

Mind the Gap - eSafety Commissioner's Report

By Gino Amato

In 2021 eSafety commissioned research to explore the opportunities and risks the Internet presents to Australian children.

Research was conducted in August – September 2021 – comprised of a national survey of over 3500 young people aged 8 to 17 years and their parents.

Key Findings

Most kids use the Internet to watch video clips, for learning purposes, for gaming, and to use social media.

Many children go online to look for health information, including information about mental, physical and sexual health.

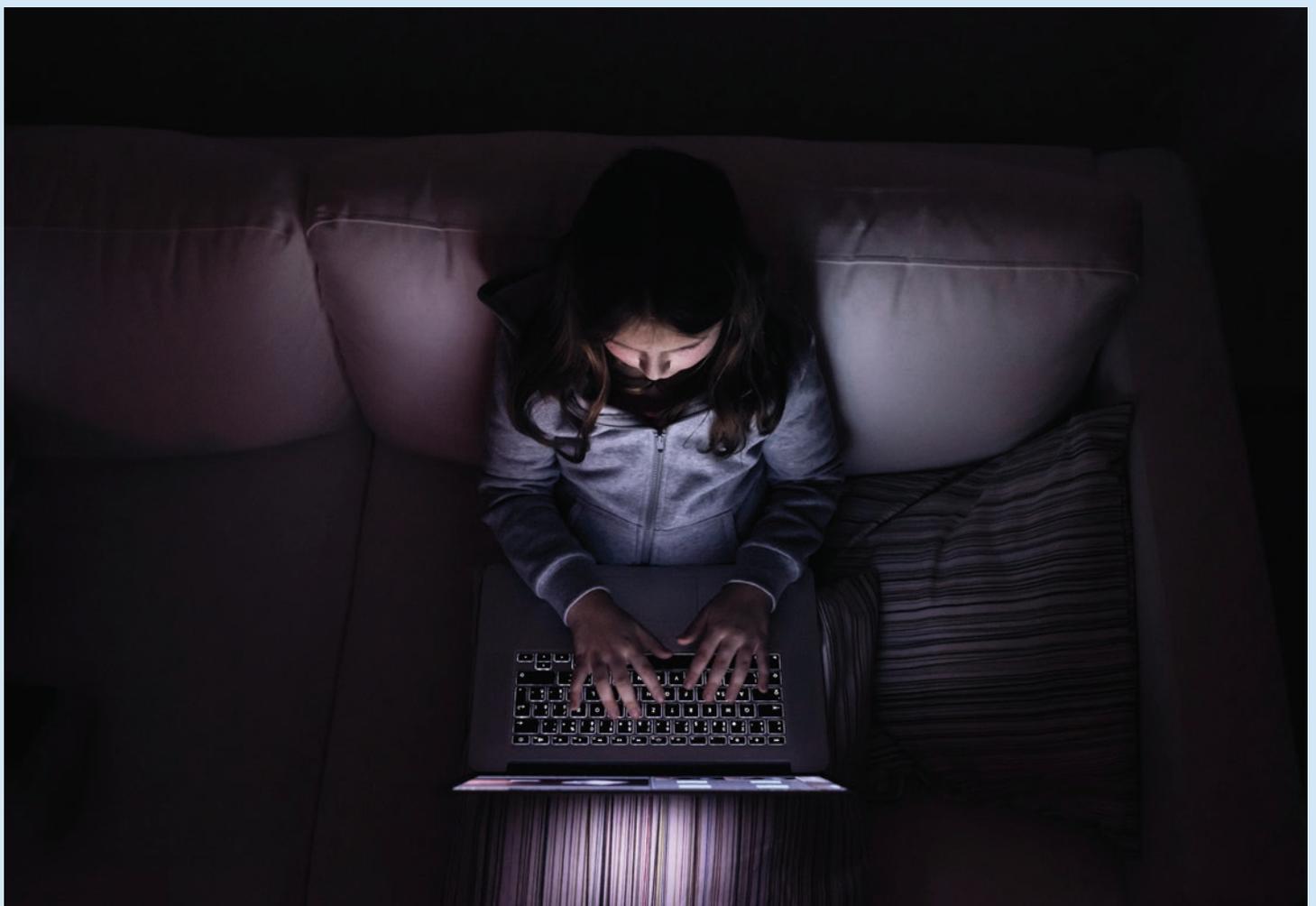
A third of children seek emotional support online from friends and / or mental health services.

Boys vs. Girls

Boys are more likely to watch video clips and play online games.

Girls are more likely to visit social networking sites, create their own video or music posts, post their own blog or story.

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Negative Online Experiences

- Six in ten children have communicated with someone they first met online. This is up from just 22% when asked a similar question in 2016.
- One in eight children had sent a photo or video of themselves to someone they first met online.
- One in eight children have met someone face to face after first getting to know them online.
- Nearly half of children were treated in a hurtful or nasty way online in the past year.
- 1/4 of children had themselves treated someone in a hurtful or nasty way online.
- One in ten children have been the target of hate speech online.

Nearly two thirds of young people aged 14 to 17 were exposed to negative content in the last year. Such as content relating to drug taking, suicide or self-harm, or gory or violent material.

70% of young people aged 14 to 17 have seen sexual images online in the past year, while close to half have received sexual messages from someone online.

Girls, kids in metropolitan areas and older children are more likely to experience hate speech.

Other Types of Negative Online Experiences

For children aged 8-10 years:

- 8% had nasty or hurtful messages passed around or posted.
- 14% clicked on a pop-up and had their device infected.
- 7% had personal information posted without their agreement.
- 5% had someone find out where they were because of a tracking device.
- 6% had someone impersonate them online.
- 6% have been a victim of online fraud.

“The most common response is to tell parents - highlighting the importance of parent support.”

Most Children Take Action In Response To Negative Online Behaviour

Almost all children surveyed did something in response to negative online experiences.

The most common response is to tell parents - highlighting the importance of parent support.

Children are also likely to block people, tell their friends, delete messages and change their privacy or contact settings.

A quarter of children reported the material to the website or social media company. ■

Source: Mind the Gap. Parental awareness of children's exposure to risks online. February 2022. eSafety Commissioner.