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Growing Up Online

Analytical report by Kaspersky
in collaboration with the UAE
Cyber Security Council

Content

Introduction

In the digital age, the internet has become an integral part of daily life, impacting how families interact, and how children learn and entertain themselves. With children and adolescents growing up in a world dominated by digital media, understanding the children's online behavior is crucial for both parents and educators. The interaction between parents and children in the online realm presents unique challenges and opportunities, influencing everything from communication patterns to educational development and online safety.

This report entitled **"Growing Up Online"**, delves into the online behavior of parents and children in the UAE, and aims to uncover trends, habits, and concerns associated with internet usage. The study offers tips and expert opinion for parents on how to deal and overcome pressing online threats that could be encountered by their children.

The study sample included 2000 online interviews (1000 parent-child pairs, with children aged 3 to 17 years) in the UAE. The survey was conducted by Toluna research agency at the request of Kaspersky and the UAE Cyber Security Council. Survey results were released in October 2024.

Dr. Mohamed Hamad Al Kuwaiti, Chairman of the UAE Cybersecurity Council

Based on the continuous efforts and dedication of the CSC for child online safety with our global partners, we are happy to release this report that touches on various important recommendations and advices
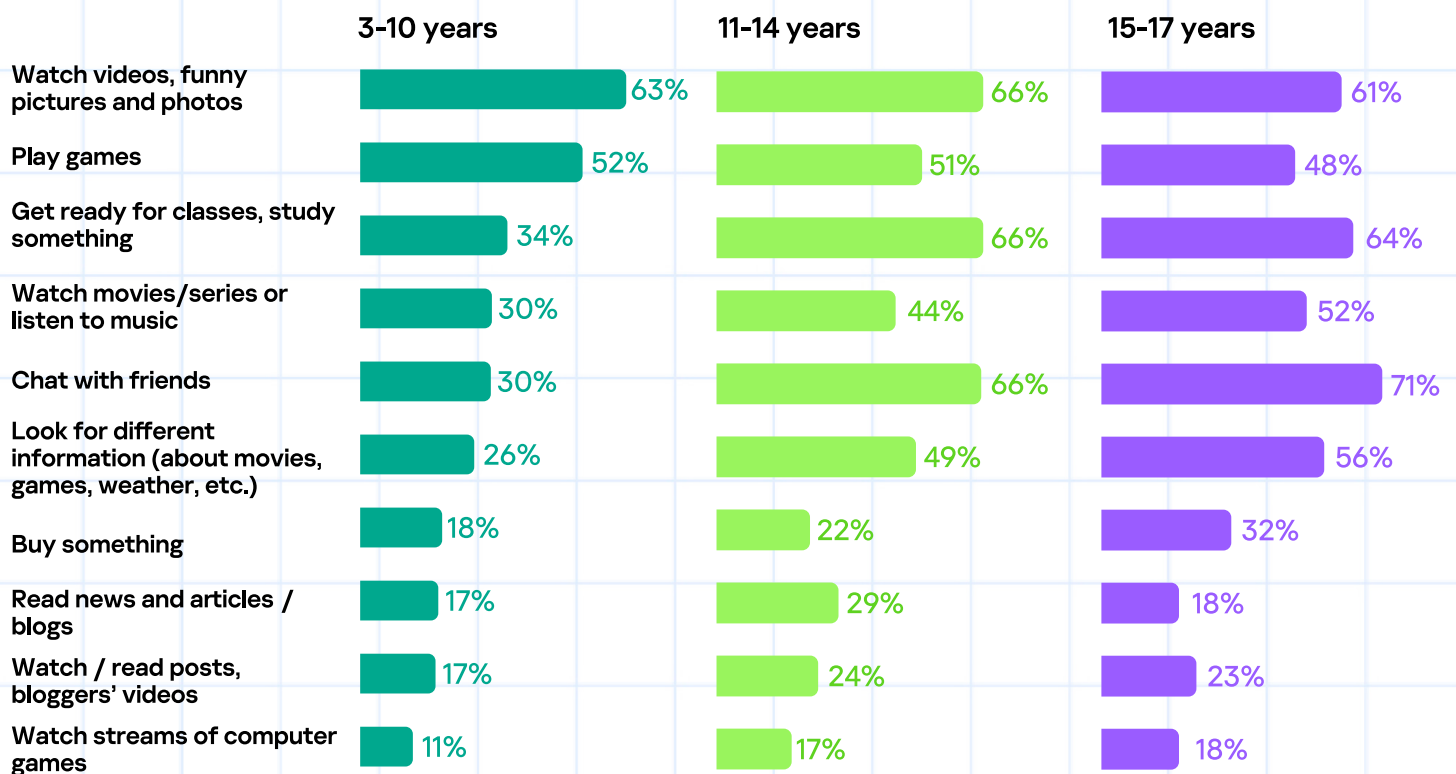
Using gadgets

