Children's online safety in 2016: what are parents' concerns, how do they address these and what support do they need?

Full report by Opinion Leader

November 2016

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Executive summary

Internet Matters commissioned a programme of research over the summer of 2016 which consisted of a nationally representative online survey of 6-16 year olds and a range of qualitative work with parents and children across the country. This report summarises findings from this research in terms of how parents and children use the internet and what risks parents identify from this, how parents approach helping their children to stay safe from these risks and what help and support parents receive, or would like to receive, in doing this. It looks in particular detail at these questions in relation to cyberbullying and sexting.

Parents were mostly regular users of the internet and most were confident in their own skills online, though confidence is not universal

- Parents typically use the internet **regularly for a range of tasks** including e-mail and browsing but also commonly for shopping and banking. The convenience of using it for the latter two was widely appreciated, as was the breadth of information that can be accessed online.

- Parents' **confidence in how to use the internet varied**, with most feeling confident that they are able to do all or most of the tasks that they would want to do online, but a large minority believed that the amount of information online could be overwhelming.

Children's use of the internet is increasingly mobile and away from direct supervision

- Children access the internet from **an increasingly wide range of locations**, many of which are out of sight of their parents. Relatively **few parents said that that their children are always supervised** when they are online; many felt that this was simply not practical given how common and easy getting online is for young people.

- Parents mostly had a **nuanced view of how the internet affects children and young people**, with parents aware of many potential benefits and risks to being online. Parents identified a number of ways in which being online was useful for their children, particularly in relation to their **education**. But there was a perception from many that being online could be **unsafe** for children – more parents agreed with this statement than disagreed – and in particular highlighted the risks of being **contacted by strangers** and being exposed to **inappropriate content**.

- Some parents were also concerned about the **amount of screen time** their children had, and the knock-on effects on inactivity and face-to-face social interaction.

- Since 2013 more parents reported that their children were going online in their bedrooms and outside of the house. This is in line with general trends that have been seen in other research, for instance in Ofcom's Media Usage Tracker, which indicated in 2016 that people are becoming more likely to go

online using devices other than a computer such as tablets and smart phones[1]. Perhaps linked to this point, fewer parents that in 2013 said that they always supervise their children whilst online.

Parents use a range of technical and behavioural strategies to online safety in order to both protect and prepare their children

- Parents use a wide range of **both behavioural and technical strategies** to keep their children safe online, and most parents use a combination of both.

- Commonly used technical strategies include installing anti-virus software, applying parental controls and using safe searches. The benefits of these were seen to be that they **reduce the risk** of children accidentally discovering inappropriate content while exploring online. One theme which emerged however was around perceptions of controls and filters. Some felt that filters could not completely prevent children from coming across inappropriate content, as children may still encounter it at other people's houses, or by circumventing these filters. It should be noted however that previous research with young people themselves has suggested that a minority of children have circumvented filters. An Internet Matters survey in 2015 of children aged between 7 and 17 found that only 19% mentioned that they always, mostly or sometimes turned off or got around safety controls and 15% that they always, mostly or sometimes used proxy servers.[2] An Ofcom report from 2015 also found that just 11% of 12-15 year olds knew how to disable filters or controls and only 3% said that they had done so in the past year.[3]

- Some more authoritarian parents cited the importance of using strategies in order to **be aware of what their child was doing online**. Children spoken to in the focus groups mentioned that parents would sometimes befriend them on social media in order to keep track of what the children were posting there and who they were in touch with. Some children also mentioned that parents would check their phones or online history at times. A number of parents mentioned similar things, including directly supervising children – something that was seen to be more applicable to younger children – as well as reviewing browser histories.

- The importance of speaking to children about online safety was also commonly mentioned, in order to **build a trusted relationship** so as issues can be discussed and the child can refer any questions or worries that they have about their online lives to their parents. This was seen to be necessary as most parents noted that the methods described above for filtering and monitoring children's use of the internet were not likely to provide a full safeguard, nor were they often seen to be an ideal way to help their children to learn and grow.

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[1] See Ofcom, Media Usage Tracker 2016: https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0026/80828/2016-adults-media-use-and-attitudes.pdf?lang=uqovrjuc
[2] See Internet Matters, Pace of Change: https://www.internetmatters.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Internet_Matters_Pace_of_Change_report-final_2.pdf
[3] See Ofcom, Report on Internet Safety Measures: https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0016/31732/Third-internet-safety-report-January-2015.pdf

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- When surveyed, **most parents reported that they had spoken to their children about staying safe online**, and this was often something they thought comes up in other conversations about parenting (such as around how to treat others, or how to keep yourself safe). **A sizable minority however only did so infrequently** – once a year or less. The parents who were more likely to say that they discussed online safety regularly were those who were more concerned about risks online and **who were more confident in their own internet use**.

- Even among parents who had discussed online safety with their children, **they had not necessarily discussed all aspects of this**. As seen in later sections of this report, under half of parents had spoken to their children about sexting.

- Overall **most parents were confident that the strategies they use are sufficient** to keep their children safe online. When asked about how their strategies kept their children safe against specific risks though, around one in ten were not confident in this. Lack of confidence was also more likely among those who were less confident in their own internet use.

- Most of the children spoken to during the focus groups were also able to discuss common online issues and strategies for how to deal with them, such as taking care over what they post online, setting privacy settings on social media and blocking or reporting unwanted attention online.

- It was noted in the children's focus groups however that **they did not always refer all questions or worries immediately to their parents**, with some wanting to deal with such issues directly themselves.

- Most parents agreed, as they had in 2013, that their child's safety online was a big concern of theirs. In the current survey this proportion had risen slightly. As in 2013, most parents agreed that they knew how to keep their child safe online, and also as had been the case in 2013 most agreed that they felt equipped with the right information and tools to keep their children sage online.

Help, support and advice

- Parents typically saw themselves as **having the primary responsibility for ensuring their children's online safety**, and **most were confident** in their ability to do this.

- **Proactive help-seeking** around how to discuss online safety with children was seen to be **uncommon** outside of discussions with friends and family – many felt that it needed to be something which was set out in their own words. Although around two in five parents agreed that they needed more help and advice about reducing risks online, **few said that they were very aware of where to find this**. Parents were also not aware of most of the organisations providing information and support about online safety.

- The source that is most commonly used by parents to find out more about keeping children safe online is their **school**. Schools were cited as the source second most responsible for teaching young people about online safety (after parents), the source through which most parents had learned about children's online safety and was often given as the place parents would turn to in any scenario where

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their child faced a serious issue online. Children also commonly noted that schools had been key sources of information about information online.

- Parents both advocated for and responded positively to suggestions that **social media networks could do more** to support children's online safety in areas such as cyberbullying, preventing underage use of the networks and encouraging use of privacy settings.

- Compared to 2013, parents continued to view themselves and schools as having the most responsibility for children's online safety. As in 2013 they saw themselves as having primary responsibility. In the current study the role of schools was highlighted even more strongly – as well as being the source which was second most likely (after parents) to be seen as being responsible for keeping children safe online, schools moved up from being the second most commonly-mentioned source by which parents had learned about children's online safety in 2013 to being the most commonly-mentioned source in the current study.

Cyberbullying

- Cyberbullying was an issue which many parents were concerned about. The sheer amount of time that young people spend online and the fact that many carry online devices with them for large parts of the day was seen by some to make cyberbullying a particular challenge as it was seen to be difficult to escape the situation.

- From the perspective of the young people spoken to, cyberbullying was an issue which they were aware of within their schools. Awareness of cyberbullying among parents too is generally good; though there was often **uncertainty** amongst both parents and children about **what would be the best way to deal with a case** of cyberbullying should it emerge. In many cases parents suggested that they would speak to their child's school.

- In terms of discussing cyberbullying with their children, **most parents felt comfortable doing so** and the majority of parents had already spoken to them about this. Some parents noted that messages which were important to give to their child which related to cyberbullying – such as the importance of treating others with respect and of thinking about the effect of your words on others – were things which would come up in general parenting conversations as well as those which specifically relate to going online. There were though some pieces of advice which parents gave children that were specific to being online, for instance advising them to block bullies online, storing any evidence of online bullying and being careful about what they posted online.

- There were **some parents** (around three in ten) **who had not spoken to their children** about cyberbullying at the time of surveying. This was more common among parents of younger children, who were typically less common users of interactive services online than older children. However parental confidence, both in their own ability to use the internet and their **confidence** in discussing cyberbullying with their child, **was again an important factor** in determining how likely a parent was to have discussed this.

- When parents were asked about identifying the signs of cyberbullying, most were very confident that they would know if their child was the victim of any bullying online – partly on account of the monitoring measures which some parents undertake but also as parents felt they would pick up on behavioural cues or changes. **Parents were less confident however that they would definitely know if their child was the perpetrator of cyberbullying**, and when parents whose child had been involved in a cyberbullying incident were asked what role their child had played in this they were far more likely to identify that their child had been a victim than a perpetrator.

Sexting

- The 11-13 year old girls and boys spoken to during the qualitative work were aware of sexting as an issue, both as a result of awareness-raising in their schools and from parents, but also from stories that they are aware of from within their school cohorts where **many felt that sexting was common**. Some had also had talks from police who were investigating cases of sexting in their school.

- Sexting was something which many parents had concerns about, with one common fear being the perception that images which were posted or shared online would remain there forever. Some parents linked the issue of sexting to a broader issue that they perceived around sexualisation of young people, and felt negatively about the idea that this was something which their children would have to deal with.

- One point which was raised by some parents was that they saw **sexting as more of an issue or concern for girls than for boys**. These parents often felt that the consequences of others finding out about the fact that a girl had been involved in sexting may be worse than for a boy. It was also admitted in the qualitative work with boys aged 11-13 that even though they were aware of a range of consequences that a boy could face for receiving sext pictures, there was a status given to boys who had received these.

- Most parents said that **they were confident having discussions about sexting** with their children, but **fewer than half of parents overall had actually done so**. As with cyberbullying, parents of younger children were particularly unlikely to have discussed this, as were parents with less confidence in their own ability online. Though many parents admitted that the prospect of having a conversation about sexting with their children was awkward, few mentioned that this would be a barrier to having the conversation if they felt it was necessary. For many of those who had not discussed it, the reason they gave was that they did not think their child needed the conversation given their age or their habits.

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Conclusions and Implications

- Children's use of the internet is becoming more mobile – and more often taking place away from their parents – and also more interactive than ever, with more games, social media platforms and interactive services offering young people the opportunity to interact with each other and meet new people. In this context most parents are aware that ensuring that their children have the skills to navigate the risks that exist when online in this context is key.

- There is a need to stimulate more conversations between parents and children about sexting in particular. Though parents are conscious that these conversations are important, some of them are delaying the start of these discussions due to issues which included awkwardness, lack of confidence and wanting to preserve their children's innocence. In some cases parents' own knowledge about the issue is not complete or up to date, and one area which may be useful to address is the perception from some parents that it is more of an issue for girls. Increasing awareness of the legal implications of sexting for boys may be one useful way of doing this.

- The likelihood of having these discussions is linked to parents' own confidence, both in carrying out tasks online and their confidence that they are able to have discussions about sexting. Communications should therefore consider the tone of the messaging to be around emphasising that these conversations are something which is possible for all parents to have.

- The obvious way to contact parents about online safety is through schools – they are the source which parents most commonly see as supporting them in keeping children safe online, and a source which parents often go to for support when problems arise online. Options such as developing a code of conduct for schools around internet safety, or using schools as a base for training workshops could be explored. Given the value of starting such conversations at a young age, primary schools would be a natural starting point.

- There does not seem to be a huge call from parents for resources and tools which support them in having conversations with their children about online safety. In the qualitative groups parents felt as if this was something they were able to do themselves but was simply uncomfortable, and many parents were uncomfortable with the idea of having conversations with their children that felt directed by someone other than themselves. One thing which did prove useful at times however was having something that prompted parents to discuss issues with their children – which could come in the form of an experience which had happened in the parent or child's life, a story that they were aware of from school or a story which they heard in the media.

- One suggestion which was made during the research as to how parents could potentially be supported in future was through creating a knowledge-sharing network along the lines of a Neighbourhood Watch. Parents who signed up to the network would receive advice or news about children's online safety – in particular suggestions for potential risks that children may be exposed to online, for instance specific concerns about new games or apps, or insights into how young people are circumventing online filters and controls.

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- Work could be done alongside social media providers in order to do more to support children's safety online and to allay parents' fears about the risks of using these sites. Parents were enthusiastic when asked about all of the potential measures which social media providers could provide.

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Introduction

In summer 2016, Internet Matters commissioned Opinion Leader to conduct a piece of research looking into parents' and children's attitudes, perceptions and behaviour relating to children's online safety. This follows on from previous research in this area, including Internet Matters' 'Cybersafe' research from 2013[4], the current study aims to gain a deeper understanding into parent's and children's views and focuses on three important areas of internet safety- cyberbullying, sexting and inappropriate content.

Through exploring these areas, this study also aims to establish the help, support and advice that parents need when keeping their children safe online and, how they would like to access this help.

The findings of this research will be used to help Internet Matters in developing communications and other services to help parents and children to stay safe online and to ensure that the support that Internet Matters offers is grounded in what parents need.

This report is divided into five areas that focus on the key objectives of the research:

- The positive and negative aspects of being online

- How do parents try to keep their children safe online and why do they do it this way?

- Keeping foster children safe

- Help support and advice

- Insight into cyberbullying

- Insight into sexting

- Insight into inappropriate content

Methodology

A mixed method approach was used for this piece of research combining qualitative and quantitative methods. A short piece of desk research was also carried out before any primary research, in order to identify knowledge gaps and avoid where possible repetition of other recent studies. An overview of the primary research conducted is shown below, and more details on each element are included in Appendix 1.

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[4]Cybersafe, Research to Support a Safer Internet Campaign, September 2013 http://www.internetmatters.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Cybersafe-20-Sept-2013-Opinion-Leader-FINAL-VERSION-1.pdf

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Qualitative research took place with parents and children between June and August 2016 and consisted of the following methodologies:

- 10 Focus groups with parents of children aged between 6 and 16 years

- 2 Focus groups with young people in Year 8 school

- 8 Family interviews with parents of children, where children were aged 11-13 years

- 3 Depth interviews with parents of children who had been cyberbullied

- 3 Depth interviews with foster parents who had had experience of issues relating to cyberbullying, sexting or inappropriate content

The key fieldwork locations for the focus groups are highlighted on the map above.

The quantitative element of this study took place online across the UK access panels. A total of 1,500 fifteen minute interviews were completed with a nationally representative sample of parents who have at least one child aged between 6 and 16 years old.

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The positive and negative aspects of being online

Summary: The positives and negative aspects of being online

<u>Parents' use of the internet</u>

- Parents typically use the internet regularly for a range of tasks including e-mail and browsing but also commonly for shopping and banking. The convenience of using it for the latter two was widely appreciated. Since 2013 more parents reported using it for streaming content, using apps and using instant messaging.

- Being online was also seen to offer a number of benefits in terms of the breadth of information that can be accessed there; it could have great benefits in expanding the horizons of both parents and children and was often seen to have a net positive effect on education.

- The breadth of information available was seen to bring its own risks, including the potential to access misleading or malicious information, the risks of accidentally seeing inappropriate content.

- Parents' confidence in how to use the internet varied, with most feeling confident that they are able to do all or most of the tasks that they would want to do online, but a large minority believed that the amount of information online could be overwhelming.

<u>Children's use of the internet</u>

- Children access the internet from an increasingly wide range of locations, many of which are out of sight of their parents – such as in their bedrooms, at school and outside of the house. Since 2013 more parents reported that their children were going online in their bedrooms and outside of the house.

- Parents identified ways in which being online was useful for their children, particularly in relation to their education. But there was a perception from many that being online could be unsafe for children – more parents agreed with this idea than disagreed – and in particular highlighted the risks of being contacted by strangers and being exposed to inappropriate content.

- Some parents were also concerned about the amount of screen time their children had and the knock on effects on inactivity and face to face social interaction.

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PARENTS' USE OF THE INTERNET

Parents felt that the internet had both positive and negative implications for their children.

In both the online survey and focus groups most parents highlighted that they were regular internet users. When asked what activities they carried out online, almost nine in ten parents reported that they use it for emailing (87%) and general browsing (86%) and large numbers also reported using it for interactions like shopping (86%) and banking (80%). Since 2013, higher proportions of parents reported streaming live content (56% mentioned this, up from 46%); using or downloading apps (56%, up from 41%); and using instant messaging (59%, up from 28%).

During focus groups, parents were also asked to reflect on what they liked and disliked about going online. Parents often mentioned the sheer breadth of information that could be accessed online. In some cases parents noted this as a positive feature – the fact that it made huge amounts of information and media available to children was seen to have great potential benefits in terms of their education (which is discussed more below) and in expanding their horizons. On the other hand however, some parents felt that the breadth of information could lead to finding misleading information. Some parents felt that being online risked coming across inappropriate or malicious content. These risks are all areas which are discussed in more detail later in this report.

> *"The internet, I suppose, is a very useful tool for information at your fingertips, but there are a lot of things that you don't really want to see on there."* Parent of child in Y1/2, Cardiff

> *"I like the accessibility of information. It's very different to when I was at school, where if you wanted to find something out, you had to wait until the library opened… whereas now it's at your fingertips*." Parent of child in Y3/4, Glasgow

Overall the majority of parents felt that the positive effects of the internet outweighed the risks (58% agreed with this). Just over seven in ten (71%) also agreed that the internet was essential to everyday life. There were some parents who were more equivocal; around a third (35%) neither agreed nor disagreed that the positive effects of being online outweighed the risks and three in ten (30%) disagreed with the statement that 'the internet is a safe place for children to be' – a slightly higher proportion than agreed with that statement (27%).

