



REPORT

CHILDREN AND YOUTH

ONLINE SAFETY

IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

JUNE 2025

netsafe



Save the Children

About Save the Children New Zealand

Save the Children New Zealand is a non-governmental organisation and a registered charity established in New Zealand in 1947. We are committed to saving children's lives, protecting their rights and providing children with the opportunity to live healthy, successful lives and achieve their full potential. Our vision is a world where every child realises the right to survival, protection, development and participation. In Aotearoa New Zealand we raise funds to support our work, advocate for the rights of children to be understood, respected and upheld, provide child rights education so children and adults can learn about child rights and support youth participation through our Generation Hope programme.

www.savethechildren.org.nz

About Netsafe

Netsafe is New Zealand's independent, non-profit online safety organisation helping people stay safe online for over 25 years. Embracing a technology-positive approach, we aim to help New Zealanders take advantage of the digital opportunities available while managing online challenges. We do this by providing practical tools, support, and advice. We operate independently, adjacent to government and law enforcement, with an unwavering focus on online safety. Our mission is to keep people of all ages safe online by providing free support, advice, and education to all ages.

www.netsafe.org.nz

Report date June 2025

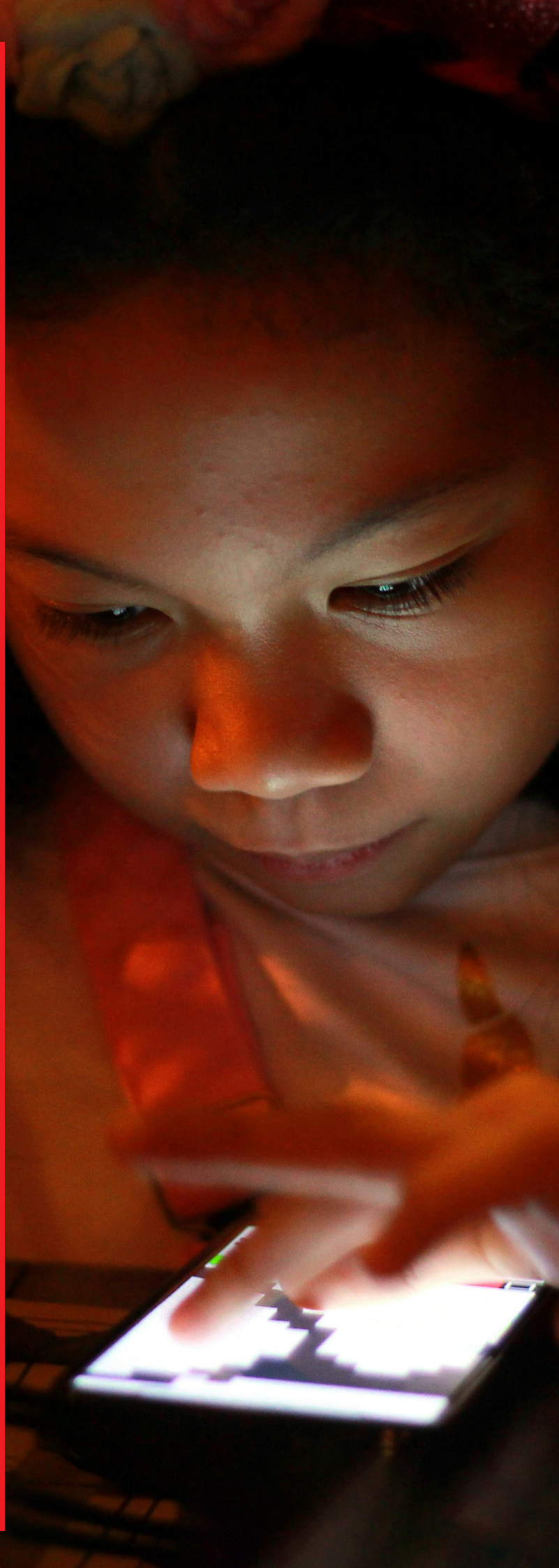
Credits

Written by Jacqui Southey with support from Lizzy Lockhart

Edited by Jacqui Southey, Lizzy Lockhart and Amie Richardson

Data analysis and disaggregation by Marina Borodatova

With thanks to Orange Creative for report design



CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| Summary | 2 |
| Key takeaways | 3 |
| Introduction | 4 |
| The survey | 6 |
| Aims and objectives of the survey | 6 |
| Methodology..... | 7 |
| Limitations | 7 |
| Demographic report..... | 8 |
| Survey participants | 8 |
| Numbers of participants by age group..... | 8 |
| Gender split of participants..... | 8 |
| Location of participants..... | 9 |
| Locations children and youth access the internet..... | 9 |
| Accounts used to access social media | 10 |
| Feelings of safety when online | 10 |
| Use of online spaces..... | 11 |
| Improving the internet for young people | 12 |
| Survey analysis and thematic insights..... | 13 |
| More control over advertising | 13 |
| Negativity, unfiltered comments or content | 13 |
| The role of parents | 13 |
| Age restrictions | 14 |
| Awareness of risk and safety actions..... | 15 |
| What is one thing you wish adults (like parents, teachers or decision-makers) knew about your experiences online? | 16 |
| Ways tech companies can create a safer online environment..... | 16 |
| Conclusion..... | 18 |
| References | 20 |
| Appendix One..... | 21 |



SUMMARY

This report shares the findings of an online survey developed by Save the Children New Zealand¹ in partnership with Netsafe² to gain insights into children's engagement in the online environment, and their views and experiences of online safety.

The findings reveal important insights into children's digital engagement and experiences at various ages, and advice from children to adults on how their safety in the online world could be improved. The survey was specifically designed to provide children and young people with the opportunity to share their views and expertise on an issue that is primarily dominated by adult voices.

