



Young People, Internet Use and Wellbeing Technology In the home

Report Prepared by Prof Andy Phippen for SWGfL, April 2019



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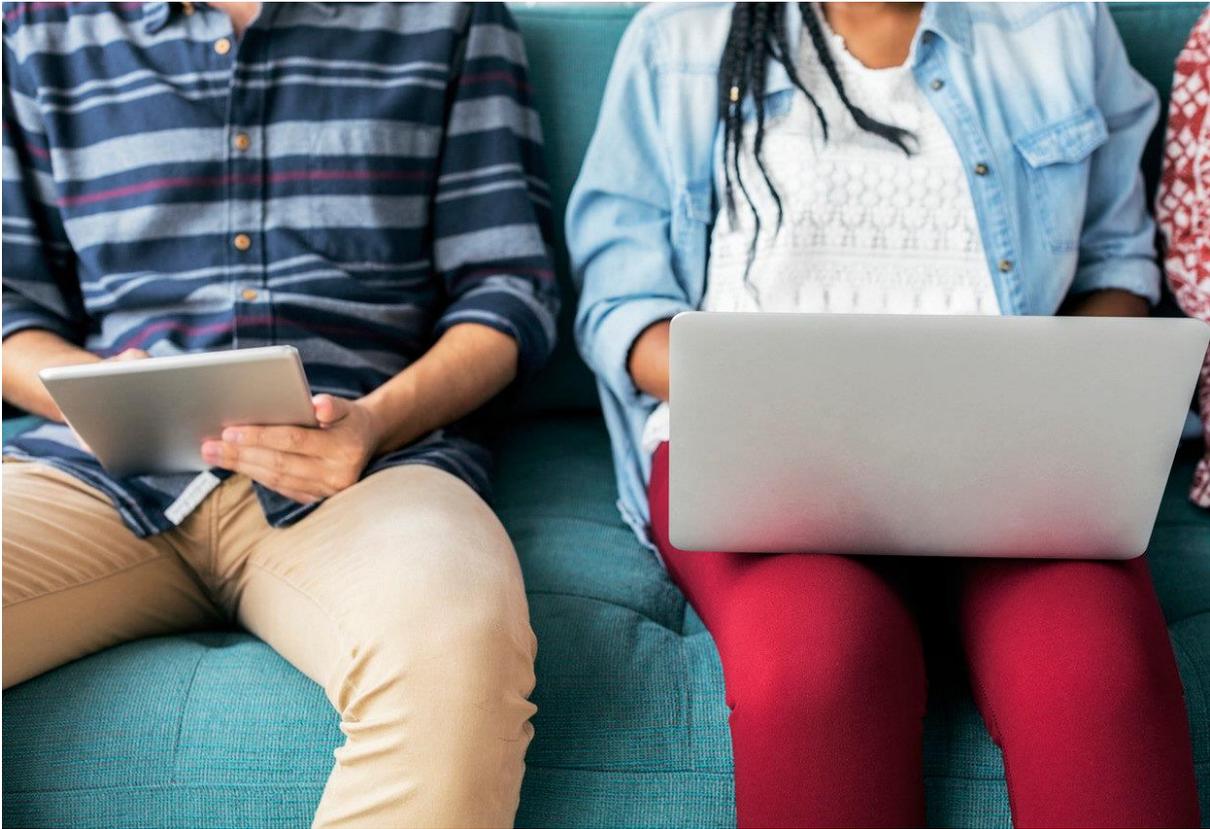
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Executive Summary

This report, the third in a series related to the relationship between digital technology and young people's wellbeing, draws from a survey sample of 9154 young people from year 2 to year 13 across over 100 schools in the UK. The focus of this report is families – the role of technology in the family home to manage concerns around online safety and interactions around digital technology use. We also draw from a separate survey conducted by Mumsnet to get a more detailed parental perspective on concerns and how they manage them.

Key highlights from this analysis include, from the parental perspective:

- Parents have a range of concerns related to both harmful content and potentially damaging contact
- Parents make use of a broad range of technical measures and “house rules” to manage online risks
- Parents of very young children are less likely to be concerned about online risks than those of older children

Young people present a complimentary, albeit somewhat conflicting as they grow older:

- Young people are likely to turn to their parents for help until they reach teenaged years
- As young people get older, they believe they know more about digital technology than their parents
- Young people become more and more confident about bypassing technical house rules as they get older
- There may be evidence to suggest as children get older they aren't aware their internet access is being monitored

The significant message from this analysis is that while house rules help, and technology provides some valuable tools to help address some concerns (such as access to harmful content), as young people get older, they will learn to bypass these “reassurances” for parents and become less confident in their parent's support if things go wrong. We also know that tools and rules will do less to prevent contact risks, such as grooming and bullying, two things parents are very concerned with. Tools and rules are no replacement for open dialogue. They can only ever be part of the solution.

Introduction

SWGfL is a charity who works to understand how children and young people use technology, deliver effective resources to support schools in ensuring they can use technology in a safe and risk manner and provide thought leadership around education policy and practice related to online safety.

As part of its work with schools across the UK, SWGfL regularly embarks on survey¹ work with schools with whom they are working, in order to collect baseline data on pupils, and also to compare the young people at the school with a national perspective.

In a series of reports, of which this is the third, we will explore specific aspects of the survey and the implications for these findings for educators and policy makers.

In this report, the focus of this report is families – the role of technology in the family home to manage concerns around online safety and interactions around digital technology use. We also draw from a separate survey conducted by Mumsnet² to get a more detailed parental perspective on concerns and how they manage them. This research was conducted as part of a joint study between SWGfL, the Office of the Australian eSafety Commissioner, and Netsafe New Zealand exploring parental attitudes toward pornography³.

The role of the family home in keeping children safe online is an important one – it is undoubtedly where young people spend a lot of their time, and it is the technology in the home that allows them to go online. Equally, we know through our work that sometimes parental concerns, and how they might tackle these concerns, is somewhat contradicted by what we are told by young people. By exploring data taken around these issues from two surveys, we can better understand what works, and what doesn't, in the home.

¹ <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/ypinternet>

² https://www.mumsnet.com/child/top-online-safety-concerns-for-parents?utm_source=Twitter&utm_medium=Tweet&utm_campaign=page+survey+iwf

³ <https://www.netsafe.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/summary-report-parenting-and-pornography.pdf>

Methodology

The survey was constructed to collect basic information on:

- online usage (devices, kinds of activity, time online),
- upsetting content (both frequency and type of upset),
- issues related to abuse (saying or receiving abusive comments),
- the sorts of things that cause upset online,
- views related to online safety and wellbeing and
- controls on their internet use.

The survey was initially piloted with a primary and secondary school to determine the effectiveness and how understandable the questions were. While there were early revisions to the survey, it was launched in October 2012 and has had a stable question set since then. While there have been new questions added since inception, there have been none modified or taken away.

Since launch we have collected responses from over 20,000 children and young people from over 100 schools.

The survey is disseminated to schools prior to visits, and the schools run the survey in class so a broad cross section of respondents is reached. Since commencement of the latest version of the survey in February 2016 we have collected data from 9154 responses and it is from these responses that we present this analysis. The survey is “live” and subsequent reports will analyse data from the most current data set to ensure the analysis is as up to date as possible. Given the breadth of data we have collected over the years, we will, in one of the reports, be publishing an analysis of how trends have changed over time.

As discussed above, for this particular report we also worked with Mumsnet and the Internet Watch Foundation on a piece of analysis they performed related to parental concerns around online access and how they mitigate risks for their children. Access to this survey data gave us opportunity to contrast parental concerns with how young people respond to risk online, and what young people tell us about the controls in their homes and the value of those.

Findings from Mumsnet/IWF Survey Pertinent to this Study

In total, there were 1035 responses to the Mumsnet/IWF survey, with a broad spread of ages of children of those parents:

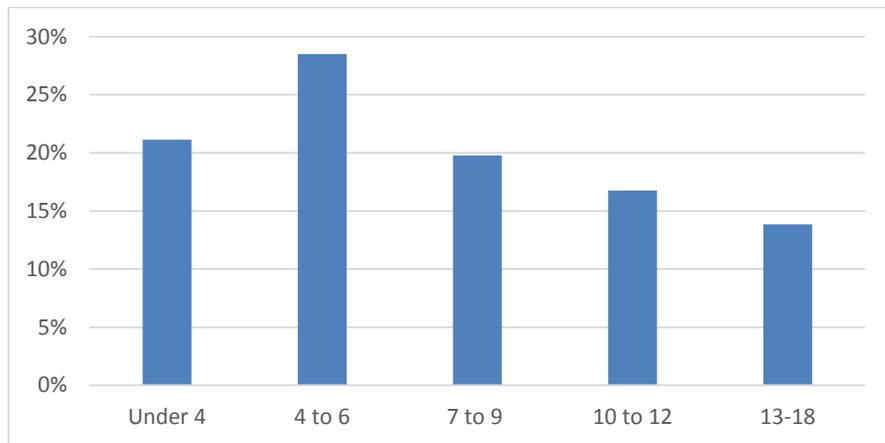


Figure 1 - Age of child thought about when answering survey

Obviously, given the nature of the membership of Mumsnet (and Gransnet) all respondents were female. While a lot of the survey was outside of the scope of this study, it doesn't provide us with useful details of parents concerns and approaches to address these concerns as a juxtaposition to what young people tell us in the SWGfL survey.