97% of children regularly use various gadgets. The most popular gadget is a tablet (**68%**), followed by a smartphone (**57%**).

The top three children's activities on the Internet includes watching videos, funny pictures and photos (64%), playing video games (52%), and preparing for classes, studying something (42%).

Girls are more likely to use the Internet for listening to music and watching movies (**37% versus 32%**). Boys choose watching computer game streams more than the girls do (**16% versus 9%**).

Regardless of age, children use Internet for gaming and entertainment (watching videos and pictures). The older the children, the more activities they have online. Thus, high schoolers more often use the Internet for their studies and learning new things, chatting, or online purchases.

Children's online activities

	3-10 years	11-14 years	15-17 years
Watch videos, funny pictures and photos	63%	66%	61%
Play games	52%	51%	48%
Get ready for classes, study something	34%	66%	64%
Watch movies/series or listen to music	30%	44%	52%
Chat with friends	30%	66%	71%
Look for different information (about movies, games, weather, etc.)	26%	49%	56%
Buy something	18%	22%	32%
Read news and articles / blogs	17%	29%	18%
Watch / read posts, bloggers' videos	17%	24%	23%
Watch streams of computer games	11%	17%	18%

Sample: children of all ages (1000 interviews).

Using gadgets
Getting to know gadgets

75% of children have their own smartphone or tablet

Try Kaspersky Safe Kids

Half of children get familiar with mobile gadgets by the age of 7.

The majority of parents provide children with gadgets for educational reasons (**93%**), and for keeping the child occupied while travelling (**88%**).

Choosing wisely: a guide to your kids' first gadget

What to do before giving a gadget to a child

Set up a Child Account before giving your offspring their first gadget. It acts as a safeguard on the device, preventing things like downloads of mature or inappropriate content.

Install all the basic applications that support either communication or geo-location (like messenger and map apps), plus learning applications. And don't forget to set up the privacy and confidentiality settings in each of the installed applications, so that the child, for example, isn't discoverable via their phone number by unknown individuals.

Install a digital parenting app. This will empower you to curate content, monitor the amount of time your kid spends on specific apps (and set limits if needed), and track their current location.

With **Kaspersky Safe Kids** parents can effectively safeguard their children across both online and offline spaces.

Using gadgets
Time with gadgets

One of the acute problems connected to the immersion of children into the digital world is the time they spend with gadgets and online.

The older the children get, the more time they spend online. Out of the majority of children who use the Internet anyway (**95%**), one-fourth do spend 3 or more hours per day online (**26%**).

As a means of control over screen time, 92% of parents set limits on how much time their children can spend online.

