

[IE] Online Safety and Children's Digital Lives: Insights from Irish Children and Parents

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On 10 September 2026, Ireland's independent media regulator, *Coimisiún na Meán*, published "*Online Safety & Children's Digital Lives*", a report presenting the findings of an Irish study that adopted the theoretical framework and methodology of the EU Kids Online project. The study examines children's online experiences across several areas, including screen time, digital literacy, exposure to online harms, parental and state regulation, and overall wellbeing. The findings will contribute to the broader international research programme, *Global Kids Online*, enabling comparisons between the experiences of children and young people in Ireland and those in other countries. Parents and caregivers were asked similar questions, providing insight into both children's and adults' perspectives on how internet use and digital technologies affect young people's lives.

The report found that digital technology is a regular part of daily life for the majority of children and young people in Ireland, with 74% of 9-17-year-olds using a smartphone on most days. The proportion of children and young people who report having a social media account varies significantly by age, ranging from 25% of 9-11-year-olds to 90% of 16-17-year-olds. Overall, 60% of children and young people aged 9-17 years have a social media account.

In the context of media literacy, almost three-quarters of children and young people (73%) reported knowing how to protect a device. However, fewer than half (46%) indicated that they knew how to evaluate the trustworthiness of a website, while one-third (33%) reported knowing how to browse privately online. Confidence in online security and information evaluation skills increased with age. Although many children and young people remained uncertain about how online content is prioritised and presented to them, confidence in information-navigation skills, such as using advanced search functions and verifying the accuracy of information, also increased with age.

Children and young people generally reported strong online communication skills, with around three-quarters indicating that they knew how to communicate appropriately in online environments. Specifically, 75% reported knowing which images and personal information were appropriate to share online, while 76% said they knew when it was appropriate to use emojis, capital letters, and text speak. Similar to online security, information-evaluation, and information-navigation

skills, confidence in communication skills increased markedly with age.

In terms of online risks, 33% of children and young people reported having had a negative online experience within the past year. This figure rose among older adolescents, with almost half (46%) of 16-17-year-olds stating that they had been upset by something they encountered online at least once during the previous year.

Overall, exposure to sexual messages and unwanted requests for sexual information was relatively uncommon among children and young people but increased with age. While 9% reported receiving sexual messages, prevalence rose from 2% among 9-11-year-olds to 20% among 16-17-year-olds. Similarly, unwanted requests for sexual information were reported by a minority of participants, although rates increased from 1% among 9-11-year-olds to 15% among 16-17-year-olds. Girls were slightly more likely than boys to report such experiences, and where the sender was identified, messages were more likely to originate from strangers than from classmates or other online contacts.

More than 40% of children and young people reported having encountered hateful or degrading content online, with exposure increasing markedly with age, from 13% among 9-11-year-olds to 74% among 16-17-year-olds.

In light of current discussions at both national and European levels, it is interesting to note that the majority of children and young people surveyed expressed a preference for education over prohibition, with 69% agreeing that teaching them how to stay safe online is a better approach than introducing a social media ban. Almost half (49%) of parents and caregivers shared this view. Most children and young people (67%) believed that a social media ban would be ineffective because it would be circumvented, a view shared by 43% of parents and caregivers.

Coimisiún na Meán, "Online Safety and Children's Digital Lives: Report of a National Survey of Children and their Parents/Caregivers"

https://www.cnam.ie/app/uploads/2026/09/CnaM_OnlineSafetyandChildrensDigitalLives.pdf