A significant body of reports, studies and recommendations related to children's online safety exists and continues to grow, however very little of the existing literature appears to be directly informed by children's views, experiences and expertise.³ This survey seeks to contribute New Zealand children's voices to this important issue that directly impacts their daily lives. It is not intended to be in conflict or in opposition to adult views, but rather an important addition to the growing body of evidence, and to inform debates on how children can be protected but also participate in the online world.

¹ Available at, <https://www.savethechildren.org.nz/>

² Available at, <https://netsafe.org.nz/>

³ OECD (2025), How's Life for Children in the Digital Age?, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/0854b900-en>



KEY TAKEAWAYS

The insights children share through this survey can inform adults' understanding and decision making on how to improve online safety for children and youth, rather than an overreliance on the common approach 'that adults know best' - based decision making.

The findings can support adults to consider a safer environment versus an excluded environment where the solution is to exclude children as a means of protection.

We encourage decision makers to consider a child rights approach to children's and young people's experience of the online world, encompassing provision, participation and protection.



INTRODUCTION

Children in the digital world

The world over, children are deeply immersed in the digital environment.⁴

This applies to children of all ages, pre-school children watching content via YouTube or early learning activities via Google or apps, primary school aged children streaming television content or music, playing games, or using technology as part of their learning, older children 14 years+ engaging in television and music streaming, gaming, technology-based learning and participating in social media platforms, and millions of children developing and uploading their own content. Children's engagement in the digital world has become so prevalent it is estimated that every half second a child goes onto the internet for the first time.⁵

Along with the increased engagement of children in the digital world, there is increasing concern about the safety of children while engaging in ever evolving digital technologies, the internet, gaming, content streaming, and social media.⁶⁷

High levels of digital engagement, a rapidly evolving environment, and growing awareness of online dangers and harmful consequences have led to many adults, including parents, professionals working with or for children, decision makers and politicians to question how can we better ensure the safety of children while online?

Adult concern about children's safety online has led to increasing debates about whether children should be online at all, limiting or prohibiting children's access to and use of devices, and limiting or prohibiting children's engagement in social media.⁸ In Australia, the debate on children's engagement has moved on to the legal prohibition of children under 16 years of age accessing social media,⁹ in essence a social media ban for under 16s.

These concerns are echoed here in Aotearoa New Zealand¹⁰ and there is increasing debate on how children's safety can be protected in the online world. Much of the debate and concern appears centered on social media rather than the online world more broadly including the internet, online gaming, music or video streaming, various apps, and other digital platforms.

Save the Children New Zealand shares concerns about online harm to children, and we too want to ensure that the digital world is a safe place for children of all ages. And that there is accountability for those that intentionally seek to harm children whether directly through some form of abuse or exploitation, or more indirectly such as platforms that allow and even promote harmful content, behaviour and practices.

However, we are less certain that some form of ban is the answer to keeping our children safe. What, in the wide world of digital would be banned, from who, and how? Who, or which children, would be protected and in what way?

As a child rights organisation we work to ensure children's rights are upheld; broadly meaning children are provided for, protected and they can participate.¹¹ And this is true for children's access to, engagement in and experience of the digital world. It is our view that children's voices, experiences and expertise should be included in the debate about children's safety in the digital world. Through our work all over the world we continually see children's agency firsthand. Children are not helpless and passive beings, they are capable of providing important and valuable insights that we adults can learn from.

Ensuring children have a say on an issue that deeply affects them, learning from their experiences in order to develop informed understanding and then recommendations for positive change, is why we partnered with Netsafe to develop an online survey to give children aged 6 to 18 years the opportunity to have their say on the safety of children and youth online.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Retrieved from, <https://www.savethechildren.org/us/charity-stories/why-children-need-protection-in-a-digital-world>

⁶ Retrieved from, <https://nzmj.org.nz/journal/vol-137-no-1598/impacts-of-digital-technologies-on-child-and-adolescent-health-recommendations-for-safer-screenuse-in-educational-settings>

⁷ Cited in, Coyne, I. (2025). 'We Want Children to Have a Childhood' Protecting Children from the Harms of Social Media. *Comprehensive Child and Adolescent Nursing*, 48(1), 1–4. <https://doi.org/10.1080/24694193.2025.2454836>

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Retrieved from Ritchie, H. (2024). Australia approves social media ban on under-16s [BBC News]. Sydney. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c89vj0lxx9o>

¹⁰ Retrieved from <https://www.simpsongrierson.com/insights-news/legal-updates/access-denied-new-zealand-s-proposed-social-media-ban-for-under-16s>

¹¹ Retrieved from <https://www.savethechildren.org.nz/about-us>

THE SURVEY

Aims and objectives of the survey

Save the Children New Zealand partnered with Netsafe to develop and disseminate an online survey to provide an opportunity for children in New Zealand to share their views, experience and advice related to online safety.

Children and youth are digital citizens and legitimate consumers of and contributors to the online world. They are experts in their own world and have important insights to share based on their experiences.

The survey had three key objectives, 1) understand the ways children engage in the digital world, 2) understand children's experiences of safety in the digital world, and 3) provide an opportunity for children to share their advice on how the digital world could be safer for children and youth.

As part of the survey, we were keen to understand the ways that children across various age groups engage in the digital world.

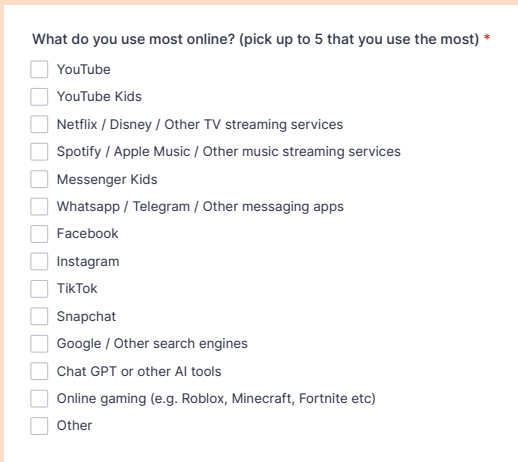
Survey questions we asked included, where children usually access the internet, what they use most online such as apps, search engines or social media, whether they have their own social media accounts, whether they felt safe online, reasons why they did or did not feel safe, information they would like adults to know, their advice on how to improve online safety, and demographic data questions, such as age, gender and location. We did not capture ethnicity or disability; these are important demographic aspects that could be explored in future studies in this area.