The first set of data that is relevant to this study relates to parental concerns – they were presented with a number of online “risks” and asked to firstly identify those risks they are concerned about, before selecting the one which is their biggest concern. Figure 2 details the risks in general:

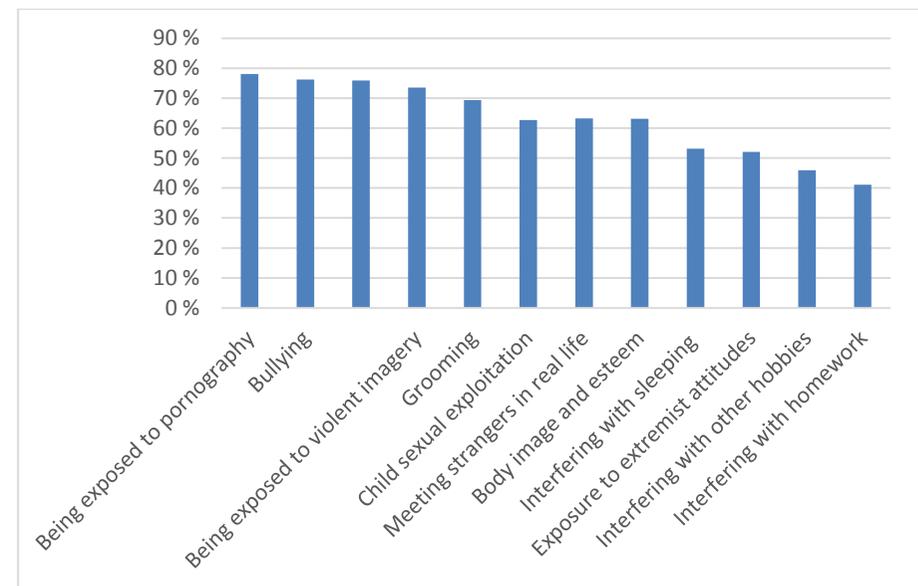


Figure 2 - What are your worries or concerns when it comes to your child using the internet? Please tick all that apply.

And shows an unsurprising set of results presenting a mix of concerns around access to different types of “harmful” content, and more contact and behavioural based worries. If we break the

responses down into age of child, we seem more dispersed results, albeit still following similar patterns, as detailed in figure 3.

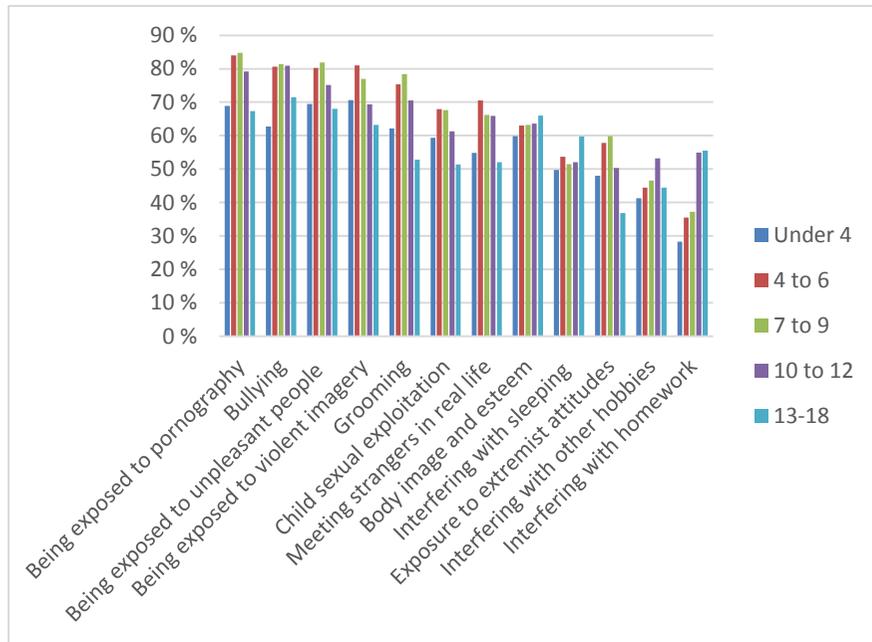


Figure 3 -What are your worries or concerns when it comes to your child using the internet? Please tick all that apply. (broken down by age of child(ren))

Content related issues come out most strongly in general, although bullying is clearly a major concern for a lot of parents, as is grooming for those with primary aged parents. Body image is also a consistent concern, which one might also view as a content related issue.

When asked what is their single biggest concern, we can see contact related concerns coming out most strongly:

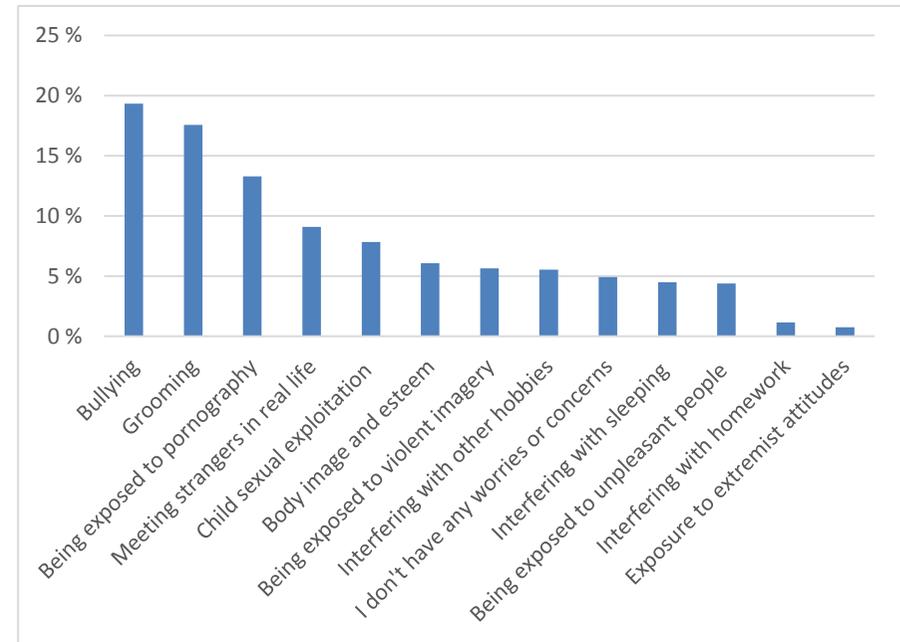


Figure 4 - What is your single biggest worry or concern when it comes to your child using the internet? Please tick only one.

However, when broken down into age group we can see that being exposed to sexualised content is one of the main concerns of parents with older children, alongside the impact screentime on wellbeing. It is also interesting to note that for over 10% of parents of very young children they claim to not have any concerns at all.