> *"I dislike it because it's very, very hard to police for safety reasons for the children. I would say it's impossible*" Parent of child in Y7/8, Glasgow

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Most parents are confident about using the internet

Parents were asked a series of questions about their levels of confidence in using the internet, and responses to these reflected a spectrum of opinions, from a sizable proportion who felt highly confident, a majority in most cases who were fairly confident but not entirely, and a smaller proportion who had limited confidence and comfort in their ability online.

When asked to rate their confidence overall online, around two in five parents (43%) said that they were confident that they knew how to do everything they would want to do on the internet. Around half (48%) were in the second-most confident category, agreeing that they could do most of what they would want to do on the internet but that there were still some things they could not do. There were also smaller proportions of parents who were largely not confident in their ability to use the internet – around one in ten (9%) said that they could do basic things on the internet but that there were still many things they could not do, and 1% said that they had difficulties using the internet for any task at all (Chart 1A). Older parents – aged over 55 – women and those in lower socio-economic groups were more likely to be less confident in their answers to this question. Parents in the qualitative sessions often felt that children were more competent online than they were and also adept at circumnavigating security passwords.

> "*I was about to say that children are more switched on technologically than I am*" Parent of child in Y3/4, Birmingham

> "*I've spoken to them about it because our children are wiser than us, even at ten. They can go on and change parental guidance, parental settings*" Parent of child in Y5/6, Birmingham

In terms of their ability to use internet devices, just over half of parents (53%) <u>disagreed</u> with the statement 'I am not confident using internet devices'. Just under a quarter (24%) agreed though that this was the case. In terms of content online a slightly greater proportion of parents were anxious about the scale – nearly four in ten (37%) agreed with the statement that 'There is so much on the internet it feels overwhelming', while a smaller proportion (30%) disagreed with this. (Chart 1B).

Chart 1A: Q. Which of the following statements best describes your own levels of confidence in using the internet? Base: All participants (1,500)

Chart 1B: Q. There is so much on the internet it feels overwhelming. Base: All participants (1,500)

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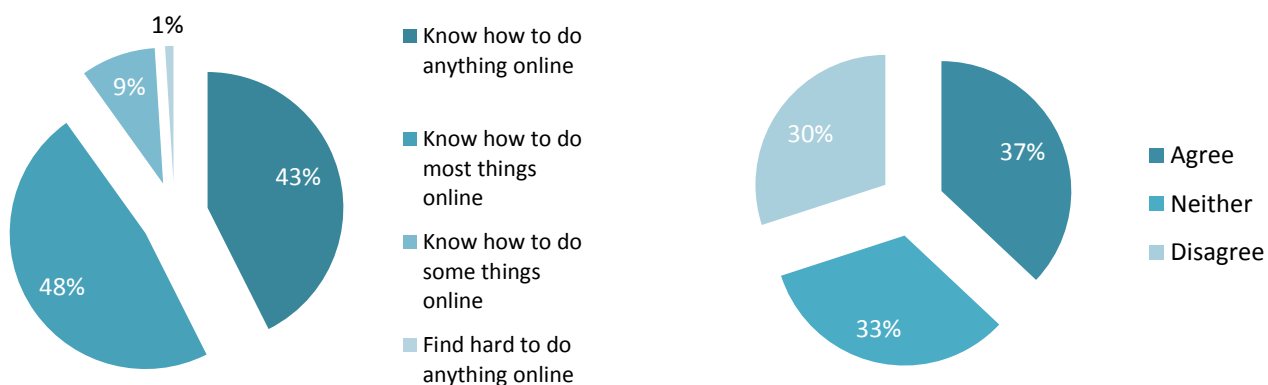
CHILDREN'S USE OF THE INTERNET

Children's access to the internet is increasingly mobile and taking place away from parents

Parents were also asked to describe their children's online behaviour, in terms of both what they are accessing and where they access it. In terms of where they go online, the most common place for children to access the internet is at home in a room shared by the family and under supervision (67%). However, over half of children (54%) also go online in shared spaces without supervision, and around three in five (61%) children use devices in their bedroom. Outside of the home, just under half of children (42%) access the internet at school, and a similar proportion has access outside the home, on the go or at a friend's house (41%). The trend here since this question was previously asked in 2013 indicates that children's online access is becoming increasingly mobile centric , with children being significantly more likely to be using internet devices in their bedroom and outside the home compared to in 2013.[5]

In terms of the activities children are taking part in when they are online, some elements of this varied with age while other types of use were consistent among children of all ages. At all ages gaming (participation levels between 68% and 78% of children were noted for gaming on mobile phones or tablets) and using computers for work or schoolwork (participation levels between 74% and 86% of children) were common. General browsing online became more common as children became older, rising from 48% among 6 year olds to 84% 16 year olds which is almost the same rate at which adults reported browsing (86%).

Use of instant messaging became more popular at around the time children started secondary school with usage jumping from 45% among children aged 10 to 62% among children aged 12. Use of social media also rose from 43% to 59% at the same time. Usage of both rose again by age 14, so that by this age around three quarters of children were using instant messaging (73%) and social media (76%).

Of those children that use social networking sites, the most popular was Facebook with almost 8 out of 10 children using this site (76%). Of the children who do use social media, a slightly smaller proportion were Facebook users than in 2013, when almost all parents whose children were on social media said that they used Facebook (97%).[6] Other popular social media sites were used by around half of children, these included YouTube (61%), Instagram (56%), Snapchat (54%) and WhatsApp (53%). Many children use instant messaging services as well as social media networks. These services are used by the majority of children who use them for individual messaging (81%) but over half of children are also involved in group conversations (54%).

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[5] An additional answer code was added to this question in 2016 so the code from 2013 'At home in a room shared by the family' was split into 'At home in a room shared by the family under supervision' and 'At home in a room shared by the family without supervision'. All other codes remained the same.
[6] Additional answer codes for this question were added in 2016, for YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, WhatsApp, Skype, Vine, Musical.ly, Reddit, Vimeo and LinkedIn.

Parents have a nuanced view of how the internet affects children and young people

When parents were asked how they felt that the internet affected certain areas of their child's life, in most areas the most common response was that these could be both positively and negatively affected by going online (see chart overleaf). There were however some exceptions to this, in which the internet was either seen to have a net positive or negative effect. In terms of education, this was mostly seen as being positively influenced by the internet as it provided a good source for games and tools related to learning and opportunities to quickly and conveniently carry out research. Some children received homework via email.

> *"The advantage is that they can do their homework on there and they have access to masses of information. The disadvantages are, with social networking, I'm really worried about online bullying, and it seems to be prevalent in pretty much all of society now."* Parent of child in Y3/4, Birmingham

On the other hand, as was mentioned before around three in ten parents (30%) disagreed that the internet is a safe place for children to be; and seven in ten (68%) say that their children's safety online is a big concern, up slightly from the figure from 2013 (64%). Two specific areas in which parents were more likely to feel that the internet had a more negative effect than positive were in relation to being exposed to inappropriate content and having contact with strangers. The latter in particular was a theme which also emerged strongly from the qualitative work as something which many parents felt was a key risk of their children being online. It was noted that online chats and gaming were platforms through which this can occur. Of particular note in many of the discussions was the fear that people who contact their children online may not be who they say they are.
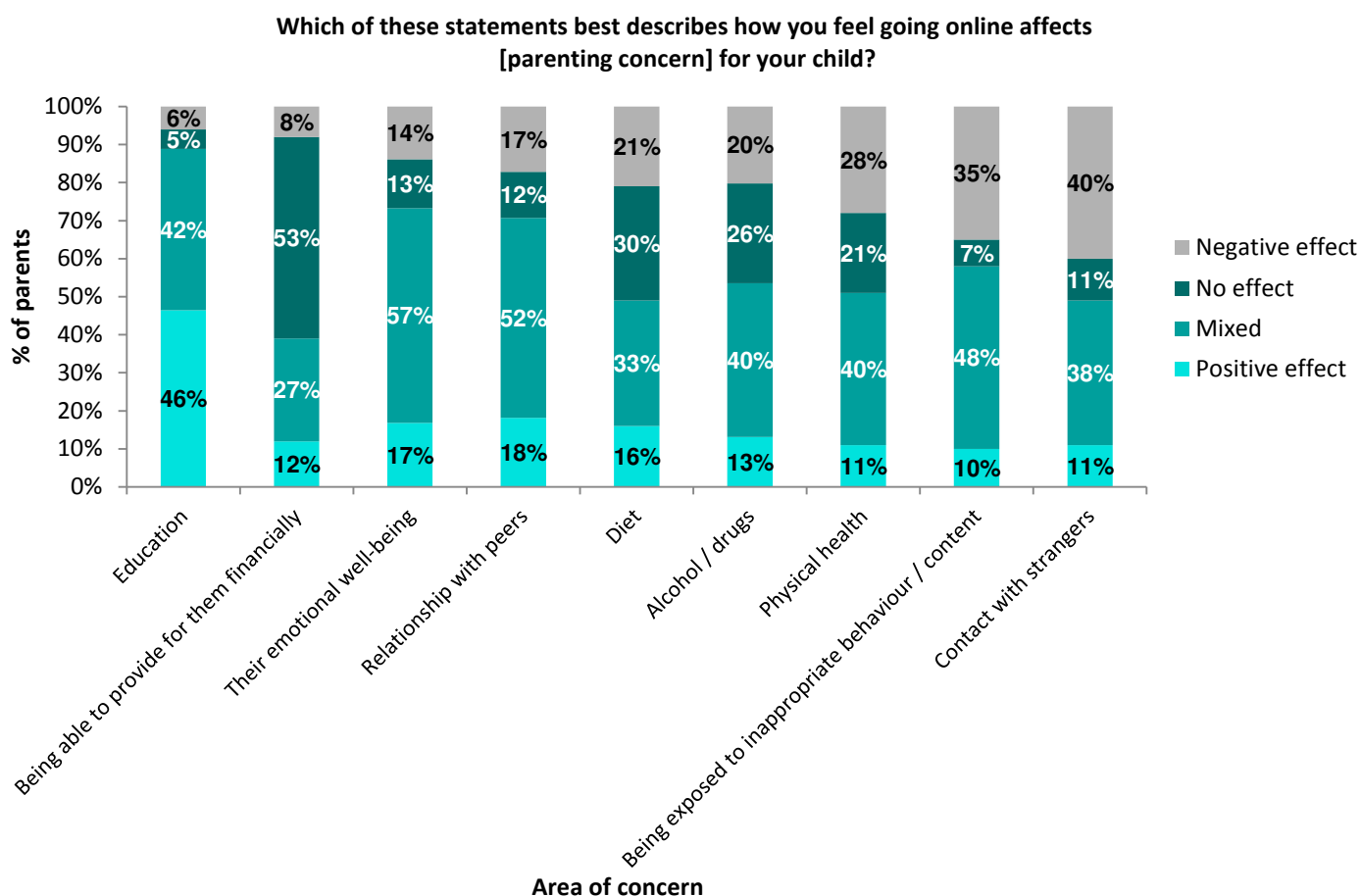
> **"***My dislike is that it's faceless. You don't know who is talking, who is there. It could be anybody, really."* Parent of child Y7/8, Glasgow

> *"They play games with people online, and he's, 'I know so-and-so, and he's fifteen years old.' How do you know? You don't because all you can hear is a voice, and anyone can put a picture of their profile. It could be anybody"* Parent of child aged 11-13, Birmingham

> *"Risks, I see as, you know, the safety aspect, they're only ever a couple of clicks away from things you don't want them to see."* Parent of child Y1/2, Cardiff

In addition to accessing inappropriate content, parents were also concerned that the internet has taken over the lives of their children in some ways. Children are seen to spend more time in their rooms alone, not socialising with others and spending very little time being physically active outside.

> *"I do worry about his social skills... they don't go out in the street and play anymore, like they used to...like, outside of school, you know. They can use the internet to socialise with friends, but then it's not the same as being outside."* Parent of child Y1/2, Cardiff
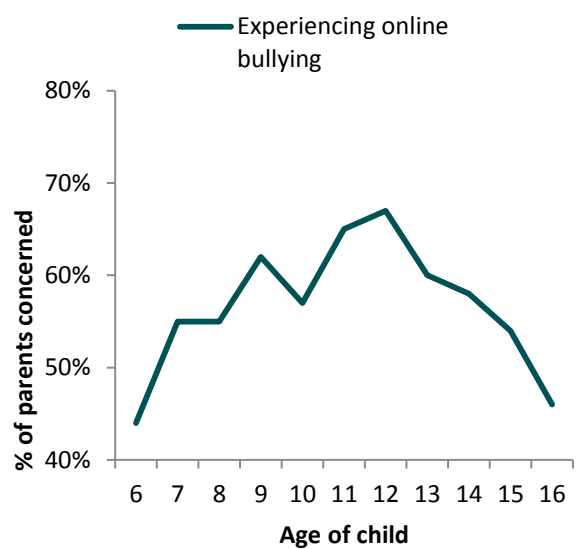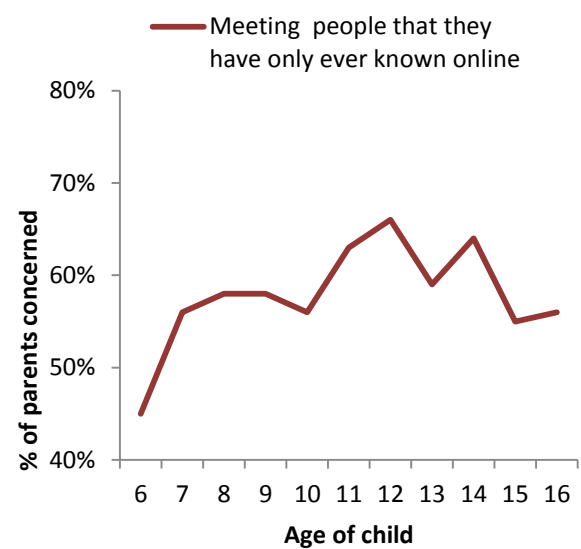
opinion leader

Which of these statements best describes how you feel going online affects [parenting concern] for your child?

Legend:
- Negative effect (grey)
- No effect (dark teal)
- Mixed (teal)
- Positive effect (cyan)

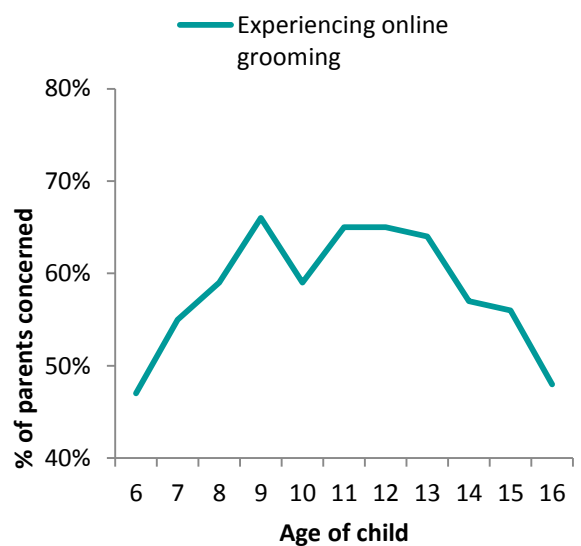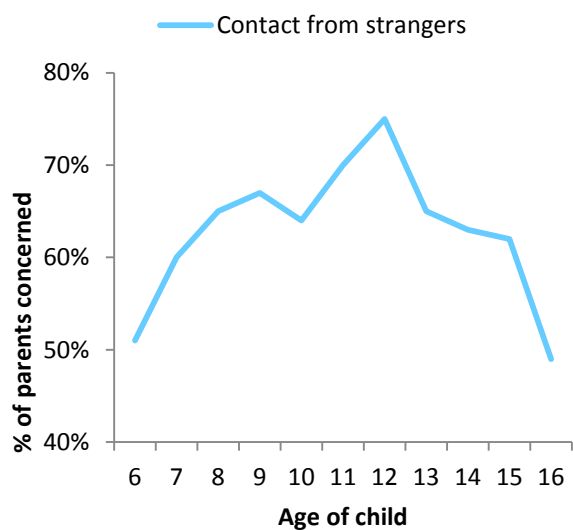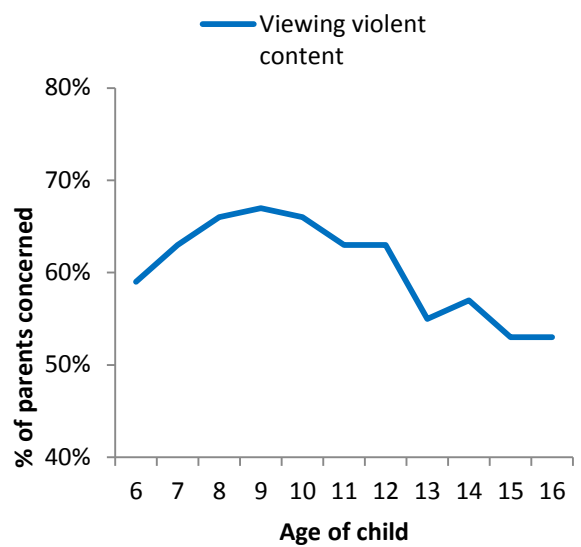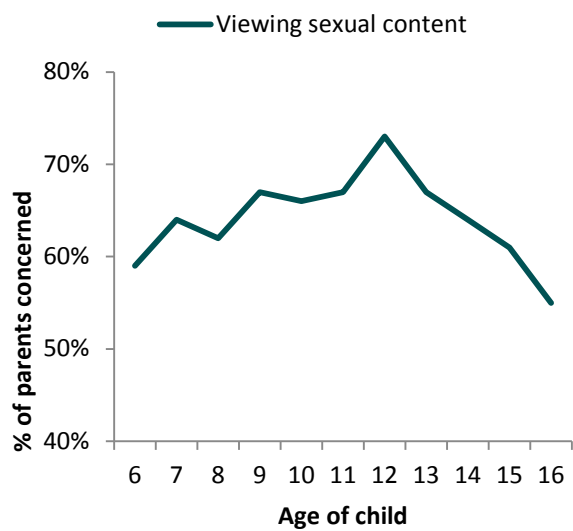| Area of concern	Positive effect	Mixed	No effect	Negative effect
Education	46%	42%	5%	6%
Being able to provide for them financially	12%	27%	53%	8%
Their emotional well-being	17%	57%	13%	14%
Relationship with peers	18%	52%	12%	17%
Diet	16%	33%	30%	21%
Alcohol / drugs	13%	40%	26%	20%
Physical health	11%	40%	21%	28%
Being exposed to inappropriate behaviour / content	10%	48%	7%	35%
Contact with strangers	11%	38%	11%	40%

Chart 2: Q. Which of these statements best describes how you feel going online affects [parenting concern] for your child? Base: All participants who highlighted this area as a key concern Education (445) Being able to provide for them financially (397) Their emotional well-being (721) Relationship with peers (294) Diet (206) Alcohol/drugs (315) Physical health (610) Being exposed to inappropriate behaviour/content (526) Contact with strangers (522)

A nuanced view of the effects that being online can have was also reflected when parents were asked to give an overall view of their children's safety online. Almost 4 in 10 parents feel that online risks are no more dangerous than those in their everyday lives (37%) whilst around 3 in 10 disagree with this (28%). There are also mixed views with the statement "the internet is a safe place to be" with 43% of parents neither agreeing nor disagreeing with this statement. Although parents are mixed in their views of whether the internet as a whole is safe or not, half of parents (50%) do not think that the risks are exaggerated. This is in line with how parents answered in 2013, when 37% agreed that online risks were no more dangerous than those in their everyday lives and 30% disagreed. Similarly, in 2013 50% of parents did not think that the risks of being online were exaggerated, the same proportion as in this current survey.

