



**Australian Government**

**NetAlert**



## Attitudes and behaviour of young people online

RESEARCH SUMMARY

Two studies commissioned by the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts offer new insight into how Australian families use the internet, and how they can protect themselves online.

They examine how young people behave on the internet, the extent to which they are exposed to undesirable materials or people, the awareness of risks among parents and children, and the steps young people and their parents take to protect their families.

## Risks to children and young people online

There is widespread concern among parents about harmful content on the internet and its effect on children. More than nine in ten parents (92 per cent) agreed that they were concerned that some things on the internet may be harmful to their children.

Almost half of children surveyed (46 per cent) said they worried about online safety. Their concern peaks at age 9 to 11 (59 per cent) and falls away with age to 25 per cent of 16 to 17 year olds. Thirty-two per cent of children and young people couldn't think of anything 'bad' about the internet.

## Inappropriate content

Parents were most commonly concerned that their children could be exposed to inappropriate internet sites—61 per cent said this was something they worried about.

However, although parents admit that they have concerns about the internet, they appear to underplay or not be aware of the extent to which their children have actually been exposed to undesirable content. Only 28 per cent of parents thought their children had been exposed to issues of concern.

In contrast, 38 per cent of children under the age of 13 have visited sites their parents would not wish them to see. This increases

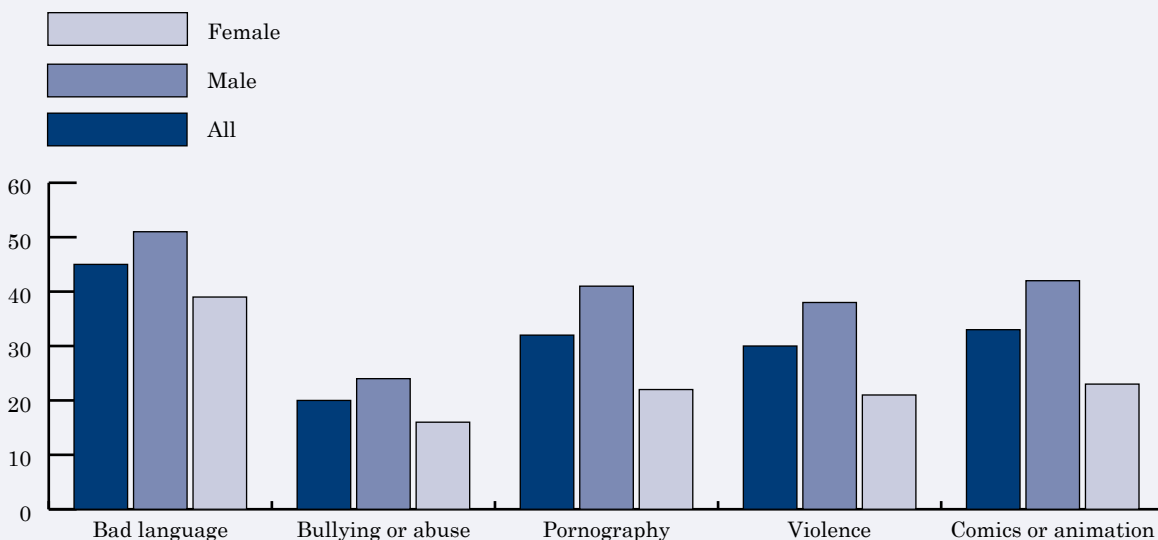
### Top five concerns parents had about their children using the internet

- Exposure to pornography (55 per cent)
- Communicating online with strangers (41 per cent)
- Chat rooms (23 per cent)
- Exposure to violent content/death/victims of violence (11 per cent)
- Identity theft (9 per cent)

### Top five things that children and young people perceived as 'bad' about the internet

- Pop up ads (24 per cent)
- Danger of downloading a virus (17 per cent)
- Too slow/difficult to use (12 per cent)
- Might meet/talk to people who are bad (8 per cent)
- Pornography/sex scenes/videos (5 per cent)

Exposure to specific content by gender (Chart 4 from 'Snapshot\*\*')



to almost half of teenagers (46 per cent). Forty-three per cent of all children said that they had accidentally come across websites that their parents would find alarming.

Teenagers are just as likely to be exposed to violence or incitement to violence, or to comics or animation containing bad language, violence or sexual material, as they are to pornography.

## Stranger danger and online grooming

Fifty-eight per cent of parents said that they were concerned about their children coming into contact with strangers online. This was the second most common concern overall.

Eighty-one per cent of 13 to 17 year olds chat online, as do 48 per cent of children aged between 8 and 12.

Twenty-eight per cent of 8 to 12 year olds and 42 per cent of 13 to 17 year olds who chat online said they had been contacted online by someone they didn't know.

The older a child is, the more likely they are to have been contacted by strangers. Almost 18 per cent of teenagers had been asked by a stranger to meet them, with girls are more likely to be asked.

Although the great majority of young people (71 per cent) would refuse to meet a stranger, 19 per cent of teenagers said that they would consider it under some circumstances. Boys are twice as likely to consider it as girls.

Almost 40 per cent of young people have put a photo of themselves on the internet.

Forty-five per cent of children reported that their parents had warned them against giving out personal information online, while 40 per cent had been warned against talking or meeting up with strangers met online.