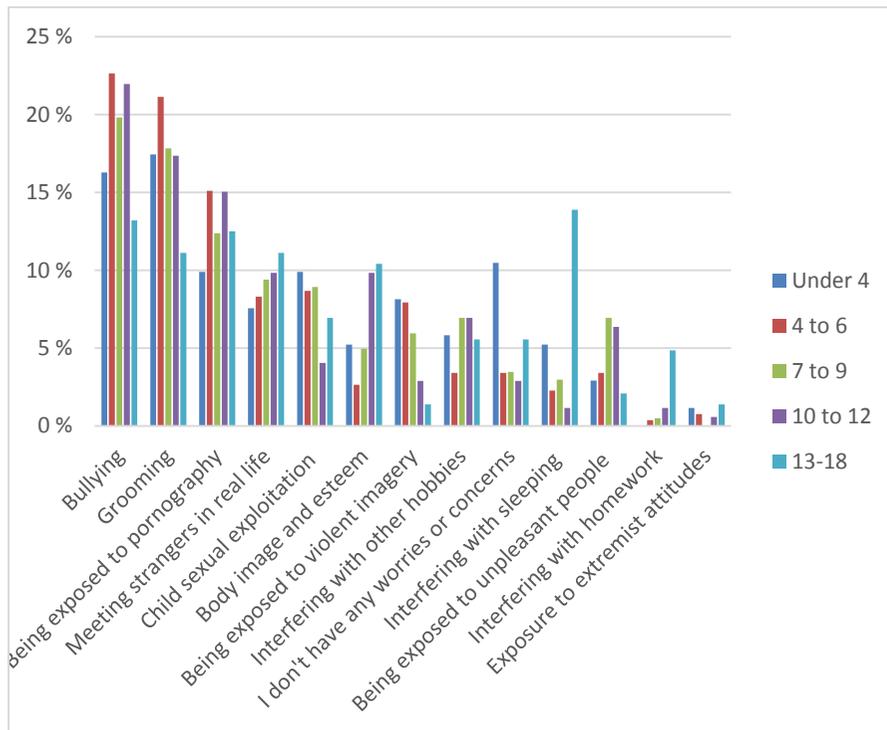


Figure 5 - What is your single biggest worry or concern when it comes to your child using the internet? Please tick only one. (differences between age groups)

Once establishing the concerns that parents have, the other part of the survey provides us with the most useful data for comparing with our own survey findings is how parents address these concerns. In addressing the concerns around content, it was interesting to note how many have installed parental controls (or, to use another name, filters). While we know that parental controls

are not infallible⁴, and can restrict access to innocuous content, they are a useful tool to prevent accidental access to content that might be upsetting for children.

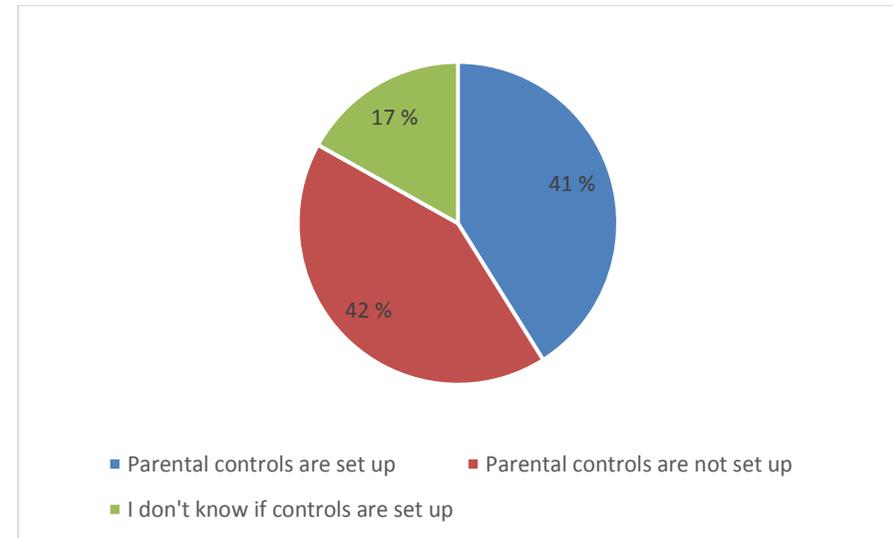


Figure 6 - Do you have parental controls set up at home?

We can see from figure 6 that only 41% of respondents were clear that parental controls are set up. If we break it down to children of different ages, we can see that parental controls are more likely to be installed for older children, which is interesting to note when we explore responses from young people themselves below.

⁴ <https://www.blocked.org.uk/>

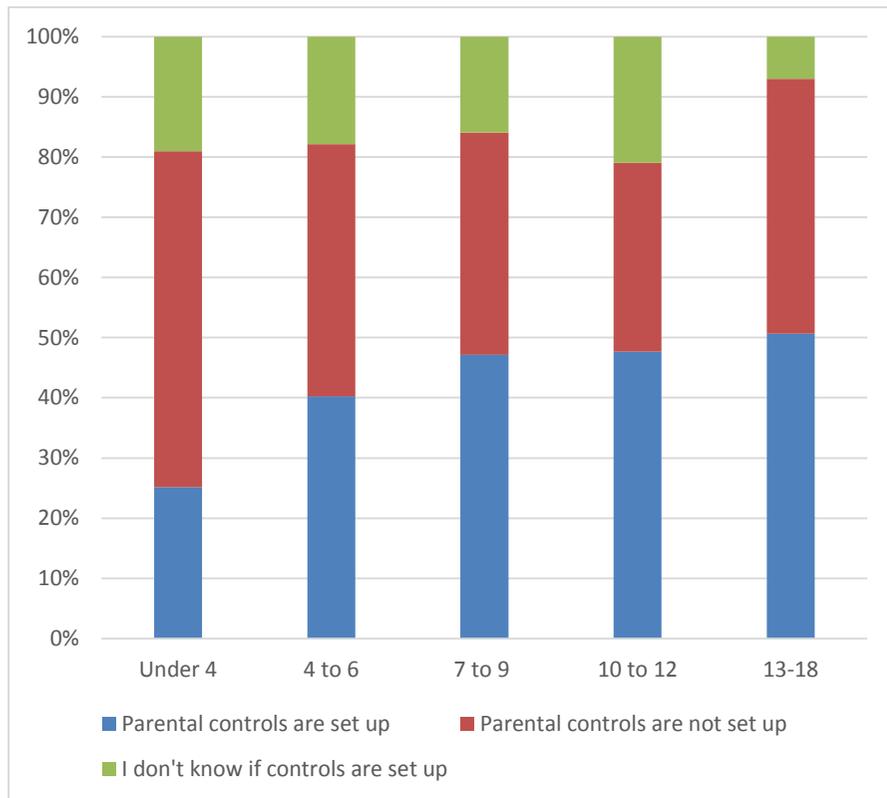


Figure 7 - Do you have parental controls set up at home? (Age of child)

The survey also expanded beyond filters to look at other approaches parents might use in either limiting internet access or defining house rules that might mitigate risk around access to digital technology in the home. In figure 8 we can see that checking which sites the child visits is the most popular approach.

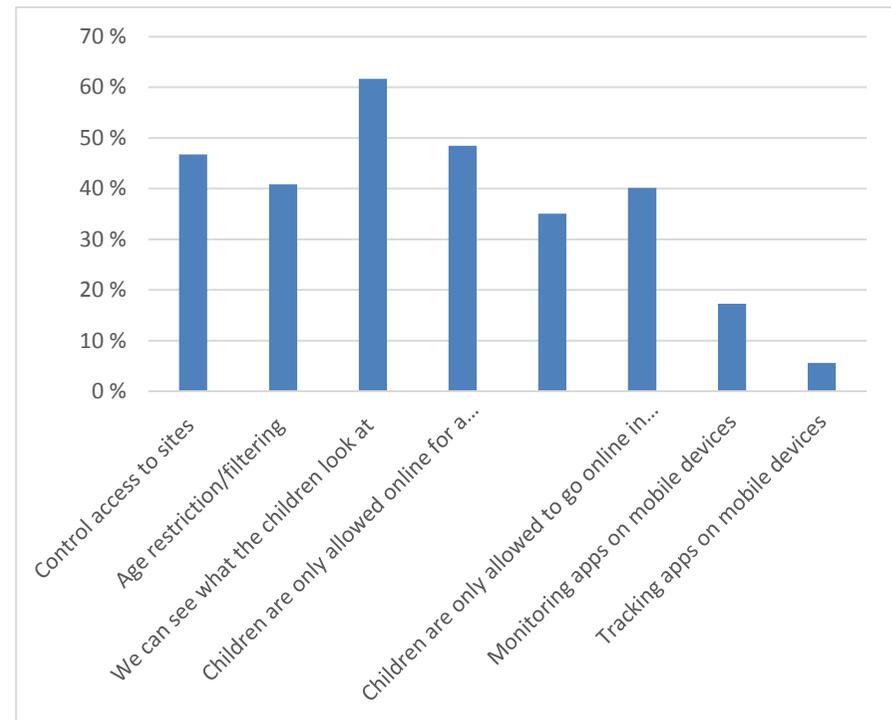


Figure 8 - Which controls or rules do you have at home related to Internet access by your children?

Age variation is interesting to explore with these responses, as broken down in figure 9. We can see that a monitoring approach is consistently popular until children reach their teenaged years, while filtering remains more of a constant (except for very young children). Time limits also seem extremely popular for younger children, but drop off rapidly for children over 10.