The main risks of being online were seen to change with age

For younger children, parents' worries surrounded what they see online, but as they get older this changes to worries around what they share and who they interact with.

opinion leader

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Children's online safety in 2016Children's online safety in 2016

opinion leader

Chart 4: Q. To what extent do the following concern you as risks to your [X] year old child when they go online? Base: All participants (1500)

For many topics the point at which most parents peaked was around the age of 12. Parents of younger children, those aged 6 or 7, highlighted the risks of seeing sexual or violent content more commonly than the risks of contact from strangers or other risks related to interacting online. Parents of children older than 12 also became gradually less concerned about most risks, though when asked about the risk of meeting someone that they had only ever met online, parents of older children remained concerned even up to age 16 – by which point this was the risk that they were most concerned by.

Children's online safety in 2016

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How do parents try to keep their children safe and why do they do it this way?

Summary: How do parents try to keep their children safe and why do they do it this way?

- Parents use a wide range of both behavioural and technical strategies to keep their children safe online, and most parents use a combination of both.

- Commonly used technical strategies include installing anti-virus software, applying parental controls and using safe searches. The benefits of these were seen to be that they reduce the risk of children accidentally discovering inappropriate content while exploring online. One theme which emerged however was around perceptions of controls and filters. Some felt that filters could not completely prevent children from coming across inappropriate content, as children may still encounter it at other people's houses, or by circumventing these filters.

- A strategy which was also mentioned some more authoritarian parents was in some way observing or monitoring what their children did online. A number of different methods were mentioned for this, including directly supervising children, reviewing browser history and friending them on social media.

- The importance of speaking to children about online safety was also commonly mentioned, in order to build a trusted relationship in which the child can refer any questions or worries that they have about their online lives to their parents. Some parents highlighted the importance of this given that they did not feel able to monitor their child's internet use all of the time and to ensure that if they were to come across inappropriate content or find themselves in a difficult situation the child would know what to do.

- When surveyed, most parents reported that they had spoken to their children about staying safe online, but a sizable minority only did so infrequently – once a year or less. The parents who were more likely to say that they discussed online safety regularly were those who were more concerned about risks online and who were more confident in their own internet use.

- Most parents agreed, as they had in 2013, that their child's safety online was a big concern of theirs. In the current survey this proportion had risen slightly. As in 2013, most parents agreed that they knew how to keep their child safe online, and also as had been the case in 2013 most agreed that they felt equipped with the right information and tools to keep their children sage online.

opinion leader

- Overall most parents were confident that the strategies they use are sufficient to keep their children safe online, as had been the case in 2013. When asked about specific risks however, around one in ten were not confident that the strategies they used were sufficient to keep their children safe from these. Lack of confidence was also more likely among those who were less confident in their own internet use.

- It was noted in the children's focus groups however that they did not always refer all questions or worries immediately to their parents, with some wanting to deal with such issues directly themselves.

Most parents said that they use a mix of both behavioural and technical strategies to keep their children safe online

Most parents reported that they used a mix of different strategies in order to try and address some of the risks related to being online which were mentioned in the previous chapter.

Online filters and safe searches were met with mixed views, parents felt that they were useful but they had some limitations

One of the most commonly mentioned technical strategies both in the online survey and during qualitative work was the use of parental controls and safe search. Some parents felt that putting online blocks in place worked well and provided the support that they needed in order to allow children to browse more safely, or to prevent them from accessing inappropriate content.

"We've also got the Norton Family set up for both the children. It obviously prevents them going on to websites that wouldn't be appropriate for their age or, you know, websites they shouldn't be looking at. You know how sometimes you might type something in, and it'll bring things up, and it's not always what you want it to bring up. It can bring up stuff that you didn't mean but obviously, because we've got the controls, he can't... Hopefully, it will help." Parent of child aged 11-13, London

"I've seen it in the history of what he'd been on. So I blocked YouTube and, you know-, because I hadn't put a control on until I found that because I trusted him. Then when I found that, I put the control on" Parent of child in Y5/6, Newcastle

There were concerns that parents raised however, about the use of filters. One concern was mentioned was that applying filters may make it difficult to access other content which they did not intend to filter out. One example was given by a parent who described an internet search for football boots that was blocked due to a gambling advert appearing on a sports website.

"The restrictions are not that good, in terms of it'll stop them going on over-eighteen sites, but he loves football. Sports Direct, if he wants to have a look for new football boots, it won't even let him

opinion leader

on that website because, apparently, the gambling on the bottom. There are poker advertisements that run along the website, so he can't even go on them" Parent of child, Y5/6 Newcastle

*"You can block it on Virgin, but then it will block it on every device. If you try and watch a film eighteen, it's going to affect, you know"*Parent* of child Y7/8, London

It should be noted that in the examples given the parents perceptions of how the filters work was actually incorrect. The Sports Direct website would be categorised as shopping and only blocked if the parent chose to block the site. Virgin Media TV content is separately controlled by the parental controls on their on demand service. This indicates that parents have varying levels of understanding about how controls work and how to use them effectively.

Another concern that was raised around filters and safe searches was that there are ways in which children are still able to view inappropriate content even if these are in place. One method which was described for this was by accessing content in different locations or different devices which do not have the safe search turned on, something which may be increasingly possible given the increasing range of locations and devices in which children are going online. Other parents mentioned that they felt their children were sufficiently technically advanced that they would be able to bypass any filters which they had applied.

"*We put in a restriction, whether it be under ten, twelve, whatever such like but they go around to their friends' for a couple of hours. They have tablets and devices with them and they're picking up all kinds from the other brothers and such like. I don't think there's an easy fix*" Parent of child Y3/4, Birmingham

"*I was about to say that children are more switched on technologically than I am as well so any filters that I might put on, they're so clever that the teachers have told me that they're able to navigate around those filters*" Parent of child Y3/4, Birmingham

It should be noted however that prior research with young people indicated that the actual rate of young people getting around filters was relatively low. Only just under one in five (19%) mentioned that they had turned off or got around any safety controls, and 15% mentioned that they had used a proxy server to access websites or apps. [7]

Lastly, one further barrier to using filters was highlighted by some parents. Some parents highlighted that they did not use filters because they did not feel technically able to implement them.

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[7] See Internet Matters, Pace of Change: https://www.internetmatters.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Internet_Matters_Pace_of_Change_report-final_2.pdf

Children's online safety in 2016

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During the focus groups with young people most did not think that they had parental controls on at their home, though some noted that they did at school[8]. The mixed opinions from parents extended to their views on technical tools in general. Parents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with two statements about technical tools - "the technical tools available are too restrictive" and "the technical tools available are easy to use". In both cases the most commonly given response from parents was that they neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement.
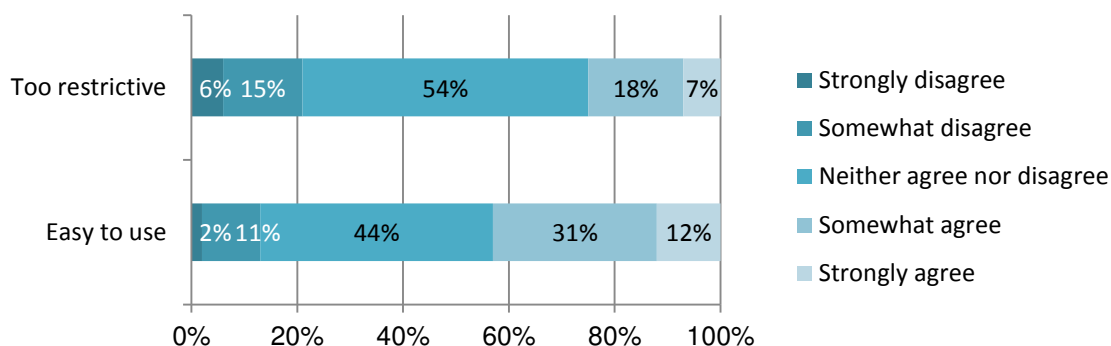

Chart 5: Q: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements: The technical tools available are too restrictive; The technical tools available are easy to use Base: All participants (1500)

Those parents who agreed with more authoritative statements about parenting – for instance 'I always know what my children are doing and where they are' or 'I would not let my children do anything I would not do' were more likely to agree that technical tools were easy to use, compared to those parents who were more permissive. There were no significant differences between the groups however in terms of the extent to which they found technical tools too restrictive.

Another technical feature which was mentioned in the qualitative research was parents defining social media settings for their children, or parents and children working alongside them together. Most commonly the emphasis of this strategy was on ensuring that children did not make friends with anyone who the parent did not know or approve of, reflecting the high levels of concern that parents had about their children talking to strangers online.

> *"My son is fifteen. We set his Facebook up for him. He set his own Instagram up only with permission from us that he could do it and the same with my daughter. My daughter is not on Facebook yet… [my daughter's] Instagram is all set to private and I know that my son's Facebook is all private"* Parent of child who was the victim of cyberbullying

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[8] It should be noted that we did not capture information about whether or not parents actually had implemented parental controls at home

Supervision, observation and monitoring of children's online use were also used by some parents in order to support keeping children safe

Given the variety of locations and devices on which children go online (especially mobiles), it is perhaps not surprising that most parents do not always supervise their children's internet use. Just under one fifth (19%) always supervise their children whilst online, something which has changed since 2013, at which point there were significantly more parents always supervising their children (30%). The change here is mostly among parents of children aged between 6 and 12 saying fewer of them now supervise their children all of the time when they are online. One potential explanation for this is the greater use of tablets which allow movement throughout the home while being online. In 2016 the majority of parents reported that they "sometimes" (41%) or "often" (36%) supervise their children online.

To what extent are you present to supervise your children when they are online, using computer devices?
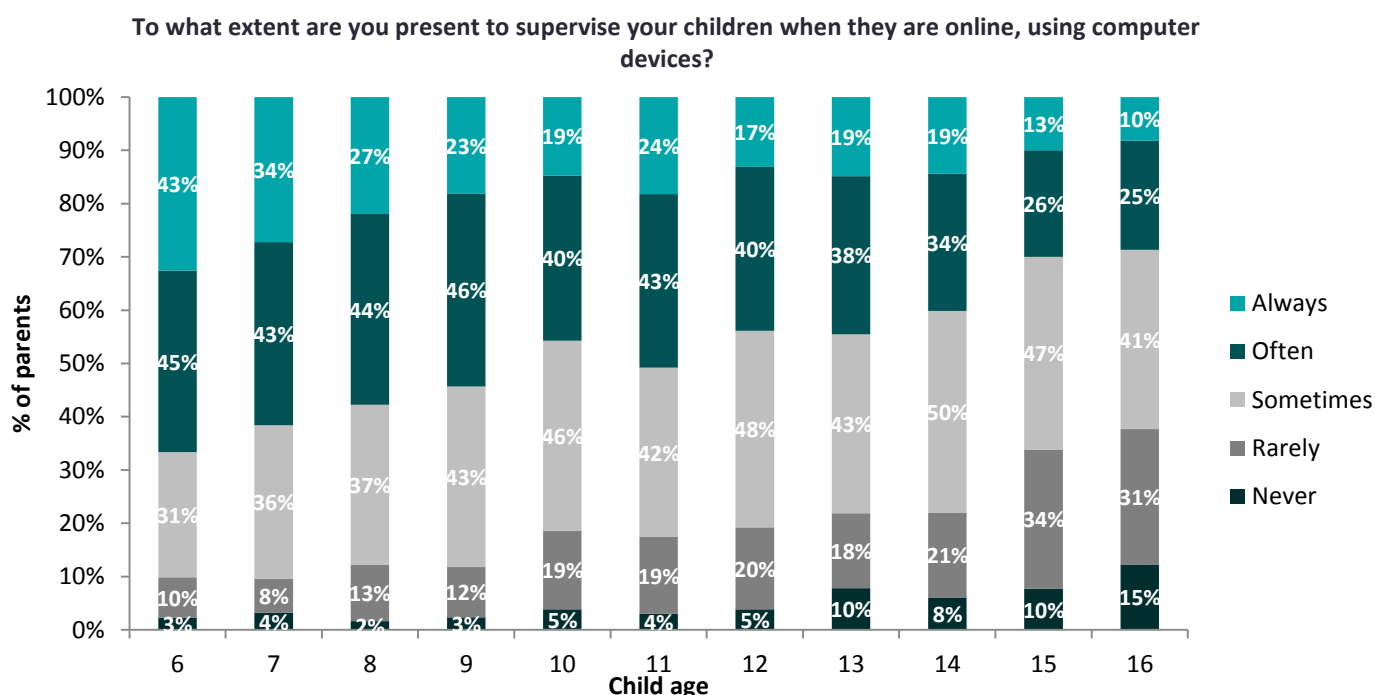
Chart 6: Q. To what extent are you there to supervise your children when they are online, using computer devices? Base: All participants (1500), 6 years (185), 7 years (208), 8 years (212), 9 years (228), 10 years (222), 11 years (218), 12 years (214), 13 years (204), 14 years (213), 15 years (208), 16 years (194).

Parents had mixed views as to whether supervision was enough to keep their children safe online. Around half overall (53%) agreed that this was enough to keep them safe, but this varies with age – parents of younger children were more likely to agree that supervision is sufficient while parents of older children were more likely to disagree. This may be related to a range of factors which change with age, including the wider range of locations and devices in which older children go online, the wider range of activities which they carry out whilst online and older children's perceived technical skills, all of which mean that supervision was felt to need to be coupled with other approaches.

If someone is supervising my child while they are online, this is enough to keep them safe
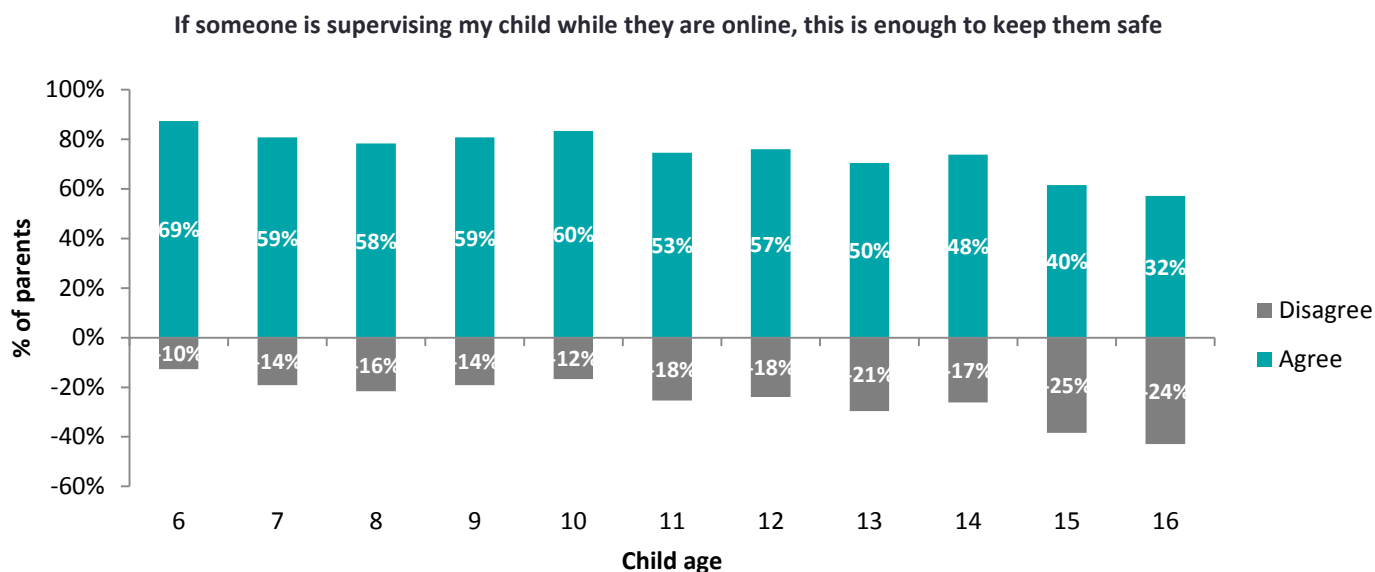

Chart 7: Q. If someone is supervising my child while they are online, this is enough to keep them safe. Base: All participants (1500), 6 years (185), 7 years (208), 8 years (212), 9 years (228), 10 years (222), 11 years (218), 12 years (214), 13 years (204), 14 years (213), 15 years (208), 16 years (194).