We intentionally wanted to capture information that provided insights across the online world a child or young person may engage in. We included online gaming such as Roblox, Minecraft or Fortnite, streaming

platforms such as YouTube, Disney, Netflix; Messenger Apps such as Messenger or WhatsApp; Social Media platforms TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat; browsing tools or search engines; and AI tools. Not every possible tool was listed, meaning that the survey gives insights into online use but is not exhaustive nor definitive.

Additional information categories included, location the internet is most commonly accessed, such as at home, at a friend's house, or community spaces such as libraries; whether children and youth access social media via their own accounts or their parents' or don't have an account; feelings of safety, reasons for those feelings; advice on what would improve their online experiences; advice to adults and tech companies on how to improve safety; and the opportunity to provide any advice that children and youth would like adults including parents, teachers, decision makers, to know about their experiences online.

The full set of questions can be found in Appendix One of this report.



What do you use most online? (pick up to 5 that you use the most) *

- ☐ YouTube
- ☐ YouTube Kids
- ☐ Netflix / Disney / Other TV streaming services
- ☐ Spotify / Apple Music / Other music streaming services
- ☐ Messenger Kids
- ☐ Whatsapp / Telegram / Other messaging apps
- ☐ Facebook
- ☐ Instagram
- ☐ TikTok
- ☐ Snapchat
- ☐ Google / Other search engines
- ☐ Chat GPT or other AI tools
- ☐ Online gaming (e.g. Roblox, Minecraft, Fortnite etc)
- ☐ Other

Image 1: Types of online tools or apps most used.

METHODOLOGY

The survey was designed to be disseminated and accessed as an online survey via the survey tool Jotform.¹²

The survey questions were developed with children in mind and were deliberately simple to allow for ease of engagement. It was intended that young children would access and participate in the survey with adult support primarily through their parents or teacher.

The questions were designed by our education specialist in consultation with the Netsafe team and then tested with a small group of adults and children before publishing the survey. They were developed with the intention to capture information that would provide insights into child and youth experiences of online safety, and the online context they operate in.

Save the Children collaborated with Netsafe, and a youth-led and founded platform CreateHappy Media¹³ to promote the survey to reach our intended audiences of children and youth aged 6-18 years.

The survey was promoted to parents and teachers as a means to connect with children and youth. It was shared on platforms that young people are using such as Instagram.

The data analysis methodology includes self-reported frequency measures, and anecdotal data that has been coded using thematic analysis. Survey responses have primarily been categorised based on age and gender.

Limitations

The survey has several limitations. These include the limited collection of demographic data where ethnicity, disability and socioeconomic data were not collected. The participants in the survey are self-selected, and their data contributions are self-reported and therefore it is not a representative sample. The survey participants completed the survey anonymously, so it is not possible to follow up directly with the participants.

Another limitation was the grouping of age cohorts including 14-year-olds with 12 and 13-year-olds. A learning is that it would have been effective to separate 14-year-olds to have more accurate insights into the age children are more likely to be engaging in social media.

However, the survey did have 997 respondents which is a strong sample size.



¹² Available at <https://www.jotform.com/>

¹³ Available at, <https://createhappy.org/>

DEMOGRAPHIC REPORT

Survey participants

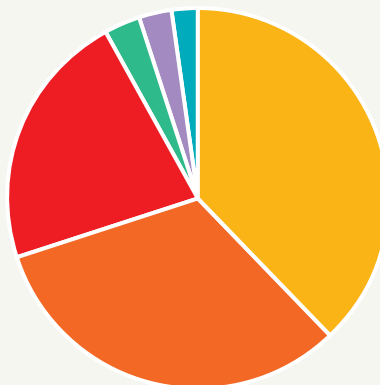
Children that engaged in this survey were aged 6 – 18 years. Over 18s could contribute and the data from over 18s can be viewed separately. Participants contributed 997 responses.

Numbers of participants by age group

3% 6-8 years; 22% 9-11 years; 38% 12-14 years; 32% 15-17 years; 2% 18-20 years; 3% 20+ years

Graph 1: How old are you?

| How old are you? | Total |
|------------------|-------|
| 12 to 14 years | 382 |
| 15 to 17 years | 318 |
| 9 to 11 years | 224 |
| 6 to 8 years | 28 |
| 20+ years old | 26 |
| 18 to 20 years | 19 |



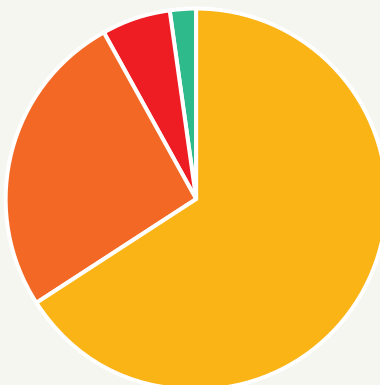
- 12 to 14 years
- 15 to 17 years
- 9 to 11 years
- 6 to 8 years
- 20+ years old
- 18 to 20 years

Gender split of participants

66% Female; 26% Male; 6% prefer not to say; 2% non-binary

Graph 2: What is your Gender

| What is your gender? | Total |
|----------------------|-------|
| Female | 655 |
| Male | 261 |
| Prefer not to say | 58 |
| Non-binary | 18 |