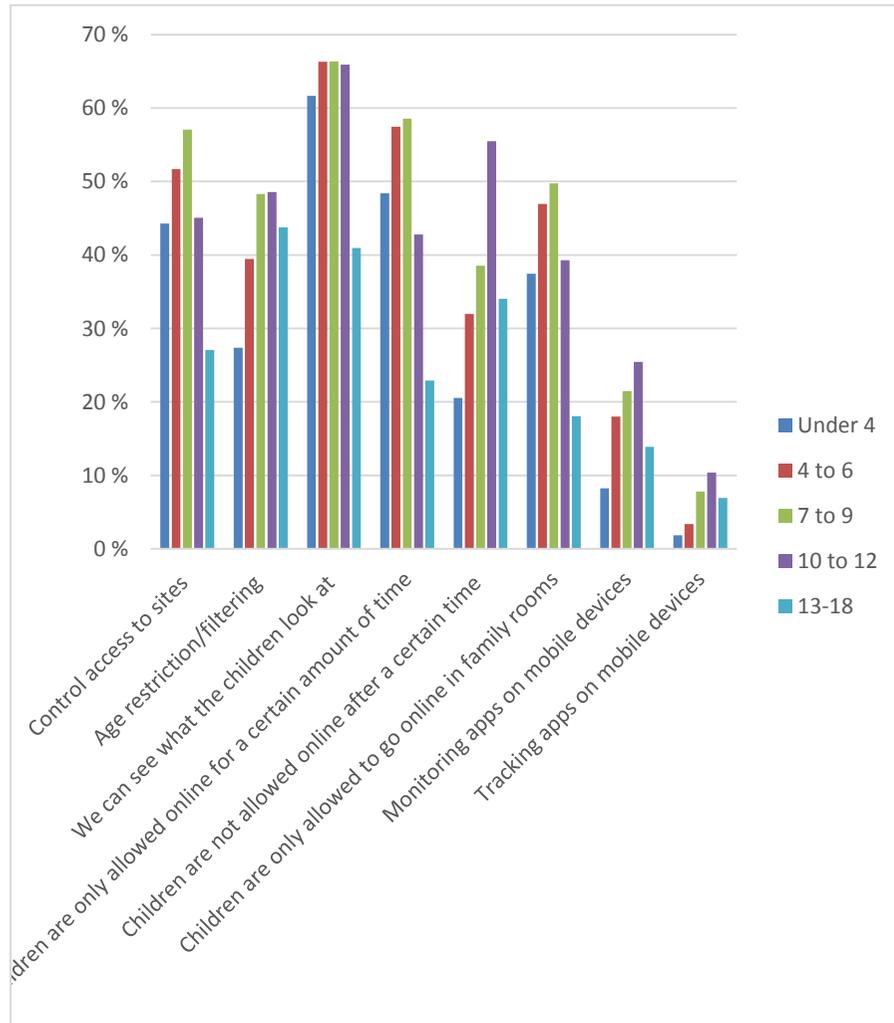


Figure 9 - Which controls or rules do you have at home related to Internet access by your children?

The picture we get from this data is that parents have a range of concerns around their children’s online access, and while there are few surprises, it is interesting to see where concerns lie around age of child (for example, there is evidence that parents of very young children have fewer concerns and use fewer house rules). We can also see that there is a significant reliance of digital technology (filtering and monitoring) to manage online lives in the home. We can also compare these response with OFCOM’s recently released 2018 Media Literacy report⁵ which stated that around 56% of parents they surveys used at least one technical tool to manage their children’s internet access.

This provides us with a useful foundation to compare with what young people tell us about how house rules affect them, as discussed below.

⁵ https://www.ofcom.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0024/134907/Children-and-Parents-Media-Use-and-Attitudes-2018.pdf

Young People’s Responses to Questions Around House Rules

Returning to the SWGfL survey of young people, the focus of our data analysis for this range of questions centres on house rules and bypassing. Namely:

- 13. Are there any rules at home for using the Internet?
- 14. If yes, what sort of rules are there (please tick all that apply)?
- 15. If you answered yes to rules at home, do you know how to get around these restrictions?
- 16. Who would you turn to if you were upset by something that happened online (please tick all that apply)?

As well as one element of question 12:

- a) *I know more about the Internet than my parents*

These questions allow us to determine, from the young person’s perspective, what they view as the rules that are placed upon them in the home, whether they work, and whether that impacts on whom they might turn to for support.

The basic demographics from our respondents are as follows:

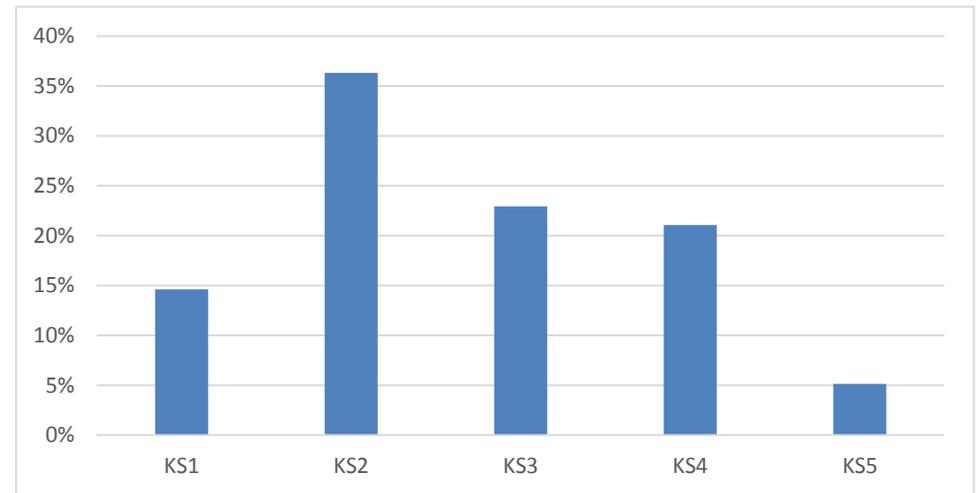


Figure 10 - What year group are you in? (combined into key stage)?

We have grouped responses into key stages, as defined in the UK England and Wales National Curriculum,⁶ to leave us with bigger groupings for analysis. Given the small number of respondents for KS5, we will not be exploring these responses in detail.

⁶ Department for Education (2014) *The national curriculum in England: complete framework for key stages 1 to 4*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-framework-for-key-stages-1-to-4>

Gender for the respondents is an almost equal split, with slightly more females than males:

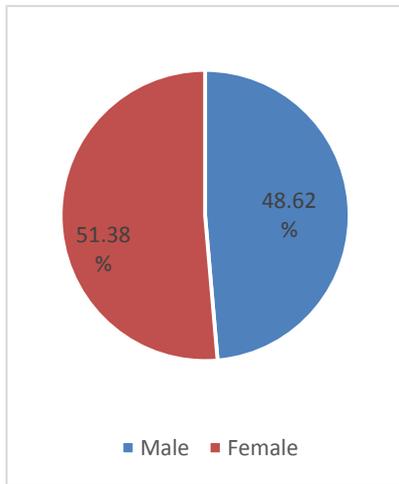


Figure 11 - Gender split in young people's data

In considering responses to the questions we are focusing upon for this analysis, the first posed is whether there are any rules at home. We can see from figure 12 that the majority (almost two thirds) of respondents say that there are rules at home:

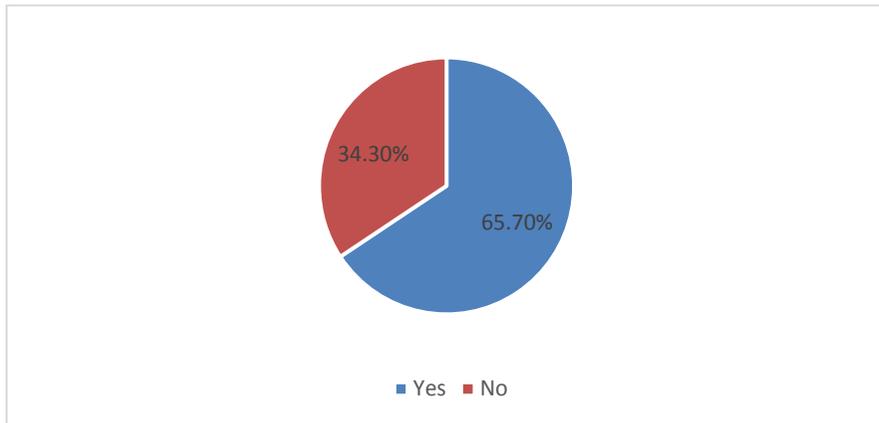


Figure 12 - Are there any rules at home for using the Internet?

