Key Messages

The Cybersurvey is run annually in Suffolk, enabling it to be used for evaluation, forward planning and watching trends. It provides insights into young people's experiences and early alerts to trends.

The sample: Responses from of 1961 young people were collected in the autumn term of 2017 from 26 different schools and respondents are aged between 10 and 16 years old. There is a range of abilities, special educational needs and difficulties among the respondents. Males and females are equally represented while 7% did not wish to state their gender.

TRENDS YEAR ON YEAR						
		2013	**2014**	**2015**	**2016**	**2017**
Taught about e-safety at school		93%	89%	78%	80%	80%
Cyberbullied		20%	23%	19%	19%	**22%**
Met up with person known only online		-	-	14%	14%	12%
Sexting		4%	5%	4%	4%	4.6%
Victim of revenge sharing of images			-	6%	6%	6%
Spends 5+ hours a day online			25%	17%	16%	19%
Extremist content seen			-	8%	9%	12%
Very violent images/videos seen			20%	21%	20%	23%
Seen content encouraging self-harm/suicide			22%	10%	9%	14%
Seen content encouraging anorexia			21%	25%	24%	29%
Seen content promoting racism/hatred			17%	11%	13%	19%
Someone online tried to persuade you into unwanted sexual activity			24%	6%	6%	5%
Using chatrooms	25%		19%	15%	12%	8%
Threats (online) to harm me or my family				7%	9%	12%
Homophobic bullying online	10%		19%	4%	3%	4%
False solicitation, person not who they said			13%	4%	4%	5%
Adult content seen			11%	n/a	5%	6%
Visited gambling sites				5%	6%	6%

The age cohorts in the sample differed in 2014 it was a slightly older sample.   **Table 2**

Increased:
Spending 5+ hours a day online. Sites with: violent videos or images; extremist content; sites encouraging suicide and self- harm; sites encouraging anorexia; content promoting racism and hatred; threats to harm me or my family; cyberbullying.

Stable/slight increase:
False solicitation; viewing adult content; homophobia.

No increase:
Revenge sharing of intimate images; visiting gambling sites; sexting (except 15 year olds).

Decrease:
Using chatrooms; Meeting up with someone known online; (not 15yrolds) someone online tried to persuade you into sexual activity (slight drop).

Young people saying parents did not give them advice on staying safe online.

Improvements since 2016

- There is an upturn in parental engagement since it was strongly flagged up last year. More parents are talking to their children about online safety at age 10, they are also less likely to reduce their advice after their child reaches age 12
- Fewer young people said they were using chatrooms – platforms which have been identified as high risk
- Slightly fewer young people said they had experienced someone online trying to persuade them into unwanted sexual activity (manipulative relationships)
- Fewer young people were meeting up with someone they knew only online except 15 year olds among whom this has increased.

Many aspects of online life show little change

- Incidents of fake solicitations – when someone turns out to be not the person they said they were – are low and remain so
- Numbers of those admitting to viewing adult content remains low
- Homophobic bullying online has been low in Suffolk for three years

A mixed picture

- Revenge sharing of intimate images after a relationship breaks down, often called revenge porn, shows no increase (but this could be due to the young age of the sample)
- Visiting gambling sites is low and stable in Suffolk in the total sample, despite concerns about children being lured into gambling. However there is an increase among 15 year olds

- Sexting remains low and has been stable for the past five years in the total sample. However among the 15 year olds it has risen this year from 11% to 17% and 16 year olds: up from 12% to 20%

What should be the focus now?

- 15 year olds are behaving differently from the total sample. High risks reported
- Overall more young people report seeing online content promoting hatred and racism; reports of this more than double between age 14-15 up from 20% to 42%. Last year it was reported by 28% of 15 year olds
- More young people report seeing very violent videos or images; the incidence is over 1/3 at age 15-16
- A higher percentage overall have seen extremist content, by age 15, more than 1 in 4 mention it (26%)
- More young people have seen sites encouraging anorexia than in any other year since 2014
- More young people report receiving online threats to harm them or their family than last year
- Cyberbullying has been stable for several years but shows a slight increase this year. This may be due to variations in the sample, but it is not advisable to 'take the eye off the ball'
- Compared to last year, 15 year olds are more likely to: visit pro-anorexia sites, up by over a third; visit pro-self-harm sites; be involved in sexting and meeting up with someone they met online. All these are stable among younger age groups
- 18% of 15 year olds admit to going online to look at adult content but this is rare at younger ages

Emotional health: To obtain a picture of their general emotional health young people were asked: 'Thinking about your life and future, how do you feel 'most of the time'? While the majority feel positive - 48% feel happy and confident most of the time and 41% some of the time; 7% of young respondents feel depressed, 14% have worrying thoughts, 11% feel 'I'm not good enough' and 20% find it hard to concentrate. Many feel this way 'sometimes' as expected. There is a 5% drop in happiness and confidence since the last survey in 2016.

Responses differed markedly by gender. Boys are more optimistic and confident than girls, while one in five young people who prefer not to state their gender say 'I feel I am not good enough most of the time' and a quarter said they do not feel happy and confident. As our respondents get older they are less likely to be happy and confident. The majority of young people are resilient and coping well with their online lives, many are helping their peers if they have a bad experience. But there remain some vulnerable groups about whom we have reported regularly in recent years: they include those, who need help with English, young people in or leaving care, young carers, those with mental health difficulties, hearing or speech difficulties, vision loss, longstanding illness, learning difficulties, physical disability and other special educational needs. They may spend extensive time online and respond to their online experiences in particular ways. Research based on the Cybersurvey has identified specific groups of young people who are more at risk than their peers.[1]

Controversies rage about the issue known as 'screen time' and its impact on young people. This is a very broad term. Some refer to social media or smartphones, others include TV viewing and video games. Extensive research by Przybylski and Weinstein shows no damaging effects of using a range of media up to 2-3 hours per day but some increase in harm thereafter. 'Moderate use of digital technology is not intrinsically harmful,' they write, 'and may be advantageous in a connected world'. They differentiate between weekday or weekend time and speculate that other factors, such as caregivers joining in could be more important for mental wellbeing than simply time spent.[2] Parkes et al explored young children's TV and video gaming habits and found conduct problems were more likely to be seen after lengthy TV watching than game playing.[3] It is likely that the very lengthy periods online described by some of our respondents – 9 hours in the holidays, could be harmful and isolating. Other research recommends a focus on what is done online and in what context, rather than time only.[4]

These messages from young people contribute to our understanding. Frontline professionals need to keep well informed about this debate about the impact of internet use if they are to deliver suitable and timely advice that young people accept.

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[1] El Asam, A. and Katz, A. Vulnerable Young People and Their Experiences of Online Life (In Press).

[2] Andrew K. Przybylski 1,2 and Netta Weinstein 3 1Oxford Internet Institute, University of Oxford; 2Department of Experimental Psychology, University of Oxford; and 3School of Psychology, Cardiff University; A Large-Scale Test of the Goldilocks Hypothesis: Quantifying the Relations Between Digital-Screen Use and the Mental Well-Being of Adolescents.

[3] Parkes, A., Sweeting, H., Wight, D., Henderson, M. (2013). Do television and electronic games predict children's psychosocial adjustment? Longitudinal research using the UK Millennium Cohort Study. Archives of Disease in Childhood, 98, 341–348. doi:10.1136/archdischild-2011-301508 Google Scholar, Crossref, Medline

[4] Blum-Ross. A. & Livingstone, S. Policy Brief Media Policy Families and Screen Time http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/66927/1/Policy%20Brief%2017-%20Families%20%20Screen%20Time.pdf