Safer Internet Day 2023 Summary Report

Want to talk about it?

Making space for conversations about life online

A summary report by the UK Safer Internet Centre for Safer Internet Day 2023

UK Safer Internet Centre

Safer Internet Day

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About the UK Safer Internet Centre

The UK Safer Internet Centre (UKSIC), established in 2011, is a leading global partnership helping to make the internet a great and safe place for everyone. We provide support and services to children and young people, adults facing online harms, and professionals working with children.

We are unique. Formed of three charities, Childnet, Internet Watch Foundation and SWGfL, we work together to identify threats and harms online and then create and deliver critical advice, resources, education and interventions that help keep children and young people, and adults, safe. We share our best practices across the UK and globally.

The UK Safer Internet Centre coordinates Safer Internet Day each year, reaching millions of young people, parents and carers, and educators across the UK, giving them the vital information and support they need to keep young people safe online.

"The adults need to know how to react to various scenarios and what they can do to remedy whatever happens, and so they've got to have some kind of baseline understanding. And it's not their fault that they don't know it but it is their fault if they refuse to learn about it and listen, because young people have a lot to say."

Brook focus group participant, age 16

Conversations about young people's online lives are more important than ever

Now, more than ever, we need to talk with and listen to young people about what they do, see and experience online. Conversations are key to ensuring they feel confident to speak up about anything that troubles them online and can tell us what they think should be done to make the internet safer and more enjoyable for everyone.

Our research highlights the critical importance of conversations at home. The support works both ways: young people report overwhelmingly that their parents and carers are their first port of call if they are concerned about anything online, but they also feel they can help their parents and carers know more about being safe online. With young people relying on parents and carers to be ready to talk, we must support parents and carers to feel equipped for these conversations.

Young people want to make a difference through conversations and speaking up; helping their friends, promoting online safety at school and being ready to report online when they see something offensive, mean or potentially dangerous. They are looking to schools, online platforms, and government to play their part. We must listen to what they have to say and respond to their ideas.

Will Gardner OBE

Director of the UK Safer
Internet Centre

Talking with parents and carers about life online

Our research shows that most parents and carers and their children have regular conversations about young people's online lives. 77% of 8 to 17 year olds say their parents, carers, or guardians talk to them about their life online, including being safe online, and 69% of parents and carers say they speak to their child about their life online at least once a week. Our research also showed overwhelmingly that young people would turn to parents or carers first if they are troubled by something online. This applies across issues as diverse as unwanted contact, bullying, fake news and more. For example, at least 80% of young people say they would turn to a parent if they saw something worrying or upsetting online (80%), were being bullied online (82%), or were contacted by someone online who made them feel uncomfortable (85%).

69% of parents and carers speak to their child about their life online at least once a week

85% of parents and carers say they are open-minded about and interested in their child's life online

89% of parents and carers feel they can have an open and honest conversation about their child's life online

While it is positive that this dialogue is happening at home, and that young people feel able to talk to their parents and carers about online issues, both young people and parents and carers tell us there is scope for more and better conversations. Young people are keen to educate their parents and carers, with over half (57%), feeling they can help their parents or carers know more about being safe online. Parents and carers also want to talk more and have concerns: 67% worry about their child talking to a stranger through interactive online environments such as chat rooms or games and 69% want to be able to talk to their child more easily and more often about being safe online. Our research suggests parents and carers would benefit from better support. When asked if they agreed with the statement "I know where to go for support if something goes wrong and where to access relevant resources", over a third of parents and carers (36%), either said they neither agreed nor disagreed or said they did

not know where to go. Finally, it is important to recognise that some young people don't feel able to talk. A minority (7%), of young people, told us they don't think they could have a conversation about their life online, or being safe online, with anybody. While 7% may seem small, this is still hundreds of thousands of 8 to 17 year olds across the UK*. We must make every effort to provide opportunities for the hardest to reach young people to talk with a trusted adult about what they do, see and experience online and anything that troubles them.

These responses highlight just how important it is to provide regular opportunities, such as Safer Internet Day, where we can support parents and children to have conversations with each other and signpost them to helpful resources and ideas. With young people so ready to talk at home about their online lives, we must ensure parents and carers feel equipped to have those conversations and know where to go for support if they need it.

"I have taught my parents to be safe online by showing them how to know if a website is secure or not secure and I have taught them about the importance of passwords."

Childnet Digital Leader, age 11

*Data source for 8-17 year old UK population: ONS. See: 'Estimates of the population for the UK, England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland - Office for National Statistics (ons.gov.uk)'

Talking in school and with friends about life online

The majority (80%), of young people say they have regular online safety lessons at school and most find them valuable; 71% say these lessons help them increase their knowledge about being online and 69% agree that they help them know who to talk to at school with online issues and questions, demonstrating how important they are for supporting conversations when young people feel the need to talk or seek support. With the range of online activities available to and popular among young people constantly changing, there is always scope for improvement and responsiveness. While young people welcome and value online safety lessons, 62% think they could be better and almost a third (30%), think they don't allow them to talk about the online issues they are worried about. It is vital we do all we can to ensure that online safety education is as engaging and relevant as possible in the context of a dynamic online space. Many young people are keen to play their part in schools, with 44% feeling they can make a difference in supporting and promoting being safe online at school.

69% of 8 to 17 year olds think online safety lessons help them know who to talk to at school with online issues and questions.

44% of 8 to 17 year olds feel they can make a difference in supporting and promoting being safe online at school.