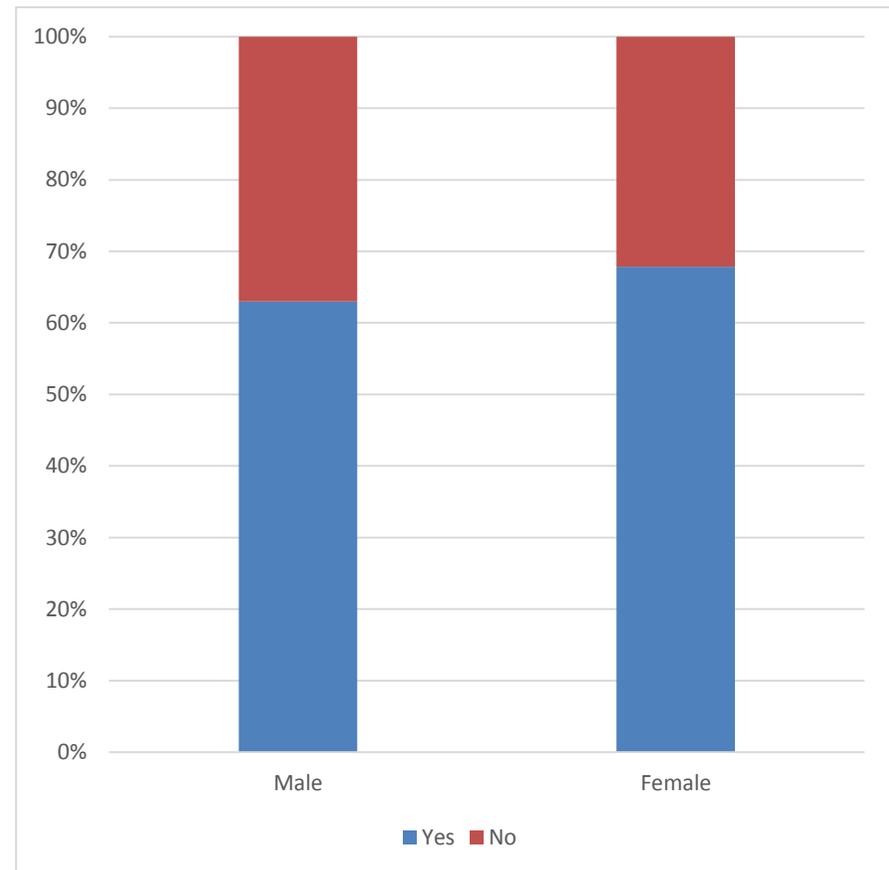


Figure 13 - Are there any rules at home for using the Internet?(gender differences)

If we consider the gender split for this question, we can see that females are slightly more likely to have rules at home than males. However, the difference isn't significant.

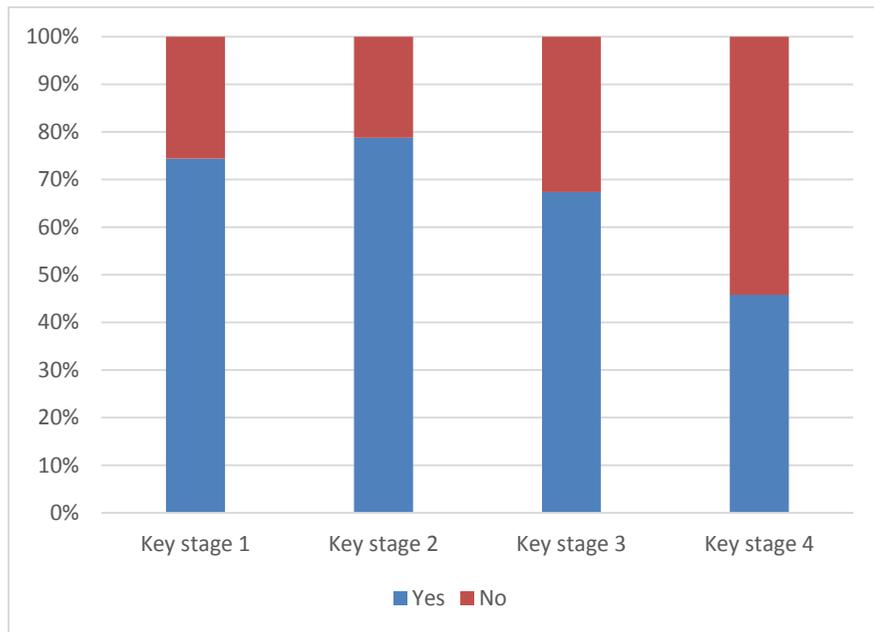


Figure 14 - Are there any rules at home for using the Internet? (age differences)

We can also see a significant drop off in house rules for older children, as detailed in figure 14. This is an immediate contrast to the Mumsnet/IWF data, where parents were telling us that older children are more likely to have parental controls set up. However, it also compliments the drop off in other “rules” in the home, such as monitoring or whitelisting sites.

In order to explore the rules in more detail we also ask what rules are in place in the home. Figure 15 shows overall results for this:

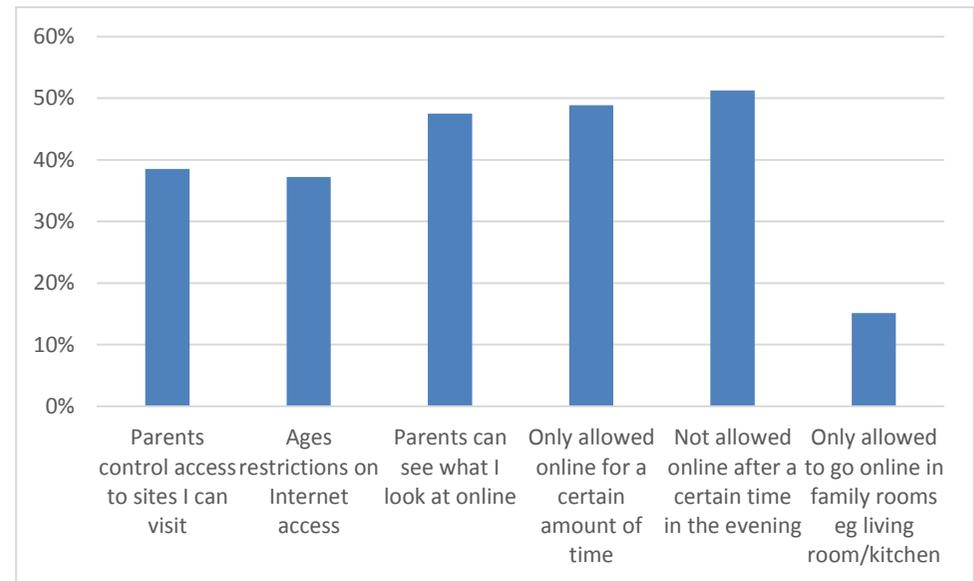


Figure 15 - If yes, what sort of rules are there (please tick all that apply)?

We can see, as with the Mumsnet data, there is a reasonably consistent spread of “rules” with technological intervention. If we compare responses directly with the Mumsnet results, we can see fair consistency across a number of factors, but also differences in areas such as “only allowed online in family rooms” and “parents can see what I look at online”. While we cannot draw conclusions from this comparison, we might observe that perhaps there is a difference in “parents can see what I look at online” because some young people will not be aware they are being monitored.

