

Statistical bulletin

Children's online behaviour in England and Wales: year ending March 2020

The prevalence and nature of online activity among children, using data from the 10- to 15-year-old's Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW)

Contact:
Nick Stripe
crimestatistics@ons.gov.uk
+44 (0)20 7592 8695

Release date:
9 February 2021

Next release:
To be announced

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1 . Main points

- Almost 9 in 10 children (89%) aged 10 to 15 years said they went online every day.
- While the majority of children told us they only spoke to or exchanged messages with people online who they knew in person, around one in six children (17%) aged 10 to 15 years spoke with someone they had never met before (equivalent to 682,000 children) in the previous 12 months.
- An estimated 1 in 50 children (2%) said that they spoke to or messaged someone online in the previous 12 months who they thought was their age but later found out were much older.
- An estimated 5% of children aged 10 to 15 years met up in person with someone they had only spoken to online (equivalent to 212,000 children) in the previous 12 months.
- Around 1 in 10 children (11%) aged 13 to 15 years reported receiving a sexual message, while 1 in 100 reported sending a sexual message, in the previous 12 months.
- Girls aged 13 to 15 years were significantly more likely to report receiving sexual messages than boys (16% compared with 6%) in the previous 12 months.
- The majority of parents or guardians of children aged 10 to 15 years (64%) had some sort of rules about the length of time and when their children can go online.

Statistician's comment

Commenting on today's figures, Sophie Sanders from the Office for National Statistics Centre for Crime and Justice said:

"Now more than ever, being online can bring huge benefits to children, but it can also pose significant risks. Using data collected before the COVID-19 pandemic, we can see that most children aged 10 to 15 years only spoke to people online who they already knew in person.

However, 1 in 6 children spoke to someone they had never met in person and five percent subsequently met up with someone they had only spoken to online. Although these situations may not necessarily lead to any harm, it is important to bear in mind that they all carry serious risks for children."

Finding help

If you believe a child is in immediate danger, contact the police on 999 or 112. If the child is not in immediate danger but you are still concerned that they might be in danger or in risk of being in danger, you can contact:

- the NSPCC helpline on 0808 800 5000 or by emailing help@nspcc.org.uk
- [Childline](https://www.childline.gov.uk) on 0800 1111
- your local child protection services

2 . Children’s online activity

As highlighted by the [Children's Commissioner for England](#), today's generation of children are hugely connected online. Data from the 10- to 15-year-olds’ Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) year ending March 2020¹, which was collected prior to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, shows almost 9 in 10 children (89%) said they went online or used the internet at least daily.

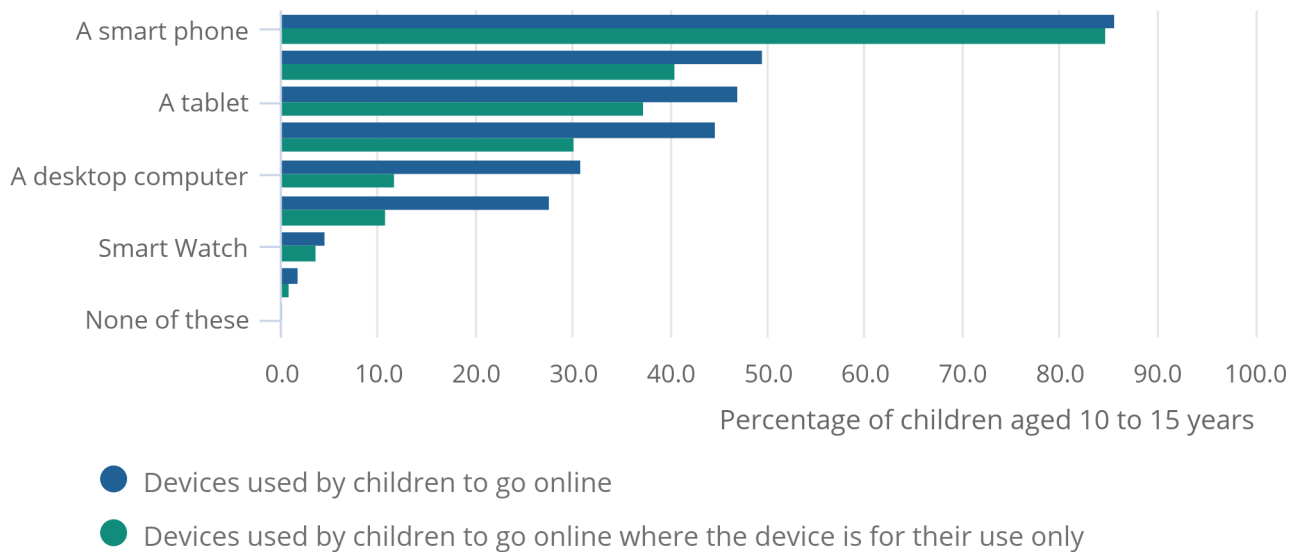
More than three-quarters of children said they spent three or more hours online a day at the weekend, with one in five (22%) spending seven or more hours a day online at the weekend. Almost half of the children spent three or more hours online on an ordinary school day.

Figure 1: Most children (85%) owned a smart phone that they used to go online

Devices used by children aged 10 to 15 years to go online, England and Wales, year ending March 2020

Figure 1: Most children (85%) owned a smart phone that they used to go online

Devices used by children aged 10 to 15 years to go online, England and Wales, year ending March 2020



Source: Office for National Statistics – Crime Survey for England and Wales

Notes:

1. Percentages may not sum to 100 as respondents may have given more than one answer.

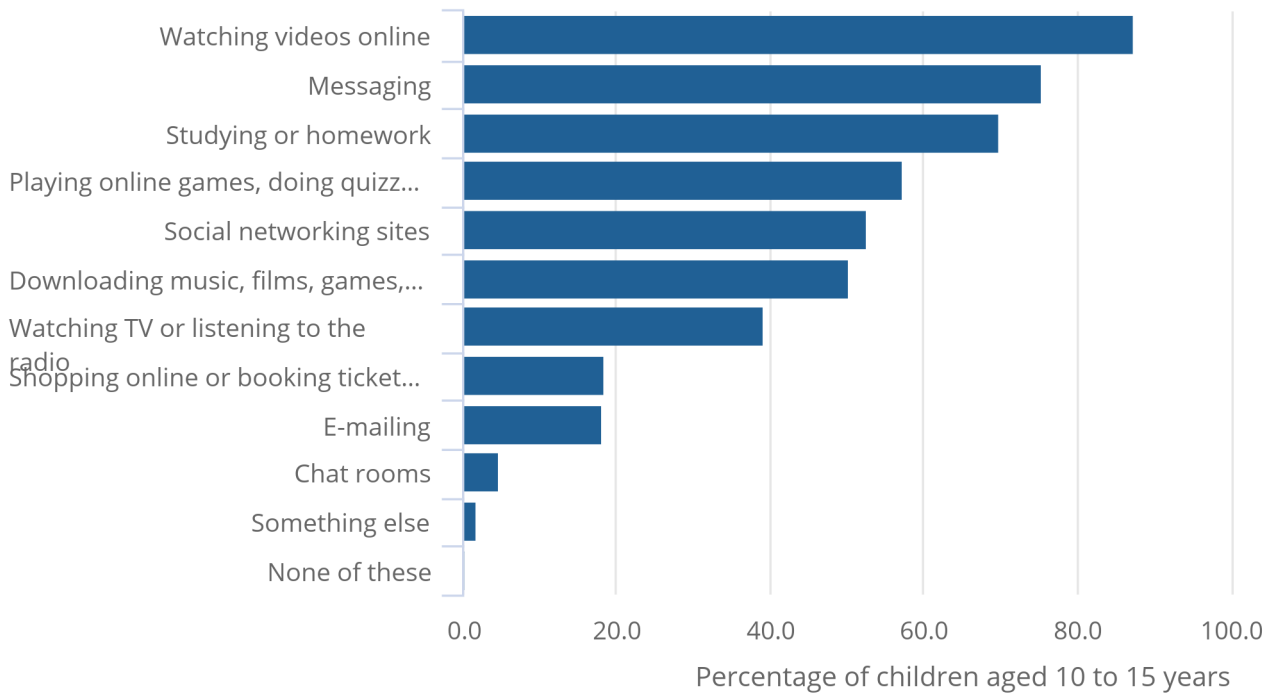
Owning portable devices such as smart phones and laptops gives children the ability to go online from anywhere. While almost all children (98%) said they went online or used the internet at home, many children went online in other places such as in a friend or relative’s home (59%), at school or college as part of a lesson (55%), or when they were on their way somewhere (42%).

