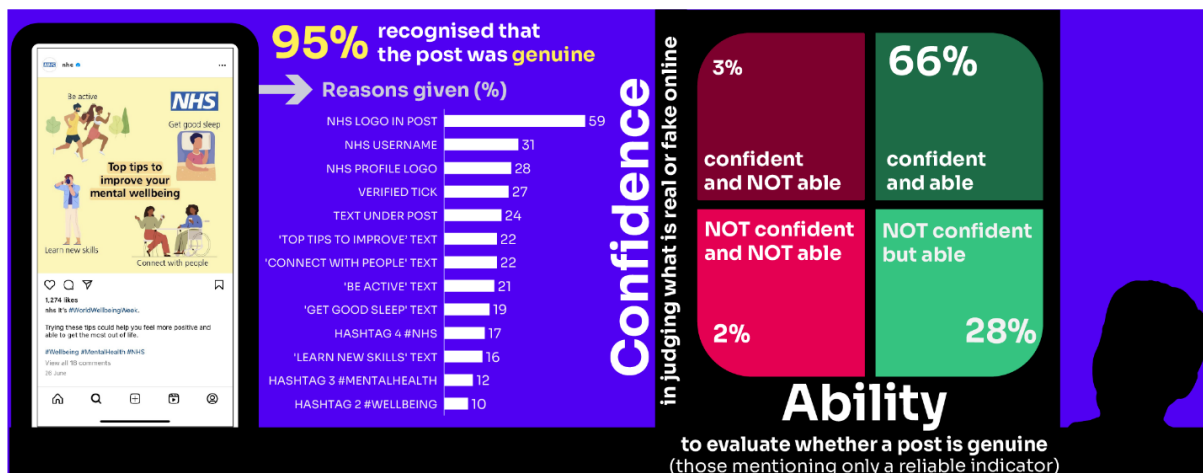
Almost all 12-17s (95%) recognised that this was a genuine post,[22] with just 2% indicating that they thought it was *not* genuine. We then asked these respondents to indicate which aspects of the post led them to their conclusion (by clicking on or touching the image directly). Among those who thought the post genuine, the presence of the large NHS logo was the most commonly-cited factor for their decision (59%) with the NHS username (31%), the smaller NHS logo (28%) and the 'verified' tick (27%) all being cited by around three in ten respondents who identified the post as genuine. Given that only 2% concluded that the post was not genuine, we only have a low base size from which to draw information,[23] but among this group, just under one in five noted either the reference in the post to being able to 'learn new skills' (19%) or the number of likes (17%).

Fewer teens were able to identify a fake social media profile

We also showed 12-17s a mocked-up social media profile[24] and asked them to tell us if they thought it was genuine or not. Seven in ten of these teenagers (69%) correctly identified that this was a fake profile, with the reminder evenly split between those thinking it was genuine (16%) and those who did not know (15%). Among those who identified that this was a fake social media profile, nearly eight in ten (77%) pointed to the 'earn money' text in the post as the clue to this not being a genuine post. About half this group (48%) noted a link in the post and around a third noted the number of followers the profile had (35%), the numbers it was following (29%) or the profile username (28%). For those who believed the profile was genuine, the two most commonly-cited factors were the profile picture (30%) and one of the photos included within the post (25%).

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[22] We cannot compare this finding to that for the relevant scenario from 2022 because we used a different post this year.

[23] Low base size (73).

[24] This profile is a fictional profile. Image source: Pexels. Sources were shown at the end of the survey during fieldwork.
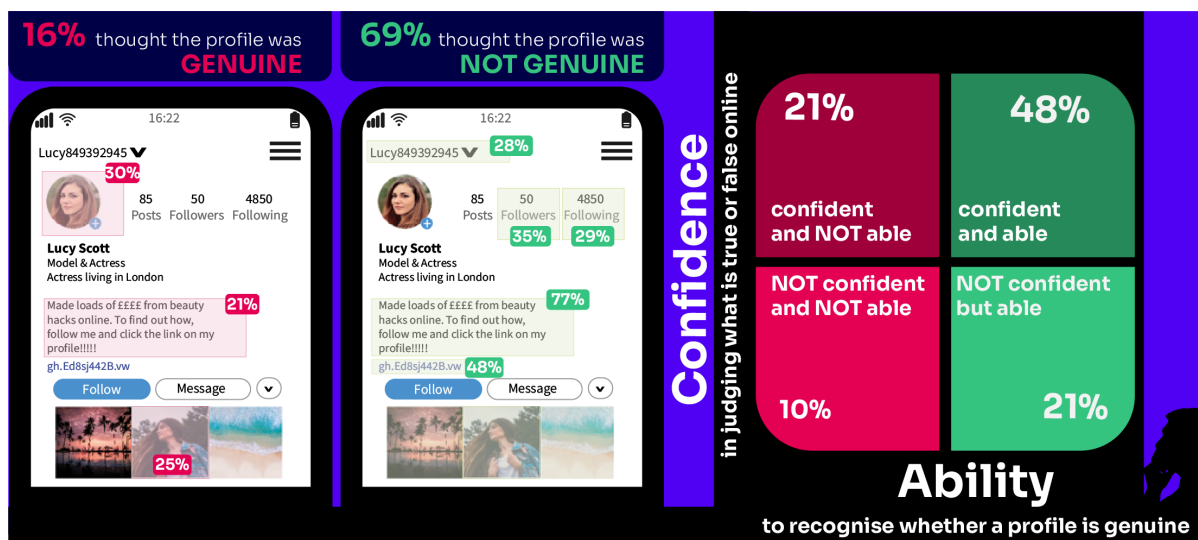
16% thought the profile was **GENUINE**

69% thought the profile was **NOT GENUINE**

Confidence in judging what is true or false online

Ability to recognise whether a profile is genuine

| 21% confident and NOT able | 48% confident and able |
| 10% NOT confident and NOT able | 21% NOT confident but able |

Sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds are less sure of their ability to distinguish the real from the fake online than they were last year

Before seeing either of these scenarios, the children (aged 12-17) were asked if they were confident in their ability to judge whether what they see online is real or fake. Seven in ten (69%) said that they were confident. And this claimed confidence was more likely among boys than girls (72% vs 66%) and 16-17s than 12-15s (75% vs 67%). That said, 16-17-year-olds are less sure of their ability to distinguish the real from the fake than they were last year (75% vs 82% in 2022).

The infographic above shows how well (or not) their confidence was borne out when the children were tested with a fake social media profile.

The findings were similar to those in 2022, when the same fake profile was shown to respondents: just over two in ten (21% vs 23% in 2022) older children were confident in their ability to judge what was real versus what is fake online, but unable to do so in practice, while around half (48% in both years) were both confident and able on this measure. A further two in ten (21% vs 19% in 2022) were able to correctly identify this as a fake post, despite initially lacking confidence in their ability to spot fake content online. This means that, overall, seven in ten 12-17s were able to judge this post accurately, although the lack of confidence among a subset of teenagers might hamper the extent to which those in this group will be able to fully explore and realise the opportunities that being online could offer them.

And this year, we found a gender gap among older teens on this measure, with similar proportions of girls and boys able to identify the profile as fake (69% of girls aged 16-17 vs 70% of boys 16-17) but fewer girls this age confident in their ability to do so beforehand (45% vs 57%).

