ONLINE RISKS TO CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE

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Doing research with children

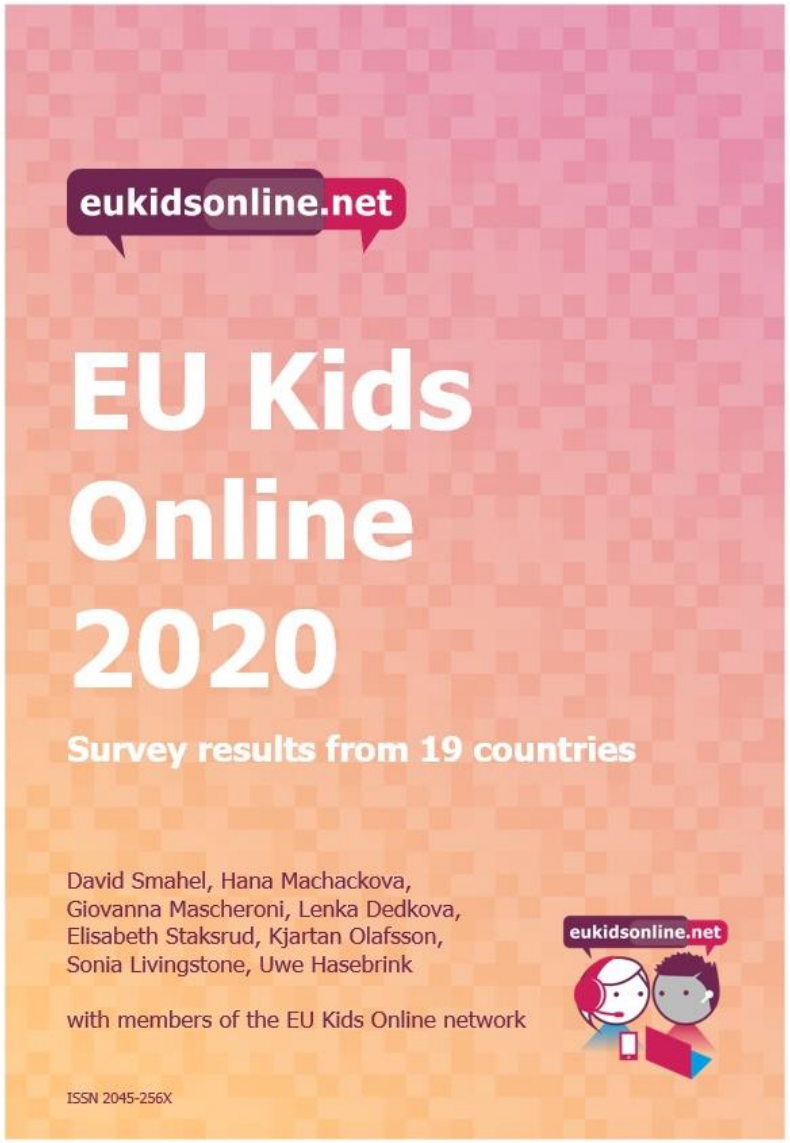
- Where spaces can be created, children and young people actively participate in a range of capacities
- Changes in the global political and policy landscapes
  - Part to the UNCRC
  - Theoretical thinking and new ideological conceptualizations of childhood (Archard, 2004)
- Recognition of children and young people's right to participate in public decision-making
- Growing engagement in research
- Despite most studies on children's issues, rely only on adults' involvement in these projects

A Positive Online Experience

- Positive social Interaction with others
- Healthy sexual learning & exploration
- Identity Support – LGBTQ+ & Disability
- Online mental Health Support & Advice
- Educational Resource
- Communication with friends & family far away
- Self Development

More online risks to children, but not necessarily more harm: EU Kids Online 2020 survey

- The degree to which children are exposed to risk online is shown to be rather less than sometimes feared by parents or claimed by the mass media.
- This does not warrant the claim that nothing should be done.
- It invites a careful assessment on priorities.
- Weighing of the consequences of different kinds of interventions.
- Finding a balance between creating a safe space and not limit children's civil rights and freedoms.



What are the risks?