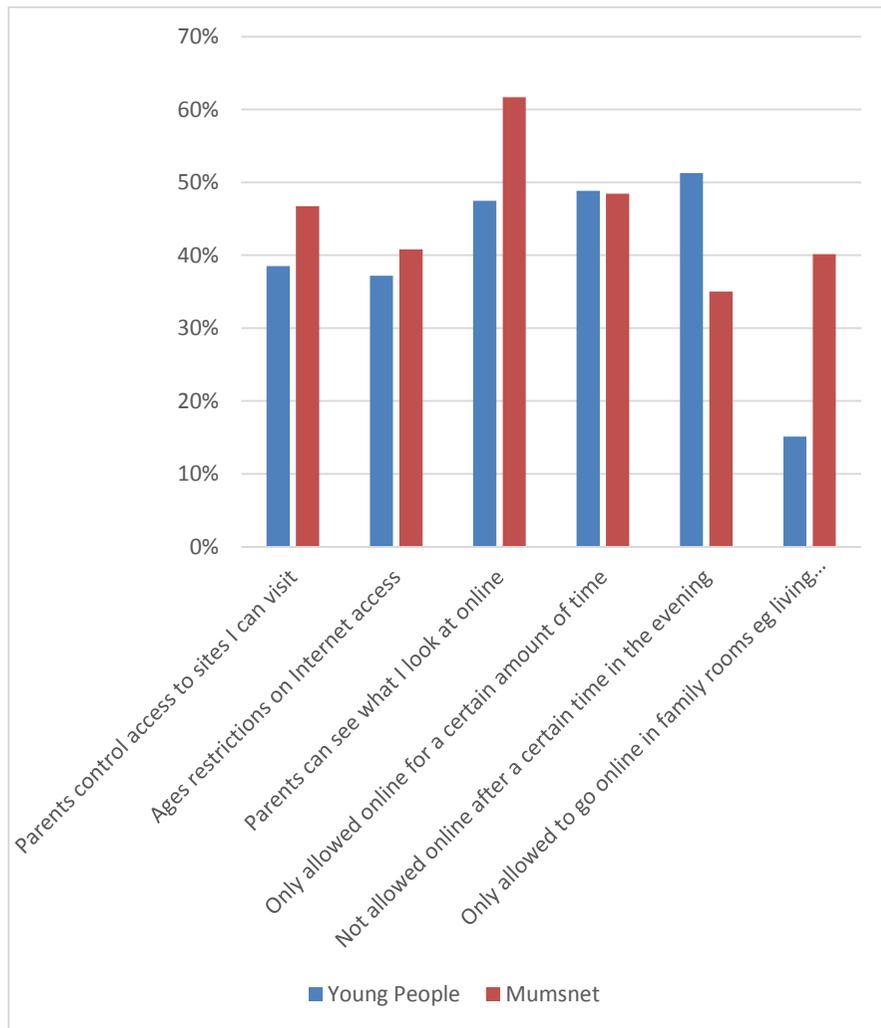


Figure 16 - Comparison of house rules between young people and Mumsnet responses

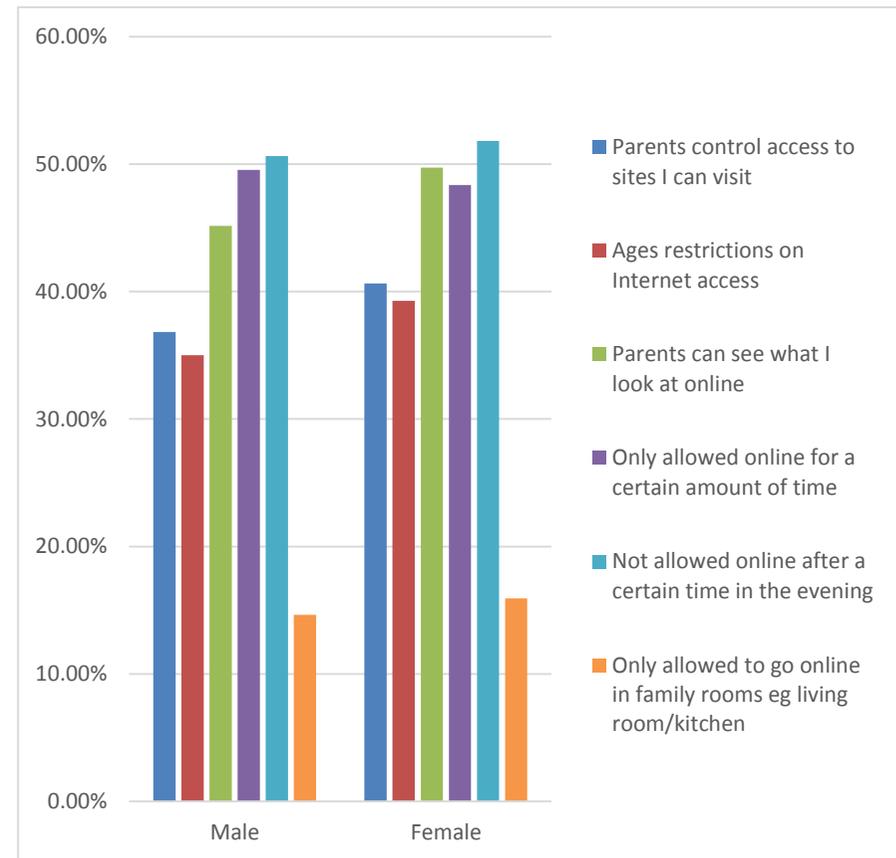


Figure 17 - If yes, what sort of rules are there (please tick all that apply)? (gender differences)

Comparisons based upon gender throw up little difference, aside from the general trend about slightly higher numbers of females being subject to house rules.

However, as we might expect, there are clear differences between age groups.

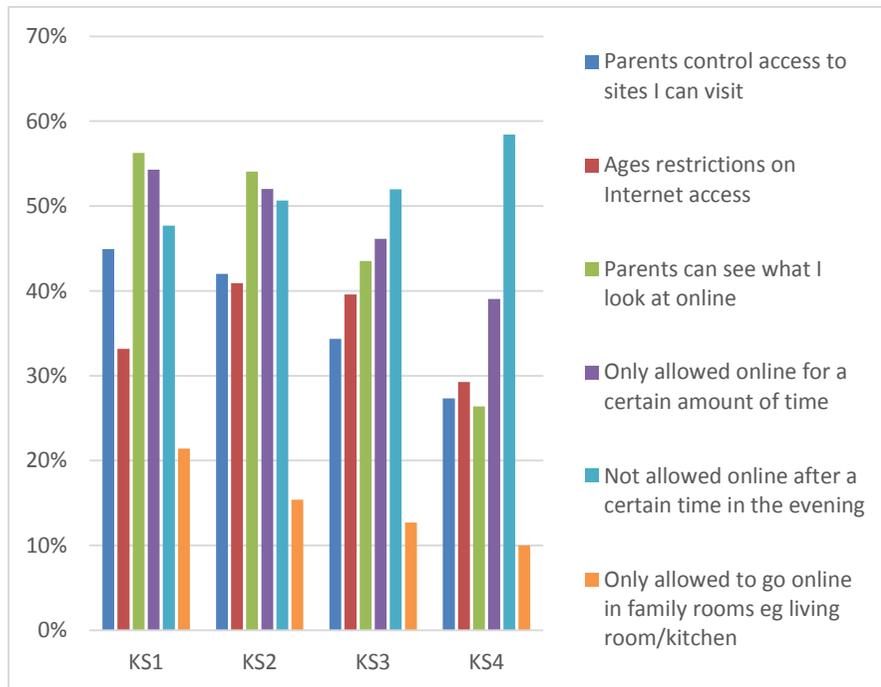


Figure 18 - If yes, what sort of rules are there (please tick all that apply)? (age differences)

Site control is significantly higher for younger children, as is monitoring. Most rules tend to drop off as children get older, with the exception of not being allowed to go online after certain times. This is to be expected given it is unlikely that younger children

would be up too late into the evening anyway. We also see house rules on screen time reduce – again, we should not be surprised by this. As young people move into secondary school in particular, they are increasingly reliant on internet access to perform school work, especially as many homework policies now centre on online technology.

However, perhaps a more searching question is whether our respondents know how to get around these house rules. In this case we are mainly focussing upon the technical measures that might be put in place to control or limit Internet access. Figure 19 shows that for our respondents over 60% of them know how to bypass at least some of these rules.

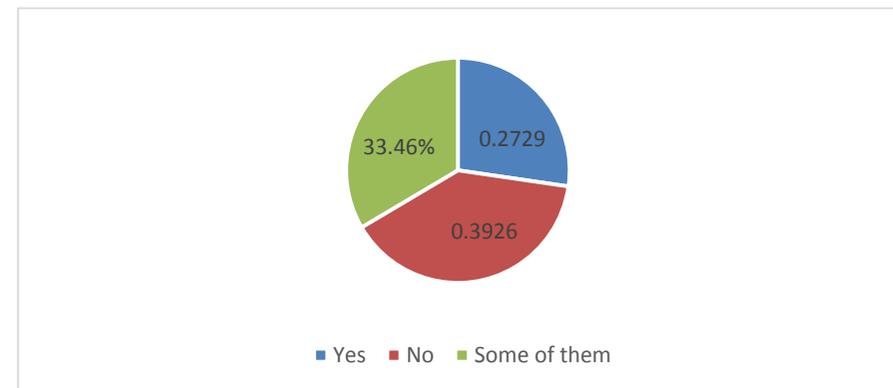


Figure 19 - If you answered yes to rules at home, do you know how to get around these restrictions?

And while there are few differences in gender on this question, can see clearly that the older increasing numbers of our respondents develop the skills necessary to bypass these rules.