Understanding the commercial environment online

Only 40% of children who use search engines accurately recognise advertising on them

Almost all children aged 8-17 use search engines (95%); so in order to measure their understanding of online advertising, we presented the children in this group with a screenshot of a Google search for trainers (see image below) and asked them which of the options we presented to them explained why the top three results appeared first in the list shown. They were given three options and were allowed to pick all that they felt applied. [25]
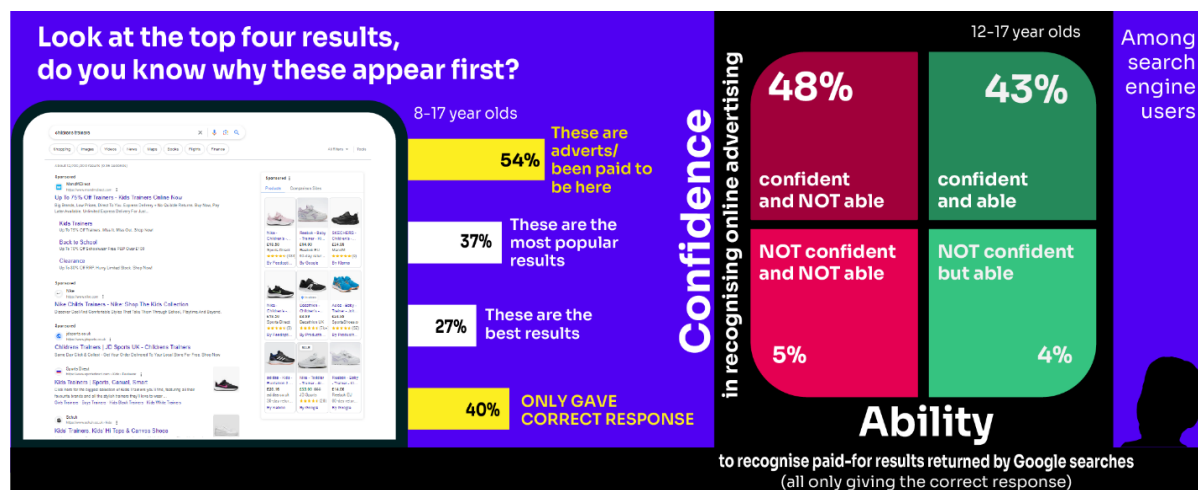
As in 2022, just over half (54%) of the children correctly indicated that these were paid-for results. However, nearly four in ten (37%) erroneously believed that these results appeared first because they were the most popular results, and about a quarter (27%) thought it was because they were the best results. As noted above, the children were able to pick more than one option, and, when we isolate those in the group who gave the correct response and no others, we see that just 40% of children who use search engines truly recognise online advertising when they see it.

Older search engine users (aged 12-17) were more able than those aged 8-11 to identify online advertising correctly in this scenario (47% and 46% of 12-15s and 16-17s respectively selected only the correct response, compared to 29% of 8-11-year-olds).

And when we compared claimed confidence in spotting online advertising with the ability to do so, we found that about half (48%) of 12-17s were confident in their ability to detect this type of advertising but did not correctly identify that the only reason the top search results appeared first was because they were paid for. This is unchanged since 2022.

[25] Source: Google search for "children's trainers". Images of trainers (reading top to bottom): Nike; Rebook; Skechers; Nike; Decathlon; Asics; Adidas; Nike; Reebok; Sports Direct; Schuh; TK Maxx. Sources were shown at the end of the survey during fieldwork.

Over three-quarters of teenagers who go online can recognise paid-for endorsements on Instagram

We were also keen to understand the extent to which older children (aged 12-17) recognised influencer marketing. So we showed them a real social media post shared by American actress and model Madelyn Cline on her Instagram feed, and asked them why they thought she might share a post about the product shown (Tommy Hilfiger clothing).[26] The children were given three options and were able to select as many as they felt applied.
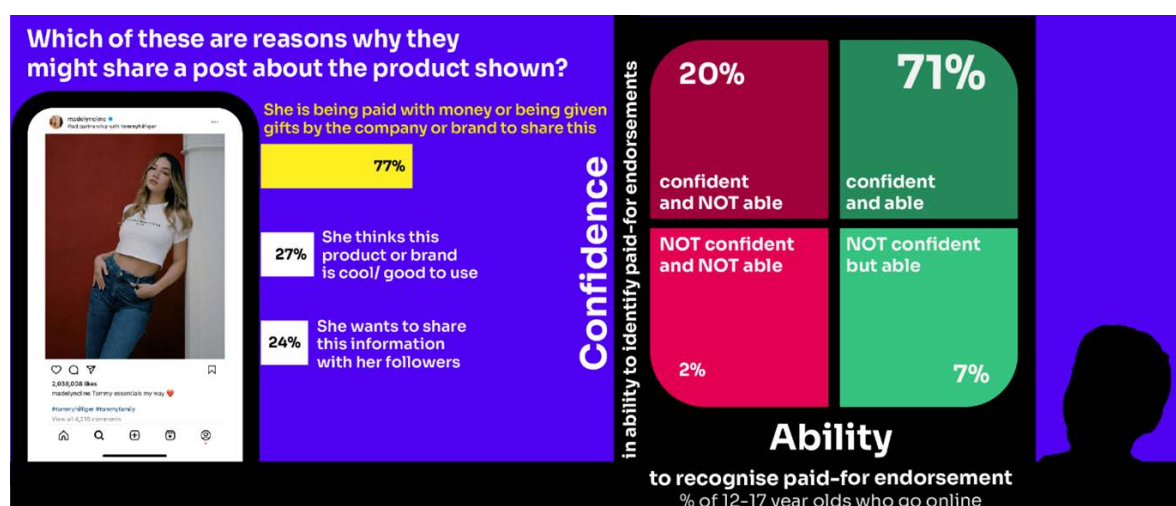
Over three-quarters (77%) of 12-17s correctly identified that this was a paid-for endorsement of the product shown.

However, about a quarter believed that Madelyn Cline had shared this post because she thought the product or brand was cool, or good to use (27%) and/or that she had posted it because wanted to share this information with her followers (24%).

Given that influencers may have more than one reason to promote a product (for example, they may genuinely like it as well being paid to endorse it) any mention of the post being paid-for is considered a correct response, even if the respondent also selected other reasons for the post.

Girls may be more susceptible than boys to influencer marketing

Boys aged 12-17 were more likely than girls to give the correct response either on its own (62% vs 51%) or combined with other potential motivations (80% vs 74%), while girls were more likely than boys to believe that the post was motived by the influencer's positive attitude to the product (30% vs 23%) and/or her desire to share the information with her followers (30% vs 23% for boys).

This indicates that boys are more aware than girls when it comes to recognising influencer marketing. However, it is notable that the post was shared by a female celebrity and was probably

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[26] Source: Madelyn Cline Instagram account, 13th June 2023 ([Madelyn Cline on Instagram: "Tommy essentials my way)](#) Sources were shown at the end of the survey during fieldwork.

aimed at a female audience. Given this, it is possible that if the boys in the sample had been presented with this type of post but from a male celebrity/influencer, a higher proportion would have given that celebrity the benefit of the doubt when it came to determining the reasons the post was shared.

We again compared claimed confidence with demonstrated ability and found that while a relatively high proportion of teens (71%) were both confident and able on these measures, two in ten (20%) of these 12-17s were unable to recognise this example of influencer marketing despite being confident in their ability to recognise online advertising.

We also see a gender difference in confidence among older teens, with girls aged 16-17 less likely than boys of the same age to be both confident and able in identifying influencer marketing (76% vs 66%).

Our CML findings illustrate the difficulty children face in recognising commercial messages on social media. Very few participants appeared to take a critical approach to the motives of the content creators they followed, even when they were advertising products for sale in their profiles. Several participants had been swayed by what they had seen posted by influencers. For example, one talked about the skincare products she sees on TikTok:

> "Makeup and skincare have definitely become more viral on TikTok. You get to see new products and influencers tell you about them. They're interesting to watch. I have bought things that influencers use because it looks really good in their videos. I recently bought a shimmer."
>
> Niamh, 14

Children are more likely to recognise influencer marketing than search engine advertising

Older children aged 12-17[27] are more capable of identifying when an influencer is being paid than to recognise advertising in search results. If we compare children of this age who gave only the correct response to each of the above scenarios, just under six in ten 12-17s recognised the paid-for influencer scenario, against just under half of 12-17s who recognised the online advertising.

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[27] 8-11s were not shown the influencer post so we cannot include this group in the comparison.

Comparing confidence and critical understanding scenarios
Confident and able vs Confident but not able
% of 12-17 year olds who go online (*and use search engines)

Influencer endorsement

20

71

Search engine results*

48 43

Note: Given that influencers may have more than one reason to promote a product (for example, they may genuinely like it as well being paid to endorse it), any mention of the post being paid-for is considered a correct response even if the respondent also selected other reasons for the post. However, for the search engine results, selecting only one answer – that the listings that appear at the top are paid-for – is considered to be correct.

Online safety and parental control

Introduction

This section focuses on the behaviours of both children and their parents in keeping children safe online. We look at how children are taught about online safety, the steps children take to keep themselves safe online, the user ages of children, and the rules and controls that parents are implementing. This was the first year in which we asked questions about online safety lessons in school, and whether children were faking their ages to use an app/site.

Being taught about online safety

Only three in ten 8-17s recall having regular lessons on online safety at school. Children are more likely to find these lessons useful when they have had more of them

This year we introduced two new questions about online safety lessons in school.