Different risks depending upon the age of the child and the apps/games that they are accessing:

- **Conduct:** too much information; feelings of anonymity—disinhibition effect; digital footprint; lack of understanding of affects on others.
- **Grooming & Sexual Exploitation:** Social media platforms as gateways to some adults
- **Content**: age-inappropriate or unreliable (violent or sexual content).
- **Peer on Peer Abuse:** Online bullying by their peers which can range from malicious comments, to identity fraud and catfishing
- **Mental health:** Introduction to self-harm, suicide, threats, coercion, support from others.
- **Fraud/Commercialism:** Financial/Identity/Romance

Online CSA

"Child sexual abuse (CSA) is when a child is forced or persuaded to take part in sexual activities. This may involve physical contact or non-contact activities and can happen online or offline." (Department for Education, 2018; Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, 2017; Scottish Government, 2014; Wales Safeguarding Procedures Project Board, 2019).

- **Grooming**
- **Live Streaming**
- **Coercion and blackmail**
- **Child abuse images (CSAM)**

Defining Sexual Grooming

Establishing a relationship with a child online, through hiding their identity or not, to establish trust in order to coerce the child to share nude/semi-nude images or videos, or sexual acts, to either keep for themselves or to distribute for the purpose of financial gain. Grooming can also be conducted with the intention of meeting the child in order to sexually abuse them. This form of abuse can be both CSA and CSE.

Martellozzo, 2013

Identify → Trust → Isolate → Secrecy → Contact → Control

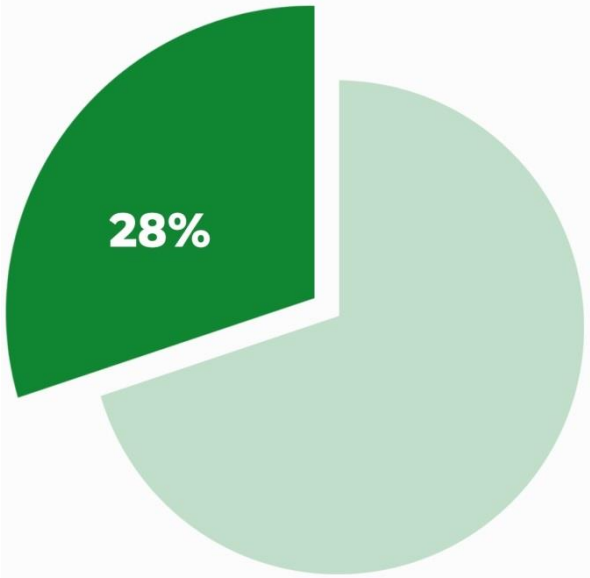
Age inappropriate content

‘…I wasn’t sure it was normal to watch it…’

A quantitative and qualitative examination of the impact of online pornography on the values, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of children and young people