Figure 2: The most common activities children used the internet for were watching videos online, messaging and studying or doing homework

What activities children aged 10 to 15 years did online, England and Wales, year ending March 2020

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What activities children aged 10 to 15 years did online, England and Wales, year ending March 2020



Source: Office for National Statistics – Crime Survey for England and Wales

Notes:

1. Percentages may not sum to 100 as respondents may have given more than one answer.

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic are making it likely that children now spend even more time online than ever and what they spend their time doing online will likely have changed. For example, there has been an increased reliance on access to the internet for schooling and communicating with friends and family.

As highlighted by the [UK Council for Child Internet Safety \(PDF, 5.5MB\)](#), being connected online can bring large benefits and opportunities to children, such as the ability to self-express, develop knowledge, meet new friends or bring people together. However, along with these benefits there are significant risks.

Previously we reported on findings from the 10- to 15-year-olds' CSEW that [one in five children aged 10 to 15 years had experienced at least one type of online bullying behaviour](#) in the year ending March 2020. The [government's Online Harms White Paper](#) also highlights serious issues including online child sexual abuse and exploitation and emphasises that the impact of harmful content and activity can be particularly damaging for children's mental health and wellbeing.

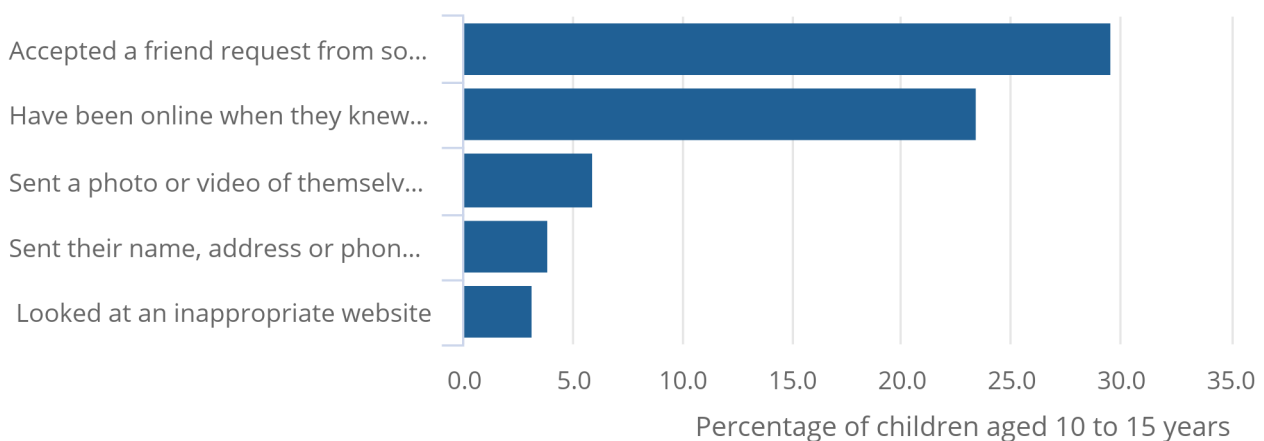
This bulletin examines the extent to which children are involved in certain behaviours that may carry risk. Figure 3 shows the proportion of children who took certain "risky" actions in the previous 12 months.

Figure 3: Nearly a third of children accepted a friend request from someone they did not know

What actions children aged 10 to 15 years took online in the previous 12 months, England and Wales, year ending March 2020

Figure 3: Nearly a third of children accepted a friend request from someone they did not know

What actions children aged 10 to 15 years took online in the previous 12 months, England and Wales, year ending March 2020



Source: Office for National Statistics – Crime Survey for England and Wales

Notes:

1. Percentages may not sum to 100 as respondents may have given more than one answer.

It is important to bear in mind that while engaging in these activities is considered to carry risks for children, not all of these activities reported on will have resulted in a harmful situation.

Around one in six children (17%) stated that they had bad experiences while using chat rooms, 15% of children while messaging, 14% while using social networking sites and 10% while playing online games or doing quizzes and competitions.

Notes for: Children's online activity

1. For the year ending March 2020, 2,398 children aged 10 to 15 years took part in the children's survey.

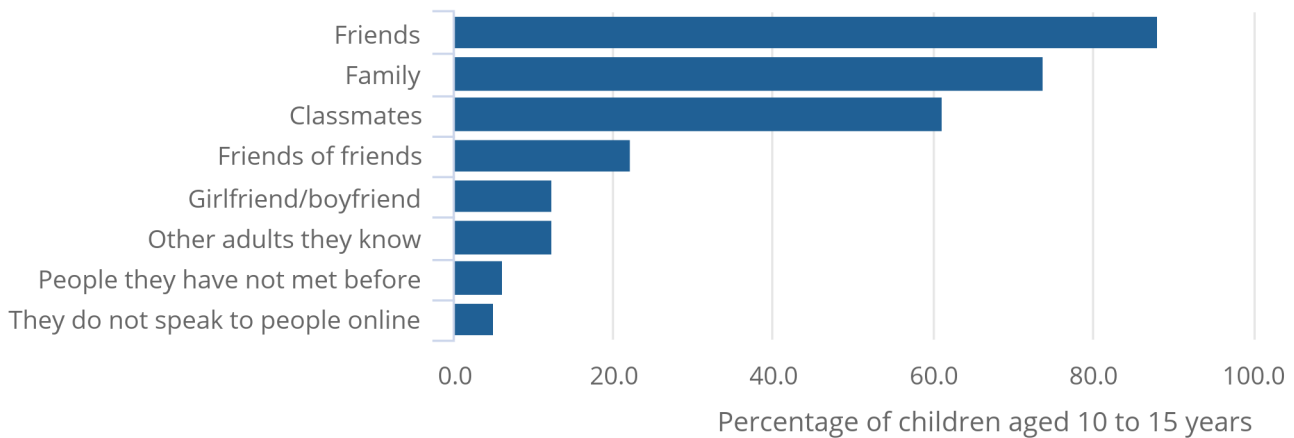
3 . Prevalence of children speaking to or meeting someone online

Figure 4: Children most commonly spoke to friends, family and classmates online

Who children spoke to online, England and Wales, year ending March 2020

Figure 4: Children most commonly spoke to friends, family and classmates online

Who children spoke to online, England and Wales, year ending March 2020



Source: Office for National Statistics – Crime Survey for England and Wales

Notes:

1. Percentages may not sum to 100 as respondents may have given more than one answer.

Estimates from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) for the year ending March 2020 show that 95% of children aged 10 to 15 years spoke to people online. The most common people children spoke to online were friends (88%), family (74%) and classmates (61%). An estimated 6% of children spoke to people online that they have never met in person before.