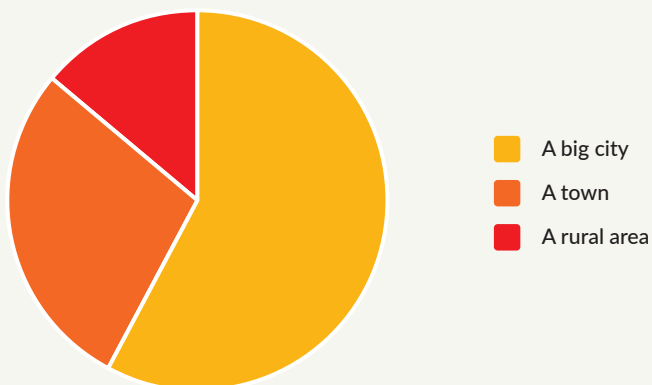
- Female
- Male
- Prefer not to say
- Non-binary

Location of participants

58% live in a big city; 28% live in a town; 14% rural

Graph 3: Where you live?

| Where you live? | Total |
|-----------------|-------|
| A big city | 578 |
| A town | 282 |
| A rural area | 137 |

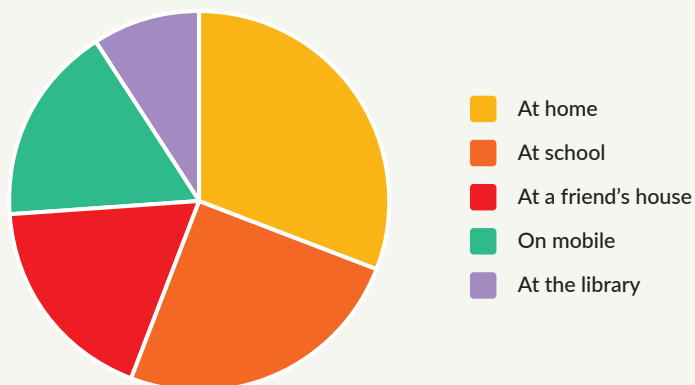


Locations children and youth access the internet

31% at home; 25% at school; 18% at a friend's house; 17% on mobile data out and about; 9% at the library or community space.

Graph 4: Where do you usually use the internet?

| Where do you usually use the internet?? | Total |
|---|-------|
| At home | 971 |
| At school | 787 |
| At a friend's house | 562 |
| On mobile | 546 |
| At the library | 281 |



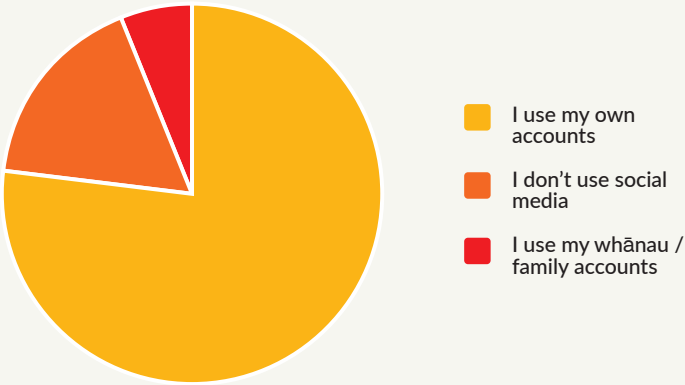
Children and young people were most likely to access the internet at home versus accessing the internet at a public or shared space like a local library. Despite a ban on phones at school, school is the second most commonly reported place children and youth access the internet.

Accounts used to access social media

77% have their own accounts; 17% don't use social media; 6% use a family account.

Graph 5: Do you have your own social media account?

| Do you have your own social media account? | Total |
|--|-------|
| I have my own accounts | 770 |
| I don't use social media | 169 |
| I use my whānau / family accounts | 58 |

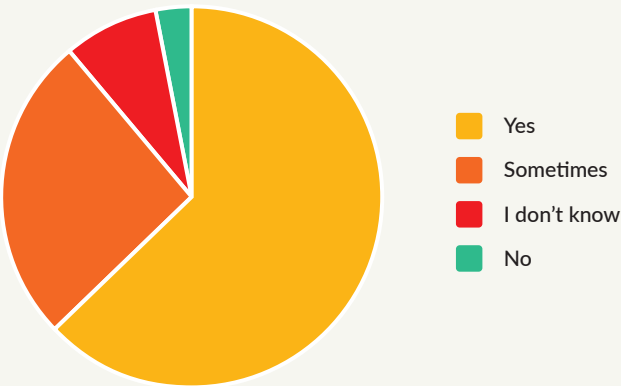


Feelings of safety when online

64% feel safe; 26% sometimes feel safe; 8% don't know; 2% do not feel safe

Graph 6: Do you feel safe online?

| Do you feel safe online? | Total |
|--------------------------|-------|
| Yes | 627 |
| Sometimes | 261 |
| I don't know | 82 |
| No | 27 |



The majority of children engaging in the survey reported feeling safe or sometimes, compared to just 2% who did not feel safe. These numbers align with children participating more likely to comment their online experiences were positive than negative, although a number of participants commented both negative and positive experiences.

Some children commented, 'they were not afraid of the internet', these comments occurred across all age groups. However, boys were more likely to report not being afraid than girls or non-binary participants.

Use of online spaces

CHILDREN 6 TO 8 YEARS

28 participants; most children reported using the internet for TV streaming (18), online gaming (14), music streaming and YouTube (13).

9-11 YEARS

224 participants; online gaming (157), YouTube (152) TV streaming (148) Google (119).

12-14 YEARS

382 participants; for this group music (278) and TV (245) streaming along with YouTube (259) are the most used apps/tools. Social media is starting to become more prevalent with Snapchat (225) and TikTok (186) rating more highly than online gaming (176).