Finding other ways to monitor children's online behaviour was also seen to be useful as a means of understanding what parents may need to act on

One of the factors which was seen to be useful for some parents who could not or did not want to undertake direct supervision was finding additional ways in which they could monitor what their children were doing online. One method which was mentioned by around two in five parents (38%) was checking their children's internet browser history.
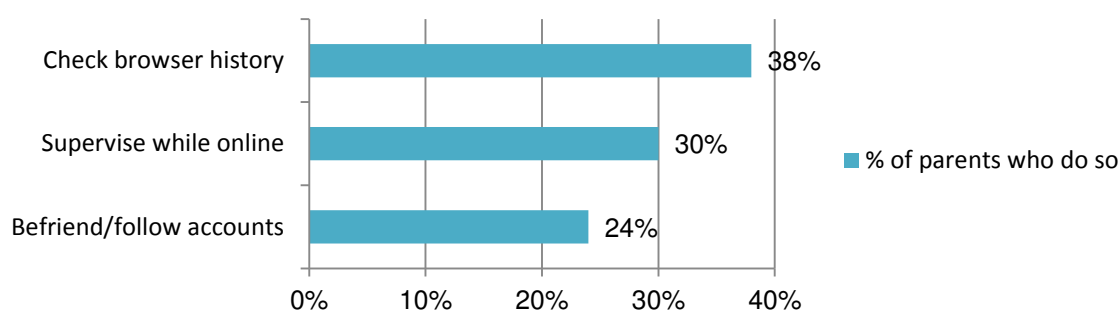
Chart 8: Q. Which of the following do you use or do to ensure your child(ren)'s safety online? (1500)

> *"The oldest one, when he first went on, started playing games. We used to monitor what he used to do. It got to a point where he went to bed. Occasionally we'd just pick up his tablet and just go through his history and see what he's been doing or anything"* Parent of child in Y3/4, Birmingham

Children's online safety in 2016

"My son, he's just not bright, and just puts his date of birth [as his password]... I just check everything on it because he wouldn't think that I would ever know what his password is" Parent of child in Y9/10, Newcastle

"My parents just check randomly" Boys Focus Group

"It can't just be, 'I'm checking your history.' 'Look what Daddy was doing today. I was doing this.' It's just like a proper, kind of, emotional bond where you're showing, they're showing. It's not just all about, 'I'm checking on you" Parent of child in Y1/2, London

As the quotes indicate, there were different approaches to how parents monitored their children's histories. The first quotes indicates a more common approach, whereby the parents would monitor their child's internet or phone use without the child being present – often by looking through a phone, tablet or computer while the child was away or asleep. In that case, if the parents identified anything that they were concerned by they could follow up by having a conversation with the child or taking some other action – for instance applying new filters. The last quote indicated a less common approach but one which illustrates the kind of trusted relationships that many parents hoped to build with their children, in which they parent and child discuss the child's online use together and collectively address any issues which the child has.

Parents did note some drawbacks to the monitoring approach – one of which was that children would often delete browser histories, or hide files or photos that they did not want their parents to see.

"100%. My son knows how to delete the history" Parent of child in Y5/6, Birmingham

"There was one quite interesting where one of the kids in the school was caught with some, I don't know, indecent images and apparently, there was an app that's hidden behind a calculator that can hide images that some children were using" Parent of child aged 11-13, London

A second method for monitoring young people online was related specifically to social media accounts, where parents would befriend their children in order to be able to see what content they were posting or who they were making connections with.

"They live their life on music and Instagram and I don't understand any of it, but my wife's on it and she's friends with her on there and she can monitor everything on there" Parent of child in Y9/10, Newcastle

Another area in which parents felt that this could help was that it discouraged children from posting content which they would be unhappy for their parents, or their friends' parents to see. The parents felt that this may prevent them from posting either inappropriate or impolite content.

"A friend polices friends on the Snapchat thing or something, and a few of them are on it. What happened was she phoned my wife and she said, 'I've just seen what Sarah has posted up.' This is my youngest daughter. 'She's posted something inappropriate.'... So, my wife and I talked about it, and she said, 'We'll need to talk to her about this" Parent of child in Y7/8, Glasgow

opinion leader

"We've actually got a pretty good group of mothers and fathers, who we all socialise with one another as well outside of school. Some parents forensically examine their child online. It's good, I mean, if they're well aware of what's happening to their child. We've got a good idea, because our child is within that group, so I think if you're in a sensible group, speak to the parents. You'll have a general idea." Parent of child in Y7/8, London

Children whose parents had friended them on social media said that they were very conscious of the language and images that they posted online. They also worried about the posts that their friends had made especially if they contained swearing or other inappropriate messages. Having their parents monitoring their social media in this way was often resented as an infringement of their freedom to express themselves and could be embarrassing.

"When I'm on Facebook [which her parents are on] I probably post general stuff but the things that you find on Snapchat [which they are not], you just post anything within reason" Girls Focus Group

"I just wouldn't be as… careful with what I say [if my parents were not friends online]" Boys Focus Group

"I see other people's pictures, like their mum's commented... 'My beautiful girl.'… 'My baby boy.'" *"Yes, why they comment their own stuff when they see them every day."* Two participants in Boys Focus Group

It was noted by one parent though that it was harder to do this on Snapchat, because of the instant delete function.

"My wife is on Instagram, so she monitors what he does, his WhatsApp. He knows we look at his phone, but the Snapchat one, with the instant delete thing...Then he'll know if we've looked at something, because it will just disappear" Parent of child in Y7/8, London

Young people also noted that Snapchat was one platform on which their parents were less likely to be present.

Discussions about staying safe online were seen to be key by many parents, although not all parents conducted these regularly

Although the technical and monitoring approaches mentioned above were seen by users to play a useful role, many acknowledged that they were not sufficient to keep young people safe online as they grow up. Education for children about the risks of going online and how to navigate these responsibly was seen to be important in ensuring that they grow up able to use the internet safely.

"Now, I think, like me, with my parents, I couldn't say anything to them. I didn't have open parents at all. Now I'm making sure that I'm not going to be like that. I think maybe, now, a lot of parents, parents I speak to, have the same mind set as me, that it's better to speak about it than not. You want your children to be educated about every aspect of life, and you know, some are bad, some

are good, but you've got to educate them. That's the only way that they're going to learn, and I think it's a parent's responsibility to go ahead and do it, and not shy away, and not see anything about topics that are a bit cringe-worthy" Parent of child in Y5/6, Newcastle

It was also suggested during the qualitative work that given the impracticality of supervising and monitoring children's online usage at all times – especially as they grow older – that it was important for parents to establish a trusted relationship with their child in which the child felt comfortable to raise any questions or worries about their life online with the parent.

"I'd rather do it in a way that they feel comfortable that they'd come to me if there was a problem or they weren't sure about something" Parent of child aged 11-13, London

"My oldest boy...we've got a really open relationship, he just tells me everything...which is, kind of, why I trust him and he's on all, sorts of sites....he'd got a message off a young boy who was supposed to be eleven, it was really an inappropriate message, something about his sister. He came straight to me, he said, 'Mam, I've got this,' and I noticed there was a phone number at the top. So I rang it straight away, I didn't know what it was, how it was there, I didn't know how he'd got-, I just didn't know. I rang it and it was a man, I had to get the police involved. It was only one or two messages, but it was literally, he had messaged this inappropriate thing, my son has messaged back saying, 'I'm blocking you, please don't talk to me.' Then I rang him up, it was a man, it got passed to the police. So, I'm kind of pleased, in a way, that I do completely trust him and anything at all, even slightly inappropriate, he comes and tells us" Parent of child in Y5/6, Newcastle

Almost all responses from parents (94%) reported that they had spoken to their children about online safety at least once, although in 6% of cases the participant said that they never have. Most parents reported that they spoke to their children once a month (38%) or every couple of months (28%), however just over a third (35%) had either spoken to their child about online safety a couple of times a year or less often.
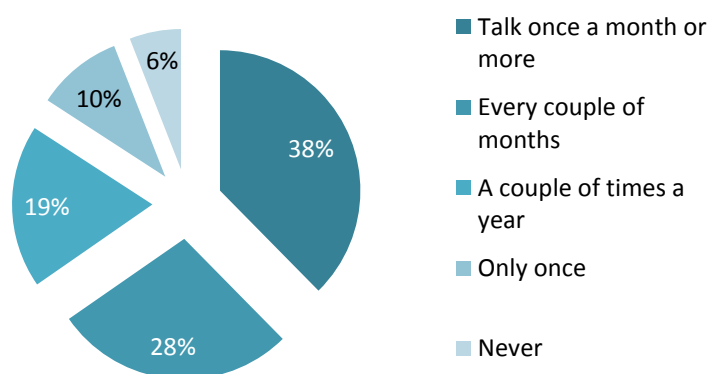

Chart 9: Q. How often do you talk to your children about being safe online. Base: All participants (1500)

Children's online safety in 2016

Certain participant types were more likely to talk regularly with their children about online safety. Mothers were more likely than fathers to report that they talked about online safety on a monthly basis (41% of mothers reported this compared with 33% of fathers). Parents with more children were also more likely to report monthly conversations (44% of parents with three or more children reported doing so, compared to 34% of parents with only one child). In the qualitative work, older siblings were also mentioned as a factor which could affect a child's experience of going online in multiple ways. One effect of having older siblings was seen to be that a child could be exposed to certain types of online content at a younger age – potentially inappropriate content but also social network sites and instant messaging services. A second effect of having older siblings however was that parents would sometimes draw on the experience or technical knowledge of an older sibling in order to support the younger sibling to behave more safely.

> "*I am worried about YouTube. She sees her older sister looking at those videos… and she wants to have a look*" Parent of child in Y1/2, London

In addition to demographic differences between those parents who talked more commonly and those who did not, there were also differences in terms of their attitudes towards other aspects of being online. Those who talked monthly were also more likely to be concerned about issues relating to being online such as cyberbullying and sexting, but they were also more likely to say that they felt confident discussing those issues - and were also more likely to have actually discussed those issues. Those who were more confident in using the internet themselves were also more likely to report regular conversations (40% of those who said that they could do anything they need to online said that they spoke to their children monthly or more) than those with lower confidence (30% of those who said that they were confident in doing some tasks but needed help with many said that they spoke to their children once a month or more).

The most commonly discussed topics for discussion included talking to strangers and accessing appropriate content

In terms of what these conversations about online safety cover, the content of the discussions reflect some of the common fears that parents had noted about children's safety online – in particular concerns about talking to strangers – 74% of participants noted that they talked to their children about this - and about accessing inappropriate content – 60% of participants noted that they talked to their children about clicking on pop-ups and 57% said that they involved either advice or rules on what content children should see or listen to. Three in five also mentioned that they spoke to their children about online bullying (60%) and more than half about how children should behave while talking to others online (51%). This will be discussed more in the chapter on cyberbullying.
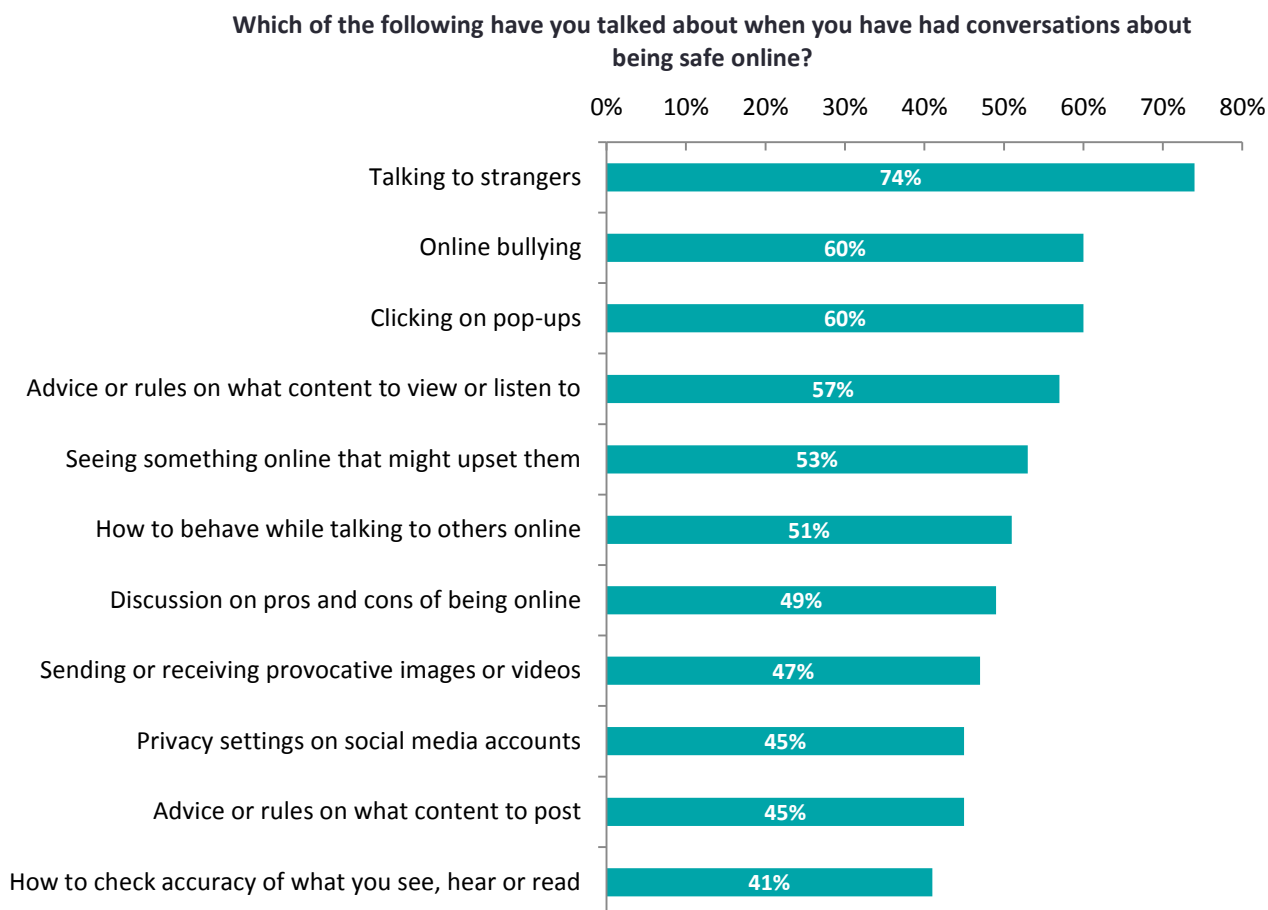
opinion leader

Which of the following have you talked about when you have had conversations about being safe online?

Topic	Percentage
Talking to strangers	74%
Online bullying	60%
Clicking on pop-ups	60%
Advice or rules on what content to view or listen to	57%
Seeing something online that might upset them	53%
How to behave while talking to others online	51%
Discussion on pros and cons of being online	49%
Sending or receiving provocative images or videos	47%
Privacy settings on social media accounts	45%
Advice or rules on what content to post	45%
How to check accuracy of what you see, hear or read	41%

Chart 9: Q. Which of the following have you talked about when you have had conversations about being safe online? Base: All participants (1500)

Children spoken to during the qualitative focus groups were aware of many of these key messages as well. Participants were very aware of what content to post and the potential consequences of posting something online which they would later not want to be associated with.

> *"Know that when you post something, it's going be there forever"* Girls' Focus Group

> *"If you have a job in the future, they'll look you up"* Girls' Focus Group

The young people spoken to were also well versed in strategies for dealing with risks which might come from unwanted contact online – either from strangers and online bullying.