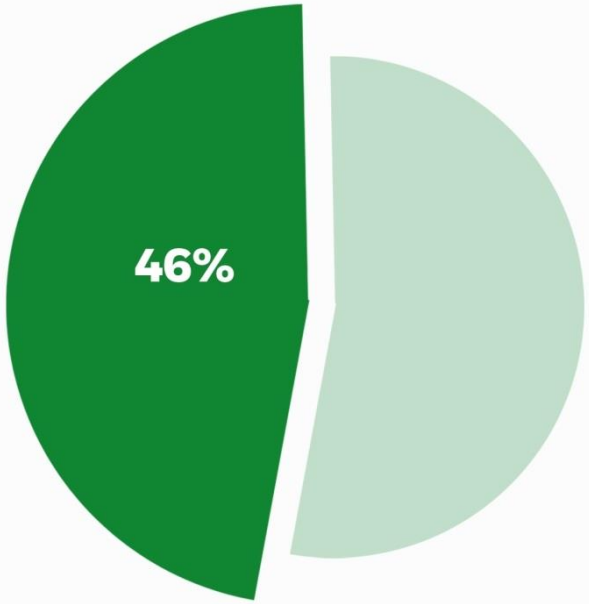
Who has seen porn: differences by age

11-12 year olds



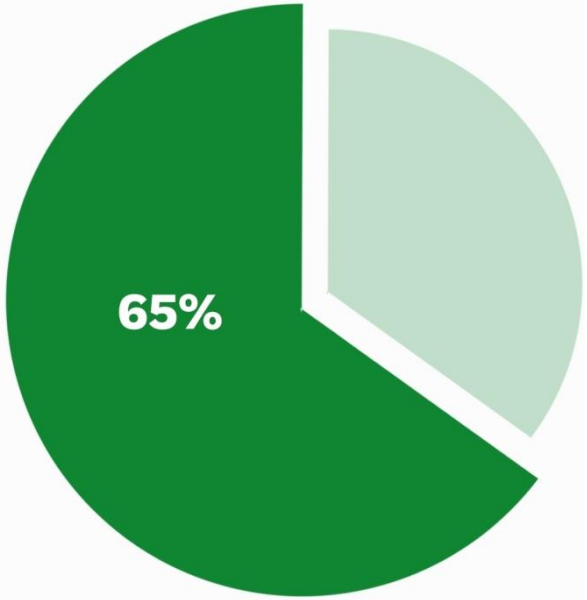
21% who have seen porn want to copy it

13-14 year olds



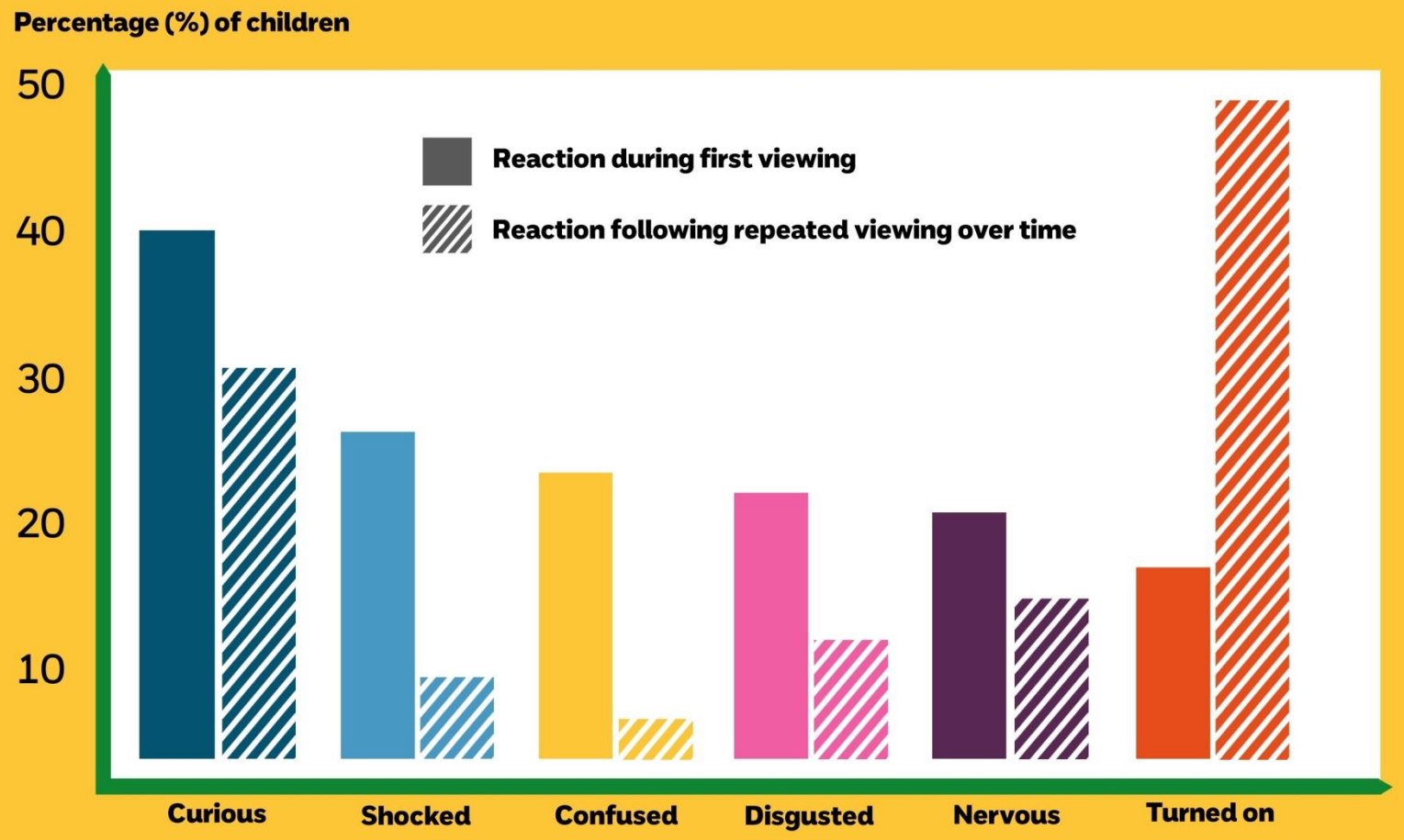
39% who have seen porn want to copy it

15-16 year olds



42% who have seen porn want to copy it

How do young people feel when they see porn online?



Exposure to content

- Of the primary school children surveyed, 1 in 25 had been sent or shown a naked or semi-naked image by an adult.
- Of the secondary school children surveyed, 1 in every 20 had been sent or shown a naked or semi-naked image by an adult.
- 5% of the primary school aged children had received a naked or semi-naked image from another young person.
- 3% of primary school children had also sent a naked or semi-naked image to another young person.