Share of parents who limit their child's time on the Internet

92% Overall

91% 3-10 years

99% 11-14 years

94% 15-17 years
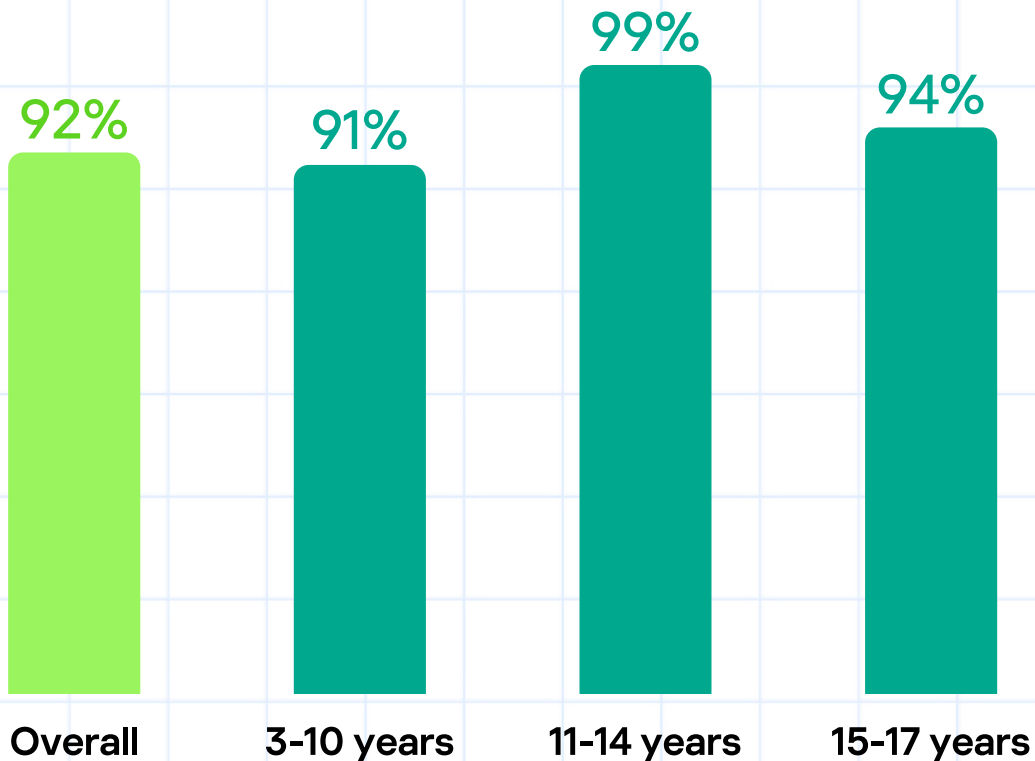
Sample: parents of children of all ages (1000 interviews).

How to discuss installing Kaspersky Safe Kids with your child

Depending on the child's age, you can install Kaspersky Safe Kids and set the rules for using devices yourself, or do it together with your child

Age: 3-6

Installing Kaspersky Safe Kids does not need to be discussed with children aged 3-6.

You can install the application before you give your child the device. If you let your child use your device, it's a good idea to create a separate account for the child where you can set all the necessary restrictions.

Remember that children can easily become addicted to gadgets. You should not let your child have their phone or tablet during meals or use it as a way to calm them down. Otherwise your child might refuse to eat without a cartoon or cry if you don't give them their phone.

Age: 7-10

Children aged 7-10 might use a computer for schoolwork, and a phone to contact parents and friends, so it's not unusual for them to have their own devices. It's better to install the application before giving your child their first personal device. You can tell your child, for example:

"I've installed a special program to protect you. It will teach you how to stay safe online, warn you about information that's bad, and help you find your phone if you lose it."

You don't need to tell the child about all the program functions. Use the information you get from Kaspersky Safe Kids wisely.

7-10 year olds spend most of their free time playing. It's important to control the time your child spends in front of the screen. The recommended time limit is no more than 2 hours a day.

⬡ Age: 11-13

Installing Kaspersky Safe Kids should be discussed with children aged 11-13.

You can link it to buying a new device your child has been hankering after. You can say:

"I'll buy you a new phone (computer) on one condition – Kaspersky Safe Kids will be installed on it. It will protect you from dangerous websites, warn me about unknown people trying to make contact with you, and let me know where you are."

If you have no plans to buy a new device, tell the child about your concerns and suggest a compromise:

"You hear all the time about threats online and in real life: kidnapping, mugging, terrorism, gambling, cyberstalking, blackmail, etc. (It would be good to give a real-life example that the child knows about.) I worry a lot about you, but understand you're growing up and want more freedom and independence. Let's agree that I'll stop nagging you about what you're doing, but we'll install a program to protect you from dangerous websites, warn me if an unknown person is trying to make contact with you, and tell me where you are. What do you say?"