> *"If it's some stranger then they probably don't know who you are, just any random person, so you just block them"* Boys Focus Group
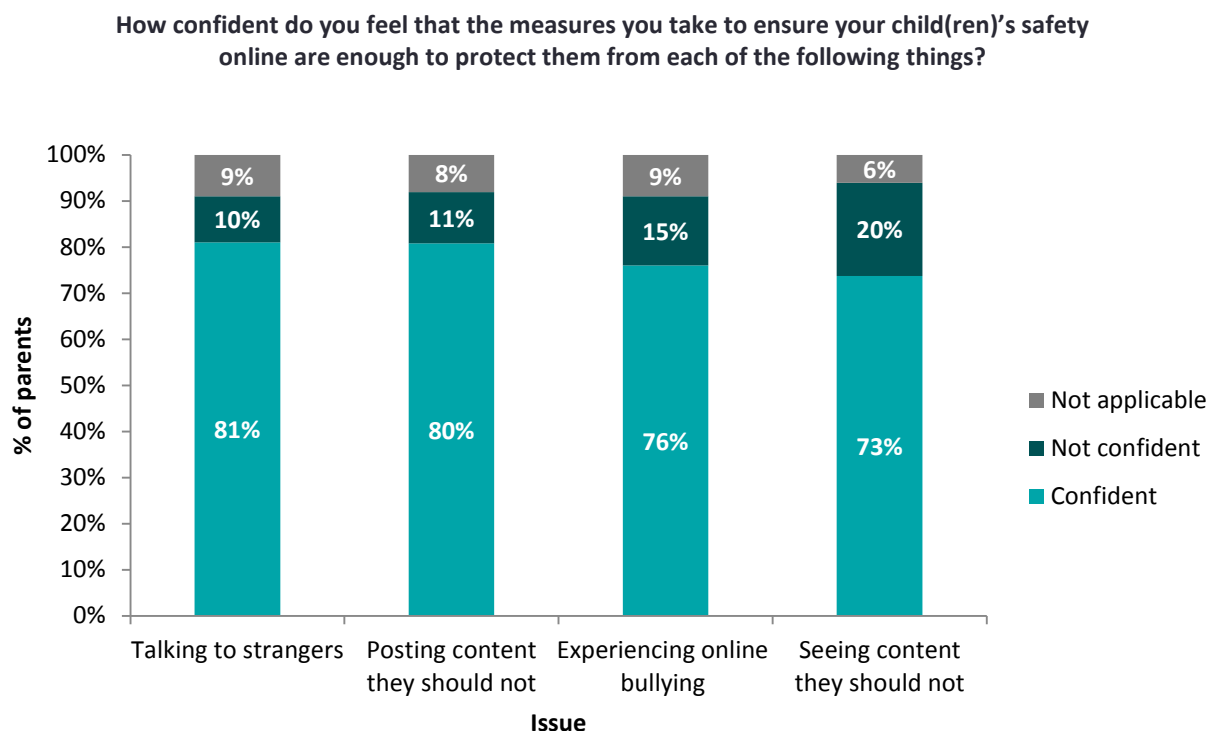
In terms of seeking help for conversations with their children about online safety, it was not particularly common for parents to say that they did this – many felt that it needed to be something which was set out in their own words.

opinion leader

"That'd be very serious, where I'd have to talk to somebody else about [how to have conversations about online safety]. I think you already know what you're going to do, once it comes to that stage. You don't need any advice" Parent of child in Y5/6, Newcastle

Parents typically said that these discussions were often reactive rather than planned, for exam as a result of hearing about a story from school or in the media, or because their child wanted to use a new game or app which the parents thought would need additional guidance. Many important messages which they wanted to pass onto their children about online safety were also things which parents felt were covered within other conversations about parenting. Points around how to treat other people online for instance, and the impact that your words can have on other people were seen to be important points which parents would want their children to understand in relation to an issue like cyberbullying. However these values were seen by some to be instilled in more general conversations about how to behave towards others. Similarly, understanding risks and dangers and knowing when to ask for help were things which were important for helping children to navigate the dangers of contact from strangers and of accidentally finding inappropriate content, but again these were things which were discussed in more general discussions about parenting as much as in those which were specific to being online.

Around three quarters of parents were confident that the strategies they used were sufficient to keep their children safe.

Overall when asked to reflect on the strategies that they used to keep their children safe online, parents were mostly confident that these were sufficient to keep their children safe. Almost seven in ten (68%) said that they knew how to keep their child safe online, a similar proportion as said so in 2013. When parents were asked about how effectively their strategies protected their children against specific risks online, they were most confident that the strategies they used were sufficient to protect their children from talking to strangers (81%) and posting content that they should not post (80%). On the other hand, confidence decreased slightly when looking at areas that their child would have less control over. Around three quarters of parents felt confident that the tools used were enough to protect their children from experiencing online bullying (76%) or seeing content that they should not see (73%).

Children's online safety in 2016

How confident do you feel that the measures you take to ensure your child(ren)'s safety online are enough to protect them from each of the following things?

Chart 5: Q. How confident do you feel that the measures you take to ensure your child's safety online are enough to protect them from the following things? Base: All participants (1500)

Parents who reported that they were not confident that the measures they took were sufficient were more likely to be those parents who were not confident in their own ability to use the internet. In all categories those parents who said that they were able to do basic tasks but no more were more likely to say that they were not confident than those parents who could do all of the tasks that they wanted to.

Parents who were concerned about issues such as cyberbullying and particularly sexting were also more likely to say that they were not confident that the measures they took were sufficient, as were those parents who did not feel confident in talking to their children, particularly about sexting.

Parents were also asked whether they felt equipped with the right information and tools to keep their children safe online. Again, the majority of parents (61%) agreed that this was the case, with just 10% disagreeing. This is in line with the feedback received when the same question was asked in 2013, when 62% agreed and 10% disagreed.

Comparison between parents' and children's feedback.

The family interviews gave an opportunity to compare how children aged between 11 and 13 described the family's approach to online safety and how the parents did. There were few differences between how each described these, and the children did not highlight instances of them breaking rules which had been set or disagreeing with the strategies that their parents used.

opinion leader

The children's focus groups however identified some instance of children breaking rules which had been set for them, although at a relatively low level. During the boys' focus group, attendees mentioned that they would sometimes use technology or devices outside of permitted hours:

> *"Sometimes I'll turn the PS4 on to do, like, an update, when my mum goes shopping I'll turn it on and I'll play, when she comes back, I'll see her in the driveway and I'll just turn it off"* Boys Focus Group

> *"I go on my phone when I'm meant to be doing homework and then I do it for so long and then I forget how long it's been"* Boys Focus Group

It was also mentioned by some participants that they preferred to try and deal with issues such as cyberbullying themselves before referring to parents. This is covered more in the cyberbullying section.

Keeping foster children safe

As part of this research interviews were conducted with three foster parents in order to identify specific needs which may apply to foster parents and children in terms of online safety. The parents identified both some specific risks which they felt disproportionately affected foster children, and also some strategies for mediating these risks which were of particular use for foster parents.

One specific risks identified for foster children was that their background could make them more vulnerable to risk-taking or being targeted online

One of the specific risks which foster parents identified was that for some foster children their propensity to take risks may be higher than average, a factor which they felt was due to influences from the child's past.

> "*I think, because of the nature of… a lot of children in care, they sort of know about risk, but they don't really. They're risk-aware, but they're not afraid of risk, because they have that element… nothing worse can happen to them than what's already happened to them*" Foster parent

It was suggested that as a result of this increased propensity to take risks, there was the potential for children to be drawn into activities which they may know carried risk but which offered the possibility of attention or of other things that the child may want. In addition to an increased propensity for risk, it was also suggested that in some cases foster children may be particularly vulnerable to being affected by cyberbullying.

> "*There were a couple of times when these arguments with friends really escalated via social media, and, you know, she was a child who didn't have the tools to deal with those, kind of, emotional issues. As much as I would try and reassure her and talk with her-, you know, she would just take to her bed… Because the other people involved, probably, the next day, there was something else on Facebook that they were talking about, but for somebody who doesn't have that strong, sort of, emotional foundation and security and-, she had not experienced a lifetime of, you know, loving parents. So everything that was said to her via Facebook was kind of magnified by a thousand, really*" Foster parent

It was also suggested that foster children were sometimes targeted by malicious or criminal elements online who sought to take advantage of the vulnerabilities which foster children can have.

> "*What happens is the kids go on their WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram and then they're chatting to a friend and they might say, 'Oh, well I'm a looked after child,' or, 'I go to this school,' or they've got pictures up of themselves, then those pictures go on to somebody else, somebody else, and then they know by the school they go to, they may get the area that they're in. It doesn't take long to work it out. Then they befriend them, and before you know it, they're off to meet somebody that can do serious harm*" Foster parent

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opinion leader

"My last foster boy that's left, I knew a couple of weeks ago that he was back on the Internet and what he was downloading wasn't appropriate. So I informed his social worker. Now I've just got an email to say how he was doing it, because somebody has given him a phone that has Wi-Fi and that's how he managed to get on the Internet. He's so much at risk, he was groomed here as well on the phone and the Internet, and he would become a groomer as well" Foster parent

There were also seen to be risks from the environment that a foster child may have been in before their current foster care

Another potential area of risk for foster children came from the environment that they had been in before they had arrived in their current foster care. Each of the foster parents spoke to mentioned that the risk of birth parents or family members contacting the child was something that they needed to be aware of and have strategies to combat.

"[His birth mother] gave him the phone, she told him to put it in a sock and hide it under the wardrobe and he never shut his bedroom door. Two or three nights after contact, he started shutting his door. Because I've been in this job a long time, why are you shutting the door?... I found it. Hoovered under the corner unit, sucked it up, there it was. She's telling him, 'I'm your mum,' you know, nice language. 'You do what I say; you don't have to stay there, run.' You're telling a 13 and a half, 14-year-old boy to run for London, no, that's not right" Foster parent

"We were fortunate enough that the girl who was with us just came and told us because she was worried about [contact with her birth family], and it concerned her. So we were able to then-, because when she came, she had her own Facebook profile, she had her friends from her previous area that, you know, she still wanted to keep in contact with… when that was set up that was in her real name etc., etc. So we just closed down that account and created a fake profile account with a different name so that that could be managed" Foster parent

Many of the strategies which foster parents used to deal with these issues were the same as other parents had used…

In terms of the overall approaches to managing online safety foster parents mentioned many of the same strategies as other parents had, with a mix of technical and behavioural approaches being used. From a technical perspective parents had used programmes which allowed them to monitor what children were doing online, and what they were downloading, and had set up filters and controls on their home networks. They also noted the importance of developing a trusted relationship with their child and of having conversations with their child about key elements of online safety even if these are uncomfortable.

…Though there were specific strategies and pieces of advice which parents highlighted which were more specific to their role

One of the areas which was highlighted in the foster parent interviews as a concern was ensuring that the approach to the child's safety online was consistent with what had happened in their past. It was noted

that a potential risk was in a foster parent trying to implement specific rules and conditions to access which did not match what the child had experienced in the past.

> "*When the child is coming into your care, it's really important to find out from their social worker, but in front of the child, what kind of rules are already in place for Internet usage. Now, I did do that, and I was very keen to find out, and in that meeting, my prospective placement tried to change that set-up. She wasn't happy about giving over her devices at 10:30, but that's what had been in place with the previous foster carer. Now, I was very clear in that meeting that it would be staying the same, and partly because, you know, her social worker did say, 'Look, this works really well for [her], actually. You know, it gives her a bit of a break. She's going into Year 10. You know, it's really important that she gets a good night's sleep.' I was clear that I wanted to continue with that. Now, over time, of course, she found a way to kind of get around that, and get the devices back, but for the first few months, that was really useful*" Foster parent

It was recognised that some foster children may be resistant to having particularly firm rules in place, particularly if they had known freedom around internet use in the past, as this represented something which they had known control over and would not want to give up.

Children's online safety in 2016

Help, support and advice

Summary: Help, support and advice

- Parents typically saw themselves as having the primary responsibility for ensuring their children's online safety, and most were confident in their ability to do this.

- Proactive help-seeking around how to discuss online safety with children was seen to be uncommon outside of discussions with friends and family. Although around two in five parents agreed that they needed more help and advice about reducing risks online, few said that they were very aware of where to find this. Parents were also not aware of most of the organisations providing information and support about online safety.

- Apart from their parents, the children spoken to highlighted schools as a key source of information about internet safety. They mentioned attending assemblies at which they were given advice about online safety, and they also noted that schools were a key source of support if they or their parents were unsure of how to handle online incidents

- The source that is most commonly used by parents to find out more about keeping children safe online was also their school. Schools were cited as the source second most responsible for teaching young people about online safety (after parents), the source through which most parents had learned about children's online safety and was often given as the place parents would turn to in any scenario where their child faced a serious issue online.

- As in 2013, parents said that they saw themselves and schools as having the most responsibility for children's online safety, with parents themselves most commonly seen as having primary responsibility. The role of schools was highlighted even more in the current study than in 2013. Previously schools had been highlighted as having responsibility for children's online safety and as one of the key sources through which parents learned about children's online safety, but in the current survey they were highlighted as the most common source which most parents had learned something about children's internet safety from, up from the second most commonly mentioned source in 2013.

- Parents both advocated and responded positively to suggestions that social media networks could do more to support children's online safety in areas such as cyberbullying, preventing underage use of the networks and encouraging use of privacy settings.

Parents saw themselves as the key people responsible for their children's online safety

When parents were asked to identify who they felt was responsible for ensuring their child's online safety, the most common answer was that they were responsible (91%). Just over half of participants felt that they as parents were solely responsible for this (53%). This is a similar pattern to the one which was seen in

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2013; when 97% of parents said that they were responsible for their children's online safety and 49% saw themselves as solely responsible.

Parents were slightly more likely to say that they were responsible for ensuring their online safety if they also agreed with authoritarian statements about parenting – for instance 'My children always have to ask my permission before doing anything' or 'I always know what my children are doing and where they are.

Most parents were confident that they could keep their children safe online, some still felt that they would like more help

As was noted in the previous chapter the majority of parents were confident that the steps that they took to ensure their children's safety were sufficient to keep them safe from specific risks online, though a small proportion were not confident. A similar pattern was true when parents were asked whether or not they agreed that they were able to keep their children safe online where around seven in ten agreed that they could (68%), around a quarter neither agreed nor disagreed (26%) and 5% disagreed.

In terms of whether parents had enough information and tools to be able to do this, around three in five parents felt that they were fully equipped with the information and tools that they needed to keep their children safe online (61%). Despite these fairly high levels of confidence however, when asked if they needed more help and advice in reducing the online risks for their children, two fifths (40%) agreed that they would like more help.
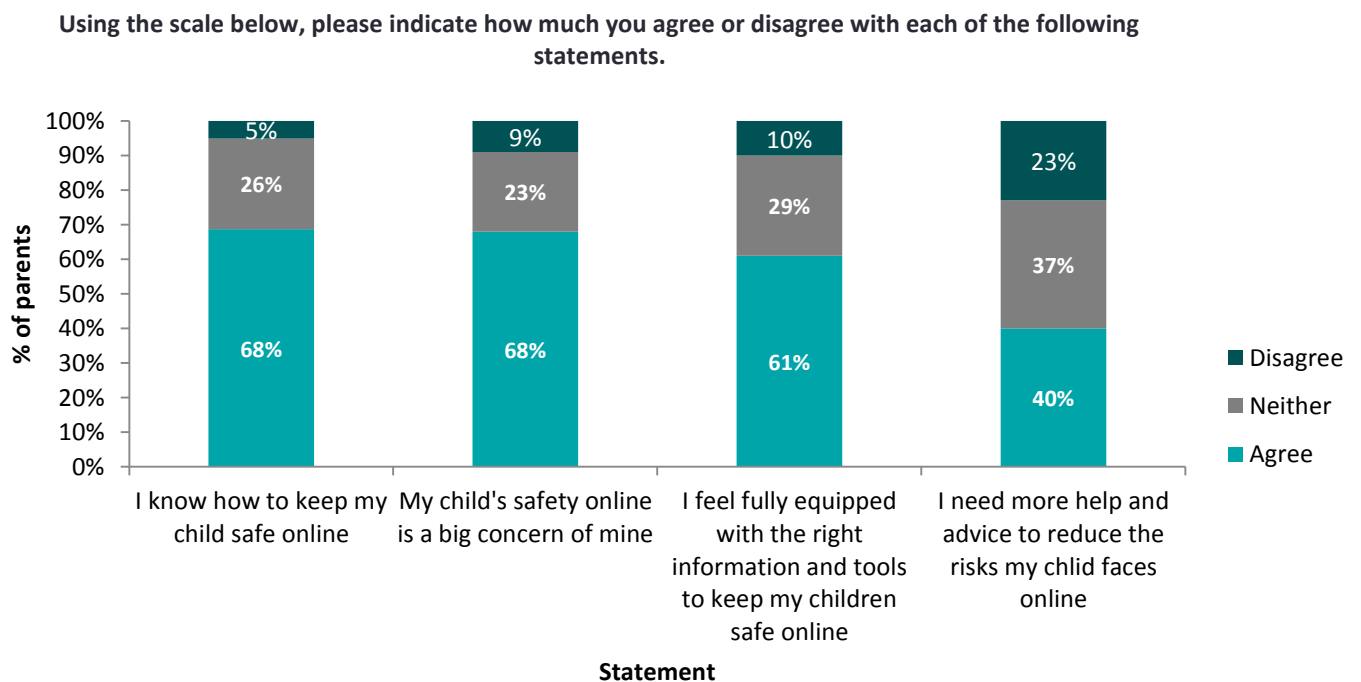
Using the scale below, please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

Children's online safety in 2016

Of those who agreed that they need more help, not all of them knew where to access this. Around two thirds of parents were aware of where to get help with online safety; however, most (51%) were only 'somewhat' aware compared to a smaller proportion (14%) who said that they were very aware. Parents reported that they were less aware of where to go to get information now (64%), compared to 2013 (74%).

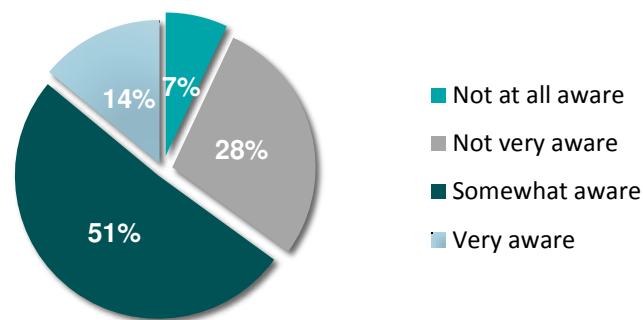**How aware are you about where to go to get help with online safety about your child?**

Chart 14: Q. How aware are you about where to go to get help with online safety about your child? Base: All participants (1500)

The information that is used was seen as easy to access and understand and is trusted

In terms of the information that parents do access about internet safety, there were broadly positive views towards it although there remained quite a number of parents who gave neutral answers – perhaps reflecting their lack of familiarity with sources as mentioned above.