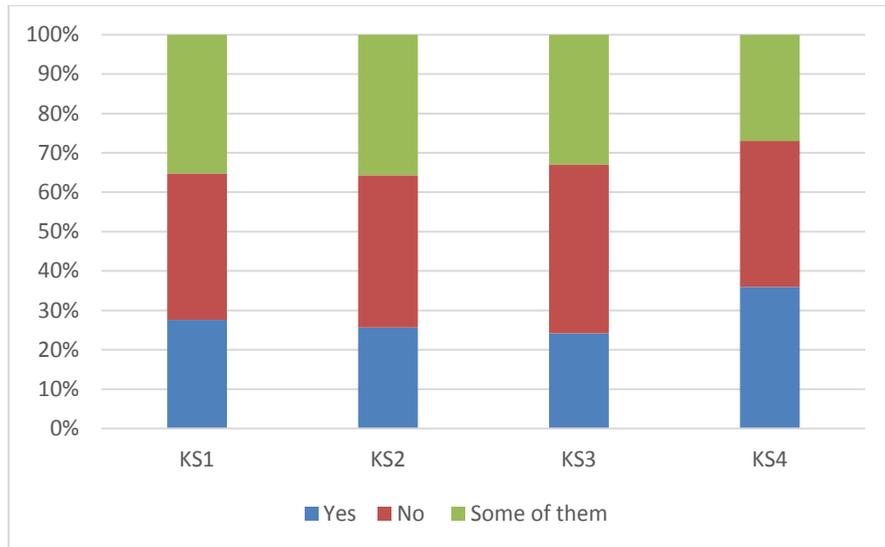


Figure 20 -If you answered yes to rules at home, do you know how to get around these restrictions? (age differences)

We would reflect on the difference in confidence between young people and parents by again drawing upon the research from OFCOM. In their published statistics⁷, they stated that 15% of

⁷ https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0027/134892/Children-and-Parents-Media-Use-and-Attitudes-Annex-1.pdf (page 211)

parents of 5-15 year olds believed their children could circumvent ISP level filtering and 10% could get around parental control software. Clearly our young people beg to differ. Perhaps a useful comparator to this question is where we ask respondents whether they feel that they know more about the Internet than their parents:

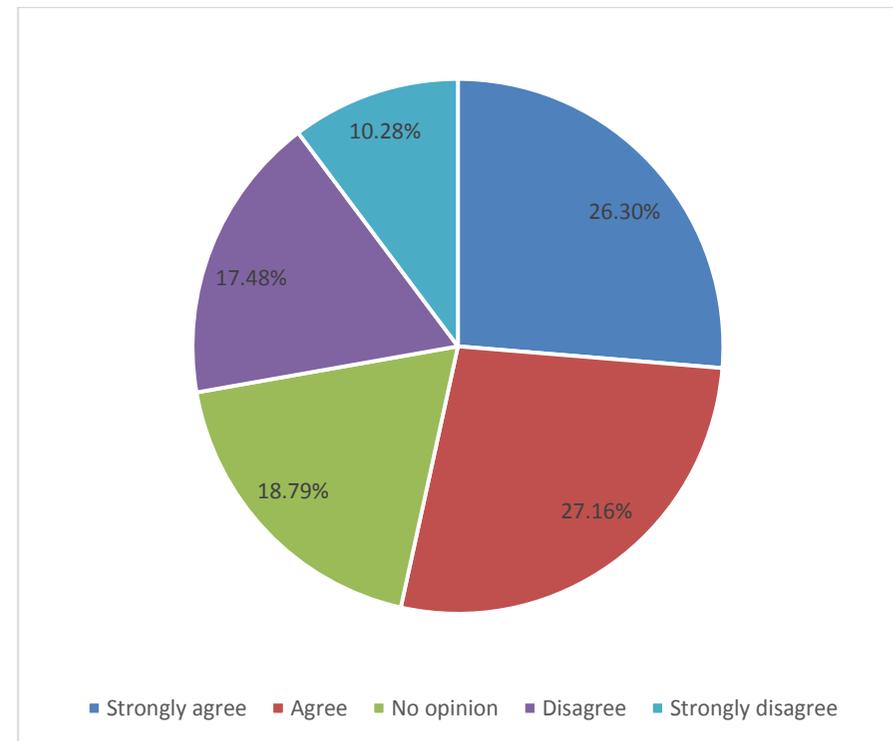


Figure 21 - I know more about the Internet than my parents

Across the whole dataset over half of our respondents believe this to be the case. And while (as detailed in figure 22) there are slight differences in gender (girls slightly less confident they know more than their parents), these variances are not great.

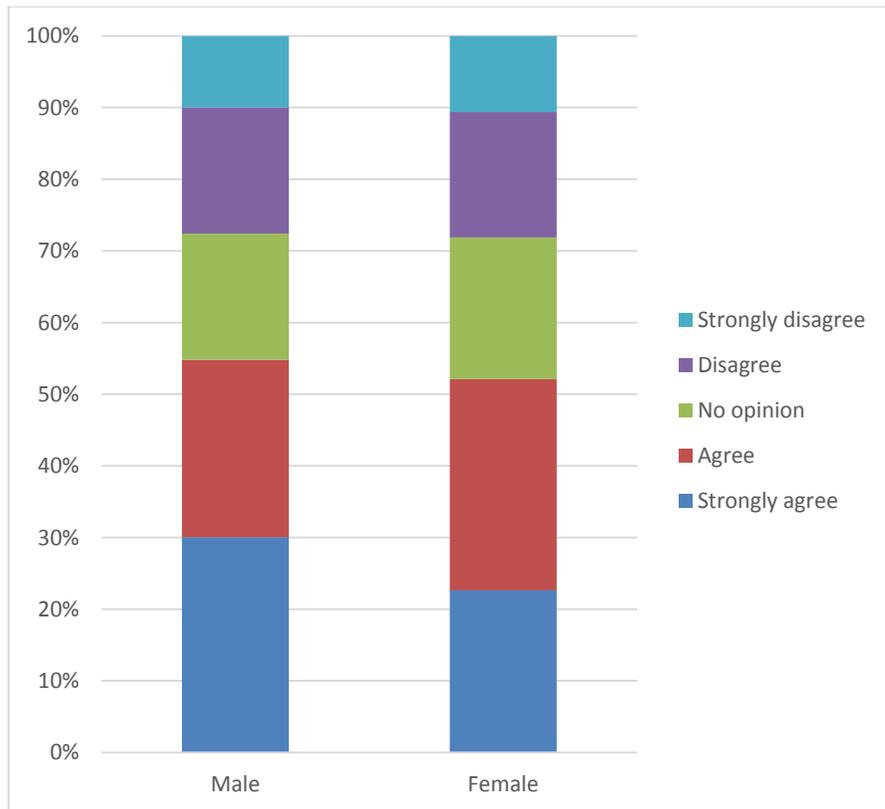


Figure 22 -I know more about the Internet than my parents (gender differences)

What is very clear from the data, however, is that as young people get older, they are very clear that they know more about the Internet than their parents:

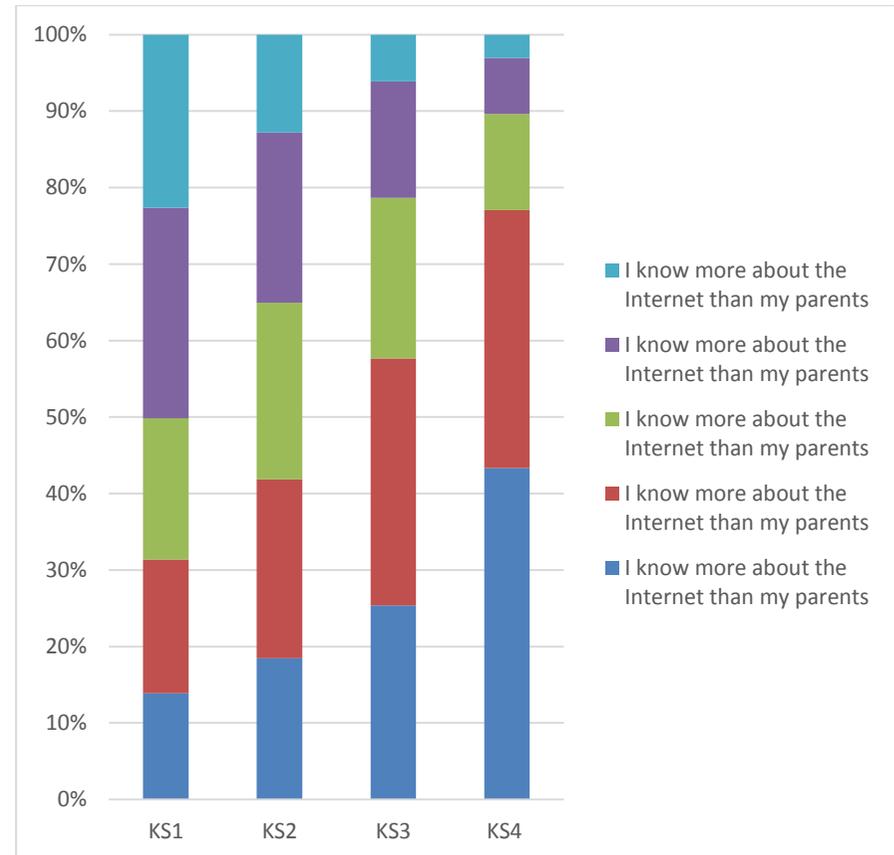


Figure 23 - I know more about the Internet than my parents (age differences)

As a final part of our analysis, we consider the question “Who would you turn to if you were upset by something that happened online?”. This is pertinent to this inquiry because it helps us understand whether parents have a role to play outside of the house rules they impose. We would hope that parents are, for most young people, the first people they would turn to if they were upset by something that had happened online. As we can see from figure 24, this is certainly the case overall.