⬡ Age: 14-17

If your child is aged 14-17, you must reach a mutual agreement to use Kaspersky Safe Kids.

If you install the application without their consent, it could have undesirable consequences. You can say:

"I realize you just think I'm fussing. But even adults sometimes get into difficult situations. I'd feel so much better if you agreed to install a special program on your phone and computer to warn me about threats and suspicious contacts, and protect you against buying things by mistake and financial fraud. I promise I won't use functions you really don't want me to."
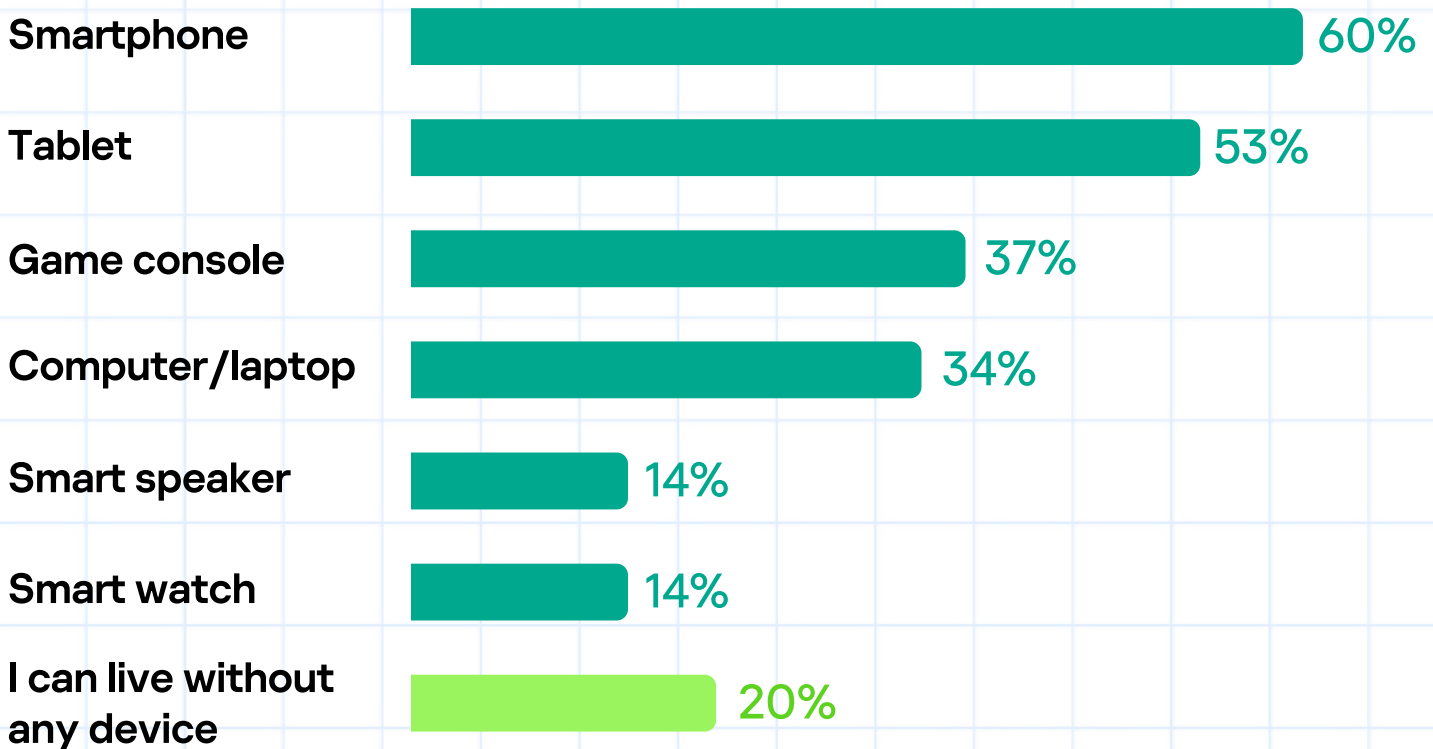
Your child's voluntary consent to install the application is a sign of trust. Remember that most children over the age of 14 are sufficiently tech-savvy to delete any application from their device. Your teenager could simply turn off their phone, buy another device, or open a different social media account.