Children may speak to people online who they have not met in person before to make new friends or join communities, which can have a positive impact on their lives. However, speaking to people online comes with significant risks. Children may not be able to verify the true identity of the person they talk with and may be coerced into sharing sensitive information.

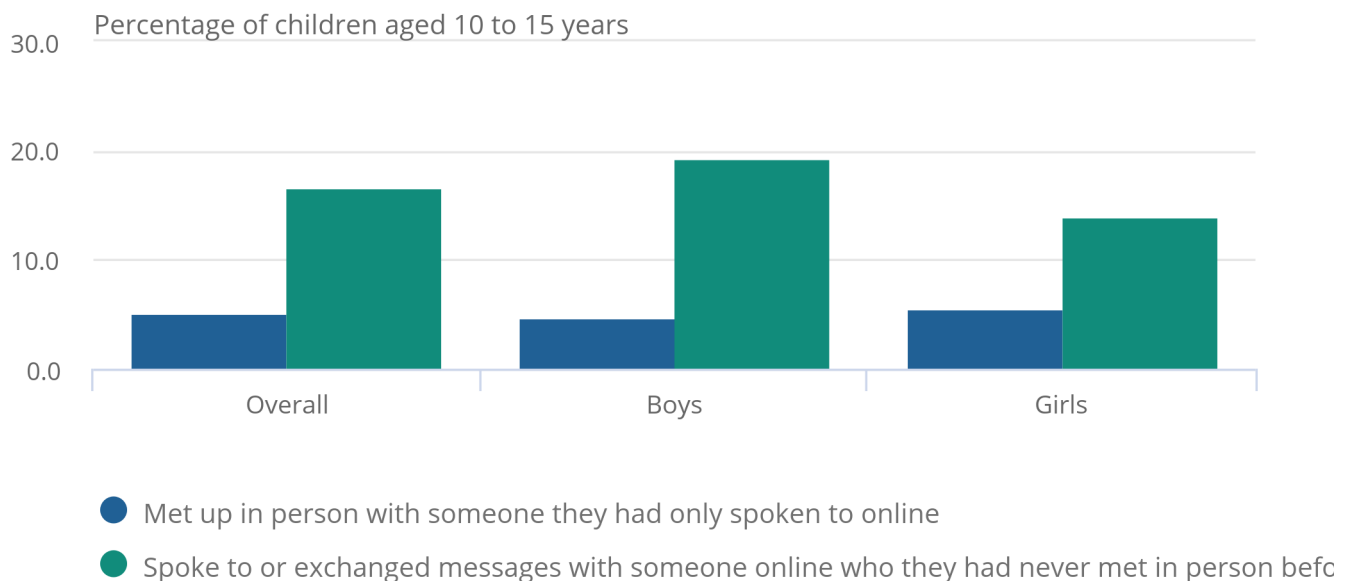
Around 1 in 50 children (2%) said that they spoke to or messaged someone online in the previous 12 months who they thought was their age but later found out were much older. Overall, around 1 in 25 children (4%) experienced this at some point in their lifetime.

Figure 5: Around one in six children spoke to someone online in the previous 12 months who they had never met in person before

Proportion of children who spoke to someone new online or met up in person with someone in the previous 12 months, by sex, England and Wales, year ending March 2020

Figure 5: Around one in six children spoke to someone online in the previous 12 months who they had never met in person before

Proportion of children who spoke to someone new online or met up in person with someone in the previous 12 months, by sex, England and Wales, year ending March 2020



Source: Office for National Statistics – Crime Survey for England and Wales

An estimated 682,000 children spoke to someone online who they had never met in person before (17%) in the previous 12 months. Boys were more likely than girls to have spoken to someone new online (19% compared with 14%). Older children were more likely to have spoken to someone new online than younger children (28% of 15-year-olds compared with 5% of 10-year-olds). Children from an Asian or Asian British ethnic background were significantly less likely to have spoken to someone new online (9%) compared with those from a White (18%) or Black or Black British ethnic background (20%).

These data cover a period prior to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. It is likely that COVID-19 has had a substantial impact on the degree to which children are involved in these online activities, given the probable increase in the time children spend online.

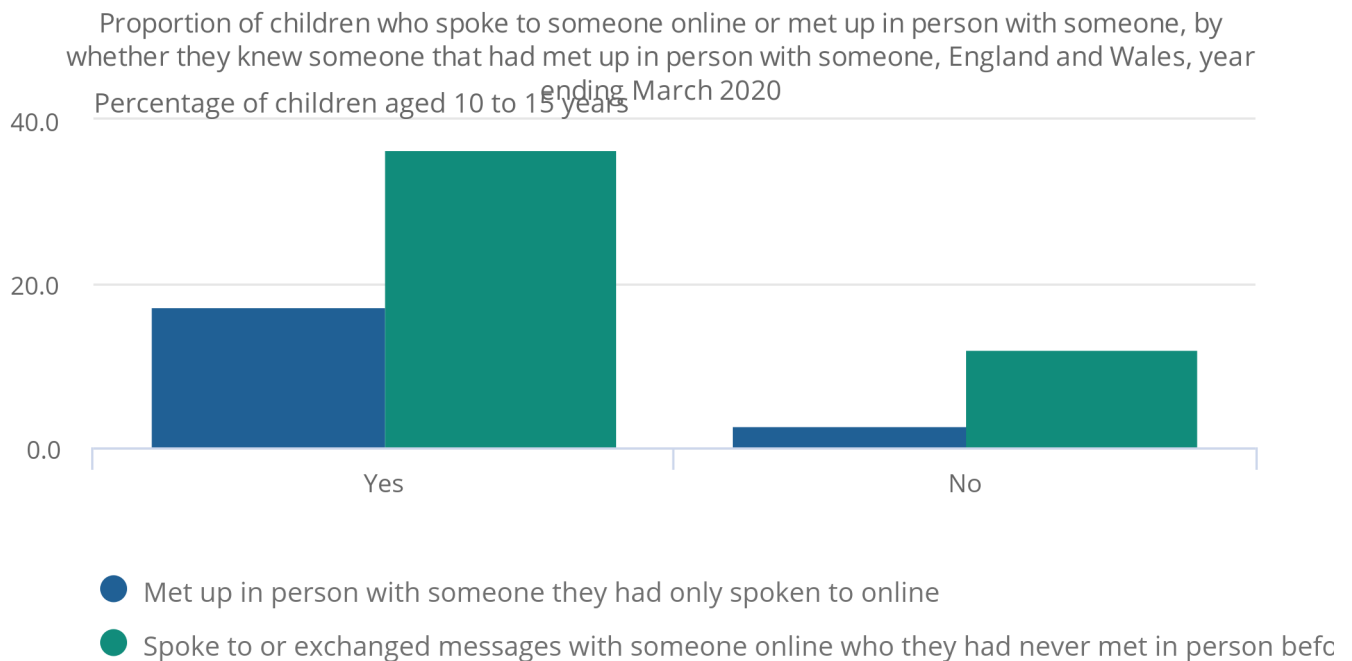
An estimated 5% of children (212,000) aged 10 to 15 years met up in person with someone they had only spoken to online in the previous 12 months. Children aged 14 and 15 years were significantly more likely to meet up in person with someone than children aged 10 and 11 years. There was not any [statistically significant difference](#) in the proportion of children who met up in person with someone they had only spoken to online between boys and girls.