## Cyber bullying

Twenty per cent of teenagers said they had seen bullying or abuse online. This was more common among boys (24 per cent) than girls (16 per cent).

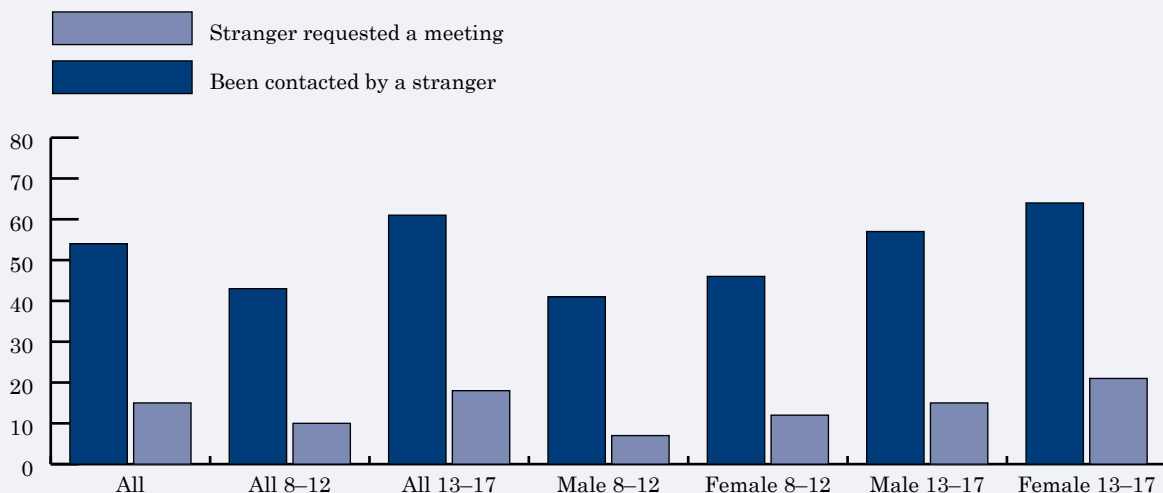
## Supervising online activity

Parents use a range of means to manage their children's internet use.

Almost 25 per cent of parents surveyed say that they always sit with their child when their child is online and 80 per cent say they sometimes do.

Fifty-seven per cent of parents have set rules about how much time their children spend on the internet, and 64 per cent have rules about the sites or content that the child can access.

*Contact with strangers (Chart 5 from 'Snapshot\*\*')*



## Internet security

The risks of most concern to young people online are pop-up ads (24 per cent) and the danger of downloading a virus (17 per cent).

Thirty-eight per cent of children access the internet from a computer located in the family study. Parents with older children are more likely to say the computer is in the child's bedroom than parents of younger children.

## Educating children about the risks

Thirty-three per cent of parents said they had discussed internet safety with their children. Children and young people themselves report a higher figure, almost three-quarters (74 per cent) stating that their parents had spoken to them about keeping safe online.

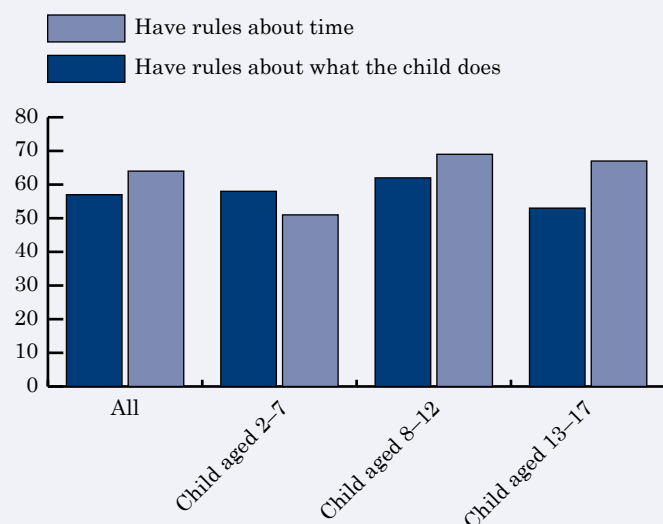
## Equipping the family with online protection

Twenty-five per cent of parents said they had installed filtering or monitoring software.

### Who do young people chat to? (Table 15 from 'Snapshot'\*)

Base: Those who indicated that they chat or message online	TOTAL (n=636)	8–12 years (n=232)	13–17 years (n=404)
	%	%	%
<b>Multiple response</b>			
Friends or other people you know from your school or your neighbourhood.	96	97	96
People that you have met online that your parents have said it is alright to talk to.	20	23	19
People you have never met who are friends of friends of yours.	31	24	35
Just a mixture of people including strangers.	14	10	17
Net: per cent who have talked to people they did not know without parents saying it is OK.	37	28	42
<b>Total per cent who talk to strangers including those vetted by parents:</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>47</b>

### Extent to which parents set rules (Chart 3 from 'Parents'\*\*)



#### SOURCES:

\* A snapshot of online behaviour and attitudes of children, Wallis Consulting Group, July 2007

\*\* Parents' attitudes and behaviour in relation to their children's online safety, Wallis Consulting Group, August 2007