

Children and Parents: Online Concerns and Mediation

Aims

The Children and Parents: Media Use and Attitudes report provides a one-stop resource on Ofcom's research on children's and parents' media use and attitudes.

Key Findings

Children's online safety attitudes and behaviours

Eighty-three per cent of 8-11 year olds and 91% of 12-15s say that they are confident about how to stay safe online, and 67% of 12-15s say they are confident that they can judge whether websites are truthful. The incidence of children disliking seeing things online that are too old for them, or things that make them feel sad, frightened or embarrassed, has decreased for both 8-11s (15% vs. 23%) and 12-15s (10% vs. 15%).

There have been some decreases in children's online safety skills. On average, 12-15s have never met, in person, three in ten (on average, 78) of the friends listed on their main social networking site profile. A substantial minority of 12-15s have a social networking profile which may be visible to people not known to them, and this has increased since 2012 (33% vs. 22%). Children with a social networking site profile that may be visible to people not known to them are more likely to have undertaken some kind of potentially risky online behaviour, such as adding people to their contacts they don't know in person, or sending photos or personal details to people only known online.

Compared to 2012, children are less likely to know how to block messages from someone they don't want to hear from (53% vs. 68%) and to have done this in the past year (32% vs. 42%). However, more positively, compared to 2012, only a very small number of 8-15s now say they would not tell someone if they found something online that was worrying, nasty or offensive (1% vs. 3% for 8-11s, and 4% vs. 8% for 12-15s).

Almost one in ten 12-15s (8%) and 4% of 8-11s say they have experienced online bullying in the past year. Close to half of all 12-15s know someone with experience of negative online/mobile phone activity such as online bullying, gossip being spread or embarrassing photos being shared. One in five say they have personal experience of negative online/mobile phone activity.

Parental concerns

In 2013, parents of 5-15s are most likely to be concerned about television (21%) and mobile content (19%), followed by online (16%) and gaming content (13%), with relatively few being concerned about radio content (4%). Around one in four (24%) parents of 5-15s who go online at home are concerned about cyberbullying, while one in seven (14%) said they were concerned about their child cyberbullying someone else. Twenty-three per cent of parents are concerned about their children downloading viruses, while 22% are concerned about their child giving personal details to inappropriate people, which may belie the level of trust that parents have in their children to use the internet safely (83%).

The majority of parents of 5-15s (79%) say that they know enough to keep their child safe online, but around half of parents continue to feel that their child knows more about the internet than they do, as do 14% of parents of children aged 3-4. Also, parents of 8-11s are more likely to agree with this statement now than in 2012 (44% vs. 35%).

Parental mediation

Although 83% of parents trust their child to use the internet safely, the majority of parents (85%) also

provide some kind of mediation to help keep their child safe online. Parents of 5-15s use a combination of approaches to mediate their child's internet use, including: having regularly talked (at least monthly) to their children about staying safe online (45%), having rules relating to parental supervision (53%) or using some kind of technical mediation (62%) which includes 43% having installed parental controls.

Eighty-five per cent of parents of 5-15s whose child ever goes online at home through a PC/ laptop or netbook use at least one of these approaches, (20% use all three, 35% use two, 30% use only one). Fifteen per cent of parents do none of the things asked about on a regular basis. Parents of 12-15s are more likely to do none of these things (22%) compared to parents of 5-7s (11%) and 8-11s (9%). Less than one in ten parents of 3-4s (8%) use all three approaches, while close to one in five (18%) do none of them.

More broadly, 79% of parents say they have any rules in place relating to the internet.

Compared to 2012, parents of 12-15s are now more likely to say they have spoken to their child about staying safe online (91% vs. 86%) and this has been driven by an increase among parents of girls aged 12-15 (95% vs. 88%).

Although, compared to 2012, parents of 8-11s are more likely to have controls on the fixed games console (26% vs. 16%), this is still significantly lower than for other media. Four in ten parents of 12-15s (40%) whose phone can be used to go online and close to half of parents of 8-11s (47%) have applied filters to mobile phones to exclude websites aimed at over-18s. Thirty-one per cent of parents whose child uses YouTube on a PC/ laptop/ netbook have the safety mode set.

Among parents of children aged 12-15 with a profile on Facebook, 87% are aware that there is a minimum age requirement, but only 37% are aware that the child needs to be 13 years old. Parents of 5-15s in the ABC1 socio-economic group are more likely than parents in the C2DE group to be aware of this.

Policy Context

The Children and Parents: Media Use and Attitudes report provides information on trends in the media usage patterns of children and young people, including their potentially risk-taking behaviour, to help policy stakeholders identify which elements of media literacy to develop and promote. It focuses in particular on internet use and attitudes.

Methodology

The report draws primarily on the Ofcom Children's Media Literacy Tracker, a large-scale quantitative survey based on in-home interviews with children aged 5-15 and their parents/carers. 1689 interviews with parents and children aged 5-15 were conducted in April/May/June 2013 along with 685 interviews with parents of children aged 3-4. Questions are tailored to the age of the child and so not all questions are asked of each age-group. The report was published in October 2013. The report also includes analysis of children's television viewing habits sourced from BARB, the UK's television measurement panel and comScore data on most-accessed websites by children aged 6-14 (2011, 2012, 2013) and frequency of instant messaging among 13-17 year olds.

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