It is important to bear in mind that while engaging in these activities is considered to carry risks for children, not all of these activities reported on will have resulted in a harmful situation.

Figure 6: Children who knew someone that had met up in person with someone they had only spoken to online were six times more likely to have met up in person with someone themselves in the last 12 months

Proportion of children who spoke to someone online or met up in person with someone, by whether they knew someone that had met up in person with someone, England and Wales, year ending March 2020

Figure 6: Children who knew someone that had met up in person with someone they had only spoken to online were six times more likely to have met up in person with someone themselves in the last 12 months



Source: Office for National Statistics – Crime Survey for England and Wales

Children were also three times more likely to have spoken to someone online who they had never met in person before if they knew someone else who had met up in person with someone (37% compared with 12%). This could illustrate the influence peers may have on children’s online behaviour.

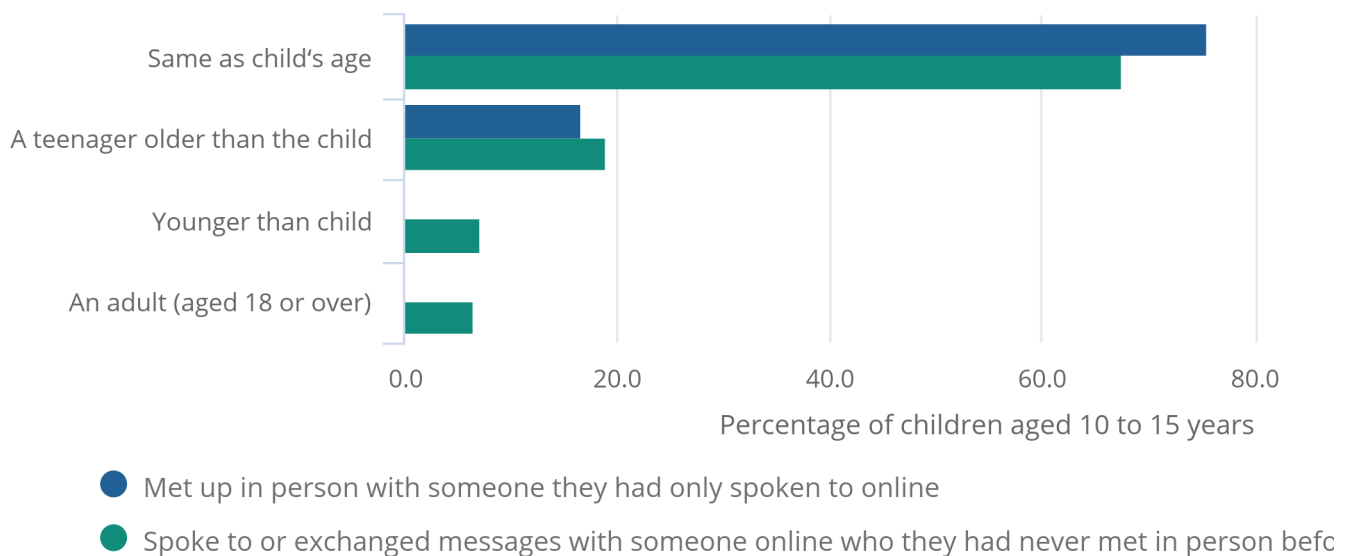
4 . The nature of speaking to or meeting someone online

Figure 7: The person children spoke to online who they had never met in person before or met up in person with having only spoken to them online was most commonly another child their age

Age of the person who children spoke to online or met up with in person in the previous 12 months, England and Wales, year ending March 2020

Figure 7: The person children spoke to online who they had never met in person before or met up in person with having only spoken to them online was most commonly another child their age

Age of the person who children spoke to online or met up with in person in the previous 12 months, England and Wales, year ending March 2020



Source: Office for National Statistics – Crime Survey for England and Wales

Notes:

1. Respondents are asked to provide the age of the person they spoke to or met up with in person to the best of their knowledge. Some responses may be inaccurate, and data should be interpreted with caution.
2. The values for the response categories “younger than child” and “an adult” for the meeting up in person category cannot be presented due to disclosure constraints.

While speaking to or meeting someone the same age might be considered lower risk than with someone who is older or an adult, it's important to acknowledge that the situation could still pose a risk to either of the children involved.

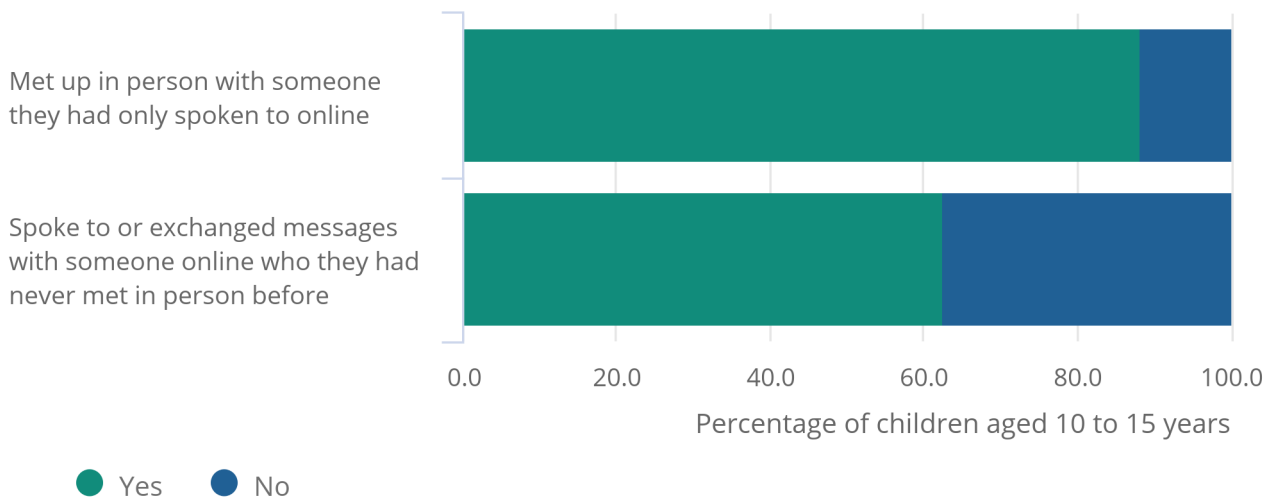
Thinking of the most recent time in the previous 12 months, of all the children aged 10 to 15 years who spoke to someone online who they had never met in person before, 59% spoke with a boy or male whereas 41% spoke with a girl or female. Boys were significantly more likely to speak to a boy or male online (71%) than girls (43%), while girls were significantly more likely to speak to a girl or female online (57%) than boys were (29%).