We found that almost all children aged 8-17 (93%) recall having had at least one lesson at school about being online and the possible risks. Most have had more than one lesson (79%), but only three in ten (30%) say they recall having had regular online safety lessons in school.

Nine in ten (91%) 8-17s who had had at least one online safety lesson in school said that these lessons were useful to them. There was a slight fluctuation by age on this measure; a higher proportion of 8-11s had had these lessons and felt that they were either very, or fairly, useful to them, (93%) compared to 16-17s (89%). It appears that online safety lessons in school may be slightly less effective for children living with at least one impacting condition. Eighty-eight percent of children living with at least one impacting condition, who had had at least one online safety lesson in school, found these lessons useful, compared to 92% of children in this position who did not have an impacting condition.

Importantly, there is a positive correlation when we look at the proportion of children who are having regular lessons about online safety and how useful they are finding these lessons – highlighting the importance of having more frequent lessons in this area.

Online safety lessons at school – perceptions of usefulness by 8-17s:

How useful the lessons have been to the child	Number of lessons child recalls		
	Regular lessons	More than one lesson	One lesson
Very useful	**57%**	33%	24%
Fairly useful	40%	59%	52%
Not very useful	3%	6%	17%
Not very useful at all	0%	1%	4%
Don't know	0%	1%	3%
NET: Useful	**97%**	**92%**	**76%**
NET: Not useful	**3%**	**7%**	**21%**

Ofcom's High Media Literacy Report includes examples of the type of things children may be taught in school about online safety. For example, one boy aged between 8 and 10 said *"they [the teachers at school] showed us how to use an app properly, how to hide your locations and stuff."*

Nine in ten (90%) children aged 8-17 confirmed that they been talked to about how to use the internet safely at least once in the past. When asked who had spoken to them about this, the two most common responses were parents (87%) or a teacher at school (74%).

About half of parents of 8-15-year-olds say they talk to their child about this at least every few weeks (51% among parents of 8-11s and 48% among parents of 12-15s), with about a further 3 in 10 (30% and 27%, respectively) revisiting this every few months. This means that at least three-quarters of parents of 8-15s say they speak to their children about how to stay safe online at least every few months.

As set out earlier in this report, this year we found evidence that five-to-seven-year-olds are becoming increasingly present online, which may pose greater risks for them. So, we looked at what proportion of parents with children this age talked to their child about staying safe online and found that three-quarters (76%) of parents of 5-7s say they have ever talked to their child about staying safe online. Over half (56%) of these parents do this at least every few weeks, and a further 27% do this at least every few months.

Taking steps to be safe online

Younger children are more likely than older children to tell someone if they see something worrying or nasty online

Younger children are more likely than their older counterparts to tell someone if they see something worrying or nasty online. Two-thirds (66%) of 8-11-year-olds say that they would always tell someone if they saw something worrying or nasty online, compared to almost half of 12-15s and 16-17s (49% and 45% respectively).

Turning to the parents' perspective, two in ten (20%) parents of 3-17s say their child has told them about something they have seen online that has scared or upset them in the past 12 months. All the parents in this group took some form of action once they were told this.[28]

The infographic below shows the types of action that parents took, and how this varied by the age of the child.

1 in 5 parents said their child told them about something they'd seen online that scared or upset them

Action taken (%)

	Talked to child about what had happened	Advised child to block certain people or types of content	Advised child to stop using certain apps or sites	Reported to the website or app it appeared on	Set up filters or parental controls	Sought advice on how to handle the situation
— All (aged 3-17)	81	54	53	32	23	19
■ Aged 3-4	62	25	55	40	39	18
■ Aged 5-7	82	39	51	27	27	17
■ Aged 8-11	81	58	56	31	29	19
■ Aged 12-15	91	75	57	36	11	21
■ Aged 16-17	72	48	38	27	14	25

Four in five parents (81%) chose to talk to their child about what had happened, followed by just over half who advised their child to block a specific type of content or person (54%) or who recommended that their child stop using certain apps or sites (53%). However, only a third of parents in this situation (32%) suggested reporting the content to the site or app on which it appeared.

We asked 12-17-year-olds about their attitudes towards sharing personal information online to get access to a new app or site. Over half (55%) indicated that they sometimes decided not to use apps/ sites which asked them to share personal information, if they didn't feel comfortable about it. A further 20% said they never feel comfortable about sharing personal information online. A small minority (10%) said they were comfortable sharing personal data on apps or sites and therefore always did this to access a new site or app. These findings suggest that most 12-17-year-olds are aware of the potential risks of sharing personal information online and show some discernment when choosing whether to share their information to access new sites or apps. However, worryingly, 12% of 12-17s say they always share their personal information in this situation, despite feeling uncomfortable about it. This suggests that approaches are needed to help empower children to make decisions they are comfortable with.

We asked this same group of teenagers (12-17s) about their knowledge of a range of online behaviours which could be categorised as either potentially promoting or hindering their safety

[28] Caution: base size below 100 for parents of 3-4s and 16-17s whose child had told them they had seen something online which had scared or upset them in the last 12 months (40 and 55 respectively).

online, before asking them if they had ever done any of these things. Examples of the safer and potentially riskier behaviours are set out in the infographic below, alongside the levels of engagement with these behaviours.

% of children aged 12-17 who go online
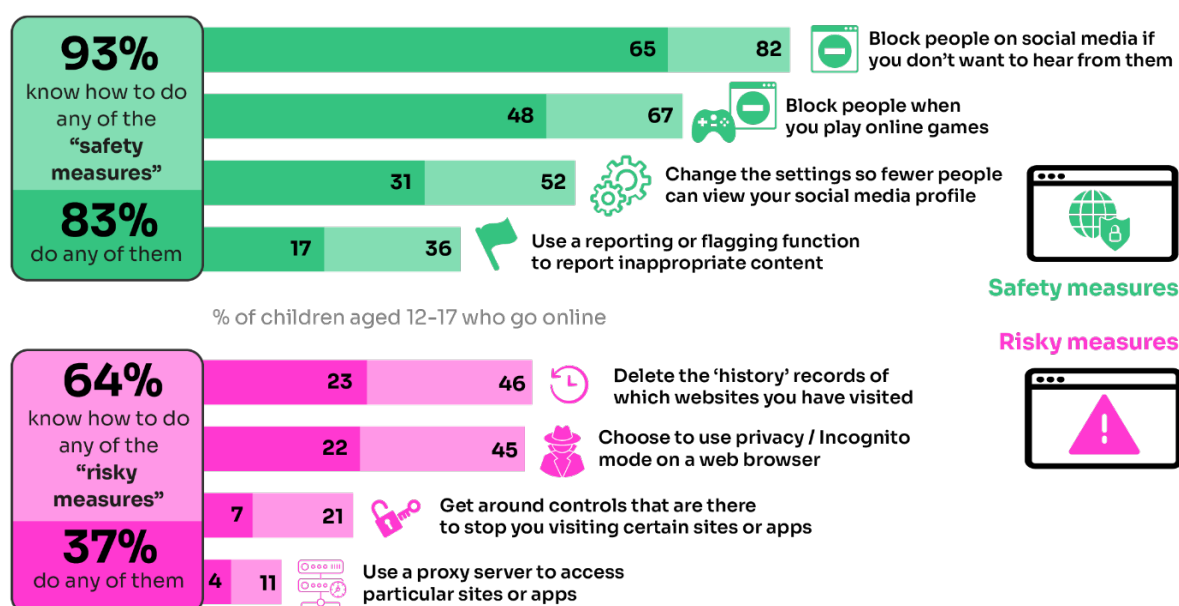
More than nine in ten (93%) 12-17s know how to do at least one of these 'safer' online behaviours, with over eight in ten (83%) reporting that they had ever done any of them; the two most common were blocking people on social media (65%) and blocking people when playing online games (48%). Looking at 'riskier' behaviours,[29] 64% of 12-17s knew how to do at least one of these things. Just under four in ten (37%) said that they had done one of them: deleting their browsing history and choosing the privacy or incognito mode were the two most common actions among this group, but only just over two in ten admitted having ever done either of them (23% and 22% respectively). This indicates that overall, there is higher awareness of, and engagement with, potentially safer behaviours than with potentially riskier behaviours among teenagers, but we should acknowledge that there may be some under-reporting of the latter.