Peer to peer conversation is also important in helping young people navigate their online lives. 78% of young people feel they could talk to friends if they were worried about another friend online and 77% feel they could talk to friends if they were worried about something else they came across online. Young people want to support each other, with over half (58%), saying they feel they can help their friends know more about being safe online.
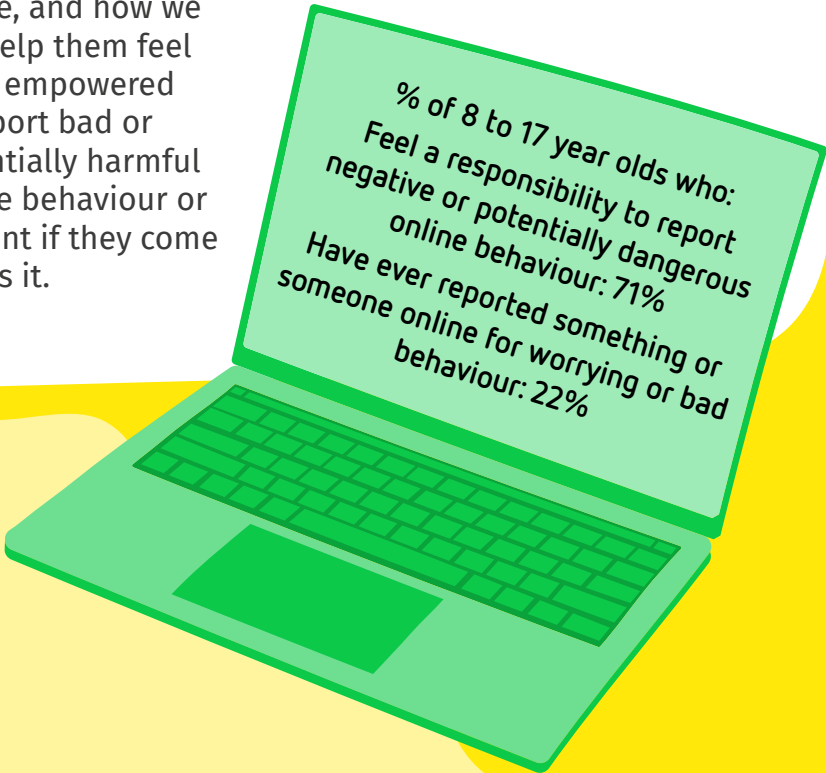
Young people are ready to learn how to be safe and responsible online, to support their friends through conversation and to help inform and educate their peers in school. We must explore what more we can do to facilitate this and encourage conversations that help all young people feel confident and safe in their online lives.

Young people speaking up and reporting online

Almost three quarters of young people (71%), tell us they feel they have a responsibility to report negative online behaviour, such as something or someone breaking the rules, doing something potentially dangerous like sharing explicit photos, or being offensive, mean, or nasty. However, only 22% of young people say they have actually reported worrying or bad online behaviour, for example, by reporting through a specific site, speaking to a trusted adult or telling a friend. 45% say they have not reported in this way and 33% say they have never needed to.

Of those young people that told us they have not reported worrying or bad online behaviour only a minority opted to give a specific reason, with responses including not knowing how to report (9%), thinking nothing will happen regarding the activity or person reported (11%), or worrying that the person they report will target them (8%). While not flagged by large percentages of young people, these responses are important. They remind us of how we must take steps to ensure that every young person knows how and where to speak up if they are worried about something online and feels confident that they will be taken seriously and offered support, especially if they fear they may be targeted for speaking up.

Our research illustrates a complex picture, where 45% of young people have never reported worrying or bad behaviour online, yet most tell us they feel a responsibility to do so. It reveals the need for more and better conversations with young people about how often and why they may not be speaking with anyone about something that troubles them online, and how we can help them feel more empowered to report bad or potentially harmful online behaviour or content if they come across it.

% of 8 to 17 year olds who:
Feel a responsibility to report negative or potentially dangerous online behaviour: 71%
Have ever reported something or someone online for worrying or bad behaviour: 22%

We must all open up space for conversations about life online

Our research shows that young people are ready to have more conversations at home, with friends and at school about their online lives. They are receptive to online safety lessons, keen to help inform and educate others, and willing to report bad or potentially dangerous online behaviour.

Young people identify a variety of tools that could help better facilitate conversations and reporting and are asking all stakeholders, including schools, online platforms, and government, to play their part. 55% of young people want more regular online safety lessons at school, 43% want to be able to report something or someone online more easily and one in five (21%), support the idea of a young persons' forum in parliament, dedicated to being safe online. Young people want to talk about their online lives. We must explore their ideas so we can create more and better opportunities for them to do so as well as keep improving online safety education, informing policy, and best enabling parents and carers to have these important conversations and be ready to support their children.

"I mean, we all know that the report button is there, but as soon as we press that report button, it's out of our hands. There's nothing more that we can physically do about it. It's up to the social media company now to implement that change, block that person, report them, give them a message saying what they did was inappropriate, educate them. And if the social media companies aren't doing that then that accountability will never be brought forward."

Brook focus group participant, age 16

About this research

A quantitative survey was conducted online by Censuswide in November 2022, with 2,010 parents and their children aged 8-17 (4020 in total). Focus groups were carried out by Childnet, with 35 young people aged 8-18 between April and May 2022, and by sexual health and wellbeing charity, Brook, with 36 young people, aged 11-18, between March and May 2022. Childnet also consulted its Digital Leaders, aged 8-17, in January 2023.

The full report can be found at
saferinternet.org.uk/sid-report

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