Figure 8: An estimated 37% of children who spoke to someone online who they had never met in person before did not have a connection to or a mutual friend with that person

Percentage of children who had a connection to or a mutual friend with the person they spoke to online or met up with in person in the previous 12 months, England and Wales, year ending March 2020

Figure 8: An estimated 37% of children who spoke to someone online who they had never met in person before did not have a connection to or a mutual friend with that person

Percentage of children who had a connection to or a mutual friend with the person they spoke to online or met up with in person in the previous 12 months, England and Wales, year ending March 2020



Source: Office for National Statistics – Crime Survey for England and Wales

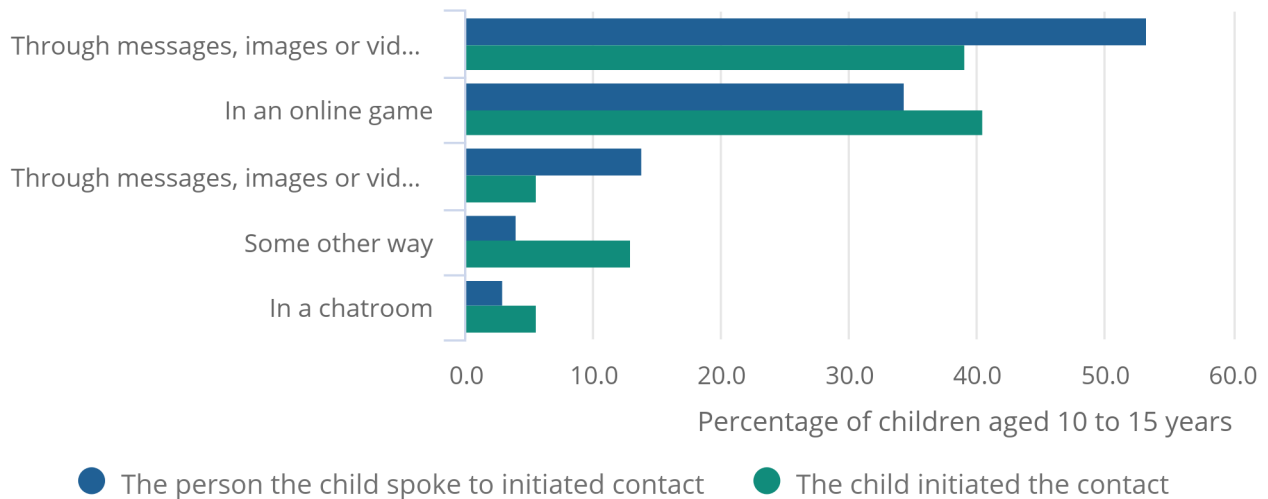
Just under half of the children interviewed (48%) said they had initiated the contact when speaking with someone online who they had never met in person before and just over half (54%) said they had initiated the contact when they met up in person with someone they had only spoken to online. It's also important to acknowledge that there could be situations where a child considers themselves to have initiated the contact but they were coerced into this by someone else.

Figure 9: Around two in five children who initiated contact with someone online who they had never met in person before, contacted them through an online game

How children who spoke to someone new online in the previous 12 months contacted the person or were contacted by the person they spoke to, England and Wales, year ending March 2020

Figure 9: Around two in five children who initiated contact with someone online who they had never met in person before, contacted them through an online game

How children who spoke to someone new online in the previous 12 months contacted the person or were contacted by the person they spoke to, England and Wales, year ending March 2020



Source: Office for National Statistics – Crime Survey for England and Wales

Notes:

1. Percentages may not sum to 100 as respondents may have given more than one answer.

The majority of messages sent by children who initiated contact when speaking to someone online who they had never met in person before were sent privately (63%), while 24% were through group messages and 14% were messages that anyone could see online.

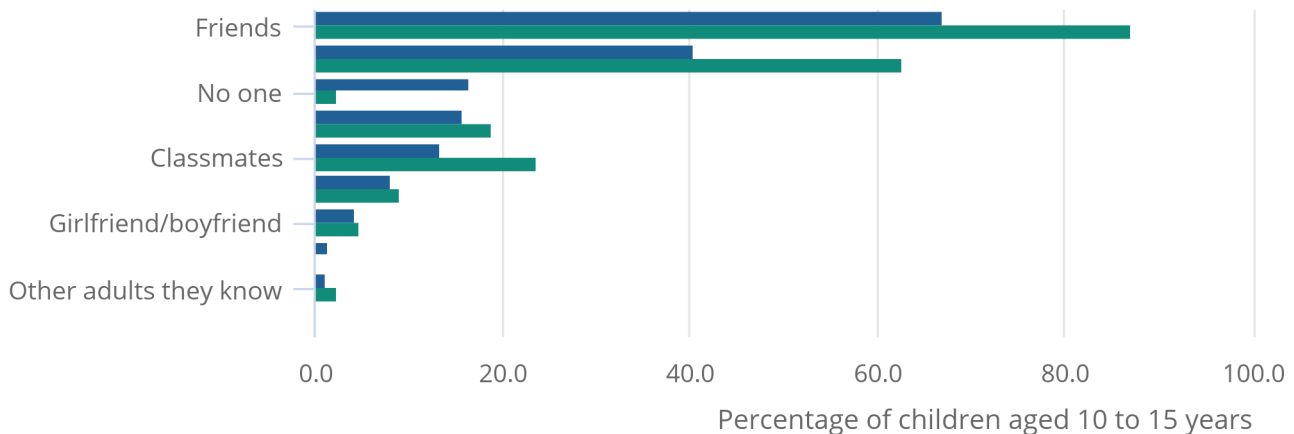
A similar pattern is observed for the messages received by children who were contacted first by the other person as the majority of these were received privately (74%). Just over one-fifth of children (22%) were contacted through group messages and 4% were contacted through messages that anyone could see online.

Figure 10: The majority of children who spoke to someone online who they had never met in person before or met up in person with someone they had only spoken to online told someone else about it

Who children told about their experiences of speaking to someone new online or meeting up in person with someone in the previous 12 months, England and Wales, year ending March 2020

Figure 10: The majority of children who spoke to someone online who they had never met in person before or met up in person with someone they had only spoken to online told someone else about it

Who children told about their experiences of speaking to someone new online or meeting up in person with someone in the previous 12 months, England and Wales, year ending March 2020



- Spoke to or exchanged messages with someone online who they had never met in person before
- Met up in person with someone they had only spoken to online

Source: Office for National Statistics – Crime Survey for England and Wales

Notes:

1. Percentages may not sum to 100 as respondents may have given more than one answer.
2. The value for the response category “helpline” for the meeting up in person category cannot be presented due to disclosure constraints.

Most commonly children told their friends, with 87% of children who met up in person with someone they had only spoken to online and 67% of children who spoke to someone new online stating that they told their friends.

An estimated 22% of children who spoke to someone online who they had never met in person before said that they discussed meeting up in person. Of the children who did not meet up with the person they were speaking to online, 27% said that this was because they did not know the person well enough and 10% said it was because they told their parents or guardians and they did not allow them to meet up with them. Two-thirds of the children who did not meet up with the person they were speaking to online said that this was because of “some other reason”. Other reasons may be that the child did not have the chance or could not be bothered.