User ages

Nearly eight in ten children are aware of minimum age requirements but four in ten admit to giving a fake age online to access a new app/site

Having looked at steps taken to stay safe online, we will now examine children's and parents' understanding of minimum age requirements and their attitudes towards these. Nearly eight in ten (78%) of all children aged 8-17 are aware that there are minimum age requirements for most social media sites or apps. Awareness is higher among older than younger children (83% of 12-15s and 84% of 16-17s vs 70% of 8-11s).

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[29] We classify these behaviours as 'risky' because they enable the child to conceal their online activity, preventing a parent or appropriate adult to ensure they are being safe online.

For the first time this year, we asked children if they had ever given a fake age to access a new app or site.[30] Four in ten (40%) children aged 8-17 admitted to having given a fake age online for this purpose. The likelihood of giving a fake age increases once the child reaches 12, with 31% of 8-11s admitting this, compared with 48% of 12-15-year-olds and 44% of 16-17-year-olds. This was also more likely among children in ABC1 households than those in C2DE households (ABC1 43% vs C2DE 38%).

These findings were supported by our Children's Online User Ages 2023 Quantitative Research Study, which found that a third (33%) of children aged 8-15 with a social media profile on at least one app had a user age of at least 16.[31]

Only a third of parents know that the minimum age requirement for most social media platforms is 13

When looking at parental knowledge and attitudes around user ages, we see that most (84%) parents of all 3-17s are aware that there are minimum age requirements for using most social media apps or sites. However, only a third (32%) parents of all 3-17s think, correctly, that the minimum age requirement for most social media sites and apps is 13 years old. Twelve percent said that that the minimum age was 12 or younger, and 31% gave an age of 14 or over, leaving 25% who say either that there is no minimum age requirement, or that they do not know whether there is a minimum age requirement, or that they do not know what that age requirement might be.

Despite most parents of 3-17s being aware that there are minimum age requirements, over a third (36%) said they would allow their child to have a profile on sites or apps before they had reached the minimum age. This is unchanged at an overall level since 2022, but there has been an increase in the proportion of parents of 5-7s who would do this (30% vs 25% in 2022), while parents of 8-11 are less likely to agree that they would do it (38% vs 43% in 2022). Conversely, 48% of parents of all children aged 3-17 say they would *not* allow their child to have a social media site/app before they had reached the minimum age required, despite the majority of parents not knowing this age.

Parental rules and controls

Parents of 12–17s are more likely to have rules about their children being online compared to last year

As in previous years, most parents of 3-17s say they have at least one rule in place about what their child can and cannot do online; this is an increase on last year (94% vs 91%). We have also seen an increase this year in the proportion of parents of older children who implement some of the specific online rules that we asked about.

For example, parents of 12-15s are more likely to say they have rules about the video content their children are allowed to watch online (67%, compared to 56% in 2022). Similarly, parents of 16-17s

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[30] These two questions were included in distinct surveys to preclude the possibility of one question influencing the response to the other.

[31] Children's Online User Ages 2023 Quantitative Research Study, slide 13.

are more likely to say they have rules about the types of websites or apps their child is allowed to use (41% vs. 32% in 2022). Parents of 16-17s are also more likely to say they have rules in place about the information that their child can share online (49% vs 39% of parents who said they were enforcing these rules in 2022).

In 2023, eight in ten (79%) parents of 16-17s implement at least one rule about their child's behaviour online, compared to 70% in 2022. This may reflect the finding that this year fewer parents of 16-17s say they believe that they can 'trust their child to be sensible' in response to being asked which of several approaches they take to ensure their child's safety online (42% compared to 53% in 2022).

We also found that parents of children in this older age group are more likely than they were last year to say that their child's online use could 'damage their reputation either now or in the future' (56% vs 45% in 2022). This increased concern could explain why a higher proportion of parents of children this age choose to supervise their 16-17-year-olds, by sitting beside them and watching or helping them while they are online, compared to last year (9% vs 4% in 2022).

Most parents have rules for their child's gaming and mobile phone use

Nine in ten (91%) parents of 3-17-year-olds who game have at least one rule in place about their child's gaming, unchanged since last year. This is more likely among parents of primary-school-aged children than those of secondary-school-aged children. Almost all parents of primary school children who game have at least one gaming-related rule in place (96%), compared to 85% of parents of secondary-school-aged children. However, while parents of older children who game are less likely than those of younger children to have at least one rule in place about their child's gaming, there has been an increase in the proportion of parents of 16-17s who fall into this category (72% compared to 56% in 2022).

Moving on to mobile phones, nearly nine in ten (88%) parents of children aged 3-17 who have their own mobile had rules about their child's use of them. While parents of younger children were more likely to set such rules, the proportion of parents of 16-17-year-olds with rules about their child's mobile phone use rose from 58% in 2022 to 69% in 2023.

This year, in particular, there was an increase in the proportion of parents of 16-17-year-olds who set rules about the apps that their child was allowed to download onto their phone (25% vs 17% in 2022).

It is clear that although rules about mobile phone use continue to be set more commonly for younger children, an increasing proportion of parents also see the need to set them for their older children.

Awareness of technical tools or controls to manage children's access to online content is high among parents, but a lower proportion actually make use of these
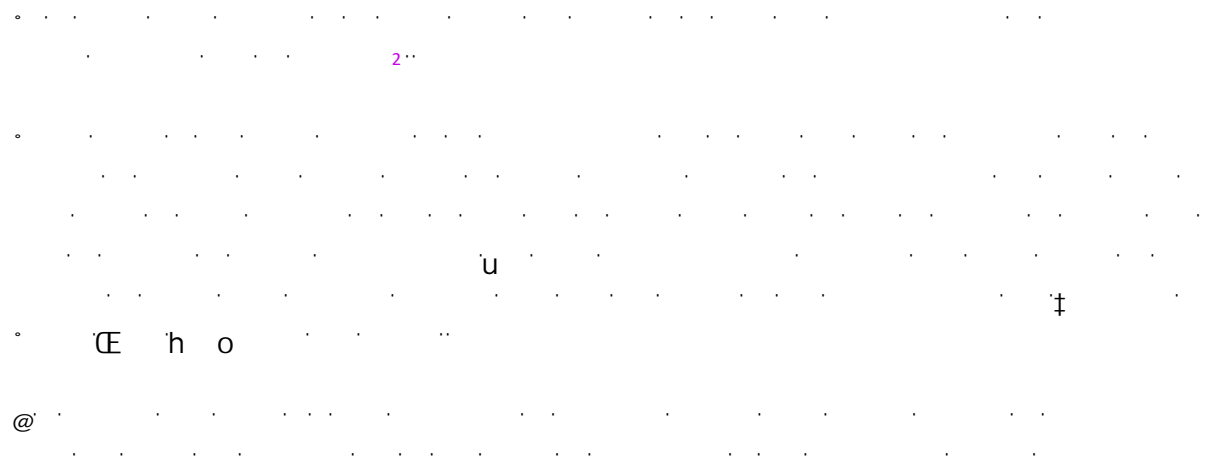
Awareness and use of technical tools among parents of 8-15-year-olds

93%
of parents with children aged 8-15

are aware
of any **"technical controls"**

77%
use any of them

29%	**Parental control software set up on a particular device used to go online** — 66%
35%	**Parental controls built into the device by the manufacturer** — 62%
31%	**Content filters provided by your broadband ISP** — 58%
33%	**Restrict access to inappropriate online content** — 53%
30%	**Change the settings to stop downloads/purchases** — 50%
28%	**Parental control software, settings or apps** — 49%
16%	**Monitoring apps** — 37%

Technical controls

filters would prefer to rely on their child's ability to navigate online content rather than to have a technical filter in place.

Parents are more likely to be nearby and regularly check what their child does online under the age of 12

Turning now to online supervision more generally; as in 2022, the two most commonly-employed types of parental supervision among parents of 3-17s are to ask their child about what they are or have been doing online (59%), and to be nearby and regularly checking what their child does (55%). Of course, this varies as the child gets older and more independent. For instance, until the child reaches the 12-15 age band, the most common method of supervision is to be nearby and regularly check what their child does. But for 12-15s and 16-17s, the most common method is to ask their child about what they are doing online (72% and 42% respectively).

Media use, by nation

This infographic provides topline data by nation, in order to compare the relative aspects of media use and media literacy across the UK. This year, there were very few differences between each nation. Those we did see included a higher than average proportion of Welsh children who use laptops to go online (48% vs. 38% of all nations), a higher than average proportion of Scottish children who use tablets to go online (71% vs. 61% of all nations) and a lower than average proportion of 8-17-year-olds in Northern Ireland who say they have had at least one lesson about online safety at school (87% vs. 93% of all nations).