15-17 YEARS

318 participants; social media use is a lot more prevalent for this age group than younger groups. Instagram (249) and music streaming (232), followed by TikTok (206), TV streaming (178) and Snapchat (175). Online gaming is lower again at (107). The gender split of this group is mostly female at 73% compared to male at 19%; the gender ratio may well be influencing the way the internet is being used.

Graph 7: Activities children and youth most use online

| What do you most use online? | Total |
|------------------------------|-------|
| Music streaming | 649 |
| YouTube | 614 |
| TV streaming | 611 |
| Google | 492 |
| TikTok | 473 |
| Online gaming | 463 |
| Snapchat | 447 |
| Instagram | 438 |
| Other messaging | 254 |
| Others | 466 |



- Music streaming
- YouTube
- TV streaming
- Google
- TikTok
- Online gaming
- Snapchat
- Instagram
- Other messaging
- Others

Improving the internet for young people

Children and young people participating in the survey were asked to share their views on what would make the internet better for young people. Participants were provided with six options and could select as many as they felt applied.

What would make the internet better for young people? Select all that apply or add your own idea. *

- ☐ Less harmful or mean content
- ☐ More privacy and control over what I share
- ☐ Better tools to stop online bullying
- ☐ More education for parents and teachers about what it's like to be online as a young person
- ☐ More control over the ads and content I see
- ☐ Safer online gaming spaces
- ☐ Other

Image 2: Options to make the internet a better place for young people.

Participants' responses in order of most selected included, more control over ads and content I see (752), less harmful or mean content (583), better tools to stop online bullying (527), more privacy and control over what I share (453), more education for parents and teachers (422), and safer online gaming spaces (352).



Image 3: What would make the internet better for young people?

SURVEY ANALYSIS AND THEMATIC INSIGHTS

Children and youth participating in the survey shared their views and advice on what would improve the internet. They were able to make comments to explain their feelings of safety online, what is the one thing they'd like adults to know about their online experiences, and advice they'd like to share with adults or tech companies to make the internet safer for children and youth.

Based on the responses shared in the survey the following themes were identified.

More control over advertising

Control over ads and content was the most recommended action that would make the internet better for young people.

Advertising appears to be a problem. Child and youth participants want to see fewer adverts, and they were aware that many adverts were not appropriate for children. Children and young people reported advertisements of all types popping up in the free apps they are using such as games or while on YouTube or Google. They also felt that advertisements should be restricted when they are online at school. Advertisements are essentially a way of streaming unsolicited content into a user's feed regardless of who the user is.

The streaming of unsolicited advertising content has implications in terms of being age appropriate, particularly as young children may be more likely to access the internet via a family account and potentially a parents' device.

Negativity, unfiltered comments or content

Less harmful or mean content was the second most recommended action to make the internet a better place. Children and young people across all age groups made specific comments about being concerned about harmful or mean comments, and the need for improved filtering to remove negative content. A number of children specifically commented on being dissatisfied due to lack of action by tech providers to remove or prevent harmful content on the internet in various forums. Examples of comments include,

'Stuffs crazy, especially when people have no filters stopping them from saying realllllyyyy rude things and like posting rude things even,' (non-binary, 12-14 yrs),

'Very inappropriate stuff I hate.' (Male, 9-11 yrs),

'Help stop negative comments and anything that can mentally harm someone' (Female, 15-17 yrs).

The role of parents

It is well known that parents are an important, if not the most important, source of support and guidance for children and youth and integral to their healthy development.^{14 15 16} The survey findings reveal that children see their parents as essential in supporting their safety in the online world.

¹⁴ Retrieved from <https://www.apa.org/topics/families/parents-caregivers-kids-healthy-development>

¹⁵ A. E. Kazdin (Ed). Encyclopedia of psychology, Vol. 6. (pp. 46-50). Washington, DC; New York, NY: American Psychological Association; Oxford University Press.

¹⁶ Bronfenbrenner (1979) retrieved from <https://www.simplypsychology.org/bronfenbrenner.html>

Children and young people in all age groups referenced the important role of parents in providing education, guidance, support and help to children and youth.

Younger children reported feeling safe online and directly referenced their parents as being key to their safety. E.g.,

“My mum and dad help me when using the internet and check what I’m doing” (male, 6-8 yrs),

“Because I only do stuff I’m allowed on my iPad and I just watch Lego, dinosaurs and Ninjago tv show. My mum helps me to keep me safe”. (male, 6-8 yrs),

“Not really I think my parents are pretty on to it and I personally feel safe online!” (female, 9-11 yrs),

“If my personal information is leaked or deceived, I would like to let my parents know” (female, 15-17 yrs).

The role of teachers in supporting safe online engagement was referenced, however at a much lower rate than parents.

Age restrictions

Age restrictions as means of protection and improved online experience for both younger children and older adults came up across all age groups. Essentially, the call to make the internet more age appropriate, protecting young children from harmful content, but also calling out inappropriate behaviour by adults.

Many 15-17 year olds called for age restricted access to content, apps, and/or devices for younger children. Interestingly, few called for a total ban. Some children in this age group stated that bans would not work and are only short-term limited solutions. Recommendations related to age restrictions were also aimed at adults, stating adults should not be allowed to join in on children’s activities, particularly live online games that children are playing.

A number of children reported the need for adults to behave properly and safely, particularly towards children. There was a strong awareness of strangers and associated risks. Children advised reporting strangers behaving inappropriately and only engaging with people you know ‘irl’ in real life.

Some children stated there were problems with reporting adults behaving inappropriately while they were playing live games stating the harmful person does not get kicked out while the game is live, only after it was finished. Others reported having to ignore this type of behaviour while playing online games.