For more information see https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/sexting-sending-nudes

Sharing nudes/semi nudes

Sharing and receiving a nude, semi-nude or sexually suggestive image of yourself when you are under 18 is a crime under two Home Office offences. Punishable in a court of law or with a discretionary Outcome 21.

- Possessing, creating and sharing a nude, semi-nude or sexually suggestive image of a person under 18 is a crime even if you are under 18.
- In 2020, 44% of identified indecent images of children by the IWF were self-generated by children.
- The age group seeing the greatest rise in self-generated sexual imagery online are for girls aged 11 – 13 years.
- According to UK police data there were 6,499 cases of children under 14 investigated for such offences between 1 January 2017 and 21 August 2019
- Online communities of people focused purely on obtaining self-generated images from children through grooming.

Barriers to disclosure

- **DIRECT DISCLOSURE**
- **INDIRECT DISCLOSURE**
  - **‘**Bad’ or ‘harmful’ behaviour
  - Non-verbally
  - Incomplete disclosures
- They might not be aware that they are giving off signals that they have or are being victimised.
- Disclosure can occur after the child has participated in an educational programme

(NSPCC 2021)

Negative gender stereotyping

Shame & Guilt

Unsure of what abuse is – including contact/non-contact/online/offline

Fear of a negative reaction to disclosure

Fear of not being believed

Fear of being punished

The effects of trauma

Institutional factors

Assisting Disclosure

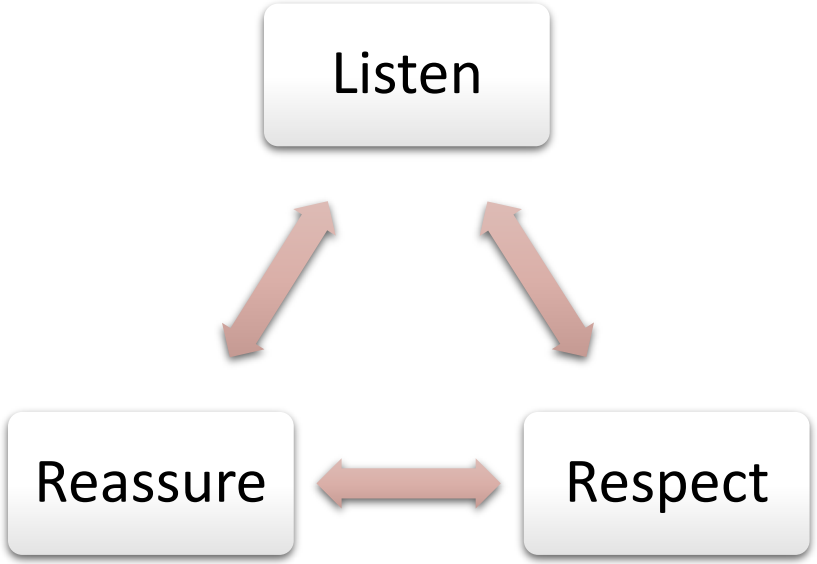
STEP ONE: Avoid denial

STEP TWO: Establish a safe environment

STEP THREE: Reassure the child

STEP FOUR: Listen to the child

STEP FIVE: DO NOT Interrogate



STEP SIX: DO NOT make promises to the child

STEP SEVEN: Taking quotes

STEP EIGHT: Support don't judge

STEP NINE: Understand that there are multiple types of abuse

STEP TEN: Get help. You don't have to manage alone.

Concluding remarks

- Technology has certainly a key role to play—together with the law and education.
- Debates in the UK on how age verification and how it can be addressed both legally and practically.
- Given that we are openly talking about safety by design, it would seem sensible for sites to have clearly visible health warnings
  - Illegal?
  - How to report if it is seen on their site
- Not only concerned with protecting children but also those that work hard to protect them.

Links to useful sites and support

Online Child Protection & Support Agencies

- https://parentinfo.org/
- https://www.childnet.com/parents-and-carers
- https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/
- https://www.net-aware.org.uk/
- https://www.internetmatters.org/issues/
- https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/

Parent Portals on Social Media & App Platforms

- https://www.facebook.com/safety/parents
- https://www.snap.com/en-GB/safety/safety-center
- https://help.instagram.com/154475974694511
- https://corp.roblox.com/parents/
- https://www.tiktok.com/safety/resources/for-parents?lang=en