Media use among 3–17 year olds in 2023, by nation

England

- **63%** have their own mobile phone
- To go online: **70%** use a mobile phone, **60%** use a tablet and **37%** use a laptop
- **81%** use messaging sites/apps
  96% use video sharing platforms
  63% use apps/sites to watch live streams
- **66%** use social media &
  76% have their own social media profile
- **61%** play games online
- **78%** watch TV or films on any type of device other than a TV set (**85%** watch on a TV set)
- **40%** watch live TV | **77%** watch SVoD[1]
- 📶 **32%** have seen something worrying or nasty online
- 📶 **94%** recall having had at least one or more lessons about online safety at school; and of those who had at least one such lesson **91%** say they were useful
- 📶 **40%** say they have ever given a fake age online
- 📶📶 **69%** were able to correctly spot a fake profile
- 🔍 **39%** were able to correctly identify sponsored search results (giving only the correct response)
- 📶📶 **58%** were able to correctly identify sponsored content posted by an influencer (giving only the correct response)

Scotland

- **66%** have their own mobile phone
- To go online: **74%** use a mobile phone, **71%** use a tablet and **38%** use a laptop
- **80%** use messaging sites/apps
  95% use video sharing platforms
  64% use apps/sites to watch live streams
- **63%** use social media &
  79% have their own social media profile
- **59%** play games online
- **80%** watch TV or films on any type of device other than a TV set (**82%** watch on a TV set)
- **37%** watch live TV | **82%** watch SVoD[1]
- **32%** have seen something worrying or nasty online 📶
- **90%** recall having had at least one or more lessons 📶 about online safety at school; and of those who had at least one such lesson **93%** say they were useful
- **41%** say they have ever given a fake age online 📶
- **67%** were able to correctly spot a fake profile 📶📶
- **45%** were able to correctly identify sponsored 🔍 search results (giving only the correct response)
- **54%** were able to correctly identify sponsored 📶📶 content posted by an influencer (giving only the correct response)

Wales

- **68%** have their own mobile phone
- To go online: **74%** use a mobile phone, **62%** use a tablet and **48%** use a laptop
- **81%** use messaging sites/apps
  97% use video sharing platforms
  62% use apps/sites to watch live streams
- **68%** use social media &
  77% have their own social media profile
- **59%** play games online
- **81%** watch TV or films on any type of device other than a TV set (**84%** watch on a TV set)
- **41%** watch live TV | **76%** watch SVoD[1]
- 📶 **32%** have seen something worrying or nasty online
- 📶 **94%** recall having had at least one or more lessons about online safety at school; and of those who had at least one such lesson **92%** say they were useful
- 📶 **44%** say they have ever given a fake age online
- 📶📶 **79%** were able to correctly spot a fake profile
- 🔍 **46%** were able to correctly identify sponsored search results (giving only the correct response)
- 📶📶 **55%** were able to correctly identify sponsored content posted by an influencer (giving only the correct response)

N Ireland

- **61%** have their own mobile phone
- To go online: **69%** use a mobile phone, **62%** use a tablet and **34%** use a laptop
- **80%** use messaging sites/apps
  95% use video sharing platforms
  63% use apps/sites to watch live streams
- **69%** use social media &
  81% have their own social media profile
- **60%** play games online
- **78%** watch TV or films on any type of device other than a TV set (**84%** watch on a TV set)
- **39%** watch live TV | **76%** watch SVoD[1]
- **37%** have seen something worrying or nasty online 📶
- **87%** recall having had at least one or more lessons 📶 about online safety at school; and of those who had at least one such lesson **89%** say they were useful
- **43%** say they have ever given a fake age online 📶
- **71%** were able to correctly spot a fake profile 📶📶
- **38%** were able to correctly identify sponsored 🔍 search results (giving only the correct response)
- **49%** were able to correctly identify sponsored 📶📶 content posted by an influencer (giving only the correct response)

[1]SVoD refers to subscription video on-demand services such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video and Disney+
📶 Among children 8-17 who go online   📶📶 Among children 12-17 who go online   🔍 Among children 12-17 who go online and are search engine users
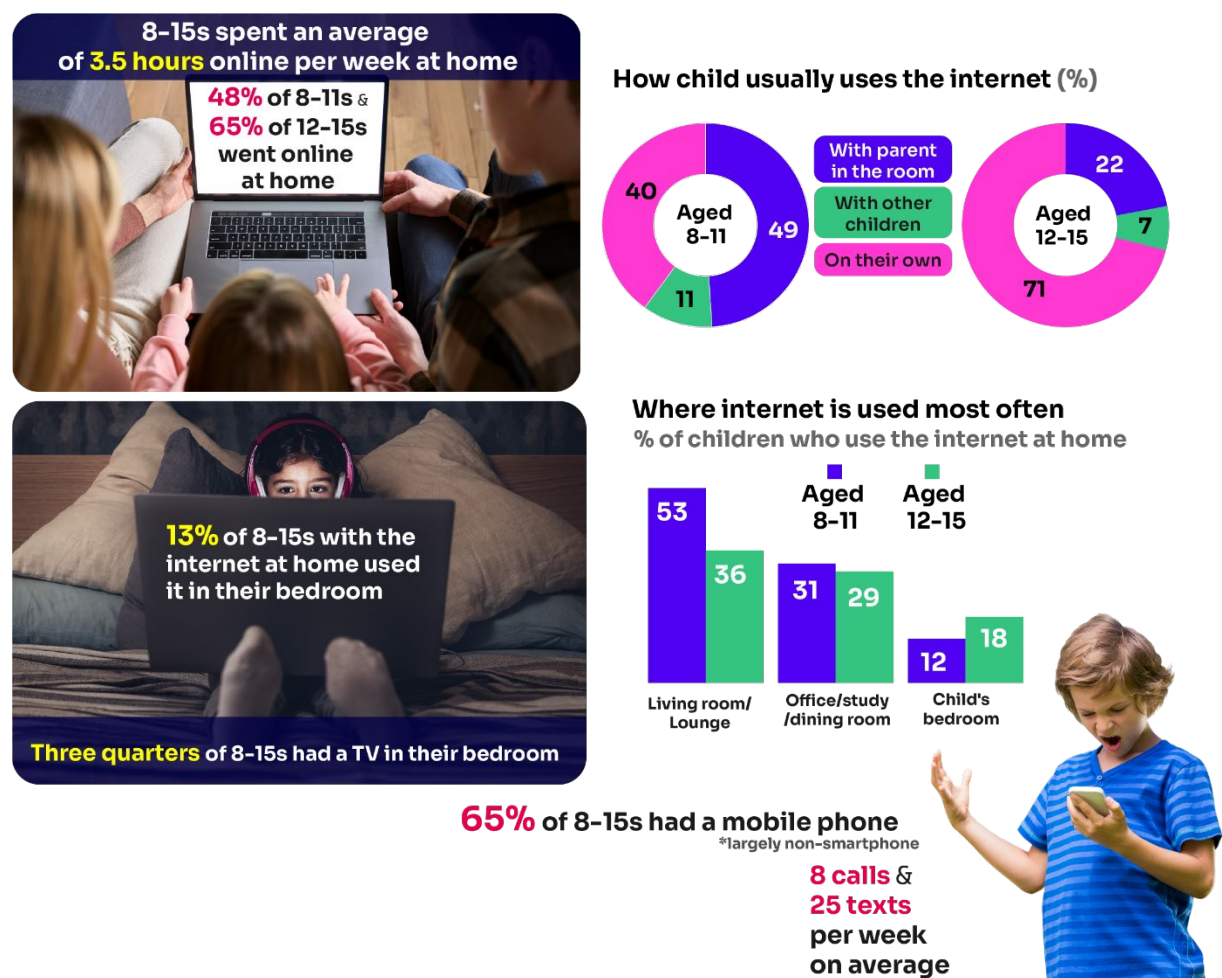
Children's media literacy over time: 2005 – 2023

We have been asking children and their parents about their media use and attitudes for nearly 20 years, and this section sets out a selection of some of the ways in which media literacy has changed – or not – over that period.

While our survey methodology was face-to-face between 2005 and 2019, it then changed to a combination of online and face-to-face methods. Given these changes, as well as the need to change the wording of questions over that period, the trends described here are indicative and illustrative rather than statistically significant, and the time periods that are examined are not uniform. Rather than provide footnotes for the source of each finding, all material in this section comes from our reports, data tables and data files during this period, located either on the Ofcom website or the National Archives.