Where existing information about how to keep children safe online is most well regarded is in term of being trustworthy (54% agreed with this), clear and easy to understand (48%) and up to date (40%). There was also widespread agreement that information about keeping children safe online is available from lots of organisations (56%). The volume of information was also something that parents had mixed feelings on, 30% agreed that there was too much information to digest, and 26% that it was inconsistent.

Most statements had similar levels of agreement as had been seen in 2013. Two of the statements where we did see changes however were whether or not existing information was seen as up to date (with the proportion who agreed with this in 2016 at 40%, compared to 34% in 2013), and the proportion who felt it was too much to digest – which was at 30% in 2016, up from 26% in 2013.
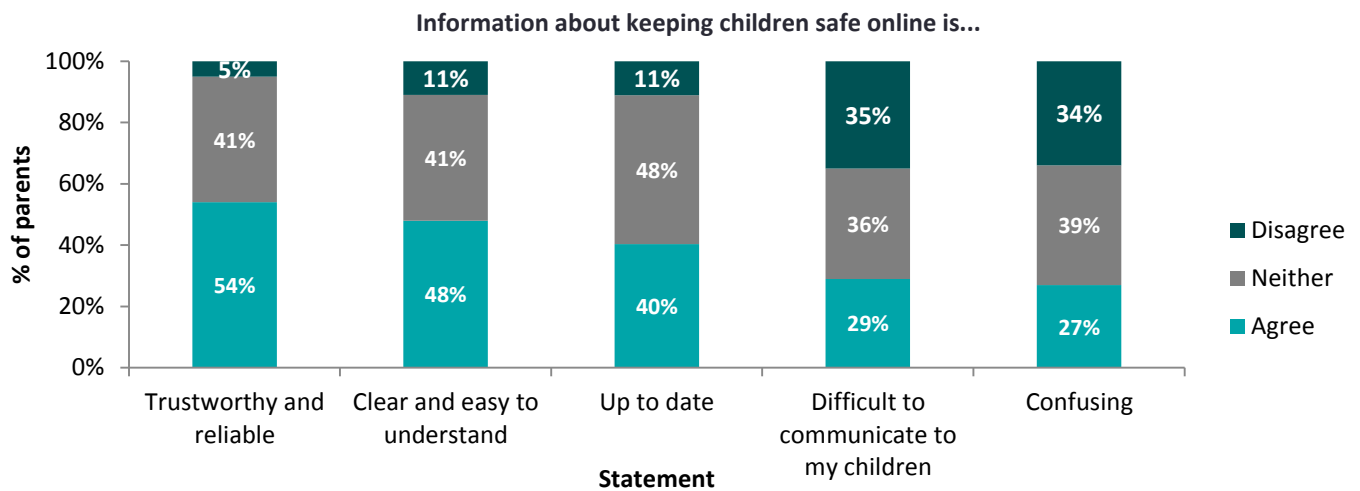
Information about keeping children safe online is...

Chart 16: Q. Information about keeping children safe online is… Base: All participants (1500)

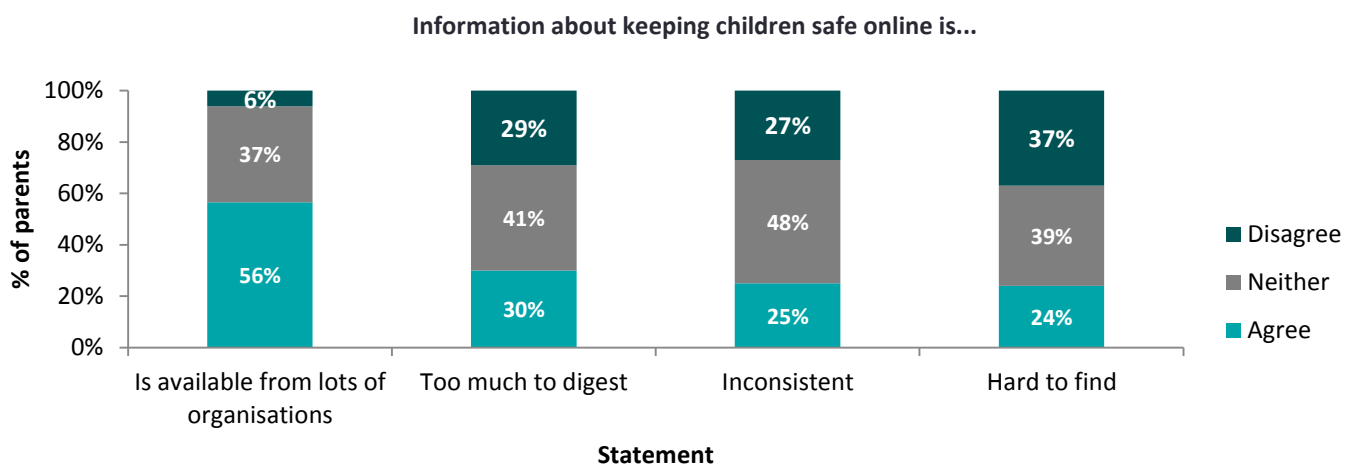**Information about keeping children safe online is...**

Chart 17: Q. Information about keeping children safe online is… Base: All participants (1500)

The source which parents commonly noted as helping with their child's online safety was schools

Though parents generally saw themselves as being the key people responsible for their child's online safety, schools were also highlighted as an important source in both the qualitative strands of the research. They were the source which was mentioned second most commonly as being responsible for teaching children

Children's online safety in 2016

opinion leader

about online safety (74% mentioned schools as a source, far ahead of the next most popular category at 35%). The same pattern was true in 2013, when parents were the most commonly cited as being responsible for keeping children safe online (97%) with schools the second most commonly cited (72%) and the next most popular category being Internet Service Providers who were mentioned by just 43%.

Schools were also highlighted as the source from which most parents had learned something about children's internet safety. Almost half of parents had learned about this from a school (46%), ahead of other sources such as search engines and internet security providers (32% and 31%) and other parents (29%). In this category, schools had improved from their second place ranking in 2013, when 41% of parents noted that they had learned something from there.

Who do you think is responsible for the teaching about internet safety and keeping your child(ren) safe online?
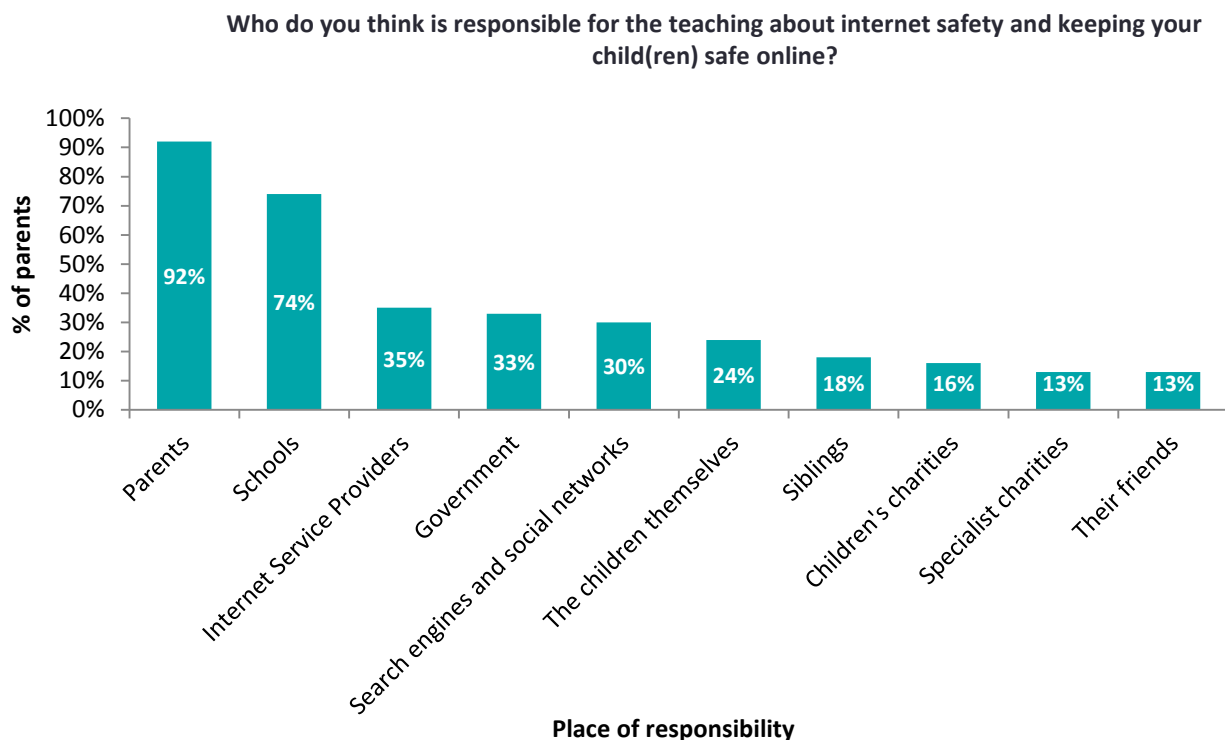

Chart 12: Q. Who do you think is reponsible for the teaching about internet safety and keeping your child(ren) safe online?. Base: All participants (1500)

"*I don't know of any other places to go to get advice, really, if things were going on - apart from school*" Parent of child aged 11-13, Birmingham

Children's online safety in 2016

Which, if any, of the following do you use to learn about keeping your child(ren) safe online?

% of parents

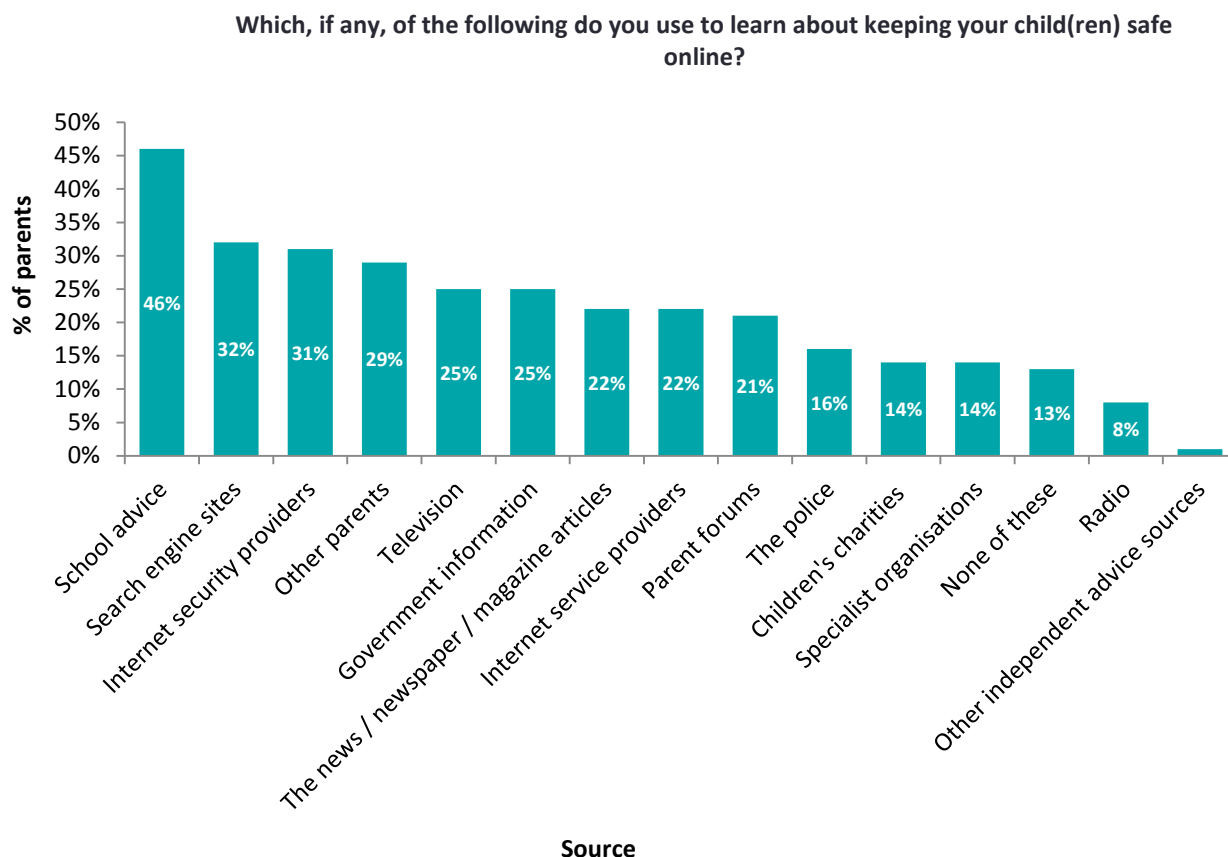| Source	%
School advice	46%
Search engine sites	32%
Internet security providers	31%
Other parents	29%
Television	25%
Government information	25%
The news / newspaper / magazine articles	22%
Internet service providers	22%
Parent forums	21%
The police	16%
Children's charities	14%
Specialist organisations	14%
None of these	13%
Radio	8%

Source

Chart 15: Q. Which, if any, of the following do you use to learn about keeping your child(ren) safe online? Base: All participants (1500)

Schools were seen as a place which could provide useful support around children's online safety for a number of reasons. Some parents expected that schools would be aware of the issues in a good amount of depth, as they may well have had to deal with similar issues before. Others were familiar with schools already having provided support in this area, either in terms of running assemblies or workshops or in sending home leaflets and resources on the subject. And in some cases parents felt that schools may know what is the best way to deal with difficult situations which have emerged online such as cyberbullying.

"I think the school is, the school, it must be a good school source to deal with things, because they tend to have a good feel of what's going on, and a lot of it, maybe, filters back to them, what's going on." Parent of child in Y7/8, London

"They had lessons at school recently because there was some bother with some girls in my sons year in the other class where a man had posed as a child on Barbie game and sent inappropriate images" Parent of child in Y9/10, Newcastle

"We thought that it was a matter that the school should deal with it and that they should have the infrastructure in place to deal with bullying which then went from face-to-face bullying to cyberbullying." Parent of child who had been cyberbullied

opinion leader

Children also mentioned that schools were a key source of information about online safety for them. A number of the children mentioned that they had attended assemblies at school which gave out advice about online safety, for instance around the legality of sexting or giving advice about what to post online.

Parents were also enthusiastic about any suggestions that social media networks could do more to support children's safety online

When asked about the potential role that social media networks could play in children's online safety, a strong majority of parents were in favour of the networks doing more in a range of areas. The majority of parents agreed that social media networks should immediately remove reported content (70%), do more to stop underage users (72%), set profile settings to private by default (74%) and do more to prevent bullying behaviour (75%).

Using the scale below, please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.
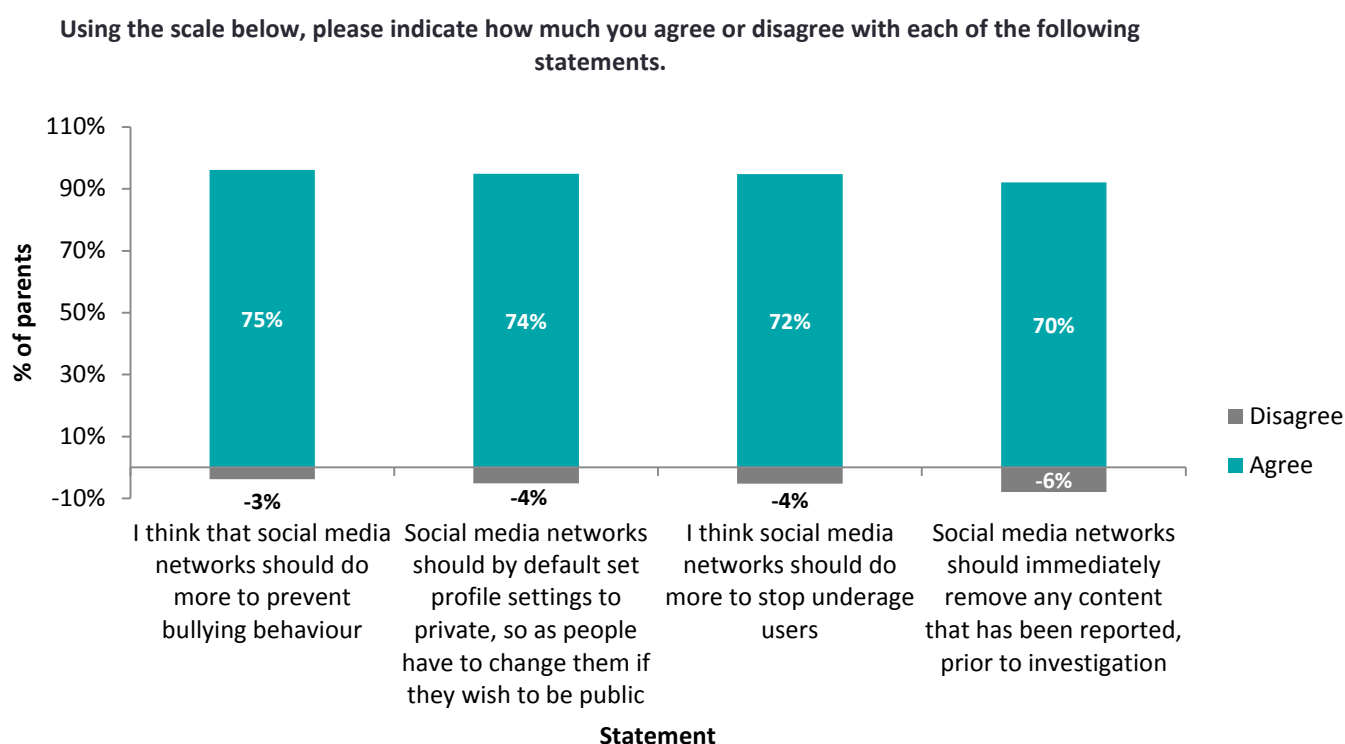

Chart 13: Q. Using the scale below, please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. Base: All participants (1500)

Insight into cyberbullying
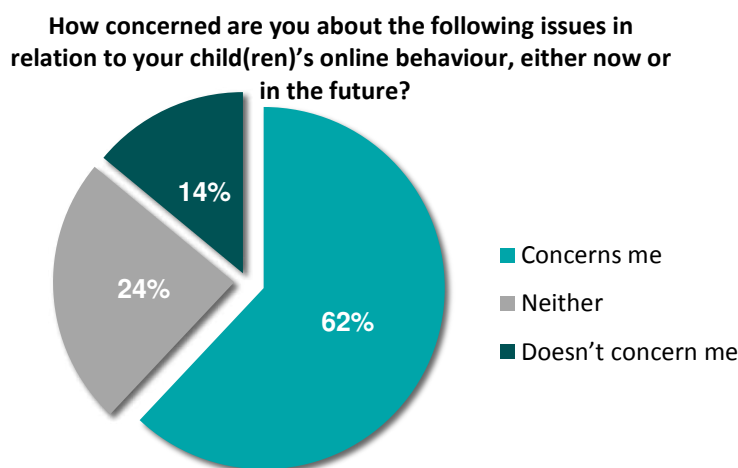
Summary: Insight into cyberbullying

- Cyberbullying was an issue which many parents were concerned about. The sheer amount of time that young people spend online and the fact that many carry online devices with them for large parts of the day was seen by some to make cyberbullying a particular challenge as it was seen to be difficult to escape the situation.