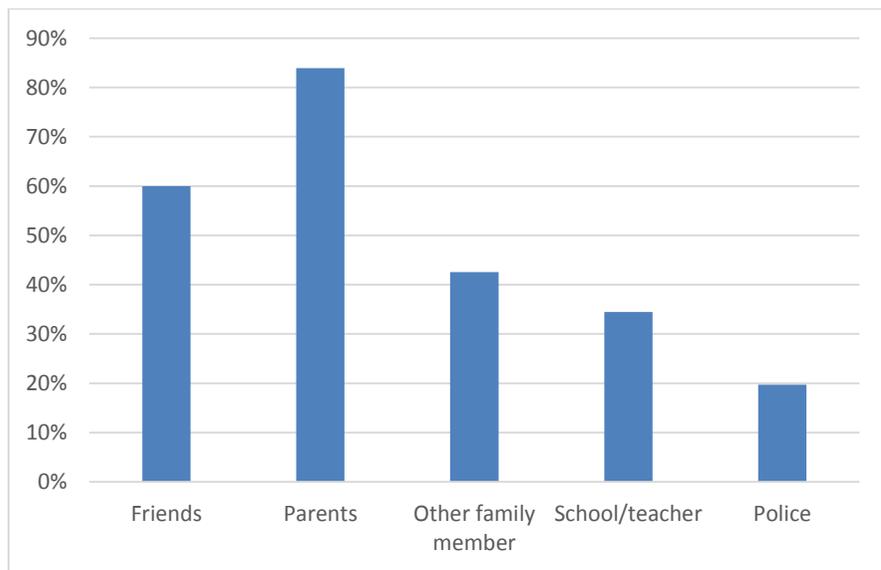


Figure 24 - Who would you turn to if you were upset by something that happened online (please tick all that apply)?

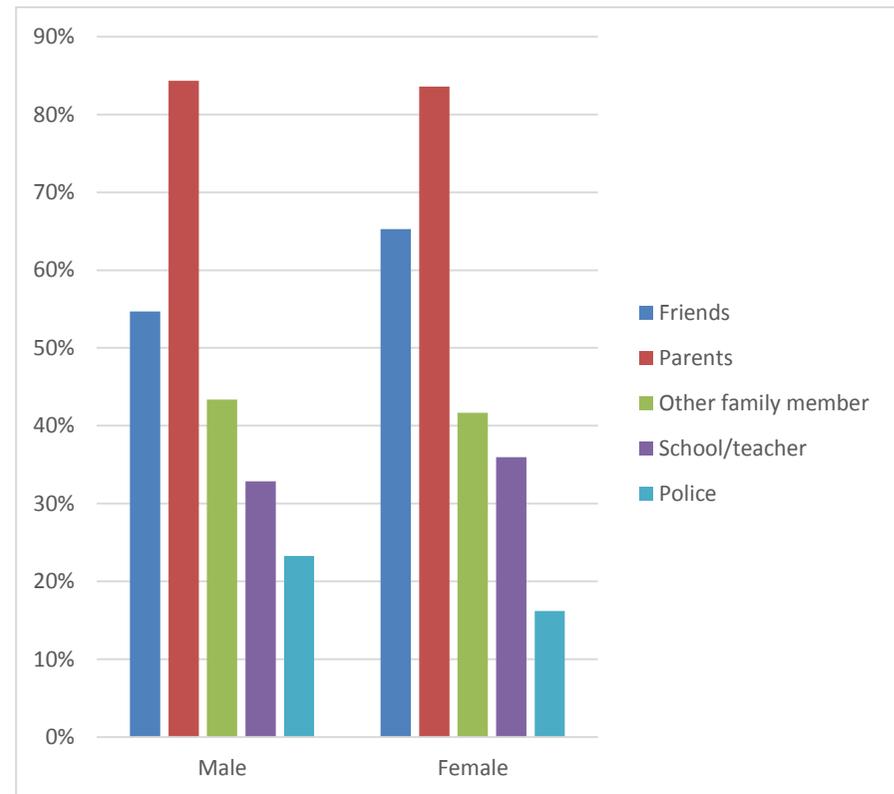


Figure 25 - Who would you turn to if you were upset by something that happened online (please tick all that apply)? (gender differences)

If we consider gender differences for this question, there is little variation other than the fact that friends are more likely to be turned to for advice by females rather than males.

However, there is a significant difference when we break down by age, where for those young people aged 14 and above, there are more likely to turn to friends than parents. This would also be reflected in the previous question – if older children believe they know more about the Internet than their parents, they have less confidence they would be able to help if they were upset by something.

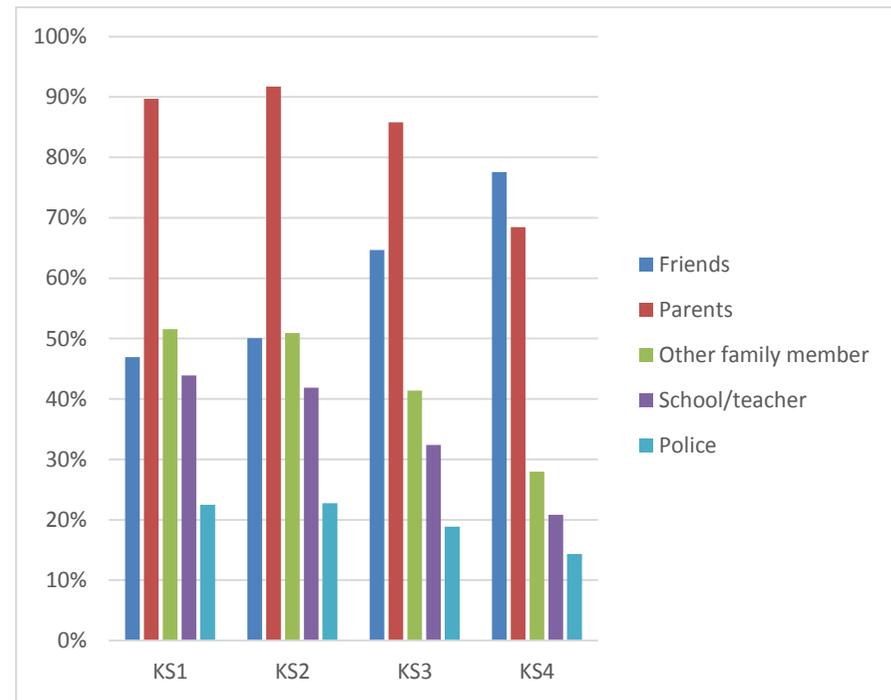


Figure 26 - Who would you turn to if you were upset by something that happened online (please tick all that apply)? (age differences)

Conclusions and Implications

In this analysis, the third in a set of wellbeing reports related to the online lives of children, we have explored the relationships between children, parents and technology in the home – what are parents concerned with, how they try to mitigate risk in the home, and how young people respond to this. We can see a mix of technical and “parenting” approaches used in the home to manage children’s Internet access and how they go online, and that parental concern is a combination of content harm (which is potentially addressable with technological intervention) and contact abuse (which is less likely to be managed through content control).

With younger children we can certainly see a harmonious relationship between parents and young people – they are accepting of the house rules and will turn to parents for advice and help if they are upset by something that happens online.

However, we see greater tension between parents and young people as they get older. While parents clearly still have (quite rightly) concerns about the risks they are exposed to, and the majority will still place house rules on their children to try to mitigate these, young people are more resistant to these rules and are more likely to bypass them. They also believe they know more about online technology than their parents, and are less likely to turn to them for help. Furthermore, we have some evidence that perhaps parents will continue to monitor as children get older, without the knowledge of the young people themselves.

The key message from this analysis is that while house rules help, and technology provides some valuable tools to help address some concerns (such as access to harmful content), as young people get older, they will learn to bypass these “reassurances” for parents and become less confident in their parent’s support if things go wrong. We also know that tools and rules will do less to prevent contact risks, such as grooming and bullying, two things parents are very concerned with. Tools and rules are no replacement for open dialogue. They can only ever be part of the solution.