Using gadgets
Psychological aspects

Gadgets play an important role in children's lives, 80% of children say they cannot live without them

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Gadgets that children cannot live without

Smartphone	60%
Tablet	53%
Game console	37%
Computer/laptop	34%
Smart speaker	14%
Smart watch	14%
I can live without any device	20%

Sample: UAE children of all ages (1000 interviews).

The older the children get, the more likely they are to be addicted to gadgets.

This digital addiction leads to high rates of negative emotions (**71%**) in situations when mobile phone suddenly runs out of power and turns off: **45%** feel very sad, **28%** feel very angry, **12%** feel very scared.

Though in one third of families (36%) children and parents have mutual understanding of the matter of online behavior, there are still 31% of parents that have conflicts with their children about it.

The main issue that triggers conflicts is amount of time spent with a gadget or online (64%). Apart from that, parents are worried about the content that the child consumes (35%) and the facts that the children spend all their time online instead of doing something useful (28%) as well as communicates with people whom parents do not like (28%).

At the same time, it is worth noting that the problem of the video content that children are watching remains quite acute. Thus, according to the parents, half of children have been exposed to violent videos on the Internet, either consciously (26%) or accidentally (33%).

Dr. Mohamed Hamad Al Kuwaiti, Chairman of the UAE Cybersecurity Council

There is little doubt that digital activities can be addictive, and seriously distract children from real-world adventure. Internet and digital services offer kids a wide range of engaging content, and can take ahold of their attention for a long time. It must also be remembered that the real world can be even more engaging, especially if parents are ready to invest their time and spend it together with kids, doing joint activities. This time is actually even more important and valuable for families and friends, to connect, create special bonds and share memories
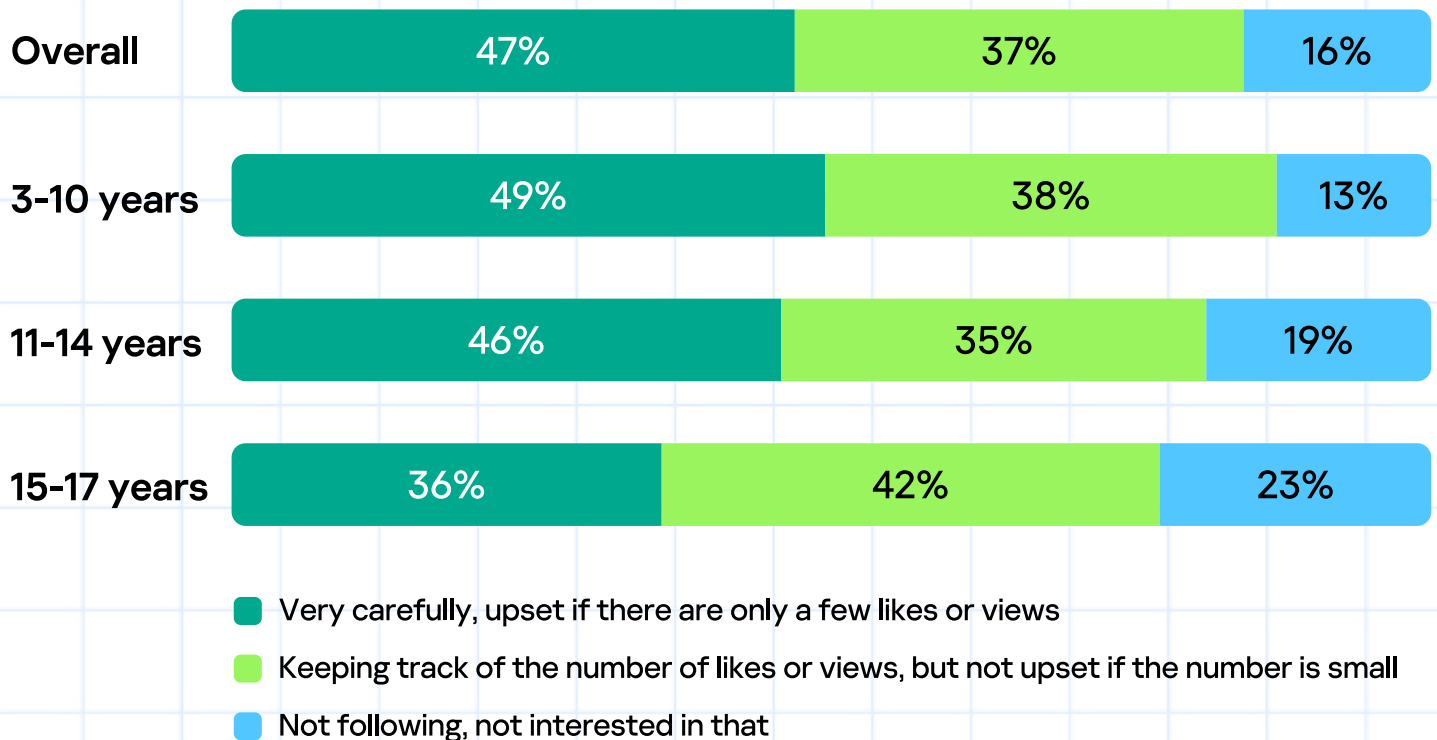
Living in the digital world
Social networks
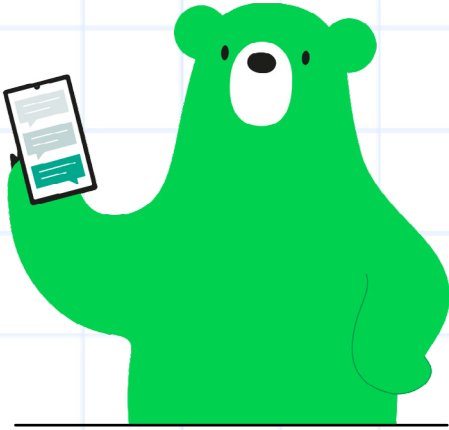
Most of the interviewed parents have accounts on social networks (**89%**). As for their children, less than a half of them have social media presence (**49%**). The older the children, the larger the number of those who use social media. The most active users are 15-17 year olds (**80%**).