Before looking at some of the trends, it's useful to provide a reminder of media use in 2005, as initial context to what has changed in children's media habits and attitudes.

Children's use of media in 2005

8-15s spent an average of **3.5 hours** online per week at home

48% of 8-11s & **65%** of 12-15s went online at home

13% of 8-15s with the internet at home used it in their bedroom

Three quarters of 8-15s had a TV in their bedroom

How child usually uses the internet (%)

Aged 8-11: 40, 49, 11
- With parent in the room
- With other children
- On their own

Aged 12-15: 22, 7, 71

Where internet is used most often
% of children who use the internet at home

Aged 8-11 / Aged 12-15

- Living room/Lounge: 53 / 36
- Office/study/dining room: 31 / 29
- Child's bedroom: 12 / 18

65% of 8-15s had a mobile phone
*largely non-smartphone

8 calls & **25 texts** per week on average

In 2005, children's media activity was predominantly TV-related. Almost all children watched TV, and 8-15s said they watched it for an average of 14 hours a week, with a further 4.7 hours spent watching DVDs or videos. Many children had a TV in their bedroom – 71% of 8-11s and 75% of 12-15s, although about a third of 8-11s (36%) and three in ten 12-15s (28%) said they mostly watched TV with an adult.
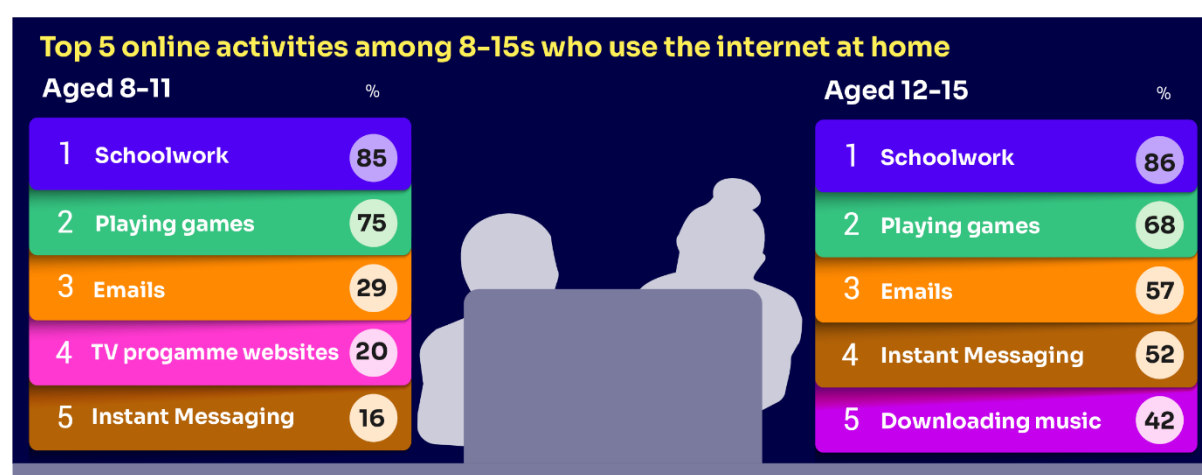
In contrast to the ubiquity of TV, children's online activity was more limited in 2005, both in terms of the extent of online use, and the degree of privacy or autonomy children had about what they were doing online.

In 2005, only one half of 8-11s (48%), and two-thirds of 12-15s (65%), were going online at home. We didn't report on the devices they used to go online, as the vast majority were using a PC or laptop. They spent an average of 3.5 hours online each week – considerably less than the amount of time they were spending watching TV.

About one in eight (13%) 8-15s with internet access said they could go online in their own bedroom, with the vast majority accessing it mostly in the living room or other shared room, according to their parents. As a consequence, parents in 2005 were likely to have had a lot more visibility of what their children were consuming than is currently the case.

In 2005, two-thirds (65%) of 8-15s said they had a mobile phone: 49% of 8-11s and 82% of 12-15s, and the vast majority of these phones were not used to go online. At that time, calls and texts were sufficiently limited as to be countable: we used to ask about the actual number of mobile calls and messages sent each week, and 8-15s said that they made an average of 8 calls and sent 25 texts.

We asked which activities children did online, and nearly all said they did schoolwork, with playing games the next most common activity. Emailing was more popular among 12-15s, as was instant messaging and downloading music.

Top 5 online activities among 8–15s who use the internet at home

Aged 8-11	%		Aged 12-15	%
1 Schoolwork	85		1 Schoolwork	86
2 Playing games	75		2 Playing games	68
3 Emails	29		3 Emails	57
4 TV progamme websites	20		4 Instant Messaging	52
5 Instant Messaging	16		5 Downloading music	42

Trends in use of media

Children's activity online has changed markedly since 2005 and continues to evolve rapidly, as we have seen earlier in this report.

Their use of different devices to go online has changed substantially over the period, with a rapid increase in the use of tablets and smartphones: 8% of children aged 5-15 used a tablet to go online in 2012, compared to 45% in 2014, 63% in 2017 and 68% in 2019. Using a smartphone to go online went up from 22% in 2012, to 36% in 2014, 50% in 2017 and 55% in 2019. These devices also started to be used as the only way of going online, in preference to a larger-screen PC or laptop. While in 2012 only 1% of children aged 5-15 were *only* using devices other than a computer to go online, this increased to 8% in 2014, 21% in 2017, and 29% by 2019.

And while the methodology is slightly different, and so not charted as a direct comparison, in 2023 63% of 5-15s used a tablet, 71% a smartphone, and 50% only used a device other than a PC/laptop to go online.
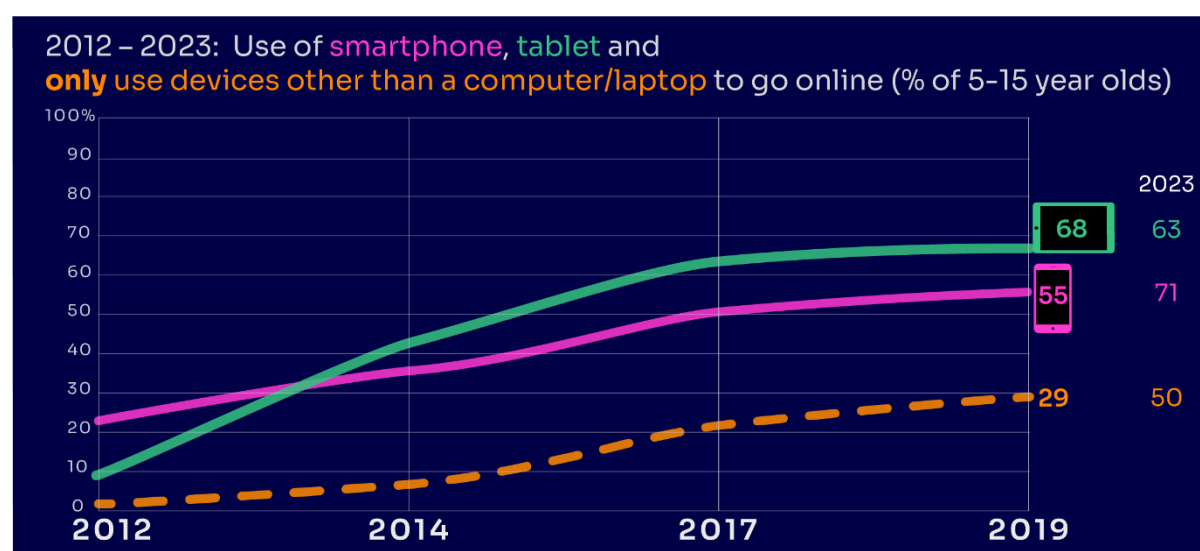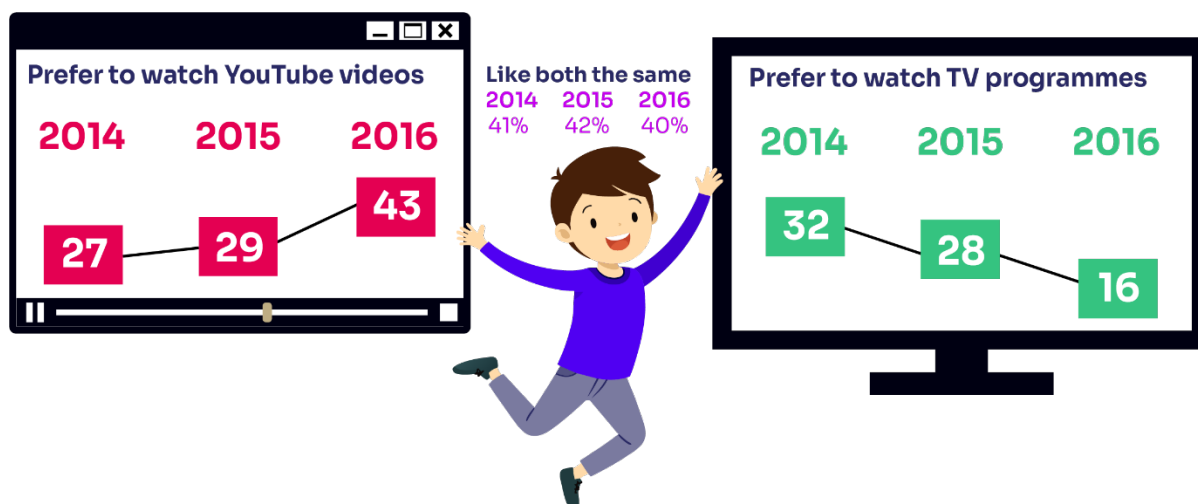