Age appropriate access is important to ensuring children can feel safe in their interactions online. For example, ‘... because I mostly only use texting apps to text my friends but I sometimes get like an unknown person messaging or calling and I don’t feel so safe and in games like Roblox there is a lot of grown up people playing so I’m not really sure.’ (Female, 9-11 years)

Older children, youth aged 15-17 years, expressed concern about the content and experience of younger children. Age restrictions related to social media, internet access, or the use of digital devices including at school, were recommended by some in this age group for younger children.

For 12-14 year olds the comments were mostly positive. This age group showed awareness of the risks of strangers and/or scams, and also showed awareness of taking action to block and not engage with bullying comments.

Children aged 9-11 refer to being online as fun, playing games, playing on devices, or watching what you want. This age group also referenced the need for age restrictions particularly related to harmful content.

‘I think that growing up there needs to be more control over the internet. I personally do not feel like children under the age of 8 or so should have unrestricted internet access, let alone YouTube at 4.’ (Female, 15-17 years),

'Online games like Roblox need to be more aware of the difference in age demographics that play their games, as a 17 year old you come across like 5 year olds plainly stating their name and age.'

(Female, 15-17 years),

'Do not let your kids have social media until they are at LEAST 13 as an older teen it makes me sad seeing kids at like 9-10 years old go through the same phases you went through at like 14 of being unaware of how unrealistic social media is, Beauty standards, ai generated slop, seeing inappropriate stuff that slips past community guidelines ect. Ect.'
(Gender – prefer not to say, 15-17 years).

Young people aged 15 –17 years posted comments that appeared to express disillusionment with the online world compared to younger age groups. For example,

'It's okay, a lot of us don't like as much as it seems but we're stuck because it's how our world and our peers' worlds are built.' *(Female, 15-17 years),*

'The Internet become so harmful and different in the past decade. I think too much young people are chronically online and exposed to harmful content without even realising it. However as a teen myself I don't believe that the phone banning in schools is going to really help online problems.'
(Female, 15-17 years),

'Social media has become a major part of our lives and there's not that much point in trying to push teenagers away from it. Rather we should focus on making it a better place!!!' *(Female, 15-17 years).*

While there were a number of comments from children and youth that supported age related restrictions, very few support a ban, just 11 participants of 997 specifically recommended a ban on social media.

One young person cautioned against a ban as it could lead to harmful consequences where young people would feel less able to seek help when needed,

'I don't think there should be an under 16 social media ban. I don't think the way Aus did it was very consultative of young people and will cause more harm than hurt. It encourages kids to lie and be sneaky about their online use, rather than teaching them smart consumption of social media.'
(Female, 15-17 years).

Some children wanted greater access and felt that it was up to parents to make decisions related to access. For example,

'I love ChatGPT and they should let children under 13 use TikTok because it has more good content than bad content and it should really just be up to our parents and how they want to raise us.'

Awareness of risk and safety actions

Comments by children and young people in the survey showed the importance of children and youth knowing how to avoid or take action if they come across harmful content or people. Many reported an awareness of harms, but appeared to be confident to act for their own safety if they needed to. Some expressed knowing how to act to prevent or respond to harm as the reason for feeling safe online.

For example,

'In my personal experience, I feel perfectly safe online, but I think it is good for kids to be aware of the dangers (eg. scammers) that are found online and how to deal with it.' *(Female, 12-14 yrs),*

'Educate, Don't Just Restrict – Instead of just blocking content, teach tamariki and rangatahi how to navigate the internet safely, spot misinformation, and protect their privacy.' *(Female, 12-14 yrs),*

'Just that there is a lot of stuff online, and I have mostly kept safe. I think adults need to realise kids are capable of looking after themselves, but also help when needed.' *(non-binary, 15-17 yrs).*

Participants also expressed a strong awareness of 'stranger danger' online and older participants felt confident in knowing about privacy settings and putting those protections in place.

'Be safe and I suggest putting your account on private.' (Female, 12-14 years).

What is one thing you wish adults (like parents, teachers or decision-makers) knew about your experiences online?

The information provided by participants in response to this question was varied. There was a mix of negative and positive experiences, feelings of safety, needing to be trusted, the internet is not all bad, chances to learn, play games, meet people, have fun, but also reports of bullying, negative and harmful comments and content, feelings of unease, the internet being fake or harmful, concerns about dangers, and many were uncertain about what adults should know.

Many children in the 12- 14 years age group felt their parents were well informed of their internet use. For some, their parents regularly checked in on them. For others, they discussed what they were doing online with their parents, and others felt comfortable in telling them if they had issues.

Children and youth across all age groups wanted adults to know that the internet or being online was not all bad. Being online helped them connect with and even make new friends, learning online was important, and being able to play games or stream content was fun.

Some children reported witnessing or experiencing negative comments and/or experiences. Some felt they could control online bullying through 'blocking mean people'.

Gaming was an area that participants wanted parents to know more about and reported mixed experiences, both negative and positive. This included trusting them when playing games, the problems with deleting games, or the inability to pause live games.

'I like Roblox and Minecraft and YouTube and I dislike it when my mom deleted them because all my progress on the games are all deleted and I have to start from scratch.' (Female, 9-11 years),

'Because I make sure to play games that I know is safe, and I don't really make unsafe choices.' (Female, 12-14 years),

'Because sometimes when I'm playing on a game which people can chat in. They say mean things to me/bully me.' (Male, 9-11 years),

'When I'm in an online game, I CANNOT PAUSE.' (Male, 12-14 years).

Many children felt they were using the internet responsibly and that parents and adults should listen more to children about their online experiences.

Ways tech companies can create a safer online environment

Children and young people felt that tech companies have responsibilities related to internet content and user habits.

Recommendations included removing live chat features from online games that are played in real-time with strangers, particularly for younger children, making it easier for children to report harm, the removal of reels, age limits on content, removing harmful content, and greater restrictions on unsolicited content and or comments.