The majority of children (**84%**) pay attention to likes/views/comments on their social media posts, and almost half of them get upset if the number of likes or views is small.

Such attention to likes and comments usually decreases with age.

Tracking views / likes / comments on social media posts

	Very carefully	Keeping track	Not following
Overall	47%	37%	16%
3-10 years	49%	38%	13%
11-14 years	46%	35%	19%
15-17 years	36%	42%	23%

- Very carefully, upset if there are only a few likes or views
- Keeping track of the number of likes or views, but not upset if the number is small
- Not following, not interested in that

Sample: UAE children of mentioned age groups (overall – 492 interviews; 3-10 years - 295 interviews; 11-14 years – 144 interviews; 15-17 years – 53 interviews).

Living in the digital world
Privacy on social media

Both parents and children share at least some types of personal information on social networks. Around a half of parents (**54%**) tend to share pictures of their children on their personal pages, and over a half of those who share photos also post additional information (**62%**). The most common types of shared personal information are children names (**55%**) and their hobbies (**61%**), though some parents could share more precise information such as geolocation (**37%**), preschool/school name (**43%**).

At the same time, children choose to share about their hobbies the most often.

Besides, over a half of children (**60%**) indicate their real age on social networks, and **22%** pretend that they are older than they really are.

The main reason for posting about their children is for a parent to keep memories (**65%**). Some of the parents also want to share their pride in child's achievements (**46%**) or letting relatives and friends know about child's life (**38%**). While **27%** of parents think its ok to do because everyone else does it.
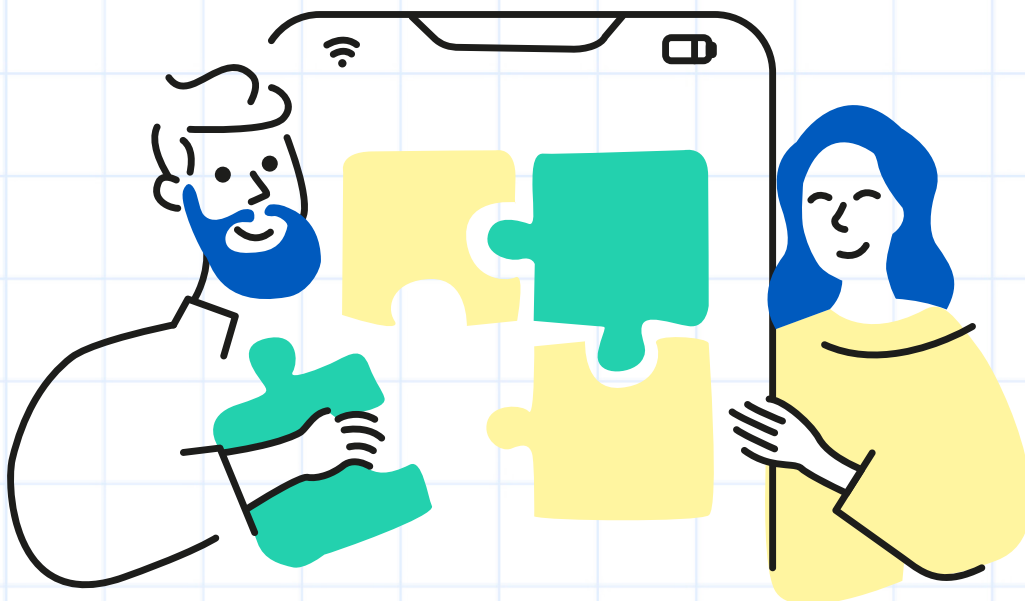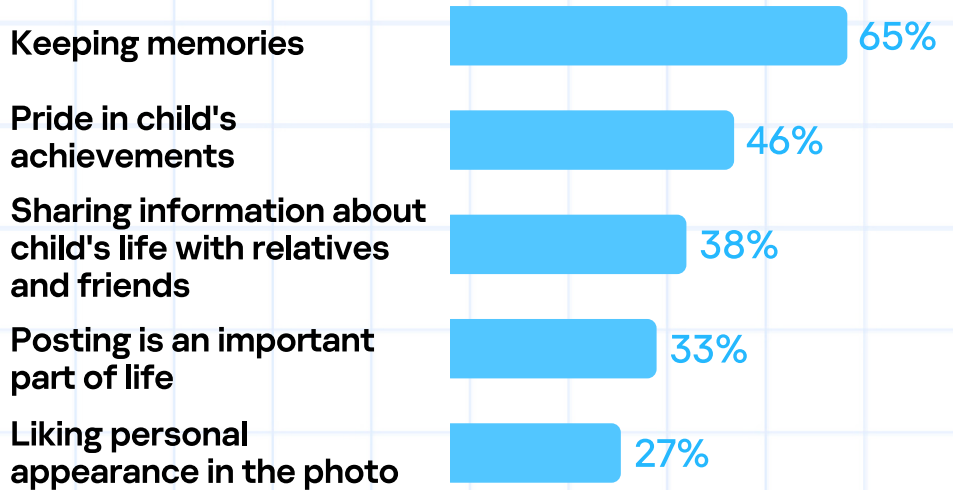
Pictures of children on social networks

54%

of parents post pictures / posts/ videos of their children on social media

Reasons for posting photos, posts and videos of children on social networks

Keeping memories	65%
Pride in child's achievements	46%
Sharing information about child's life with relatives and friends	38%
Posting is an important part of life	33%
Liking personal appearance in the photo	27%

Sometimes, the habit of sharing personal life details goes too far. One fourth (**25%**) of teenagers (11-17 years old) have cases of sending in private message or posting on social media some very personal or indecent photos or videos. Also, it is worth remarking that **43%** of children have regretted posting something on social media.

**Oversharing is a common issue among children and their parents.**

Almost two thirds of parents (**63%**) ask for their children's consent before posting information about them. However, one third of those who ask make a final decision themselves, regardless of the child's opinion. The older the child, the more important is their permission to publish photos. Thus, parents of children under 10 years old are less likely to ask for consent, because they think their children are too young.