For the majority of children who met up in person with someone they had only spoken to online, the child being interviewed was the one to suggest meeting up (67%). The same pattern can be observed for children who spoke to someone online who they did not meet in person but did discuss meeting (69%). However, it should be taken into account that, as previous data showed, a large proportion of these interactions were between children of the same age. In addition, there may be cases, particularly in the situation where a child is speaking with an older teenager or adult, where the child might think they were responsible for suggesting meeting up when in fact the other person coerced them into suggesting it.

Around four in five children (79%) who met up in person with someone they had only spoken to online had someone else with them when they met and 21% met the person by themselves.

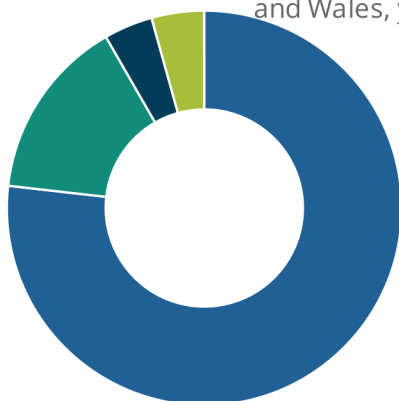
Children were asked about how they felt before meeting up in person with someone they had only spoken to online. The majority of children felt excited (35%) or happy (33%), while 11% felt nervous and 10% felt confident. Children were also asked whether anything bothered them when they met up with the person, with 4% of children stating that they were bothered by something.

Figure 11: Over three-quarters of children who met up in person with someone they had only spoken to online, met with one to three different people

How many different people children met up in person with in the previous 12 months, England and Wales, year ending March 2020

Figure 11: Over three-quarters of children who met up in person with someone they had only spoken to online, met with one to three different people

How many different people children met up in person with in the previous 12 months, England and Wales, year ending March 2020



Source: Office for National Statistics – Crime Survey for England and Wales

Notes:

1. This could include different people that children met up in person with on different occasions in the previous 12 months and situations where a child may have met up with more than one person they met online at the same time.

When asked about how many times children met up in person with someone they had only spoken to online in the previous 12 months, an estimated 27% of children met up with that person once, while 31% met up two to three times, 10% four to five times, 10% 6 to 10 times and nearly a quarter (23%) more than 10 times.

5 . Sending or receiving sexual messages

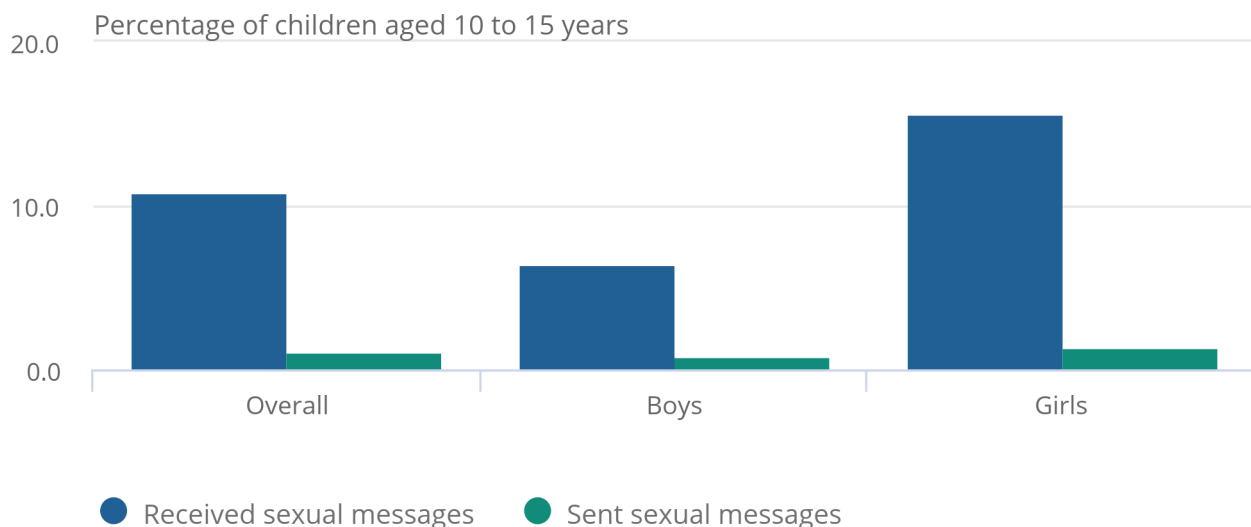
As outlined by the [NSPCC](#), the sending or receiving of sexual messages to or between children can increase a child's vulnerability to bullying and isolation. It may even lead to sexual abuse, for example if a child is coerced into sending images. It is a [criminal offence](#) to create or share explicit images of a child, even if the person doing it is a child. The term "sexual messages"^{1,2} used in the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) covers the sending and receiving of text messages as well as images and videos and therefore captures activities that are not explicitly a crime.

Figure 12: An estimated 11% of children aged 13 to 15 years stated that they had received a sexual message in the previous 12 months

Proportion of children aged 13 to 15 years who received or sent any sexual messages in the previous 12 months, by sex, England and Wales, year ending March 2020

Figure 12: An estimated 11% of children aged 13 to 15 years stated that they had received a sexual message in the previous 12 months

Proportion of children aged 13 to 15 years who received or sent any sexual messages in the previous 12 months, by sex, England and Wales, year ending March 2020



Source: Office for National Statistics – Crime Survey for England and Wales

Girls were significantly more likely to state that they had received sexual messages than boys (16% compared with 6%). There were not any [statistically significant differences](#) in the proportion of children who received sexual messages between children from different ethnicity backgrounds or by whether they had a disability³.

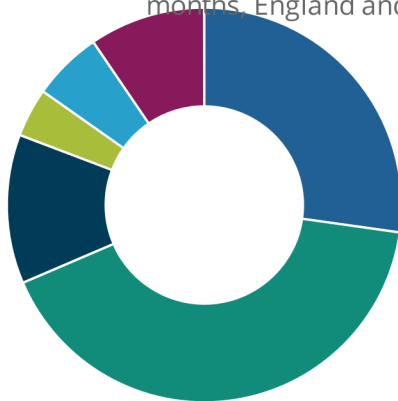
An estimated 1 in 100 children (1%) aged 13 to 15 years stated that they had sent a sexual message in the previous twelve months. There were not any statistically significant differences in the proportion of children who sent sexual messages between boys and girls, ethnic background or disability status.