Tech companies were called on to be more proactive in removing or banning harmful content. For example:

'Please filter out content that is likely to harm the well-being of children and teenagers. a lot of the stuff online once you see it you can't unsee it. I also think that the internet has a huge ability to change the mindset, views and a huge ability to influence people negatively. I think this is a danger tech company and parents and adults in general should keep in mind when exposing children to the internet.' (gender not stated, 15-17 yrs).

Tech companies need to be more proactive to take action when a complaint related to harm is made. Lack of, or slow action by tech companies to remove harmful content when it is reported was communicated by some participants. Some children stated they had made a report to remove a fake account of them or harmful content about them and received automated messages that there was nothing wrong with the content.

Children and young people were aware that too much time online was a problem and even addictive. Some participants recommended using technology tools to limit time on screen to prevent or limit addictive behaviours.

Another recommendation was that tech companies should be more proactive about privacy settings and controls, and that all users should be well informed about how to activate and use these settings.

Some children expressed distrust of tech companies and were uncertain if their information or content was being misused.

Results show that social media appears to be used more predominantly by older children, and comments from young people in the 15 -17 year old age group felt banning social media would not be overly effective. There is awareness by children and youth that harm exists across the internet and some felt that tech companies have an influential role in allowing this happen.

'Control some bad ads and create a function to limit the Internet usage time of minors.' (Male, 15-17 years),

'Don't streamline fascist and racist, harmful content to young men and then say its free speech,' (Female, 15-17 years),

'When I report a post that has me or someone I know in it, it never gets taken down and it always says that there is no reason the post or photo should be removed.' (Female, 15-17 years),

'I wish there was more active monitoring.' (Female, 15-17 years),

'Maybe just monitor add content because sometimes they can be potentially harmful, and maybe stronger safeguarding rules because often there is content that some might find scary, especially depicting mental health issues.' (Female, 15-17 years),

'Make more effort in internet safety for kids,' (Male, 6-8 years),

'If a kid makes an account then the account should be automatically locked down,' (Male, 6-8 years).





CONCLUSION

This survey explored the views of 997 children in New Zealand aged 6 to 18 years in relation to their experience of online safety, the ways they engage with the digital world, and their advice on how online safety could be improved for children and young people.

The results show that children's use of the internet is highly diverse, as are their experiences. Results indicate their engagement in the online world changes over time with younger children up to 8 years more likely to engage in streaming television content, followed by online gaming, YouTube, music streaming and Google. Whereas older teens 15-17 years are more likely to engage in social media namely Instagram, TikTok and Snapchat and music streaming. Some caution is needed in the interpretation of these results as the gender make up of the older cohorts 12-14 and 15-17 years were significantly more weighted to female participants (both around 75% female).

Based on the results, it appears that children's engagement with social media is much less prevalent for children under 12 years. A limitation of the survey is that 14-year-olds were included with children aged 12 and 13 years. For more accurate information on age related engagement in social media, it would have been more effective to split out 14-year-olds from this group. Further research focused on this is needed.

Responses from children show their online experiences are both positive and negative. However, more children predominantly reported feeling safe online with just 2% stating they don't feel safe.

Children's comments showed many feel well informed of potential online dangers, and feel they have the knowledge of how to prevent harm or avoid harm, and actions they can take should they experience harm.

It appears their knowledge of how to keep themselves safe online contributes to their feelings on safety and positive online experiences. Children's access to digital citizenship education enabling children to engage positively, critically and competently in the digital environment that evolves with child and youth development would positively support children's overall online experience as well as their safety.

The importance of parental support was strongly communicated across all ages. Implications of this finding speak to the need to ensure parents are well informed of how they can support their children's engagement in the online world including to preventing harm from occurring and being able to support their child and take action should harm occur.

Many children and youth were aware of the important role of tech companies in supporting their safety and positive online experiences. A number of children felt that tech companies did not do enough to support safety and cited a lack of action from tech companies when they saw, experienced and reported harm. Many felt tech companies had an important role in limiting harmful content that exists online and should act with speed when a complaint is made.

Some comments included the need for tech companies to create a safe and engaging digital environment for children, and to put safeguards in place to ensure that adults were behaving in acceptable ways toward children such as preventing adults engaging in online game chats with children. Unwanted and unsolicited content was another reason for children and youth feeling unsafe and they expressed they wanted greater control over that content. A key recommendation from the participants is that all children should be aware of privacy and protection settings on their accounts and that they should be easily applied by children, and potentially even automatically for all children's accounts.

Age and stage related content and access was another area children and youth felt could make the internet safer for them. However, very few supported a ban, and a number felt a ban could lead to greater harms such as preventing children from openly engaging online and being scared or 'put off' asking for help if they experienced harm. Additionally, findings from the survey suggest that it is older teens that are most engaged in social media, therefore a ban to protect children from online harm may have a limited effect.

The findings of this survey provide important insights into children's experience of the online world, and suggest many children are having positive experiences that include connecting with friends and family, accessing play, recreational and learning content. Additionally, important findings from the survey support adults to understand the harm children may be experiencing or fearful of experiencing, and what is most useful in preventing or responding to harm online.

Further research that continues to explore these findings and addresses some of the limitations of the survey relating to ethnicity and disability, drawing from a representative sample, and greater accuracy related to age cohort, would make valuable contributions to the important and ever developing issue of online safety for children and young people.