Note: question-wording changed slightly over the years, and the methodology changed in 2020 and 2021, so trend is indicative

Online gaming increased steadily for children during the same period. While in 2009 30% of 5-15s who played games did so online, this had increased to 60% by 2015.
In 2007 we started asking whether children were watching videos on sites such as YouTube, and 19% of online 8-11s and 46% of online 12-15s said they did so, increasing swiftly to 38% of 8-11s and 69% of 12-15s by 2009. In 2014 we started to monitor the extent to which children said they preferred watching YouTube or TV programmes, or both equally. As the infographic below shows, while in 2014 children on balance had a slight preference for TV programmes, by 2016 they were considerably more likely to prefer YouTube.

% of 8-15s watching both who said they...

Prefer to watch YouTube videos

2014	2015	2016
27	29	43

Like both the same

2014	2015	2016
41%	42%	40%

Prefer to watch TV programmes

2014	2015	2016
32	28	16

We have asked children (and their parents) about their use of social media since 2007, although many of the questions have changed over this period as the services and functionality have evolved. In 2007 we asked whether children went to 'websites like MySpace, Bebo or Piczo', and 19% of online 8-11s, and 55% of online 12-15s, said they did so on a weekly basis. We also asked children a series of further questions to explore their social media habits, but in 2007 these were only asked of 12-15s. We asked about frequency of use, and at that time just over a third (37%) of 12-15-year-old users said they visited social media sites on a daily basis. Four in ten (39%) said that their profile could be seen by anyone.

From 2009 onwards we tracked the proportion of children online who had an active social networking page or profile. Incidence levels fluctuated slightly over the years, perhaps because this question was asked of the parent of the child, rather than the child themselves, until 2014, but overall there was little increase over time, with around one in five online 8-11s having a social media profile, and seven in ten 12-15s, throughout the period between 2009 and 2019.

The question – and the survey method – was then changed, and since 2021 about two-thirds of 8-11s say they use any social media sites or apps, as do nine in ten 12-15s.

So, for many years now, social media has been a mainstay for children, albeit using very different types of service and functionality over time, and with frequency and duration of use increasing considerably. For example, even by 2013, 84% of 12-15s said they visited their main social media profile once a day or more, with 20% saying they did so more than ten times a day.
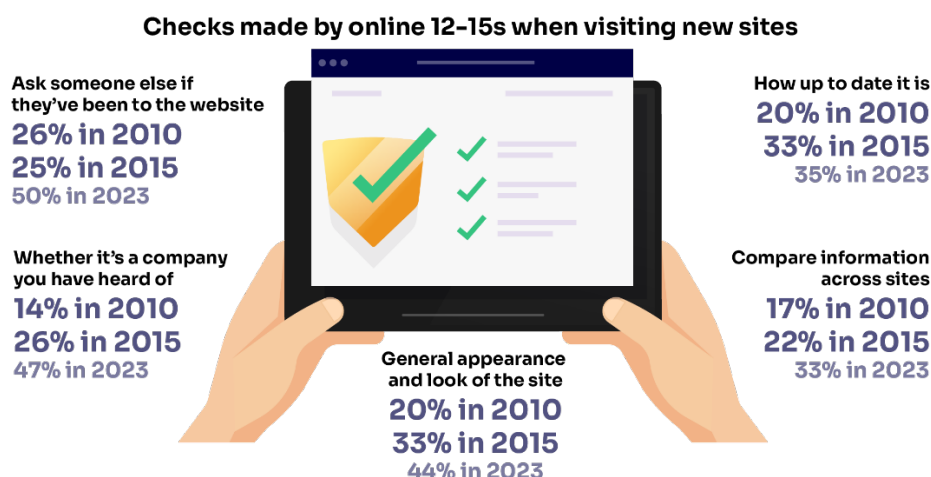
Trends in critical understanding

Over the years we have tracked a range of questions relating to children's awareness and knowledge of the online space.

Firstly, we started asking 12-15s in 2010 about the types of checks they made when visiting websites they hadn't visited before. The range of checks asked about included measures that were quite personal and individual, such as whether the child had heard of the brand name, or if someone they knew had heard of it, and measures that were more objective, such as checking if the site was up-to-

date, or checking the information on a site by comparing it with other websites. Both these types of checks were used by a proportion of 12-15s, as the infographic illustrates.

While the methods and questions have changed since 2016, it is notable that in recent years the checks which online 12-15s are more likely to make relate to their personal responses and experiences, rather than more objective measures.

Checks made by online 12-15s when visiting new sites

Ask someone else if they've been to the website
26% in 2010
25% in 2015
50% in 2023

How up to date it is
20% in 2010
33% in 2015
35% in 2023

Whether it's a company you have heard of
14% in 2010
26% in 2015
47% in 2023

Compare information across sites
17% in 2010
22% in 2015
33% in 2023

General appearance and look of the site
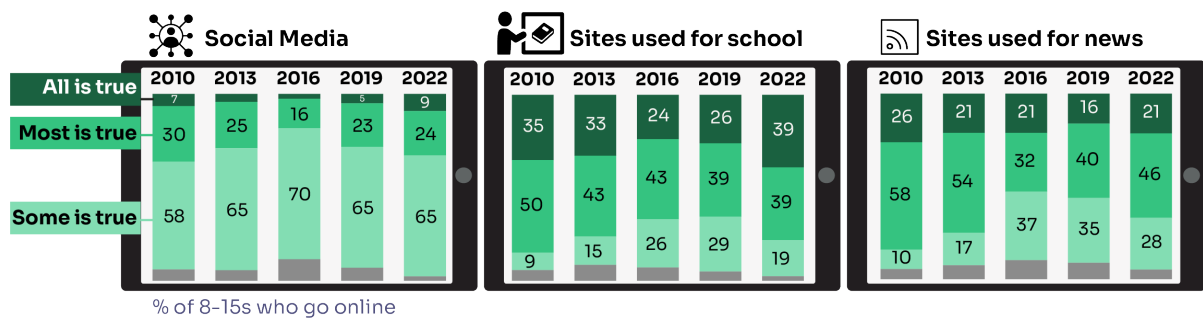20% in 2010
33% in 2015
44% in 2023

Note: question wording has changed slightly over the years, and the methodology changed in 2020 and 2021, so the trend is indicative.

We have asked children about their understanding of the truthfulness of different sites and apps for many years, comparing social media, sites used for schoolwork and homework, and news sites. To keep it simple we ask whether they think 'all', 'most' or 'some' is truthful.
As the infographic below indicates, responses relating to social media show a reasonably media-literate response over time, with the majority of children saying they think 'some' of the content is true.

When asked about the sites used for schoolwork, which might be expected to be more trusted or robust sources, a high proportion of children continue to say they are 'mostly' or 'always' true. Responses to news show an interesting shift. Before 2016 children felt that news sites could 'mostly' be trusted. But the major news events of 2016, including the election of President Trump, Brexit, etc., which tended to polarise views and perceptions of media among adults, seem to have made an impact on children too, as they were more likely in that year to think that news is only 'sometimes' true. In subsequent years there has been a shift back towards a higher proportion thinking that 'most' of the information on news sites is truthful, but trust levels have not returned to those we saw in 2013 or earlier.