- From the perspective of the young people spoken to, cyberbullying was an issue which they were aware of within their schools. Awareness of cyberbullying as an issue is generally good among parents as well, though there was often uncertainty amongst both parents and children about what would be the best way to deal with a case of cyberbullying should it emerge. In many cases parents suggested that they would speak to their child's school.

- In terms of discussing cyberbullying with their children, most parents felt comfortable doing so and the majority of parents had already spoken to them about this. Some parents noted that messages which were important to give to their child which related to cyberbullying – such as the importance of treating others with respect and of thinking about the effect of your words on others – were things which would come up in general parenting conversations as well as those which specifically relate to going online. There were though some pieces of advice which parents gave children that were specific to being online, for instance advising them to block bullies online, storing any evidence of online bullying and being careful about what they posted online .

- There were some parents (around three in ten) who had not spoken to their children about cyberbullying at the time of surveying. This was more common among parents of younger children, who were typically less common users of interactive services online than older children. However parental confidence, both in their own ability to use the internet and their confidence in discussing cyberbullying with their child, was again an important factor in determining how likely a parent was to have discussed this.

- When parents were asked about identifying the signs of cyberbullying, most were very confident that they would know if their child was the victim of any bullying online – partly on account of the monitoring measures which some parents undertake but also as parents felt they would pick up on behavioural cues or changes. Parents were less confident however that they would definitely know if their child was the perpetrator of cyberbullying, and when parents whose child had been involved in a cyberbullying incident were asked what role their child had played in this they were far more likely to identify that their child had been a victim than a perpetrator.

Children's online safety in 2016

Few parents said that they or their child had been involved in a cyberbullying incident; however most were concerned about it.

Parents of 9% of children said that a child of theirs had been involved in a cyberbullying incident, and this was reflected within the qualitative findings in which few parents spoke about their child's involvement in cyberbullying.

Despite this, it is an issue that parents are concerned about, with 3 out of 5 parents (62%) saying that cyberbullying concerns them in relation to their child's online behaviour and in addition to this, over half of parents agreed that cyberbullying was harder to deal with than face to face bullying (57%). Parents were significantly more likely to be concerned about children aged 6 to 13 years compared to those aged 14 to 16. When speaking to parents, most were able to reference an incident in which it had happened, for example personal or media stories in which a child had been pushed to commit suicide due to cyberbullies or trolls and this appeared to be a key concern that they were aware of.

How concerned are you about the following issues in relation to your child(ren)'s online behaviour, either now or in the future?

- Concerns me
- Neither
- Doesn't concern me

14%
24%
62%

Chart 20: Q. How concerned are you about the following issues in relation to your child(ren)'s online behaviour, either now or in the future? Base: All participants (1500)

Parents who agreed with some authoritarian statements about parenting such as 'I always set boundaries and rules for my children' or 'My children always have to ask my permission before doing anything' were more likely to say that they were concerned by cyberbullying.

Parents tended to have a very broad view on what cyberbullying was which ranged from receiving aggressive messages on online gaming sites to sustained malicious messages from several people over an extended period of time. An example of this is the knowledge that parents had of how incidents that started out as simple "banter" on gaming sites or WhatsApp that can then escalate and snowball to involve different parties. These events caused concern amongst parents, particularly in regards to their child's mental health and as mentioned above, parents had heard stories of where such incidents had escalated dramatically.

"They started calling him names, one of them, and everyone did in the same group. He was reacting to it, and before you knew it, there were other people, like cousins and brothers getting involved, saying, 'I'm going to come and sort you out, blah blah blah." Parent of Child, Family Interview

In terms of accessing support for this issue parents weren't always sure where to turn to for effective help. Some parents mentioned speaking to schools, which as noted above, is a key source of support for all online safety, but also the police was seen as a source of support for cyberbullying incidents for some.

"We didn't know how to deal with it in the beginning… Do we go to see other parents? Do we go through school? Do we leave it? Do we not say anything? Do we see if it will die down on its own? … Only because it has started with girls at schools, we went through school. Had it just been online, I don't know how I would have dealt with it, to be fair" Parent of child who had been cyberbullied
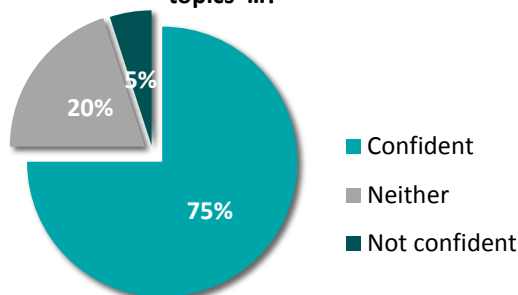
When speaking to children, there were mixed responses as to whether reporting incidents would work. As with their parents, they had a good understanding of the types of cyberbullying that existed but had a range of strategies for dealing with it. They knew how to block or report spammers and how to directly tell them to stop. There was reluctance amongst some children to tell their parents about being cyberbullied as they were concerned that this could escalate the problem and would rather deal with it themselves. This meant that when some parents did become aware of cyberbullying it had already got out of control making it more difficult to address.

"No, because, like, I'll know them and it will just make it worse." Boys Group

Most parents were confident in talking to their children about cyberbullying and most have had conversations surrounding it.

The majority of parents were confident in talking to their children about cyberbullying (75%) and over two thirds had had conversations about this (68%). Conversations about cyberbullying are more likely to occur amongst children aged 10 to 16 compared to those aged 6 to 9.

How confident do you feel about talking to your child(ren) about the following topics …?

- Confident — 75%
- Neither — 20%
- Not confident — 5%

Have you talked to your child about cyberbullying?

- Yes — 68%
- No — 32%
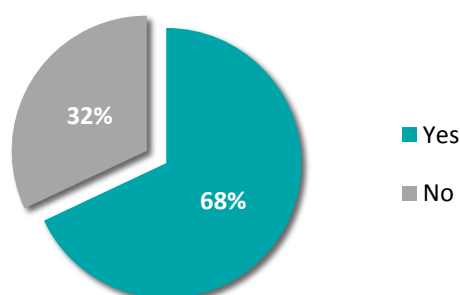
Chart 22: Q. How confident do you feel about talking to your

opinion leader

In these conversations the most commonly discussed topics included telling their children to report any online bullying to a parent or teacher straight away (68%), thinking carefully about sharing pictures or personal information of themselves online which might encourage nasty comments (61%) and telling them to block bullies online (57%). In the qualitative stream of the research some similar themes also came through; parents told children to be careful about making jokes with their friends to ensure that things did not get out of hand. Additionally, parents mentioned that they tried to ensure their children knew the difference between online and real relationships and how to conduct these.

"We have just always said, please be aware and don't post anything silly. Don't write anything negative to anyone because it can be taken so the wrong way" Parent of child who had experienced cyberbullying

"I think there are a lot of kids struggling in social situations because they're so used to sitting on computers in their room on their own, okay talking to people but through messaging or even talking to someone on a screen is not the same." Parent of child in Y5/6, Birmingham

Which of these things have you ever said to your child about cyberbullying?
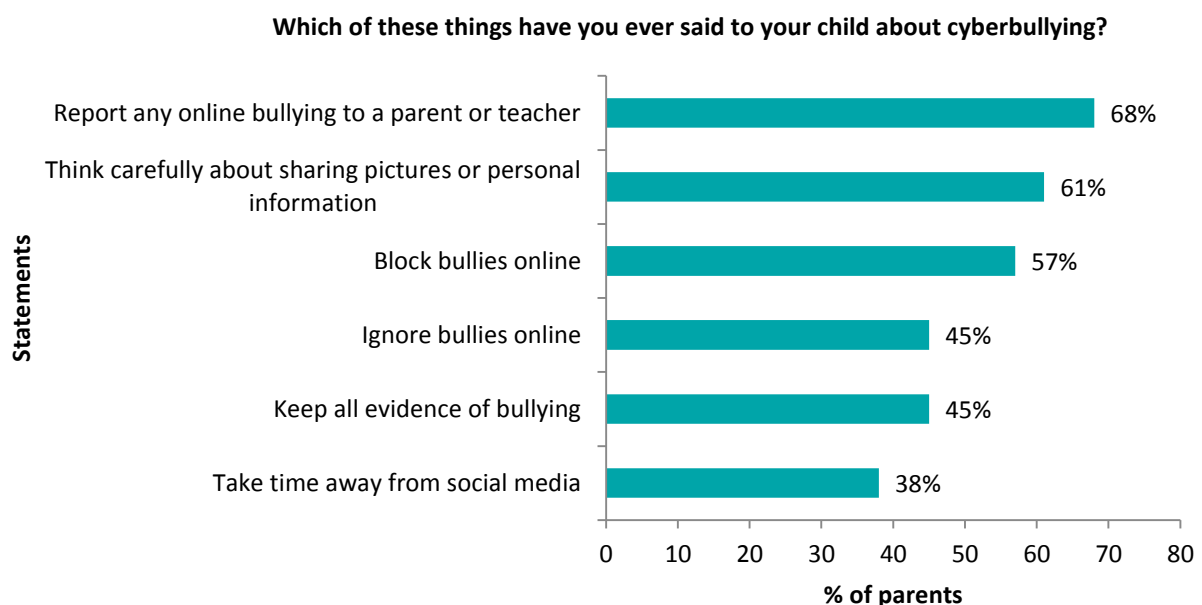

Chart 21: Q. Which of these things have you ever said to your child about cyberbullying? Base: All who have spoken to children about cyberbullying (1023)

Of those who knew their child had been involved in a cyberbullying incident of any kind, most were aware of their child being a victim rather than the perpetrator

A small proportion of parents (9%) were aware that their child had been involved in a cyberbullying incident. Out of those that had been involved in an incident, parents were most likely to be aware that their child was the victim (60%) rather than the perpetrator (7%). This may be due to the perception amongst parents that it is easier to spot someone who is being bullied than someone who is being a bully. Parents also observed in parents of bullies a sense of denial that their child could be a perpetrator even when evidence was presented to them. Parents typically felt able to identify signs which might suggest that their child was being cyberbullied and those parents who had experienced this first hand mentioned that they had noticed signs of withdrawal and not wanting to go to school.

"I probably wouldn't know if he was doing it and he was getting away with it, because he's not going to tell me he is." Male, Family Interview

Has your child ever been involved in a cyberbullying incident?

9%

91%

■ Yes
■ No

In the cyberbullying incident, was your child...?

27%

7% 6%

60%

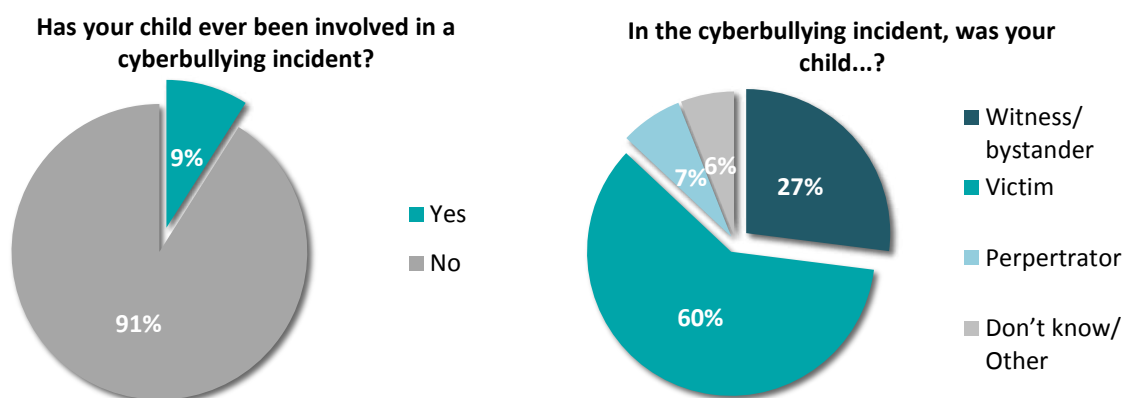■ Witness/ bystander
■ Victim
■ Perpertrator
■ Don't know/ Other

Chart 24: Q. Has your child ever been involved in a cyberbullying incident? Base: All participants (1500) Chart 25: Q. In the cyberbullying incident was your child…? Base: All who have a child involved in cyberbullying incident (137)

opinion leader

Insight into sexting

Summary: Insight into sexting

- Sexting was something which many parents had concerns about, with one common fear being the perception that images which were posted or shared online would remain there forever.

- Some parents linked the issue of sexting to a broader issue that they perceived around sexualisation of young people, and felt negatively about the idea that this was something which their children would have to deal with.

- One point which was raised by some parents was that they saw sexting as more of an issue or concern for girls than for boys. These parents often felt that the consequences of others finding out about the fact that a girl had been involved in sexting may be worse than for a boy. It was also admitted in the qualitative work with boys aged 11-13 that even though they were aware of a range of consequences that a boy could face for receiving sext pictures, there was a status given to boys who had received these.

- Most parents said that they were confident having discussions about sexting with their children, but fewer than half of parents overall had actually done so. As with cyberbullying, parents of younger children were particularly unlikely to have discussed this, as were parents with less confidence in their own ability online. Though many parents admitted that the prospect of having a conversation about sexting with their children was awkward, few mentioned that this would be a barrier to having the conversation if they felt it was necessary. For many of those who had not discussed it, the reason they gave was that they did not think their child needed the conversation given their age or their habits.

- The 11-13 year old girls and boys spoken to during the qualitative work were aware of sexting as an issue, both as a result of awareness-raising in their schools and from parents, but also from stories that they are aware of from within their school cohorts where many felt that sexting was common. Some had also had talks from police who were investigating cases of sexting in their school.

The majority of parents were concerned about sexting as an issue

The majority of parents (59%) said that sexting was an issue they were concerned about in relation to their child's online behaviour.

An aspect of sexting that did not see mixed views however was the risk that it exposes children to owing from the fact that digital imagery was permanent, sharable and that it cannot be

How concerned are you about the following issues in relation to your child(ren)'s online behaviour, either now or in the future?

- Concerns me
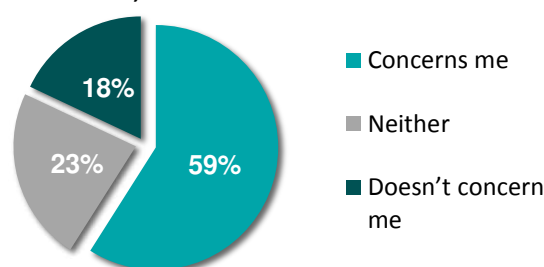- Neither
- Doesn't concern me

Chart 26: Q. How concerned are you about the following issues in relation to your child(ren)'s online behaviour, either now or in the future? Sexting. Base: All respondents (1500)

erased once online. This was a concern for many of the parents spoken to.

> *"It's dangerous. Even if it's consensual, if they break up, just out of spite, those pictures will be shared between their mates. You can't 'unsend' a picture"* Parent of child in Y3/4, Birmingham

> *"I think it would in the future but more, sort of, from the aspect of I wouldn't want my daughter to be sending images to anybody else because of knowing the damage, not personally knowing the damage, just to put that in there, just knowing the damage that it can do to somebody if that picture does get out. So that scares me."* Parent of child in Y3/4, Birmingham

Others felt that the current generation are being sexualised too quickly and are uncomfortable with their children doing this.

> *"That's why it's a dangerous thing, really, for this to happen, because at a very young age, they're getting sexualised when they shouldn't be, they should be learning stuff. Then when they go out and have these relationships with these females or vice versa, they think doing these things is normal, do you know what I mean?"* Parent of child in Y5/6, Newcastle

> *"My main concern is that you're sexualising the child."* Parent of child in Y3/4, Birmingham

Further specific risks which were cited by parents in relation to sexting were that the child could be blackmailed by the person that they sent the photographs too, or that they could be misled into sending pictures to older strangers.