Figure 13: Nearly three-quarters of children aged 13 to 15 years who received sexual messages received them more than once in the previous 12 months

How often children aged 13 to 15 years received any sexual messages in the previous 12 months, England and Wales, year ending March 2020

Figure 13: Nearly three-quarters of children aged 13 to 15 years who received sexual messages received them more than once in the previous 12 months

How often children aged 13 to 15 years received any sexual messages in the previous 12 months, England and Wales, year ending March 2020



Source: Office for National Statistics – Crime Survey for England and Wales

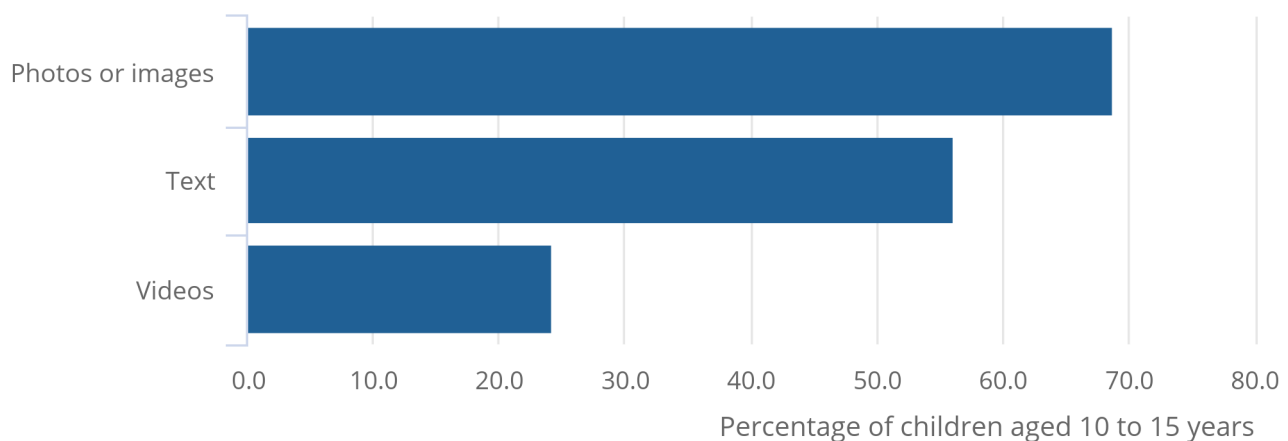
The majority of children (84%) received sexual messages through messages, images or videos sent to them, while 17% of children received them through messages, images or videos posted online. Other methods through which children received sexual messages included in a chatroom (9%) and in an online game (3%).

Figure 14: An estimated 69% of children who received sexual messages received them in the form of photos or images

Type of sexual messages children aged 13 to 15 years received in the previous 12 months, England and Wales, year ending March 2020

Figure 14: An estimated 69% of children who received sexual messages received them in the form of photos or images

Type of sexual messages children aged 13 to 15 years received in the previous 12 months, England and Wales, year ending March 2020



Source: Office for National Statistics – Crime Survey for England and Wales

Notes:

1. Percentages may not sum to 100 as respondents may have given more than one answer.

Children more commonly received sexual messages through private messages (84%) rather than group messages (13%) or something that anyone could see online (3%). Sending through private messages means that unless children tell someone about the messages they received, this would be unknown by others. The Children's Commissioner for England recently highlighted the role that end-to-end encryption, currently the default for some major messaging platforms, [can play in concealing crimes against children \(PDF, 924KB\)](#).

Slightly over half of children (56%) told someone about the sexual messages they received. They were most likely to tell their friends (80%) followed by family (47%). Other people that children chose to tell about their experience of receiving sexual messages include their girlfriend or boyfriend (10%), teacher (3%), other adults they know (2%) and other school staff (1%).

Notes for: Sending or receiving sexual messages

1. Due to the nature of questions about sending or receiving sexual messages, they are only asked to children aged 13 to 15 years.
2. These data cover a period prior to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. It is likely that COVID-19 has had a substantial impact on the degree to which children are involved in these online activities given the probable increase in the time children spend online.
3. The definition of disability used is consistent with the core definition of disability under the Equality Act 2010. A person is considered to have a disability if they have a long-standing illness, disability or impairment which causes difficulty with day-to-day activities.

6 . Online security

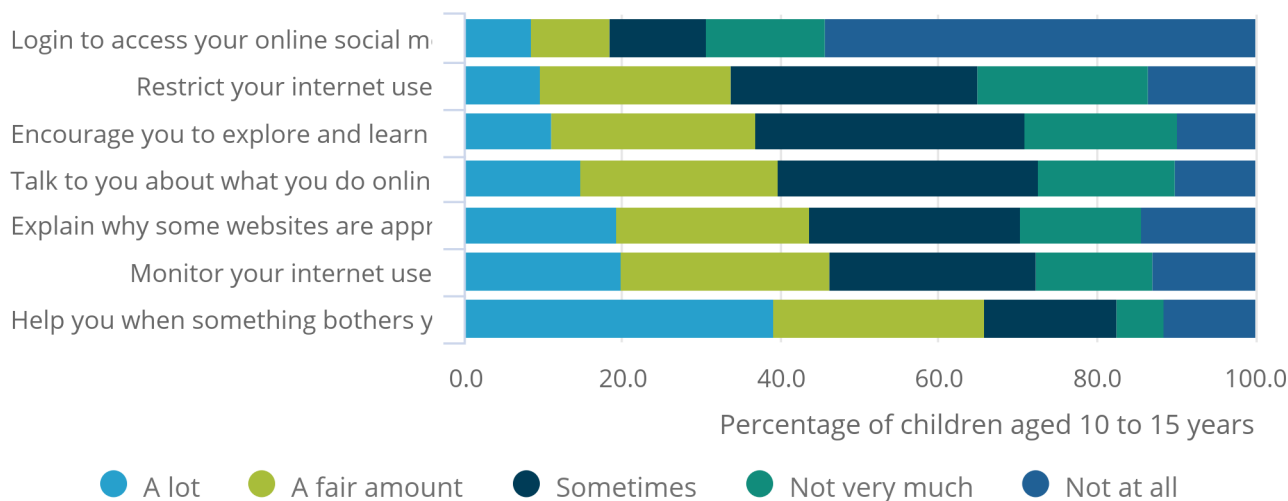
Parents or guardians can have an important role in educating their children in using the internet safely, regulating their internet use and providing help when something bothers their child online.

Figure 15: Most parents had some involvement in their child’s internet use

How involved the parents or guardians of children were in their child's internet use, England and Wales, year ending March 2020

Figure 15: Most parents had some involvement in their child’s internet use

How involved the parents or guardians of children were in their child’s internet use, England and Wales, year ending March 2020



Source: Office for National Statistics – Crime Survey for England and Wales

Children were also asked whether their parents set them any rules about the length of time or when they can go online, with 64% of children aged 10 to 15 years saying that they did have some sort of rules about internet use.

Parents can help protect their children from potential dangers when they are online, if they have some knowledge about what their children do online. Almost two out of five children aged 10 to 15 years (38%) said that their parents knew a lot about what they do online, 47% of them a fair amount, 12% not very much and 3% nothing at all.

An estimated 27% of children said that they tell their parents a lot of what they do online, 44% a fair amount, 23% not very much and 6% of children said that they tell them nothing at all.

As some children spend time online without any supervision and without their parents knowing what they do online, it is important that children have the appropriate knowledge about internet security. The majority of children (95%) said they had received information about internet security, while 1 in 20 children (5%) said they had not. The most frequent sources of information were school (82%) and parents (15%), while 2% of children said they received the information from the internet, 1% from friends and 1% from other sources¹.

There are a number of resources for parents and guardians that can help them have a positive contribution to children's online lives:

- the [online safety](#) webpage from the NSPCC provides a guide to parents on how to keep their children safe when online and outlines the latest online safety news
- the [online toolkits for parents and children](#) were developed by the Children's Commissioner's Office (CCO) in response to the COVID-19 crisis and provide a useful overview of how to help children stay safe and happy, especially now that they are spending more time online
- The [digital 5 a day](#) tool created by the CCO is a great way to begin a conversation with children about how to achieve a healthy and balanced digital diet
- The report [Who Knows What About Me?](#) includes five top tips for parents and children specifically looking at how children can manage their data online

Notes for: Online security

1. Due to rounding, the percentages may not sum to 100.

7 . Children's online behaviour data

[Children's online behaviour in England and Wales appendix tables](#)

Dataset | Released 09 February 2021

Data from the 10- to 15-year-olds' Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) on the prevalence and nature of speaking or meeting someone online and sending or receiving sexual messages.