	Social Media					Sites used for school					Sites used for news				
	2010	2013	2016	2019	2022	2010	2013	2016	2019	2022	2010	2013	2016	2019	2022
All is true	7		16	5	9	35	33	24	26	39	26	21	21	16	21
Most is true	30	25		23	24	50	43	43	39	39	58	54	32	40	46
Some is true	58	65	70	65	65	9	15	26	29	19	10	17	37	35	28

% of 8-15s who go online

Note: question wording changed slightly over the years, and the methodology changed in 2020 and 2021, so the trend is indicative.
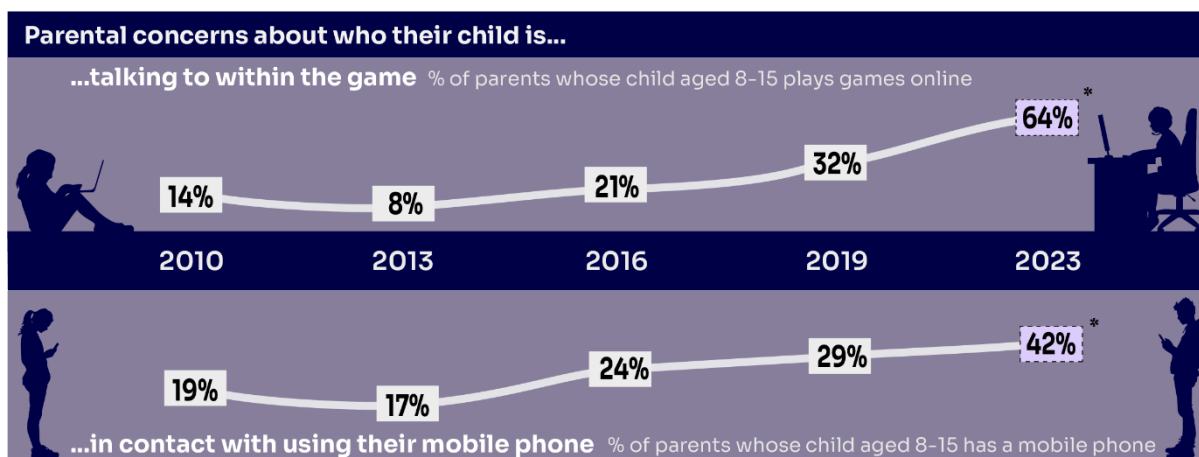
Other measures of critical understanding have improved in recent years. While direct trend analysis is not possible, given the slight changes to question wording, and methodological changes, three-quarters (77 %) of 12-15s in 2023 say that a celebrity might share a post about a particular product because they are being paid to do so, compared to 56% in 2016.
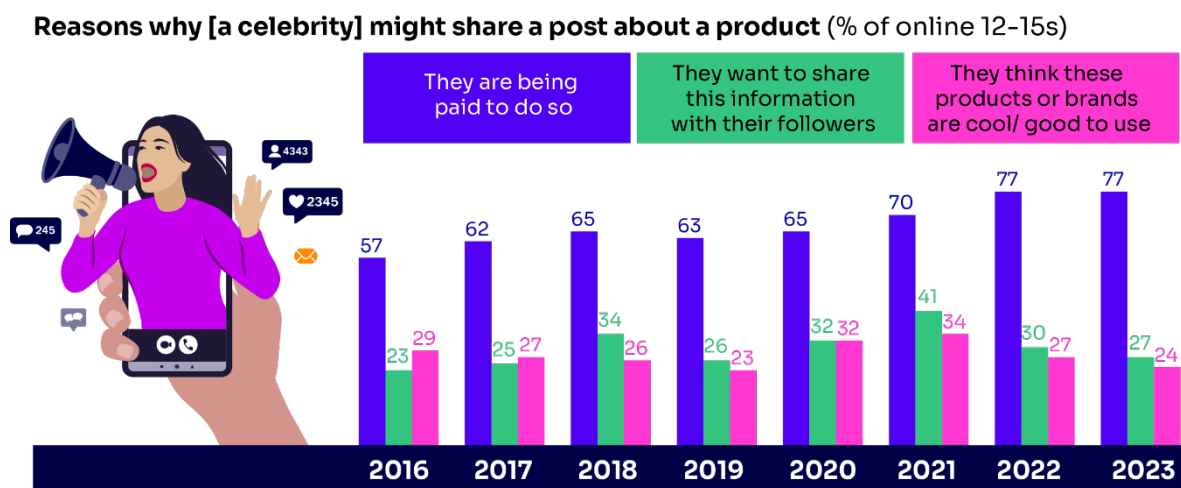
Reasons why [a celebrity] might share a post about a product (% of online 12–15s)

Note: question-wording changed slightly over the years, and the methodology changed in 2020 and 2021, so trend is indicative

# Trends in concerns and attitudes among parents

Parents' attitudes have also changed over time. In 2010, levels of concern about whom their child was in contact online with were relatively low, and remained so until 2016, when they began to increase. While identifying direct trends isn't possible after 2019, parents' concern grew considerably, as the infographic illustrates.

Parental concerns about who their child is...

...talking to within the game % of parents whose child aged 8-15 plays games online

2010	2013	2016	2019	2023
14%	8%	21%	32%	64% *

...in contact with using their mobile phone % of parents whose child aged 8-15 has a mobile phone

| 19% | 17% | 24% | 29% | 42% * |

Note: question-wording changed slightly over the years, and the methodology changed in 2020 and 2021, so trend is indicative.

This increase in concern has come alongside a relaxation of rules in some areas (although as noted earlier in this report, rules for older children have increased in some areas).
Parents of online 5-15s are increasingly likely to say they would allow their child to have an under-age social media profile, perhaps feeling that this is inevitable. In 2019, 26% said they would allow this, although 41% strongly disagreed. In 2021, albeit after some methodology changes, 34% agreed. And in 2023, 38% agreed they would allow their child to have an under-age profile, with 27% strongly disagreeing.

Finally, at an overall level, we've asked for many years about whether parents feel that the benefits of their child going online outweigh the risks. Over the period, although parents have on balance felt positive, there has been an increase in uncertainty. And when we altered the question in 2022, separating out gaming, social media, and being online more generally, we saw that parents regarded their child's gaming and use of social media as more risky than beneficial, although 57% of parents of 5-15s still thought that being online in general was a good thing for their child.
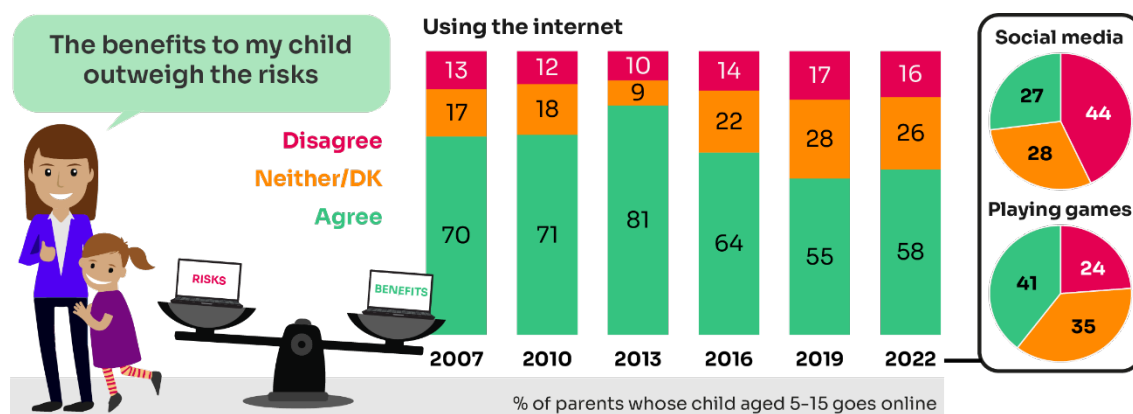
Note: question-wording changed slightly over the years, and the methodology changed in 2020 and 2021, so trend is indicative

Summary

This overview of some of the developments and trends since 2005 shows how rapid the changes in children's lives has been. Within a generation, children are behaving on a daily basis in ways that were unthinkable previously, with an always-on mindset, and a portable, largely private screen.

Their knowledge of the online landscape, and how to be savvy and safe, has been variable. In some areas there are signs of nuance, and increased awareness and changed behaviour. In others, very little has changed.

And while parental concerns in some areas have increased considerably, their enforcement of rules appears to be diminishing, in part perhaps because of resignation about their ability to intervene in their children's online lives.