The legal implications of sexting were an area where there seemed to be mixed levels of knowledge among participants in the qualitative research. Some were aware of the legal implications, but others were either unaware or had misconceptions about the age group which this applied to, with some believing that at age 16 if both parties consented then it would be legal.

A final point which emerged from some discussions about sexting was that some parents perceived that this was more of an issue for girls than for boys.

> *"I think it would be more damning of a girl-, a girl would get worse if she did it than if a boy did it."* Family Depth Interview

> *"I would class that more as a worry for parents of girls, rather than of boys"* Parent of 11-13 year old, Birmingham

Parents were mostly confident in talking to their children about sexting, although there were mixed views as to when conversations should occur.

During qualitative discussions it was commonly noted that the prospect of discussing sexting with their children was something which might be uncomfortable for parents, as was the case for other conversations about sex, but that it would be something that they would do when it was necessary.

"Well, about sex, as well, and everything that goes with it. ... I found it uncomfortable, and she found it uncomfortable, I'm thinking to myself, 'I need to get through that. I need to talk to her about it.'" Parent of child in Y7/8, Glasgow

The majority of parents responding to the survey also said that they were confident or very confident (70%) about having these conversations. However when asked whether or not they had actually had these conversations, fewer than half of parents (48%) had done so. Conversations were less common among parents with younger children.

How confident do you feel about talking to your child(ren) about the following topics ...?

- Confident
- Neither
- Not confident

8%
22%
70%
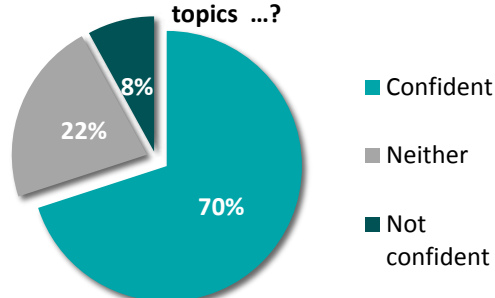
Have you talked to your child about sexting?
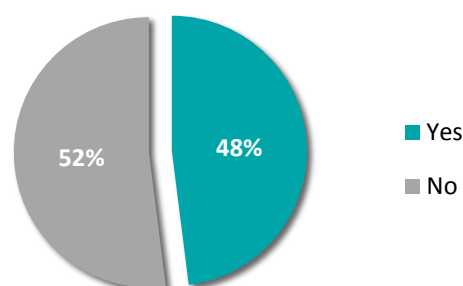
- Yes
- No

52%
48%

Chart 28: Q. How confident do you feel about talking to your child(ren) about the following topics? Base: All participants (1500) Chart 29: Q. Have you talked to your child about cyberbullying or sexting? Base: All participants (1500)

In terms of when conversations around sexting take place, there were varying views. Those with younger children see this as conversation for later on compared to older children. Some parents think a good time to start talking about it is around when their children are having sex education. The content of the conversations themselves also varied. As had been the case for other discussions around online safety, some parents emphasised to their children that if they were uncomfortable about anything related to sexting then they should feel confident to speak to the parents about this. Others noted that they would seek to make their children clear about the potential consequences of sending sexting messages. Others were more direct and said that they would emphasise to their children that they should not send sexting messages.

Children taking part in the research were aware of sexting and the consequences such as police incidents and expulsions from school

Children's online safety in 2016

opinion leader

In both the girls and boys focus groups, participants were very aware of sexting as an issue and felt that it was something which was commonly taking place in their schools. This is consistent with findings from a recent study by the NSPCC and the Office for the Children's Commissioner with over 1,000 children, which found 13% had taken a topless image of themselves and 3% a fully naked photo[9].

Some of the girls in the focus group said that that they felt pressured from boys to send sexts and that if they did not send these they were told that they were frigid but if they did they were referred to as 'slags'. One girl was very upset when she was asked by a boy to send indecent images and only told her parents when the problem escalated at which point the parent approached the school.

Children were aware that distributing such imagery would get them into trouble with the police and they were aware of the consequences of any images getting into the wrong hands. Social consequences were also recognised by children. For boys, it was seen that they could get in trouble with the police but it also earned them social status. On the other hand girls were more worried about their reputations and the shame of their images being shared.

> *"If you're going to send, like, a picture of you naked, that's clearly not very good..., you'd get arrested for it."* Boys' Focus Group

> *"So, it's very, very stupid, but as… a lad, it's a bit of a legend"* Boys' Focus Group

When asked about conversations that they may have had about sexting, some children had had conversations with their parents, whilst others said that their parents trusted them not to have them. Both boys and girls mentioned that their school will have an assembly to talk to them when an incident of sexting has happened.

> *"We got a massive, the whole of our year, all of the girls in our year, we had massive assembly about it, and this woman came in [from streetwise]"* Girls' Focus Group

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[9] The majority of these respondents were boys in the case of both figures. See Martellozzo, E., Monaghan, A, Adler, J. R., Davidson, J, Leyva, R. and Horvath, M. A. H. (2016). "I wasn't sure it was normal to watch it…" A quantitative and qualitative examination of the impact of online pornography on the values, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of children and young people. London: Middlesex University doi:10.6084/m9.figshare.3382393: Accessible at: https://www.nspcc.org.uk/globalassets/documents/research-reports/mdx-nspcc-occ-pornography-report.pdf

opinion leader

Insight into inappropriate content

Summary: Insight into inappropriate content

• Parents worried about their children finding inappropriate sexual or violent content online, particularly at a young age. There were seen to be risks both that children would be able to seek out such content but also that they may stumble upon it accidentally while searching for something else. In many cases the availability and graphic nature of both sexual and violent content was seen to be more extreme than could have been accessed when the parents were young.

• One of the specific worries that parents had around sexual content was the effect that it had on young people's perceptions of body image and of what healthy relationships look like.

• In terms of violent content, parents expressed concerns both about video content which could be seen online – either in films or in news and current affairs coverage – as well as the popularity of violent computer games.

• In terms of how parents approached dealing with instances where their child had been exposed to content they felt was inappropriate, many of the strategies which have been mentioned previously were seen to be useful. In particular, it was mentioned that they may seek to restrict the child's use of the channel through which they had seen the inappropriate content; and that they would seek to talk about what the child had seen – answer questions and to try and counter what they felt might be unhealthy messages that the child may have picked up by viewing this.

Few parents said that they or a child of theirs had experienced inappropriate content online; however parents were concerned about both violent and sexually explicit content.

When asked if themselves or their children had been exposed to inappropriate content, few parents had. In those that had experienced it, exposure to sexual content was the most common (10%), followed by exposure to violent content (8%) and lastly exposure to content that encourages self harm (4%).

During focus group discussions however, parents did raise concenrs about their children potentially accessing inappropriate content. In terms of sexual content, some parents highlighted that they felt it could be easier to access than ever before:

> "*I think the big change has been the availability of sexual content, which wasn't there before, as we were saying*" Parent of child in Y3/4, Glasgow

> "*It's like we said here. You click a box, 'I'm over eighteen.' You don't need to prove it. You don't need to show a passport or anything. You just click the box, and bang, you're in. That is totally out*

of order. They know that you're not eighteen. I'm sure, actually, these websites make it easy for anybody to go on them" Parent of child in Y7/8, Glasgow

Other parents linked the availability of sexual content and pornography to concerns about young people being sexualised too soon – as they had also done when the subject of sexting was discussed. One particular concern that parents mentioned in relation to viewing sexual content was around the risk of children being exposed to pornography that was dehumanising, and a worry that they would translate into the child's real-life behaviours as they got older.

"Main stream pornography is a little bit violent and I think it does, kind of, dehumanise women and it's a little bit nasty… What you're seeing now in the way women are treated in your average pornographic clip, it's shocking and I think this is the new norm, or I think, you know, people think this is the new norm. Maybe guys think it's the new norm but I don't think women do." Parent of child in Y7/8, London

In terms of violence, one area which was highlighted as something of concern was gaming. Parents felt that games such as Grand Theft Auto, Call Of Duty and other online sites were something which was increasingly popular among young people, but that some children were not mentally prepared to play these games.

"I'd say that my son was playing a couple a games that he shouldn't be doing, and then I think I heard of one called Brother in Arms or something. You go around shooting, you go into different levels, and then we thought that was quite bad for him. So we restricted that straight away. Now we can't get any games apart from his age group… Like you were saying, with violence games, you've got to understand your child is such a young person, he's developing" Parent of child in Y5/6, Newcastle

Some parents also noted that they worried that their children seemed to react angrily when they lost or when things did not go their way on these games.

"One of my sons used to get really violent when he played with the Xbox, and he would play with his big brothers in an eighteen-year-old game. When he didn't get his own way, he would throw things and damage things." Parent of child in Y7/8, Glasgow

Outside of gaming, some parents were worried about potential exposure to violent content everyday through news stories. In particular they were worried about them seeing graphic content – such as violent images or beheading videos – which may be accessible through social media or on news websites.

"I mean, my son is nine, ten in August, and he, for the last twelve months he's been worried about what's happening with ISIS and things like that. For a nine-year-old lad to come to me and speak with genuine concerns-, I mean, when I was nine I was worried about what was for dinner." Parent of child in Y5 and Y6, Birmingham

Overall, parents felt that the nature of inappropriate content is much more graphic than it was in their youth and parents with younger children wanted to protect their innocence as much as possible.

> *"You want to, kind of, keep their innocent as long as they can. I know there's a big, bad world out there, and you've got to prepare them for that, but kids grow up too quickly nowadays anyway."* Parent of child in Cardiff

Common responses that parents said they would take if they knew that their child had viewed inappropriate content were to restrict access, or talk about it

In terms of how parents responded to their children viewing inappropriate content, many of the strategies which were described earlier in the report were seen to play an important part in helping to keep their children safe. There were two specific routes which were identified by parents as ones which they would take if they became aware that their child had been exposed to content that they felt was inappropriate. The first of these was to mediate the child's access to the channels that they had used to view the content, or ban the use of these completely:

> *"I had a chat with him and I said to him, 'If your attitude changes, if you get violent, if you get angry or anything, you're going to lose the Xbox.' There was an incident about a year or so ago where he misbehaved... I just hid all the controllers. He didn't have them for about a month or so"* Parent of child in Y7/8, Glasgow

> *"I'd take it off her instantly* [if I knew my daughter had accessed inappropriate content]*, but then I would talk to her about it and get more information about what she's seen, you know, where she got it from. I'd make a decision then, when I felt that I could give it back to her but instantly I'd just take it off her straightaway"* Parent of child in Y5/6, Birmingham

The second strategy that parents mentioned that they would use was discussing what their children had seen. Some parents noted that it was important both to reiterate ground rules around viewing this type of content, but also that it may be necessary to counteract the kind of messages that the child might have been exposed to by viewing it. For instance, some parents noted that if their child had viewed pornography they would want to emphasise that this was not something they wanted the child to think of as normal.

> *"I think if it was accidental, then it, kind of, gives you a doorway to talk to them about it and to maybe explain to them, 'This stuff is bad. You shouldn't be watching this.' If they say, 'Well, why is it there?' you say, 'It's for older people. When you get to a certain age, then that's fine, but just now, you're not allowed that. You know, you've got to, kind of, get there.' You try to have a conversation about it, because the door has already been opened. Rather than just trying to shove it under the carpet and trying to hide it, try to have the conversation with them*." Parent of child in Y7/8, Glasgow

> *"Just be open and just say, 'Right, well obviously, it is something that you've seen, so we do need to talk about it. It's something that you might be embarrassed about, you might not, you might find*

interesting, you might not. We do need to talk about it and explain what it is, what's happened, how you avoid it in the future,' and just try and a bit mature about it with them" Parent of child in Y5/6, Newcastle

Conclusions and implications

Children's use of the internet is becoming more mobile – and more often taking place away from their parents – and also more interactive than ever, with more games, social media platforms and interactive services offering young people the opportunity to interact with each other and meet new people. In this context most parents are aware that ensuring that their children have the skills to navigate the risks that exist when online in this context is key.

There is a need to stimulate more conversations between parents and children about sexting in particular. Though parents are conscious that these conversations are important, some of them are delaying the start of these discussions due to issues which included awkwardness, lack of confidence and wanting to preserve their children's innocence. In some cases parents' own knowledge about the issue is not complete or up to date, and one area which may be useful to address is the perception from some parents that it is more of an issue for girls. Increasing awareness of the legal implications of sexting for boys may be one useful way of doing this.

The likelihood of having these discussions is linked to parents' own confidence, both in carrying out tasks online and their confidence that they are able to have discussions about sexting. Communications should therefore consider the tone of the messaging to be around emphasising that these conversations are something which is possible for all parents to have.

The obvious way to contact parents about online safety is through schools – they are the source which parents most commonly see as supporting them in keeping children safe online, and a source which parents often go to for support when problems arise online. Options such as developing a code of conduct for schools around internet safety, or using schools as a base for training workshops could be explored. Given the value of starting such conversations at a young age, primary schools would be a natural starting point.

There does not seem to be a huge call from parents for resources and tools which support them in having conversations with their children about online safety. In the qualitative groups parents felt as if this was something they were able to do themselves but was simply uncomfortable, and many parents were uncomfortable with the idea of having conversations with their children that felt directed by someone other than themselves. One thing which did prove useful at times however was having something that prompted parents to discuss issues with their children – which could come in the form of an experience which had happened in the parent or child's life, a story that they were aware of from school or a story which they heard in the media.

Children's online safety in 2016

One suggestion which was made during the research as to how parents could potentially be supported in future was through creating a knowledge-sharing network along the lines of a Neighbourhood Watch. Parents who signed up to the network would receive advice or news about children's online safety – in particular suggestions for potential risks that children may be exposed to online, for instance specific concerns about new games or apps, or insights into how young people are circumventing online filters and controls.

Work could be done alongside social media providers in order to do more to support children's safety online and to allay parents' fears about the risks of using these sites. Parents were enthusiastic when asked about all of the potential measures which social media providers could provide.

Appendix 1- Research participant details

Quantitative research

In total 1,500 responses were received to the online survey. All participants were parents of at least one child aged between 6 and 16 years old, inclusive. Within that, quotas were set by parent age, region, SEG and gender in order to be representative of this population. As we did not meet the targets exactly, data was weighted back to reflect these splits. The tables below show the demographic breakdown of the weighted sample.

	Total	%		Total	%
Age[10]					
18-24	9	0.6	**45-54**	483	32.2
25-34	278	18.5	**55+**	51	3.4
35-44	679	45.3			
Gender[11]					
Male	673	44.9	**Female**	827	55.1
Region[12]					
North East	59	3.9	**East**	147	9.8
North West	164	10.9	**London**	214	14.3
Yorkshire and The Humber	125	8.3	**South East**	212	14.1
East Midlands	105	7	**South West**	120	8
West Midlands	130	8.7	**Wales**	67	4.5
Scotland	113	7.5	**Northern Ireland**	44	2.9

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[10] Q. Firstly, could you please confirm your age (Base: All respondents, 1,500)

[11] Q. And what is your gender? (Base: All respondents, 1,500)

[12] Region data taken from existing panel information (Base: All respondents, 1,500)

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Occupation[13]					
	Total	%		Total	%
Employed full time	1077	71.8	Retired	22	1.5
Employed part time	143	9.5	Still studying	7	0.4
Unemployed	25	1.7	Disabled or too ill to work	32	2.1
Self employed	101	6.7	Prefer not to say	6	0.4
Full time homemaker	86	5.7			
SEG[14]					
	Total	%		Total	%
ABC1	765	51	C2DE	735	49

Qualitative research- Detailed breakdown of participants

10 Focus groups with parents

Parent focus groups were carried out in 5 locations across the UK with parents of different age groups.

Age of Child	TOTAL	London	Newcastle	Glasgow	Cardiff	Birmingham
6-8 (Yr.1+2)	2	1	-	-	1	-
8-10 (Yr.3+4)	2	-	-	1	-	1
10-12 (Yr.5+6)	2	-	1			1
12-14 (Yr.7+8)	2	1	-	1	-	-
14-16 (Yr.9+10)	2	-	1	-	1	-
TOTAL	10	2	2	2	2	2

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[13] Q. Which of these best describes the head of your household? (Base: All respondents, 1,500) NB: Weighted figures given

[14] Derived from questions on work status and head of household's job role (Base: All respondents, 1,500) NB: Weighted figures given

Children's online safety in 2016

For each of the locations there was one group conducted with participants from socio-economic groups ABC1 and one with participants from groups C2DE. There was BME representation within each group. Fieldwork was recruited so as permissive and authoritarian parents were grouped separately.

Focus groups with young people

Two focus groups took place in London with year 8 schoolchildren. Group 1 consisted of 8 male participants, group 2 of 8 female participants. They each lasted for approximately 90 minutes.

Family interviews

Family interviews were structured as an initial short interview with a child, followed by a longer interview with one or both parents. Each section was structured separately. The interviews lasted for 90 minutes in total.

Family interviews			
Age of child	Gender	Authoritarian / Permissive	Location
Year 9	Male	Authoritarian	London
Year 8	Female	Authoritarian	London
Year 7	Female	Authoritarian	London
Year 7	Male	Authoritarian	London
S2	Female	Permissive	Glasgow
S2	Female	Permissive	Glasgow
Year 8	Male	Permissive	Birmingham
Year 9	Male	Permissive	Birmingham

Depth interviews with parents of children who had been cyberbullied

Telephone interviews which lasted for approximately 30 minutes took place with parents of children who had experienced an incident of cyberbullying. The definition of cyberbullying was made by the parent.

Depth interviews with foster parents

Telephone interviews which lasted for approximately 30 minutes were also conducted with Foster Carers relating to the children they look after. We received support from Guardian Saints in identifying suitable participants for these interviews.