REFERENCES

1. <https://www.savethechildren.org.nz/>
2. <https://netsafe.org.nz/>
3. OECD (2025), How's Life for Children in the Digital Age?, OECD Publishing Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/0854b900-en>
4. OECD (2025), How's Life for Children in the Digital Age?, OECD Publishing Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/0854b900-en>
5. <https://www.savethechildren.org/us/charity-stories/why-children-need-protection-in-a-digital-world>
6. <https://nzmj.org.nz/journal/vol-137-no-1598/impacts-of-digital-technologies-on-child-and-adolescent-health-recommendations-for-safer-screen-use-in-educational-settings>
7. Coyne, I. (2025). 'We Want Children to Have a Childhood' Protecting Children from the Harms of Social Media. Comprehensive Child and Adolescent Nursing, 48(1), 1–4. <https://doi.org/10.1080/24694193.2025.2454836>
8. Coyne, I. (2025). 'We Want Children to Have a Childhood' Protecting Children from the Harms of Social Media. Comprehensive Child and Adolescent Nursing, 48(1), 1–4. <https://doi.org/10.1080/24694193.2025.2454836>
9. Ritchie, H. (2024). Australia approves social media ban on under-16s [BBC News]. Sydney. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c89vjj0lxx9o>
10. <https://www.simpsongrierson.com/insights-news/legal-updates/access-denied-new-zealand-s-proposed-social-media-ban-for-under-16s>
11. <https://www.savethechildren.org.nz/about-us>
12. <https://www.jotform.com/>
13. <https://createhappy.org/>
14. <https://www.apa.org/topics/families/parents-caregivers-kids-healthy-development>
15. E. Kazdin (Ed). Encyclopedia of psychology, Vol. 6. (pp. 46-50). Washington, DC; New York, NY: American Psychological Association; Oxford University Press.
16. Bronfenbrenner (1979) retrieved from <https://www.simplypsychology.org/bronfenbrenner.html>

Child and Youth Online Safety Survey

**Save the Children****netsafe****Your Voice Matters!**

Have your say about the experiences of children online. A survey for children and youth aged 5 - 18.

Kia ora! We want to hear from you!

The internet is a big part of life for many tamariki and rangatahi in Aotearoa, but adults don't always understand what it's really like for you. This is your chance to share your experiences online and tell us what you wish adults knew! This survey is part of a project by Netsafe and Save the Children to make the internet better and safer for young people. Your feedback will help parents, teachers, and decision-makers (like the Prime Minister!) understand how to support young people online. This survey is completely anonymous – we won't ask for your name or contact details. Answer honestly, and let's make a difference together!

Where do you usually use the internet? Tick all that apply. *

- ☐ At school
- ☐ At home
- ☐ At a friend's house
- ☐ At the library or community space
- ☐ On mobile data and a mobile device when I am out and about
- ☐ I don't use the internet
- ☐ Other

What do you use most online? (pick up to 5 that you use the most) *

- ☐ YouTube
- ☐ YouTube Kids
- ☐ Netflix / Disney / Other TV streaming services
- ☐ Spotify / Apple Music / Other music streaming services
- ☐ Messenger Kids
- ☐ Whatsapp / Telegram / Other messaging apps
- ☐ Facebook
- ☐ Instagram
- ☐ TikTok
- ☐ Snapchat
- ☐ Google / Other search engines
- ☐ Chat GPT or other AI tools
- ☐ Online gaming (e.g. Roblox, Minecraft, Fortnite etc)
- ☐ Other

Do you have your own social media accounts, or do you use your whānau / family accounts? *

- ☐ I have my own accounts
- ☐ I use my whānau / family accounts
- ☐ I don't use social media

Do you feel safe online? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ I don't know

Please explain why you answered this way about safety online.

What is one thing you wish adults (like parents, teachers or decision-makers) knew about your experiences online? *

What would make the internet better for young people? Select all that apply or add your own idea. *

- ☐ Less harmful or mean content
- ☐ More privacy and control over what I share
- ☐ Better tools to stop online bullying
- ☐ More education for parents and teachers about what it's like to be online as a young person
- ☐ More control over the ads and content I see
- ☐ Safer online gaming spaces
- ☐ Other

Do you have any advice for adults or tech companies about making the internet safer for tamariki and rangatahi?

This could be for parents, teachers, companies like TikTok or YouTube, or anyone else you think should listen!

About you

This is anonymous and won't be used to identify you. Quotes from the survey will be used but not with your name.

How old are you? *

- ☐ 6 to 8 years
- ☐ 9 to 11 years
- ☐ 12 to 14 years
- ☐ 15 to 17 years
- ☐ 18 to 20 years
- ☐ 20+ years old

What best describes where you live? *

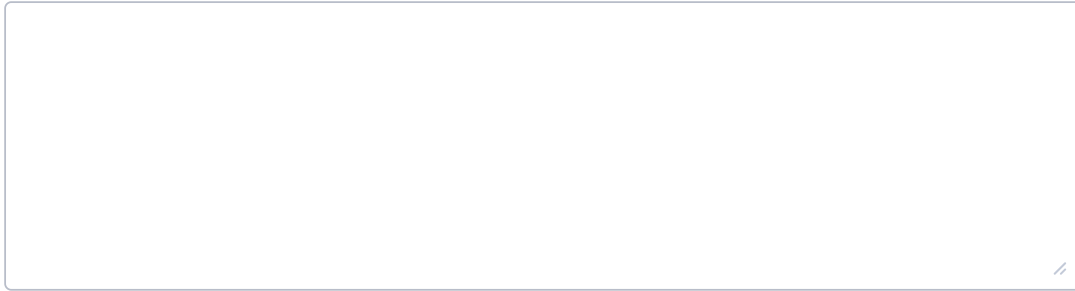
- ☐ A big city (like Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch).
- ☐ A town
- ☐ A rural area / the countryside
- ☐ Other

What is your gender?

Please Select



Final Thoughts? Is there anything else you want to tell us about being a child or young person online?



Thank you for sharing your voice!

We will use this information to advocate for better online experiences for tamariki and young people like yourself, and to know how we can better support you to have better and safer experiences online.

Submit

Powered by **Jotform**



To help us continue our work,
visit www.savethechildren.org.nz
or call us on 0800 167 168



Save the Children