8 . Glossary

Speaking to or exchanging messages with someone online who they had never met in person before

This includes children who contacted or were contacted by someone online who they had never met up with in person. This includes contact through social networking sites, instant messaging, online gaming, chatrooms or any other way online.

Meeting up in person with someone they had only spoken to online

This includes children who met up in person with someone they had only spoken to online through social networking sites, instant messaging, online gaming, chatrooms or any other way online.

Sexual messages

Sexual messages can be photos, images, videos or text that can be sent or received by a child through messages in online games, chatrooms, social media or any other online way. Text messages or photos sent between mobile phones not using the internet are not included.

9 . Measuring the data

Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW)

The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) is a face-to-face victimisation survey, which asks people resident in households in England and Wales about their experiences of a selected range of offences in the 12 months prior to the interview. In addition, from January 2009, in households with children aged 10 to 15 years, a child is also selected at random to be interviewed using a separate shorter 10- to 15-year-olds' questionnaire. For the year ending March 2020, 2,398 children aged 10 to 15 years took part in the children's survey.

Data used in this bulletin come from modules of the self-completion section of the [10- to 15-year-olds' questionnaire](#). All differences reported in this bulletin are [statistically significant](#) at the 5% level unless stated otherwise.

The "sending and receiving images" module of the [10- to 15-year-olds' questionnaire](#) was only asked to children aged 13 to 15 years. This is due to the sensitive nature of the questions.

Putting the safety of the public first, we have suspended all face-to-face interviewing on the CSEW to minimise social contact as a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Fieldwork for the year ending March 2020 was suspended two weeks early on Wednesday 17 March 2020 just prior to the lockdown restrictions being announced by the government on 23 March 2020. Estimates for the year ending March 2020 presented in this release are therefore unaffected by the pandemic.

On 20 May 2020, we launched an interim telephone survey (TCSEW) based on a reduced set of questions usually collected through the face-to-face CSEW. The TCSEW does not collect data from children aged 10 to 15 years, as the procedure for interviewing more than one member of the household via a telephone interview would be complex and add considerable time to the length of the household interview. We do not currently know when we will return to face-to-face interviewing.

The [User guide to crime statistics for England and Wales](#) provides detailed information about the CSEW.

Safeguarding

Because of the sensitive nature of the questions and the young age of the respondents, we took care to address a series of ethical considerations before introducing these questions into the survey. Our concerns focused on how we could identify an "at risk" child through the proposed data collection and how to respond to such an identification without undermining respondent trust and confidentiality. To address this, we sought advice from both the NSPCC Research Ethics Committee and the National Statistician's Data Ethics Advisory Committee as well as approval from the latter.

Consequently, we implemented a "risk rating" approach where, based on the answers a child gives, a score is calculated that can fall into three categories (low, medium or high risk). Once the risk rating is calculated, a letter is sent to both the parent and child explaining the "risk rating" for the child. This letter does not reveal any children's responses to the questions or which questions have triggered a higher risk rating for the children. Children are made aware of this process before starting their interview and letters are sent to all children who have completed the survey. In this way, we achieve a good balance between maintaining the confidentiality of the child's responses but at the same time identifying and dealing with possible causes for concern. In addition, a number of resources with further information about this process and possible contacts for help were provided to both parents and the children before the interviews took place.

Pilot studies carried out by an independent contractor showed that a child's willingness to complete the survey and do so honestly was not affected by the risk rating approach. The approach was welcomed as a valuable tool for better understanding and discussion of online risks.

Calculating prevalence estimates

Children were first asked whether they have met up in person with anyone they had only spoken to online first. This was used to calculate the prevalence of children meeting up in person with someone they had only spoken to online first.

Children followed different routes through the questionnaire based on their response to this question. In both routes, children were asked whether in the last 12 months they had spoken to or exchanged messages with anyone online who they had not met up in person before. The responses for these two questions were combined to provide the estimate of children speaking to people online who they had not met in person previously.

10 . Strengths and limitations

Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW)

The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) is a large, national sample survey that has used a consistent methodology over time. Households from all over England and Wales are interviewed, and the raw results are weighted to compensate for unequal probabilities of selection involved in the sample design so that they are nationally representative.

The CSEW does not cover those not resident in households, for example, children who live in institutions are excluded from the survey. In addition, the survey is subject to error associated with sampling and respondents recalling past events, especially children. Children complete these self-completion modules on the interviewer's tablet by themselves (computer-assisted self-interviewing (CASI)) and, when finished, their answers are hidden. Although this is considered the best data-collection method for questions with a sensitive nature, it is still acknowledged that children may not report all experiences of online behaviours accurately.

Comparability

Since the suspension of all face-to-face interviewing and the replacement of the CSEW with an interim telephone survey (TCSEW), we have been collecting a small amount of data on children's online experiences by proxy through parents. These questions collect information on the online activities of children aged 10 to 15 years during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, including whether they experienced any negative experiences while online and parent's knowledge of what their child is doing online. Findings from these questions were reported in our [Coronavirus and crime in England and Wales: August 2020](#) and [Crime in England and Wales: year ending September 2020](#) releases. Because of differences in the mode and methods used, these data are not comparable with data provided in this release.

Experimental statistics

Data used in this bulletin come from the self-completion modules of the 10- to 15-year-olds' questionnaire that was introduced in April 2019. As the year ending March 2020 is the first year of data, statistics in this publication are classified as [Experimental Statistics](#); therefore, users should interpret and treat these statistics with caution. As the statistics are new, they are still subject to testing in terms of their volatility but also their ability to meet customer needs. Experimental statistics can become [National Statistics](#) once they meet the required standards, something that is a long-term aim for these statistics.

Feedback from users on our statistics is welcome, especially when this concerns newly developed statistics. We are willing to consider different suggestions to further improve the statistics included in this release and ensure the provision of high-standard statistics.

Users can provide their feedback and suggestions by emailing crimestatistics@ons.gov.uk.

11 . Related links

[Online bullying in England and Wales: year ending March 2020](#)

Bulletin | Released 16 November 2020

Estimates of the prevalence and nature of online bullying among children using data from the 10- to 15-year-olds' Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW).

[Childhood vulnerability to victimisation in England and Wales: year ending March 2017 to year ending March 2019](#)

Bulletin | Released 5 November 2020

Victimisation and negative behaviours of children aged 10 to 15 years living in a household with an adult who reported experiencing domestic abuse, substance misuse and mental ill-health (the so-called "toxic trio" factors) based on findings from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW).

[Child abuse in England and Wales: March 2020](#)

Bulletin | Released 5 March 2020

Statistics and research on child abuse in England and Wales, bringing together a range of different data sources from across government and the voluntary sector.

[Coronavirus and crime in England and Wales: August 2020](#)

Bulletin | Released 26 August 2020

Impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on crime and people's perceptions of crime during the April and May 2020 period of national lockdown.

[Crime in England and Wales: year ending September 2020](#)

Bulletin | Released 03 February 2021

Crime against households and adults using data from police recorded crime and the new telephone-operated Crime Survey for England and Wales. Includes the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on crime and people's perceptions of crime during the June to November 2020 period.