In terms of cybersecurity, the negative trend among parents and children is disregard to privacy settings.

Thus, over one third of adults (**39%**) and children (**33%**) have public accounts on social networks so that everyone could access their information.

Younger children are more likely to add other children as friends on social networks that they do not know in real life (**34%** among those who are 3-10, compared to **24-29%** among 11-17 years olds). However, most of the social networks friends are real-life acquaintances, peers (**74%**) and family members (**62%**).

Parents are not fully aware about their child's communication in messengers. Over two thirds of all the children have secret chats with classmates and / or friends that parents and teachers do not know about (**70%**). Every third child has secret chats with non-school friends (**31%**).
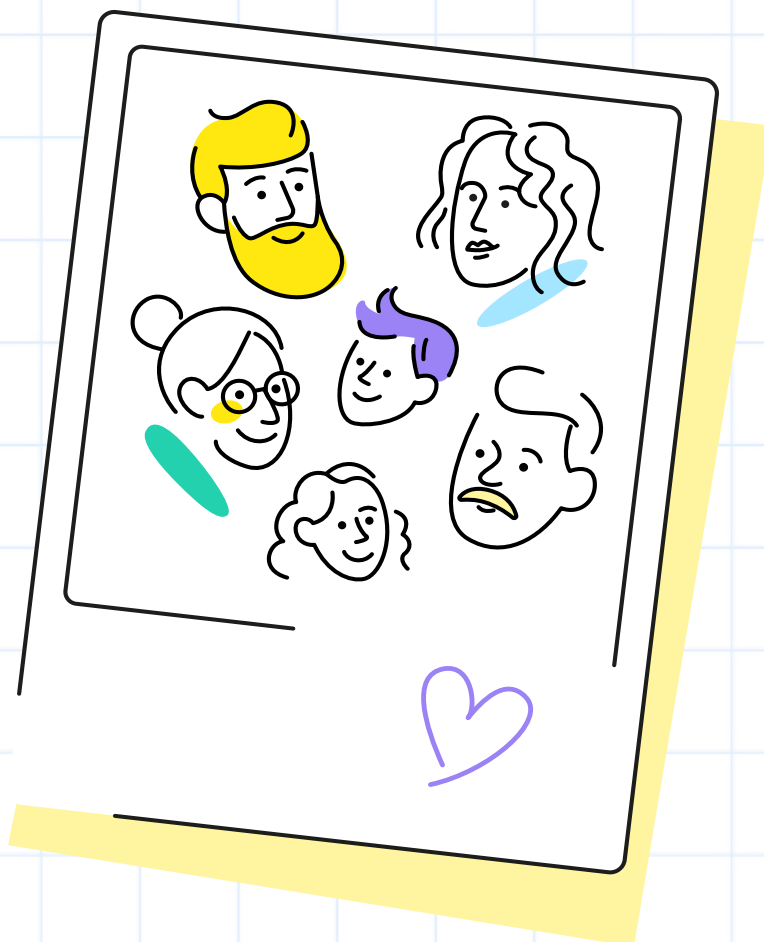
Social media rules for parents

Kids and social media do not have to be an incompatible pairing. However, parents must guide their children's social media use. In many instances, this may involve exposing kids to social media and having conversations about the use of these platforms — and their minherent dangers and pitfalls — long before the kids ever create their own accounts. Once it is appropriate to begin using these platforms, following simple social media guidelines for parents can help avoid the worst effects of social media on children.

Here are a few considerations:

- Know which social media platforms your kids are using.

- Know the legal age restrictions for each social media platform in use — the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) restricts social media use to children under the the age of 13.

- Ask questions, but in a non-invasive way — show genuine interest in what they're seeing online and who they're talking to.

- If and when appropriate, use parental controls on your children's devices and social media accounts.

- Talk to kids about the importance of maintaining in-person friendships and social interactions in real life as well as online.

- Verify children's social media connections — teach them to identify fake accounts.

- Discuss what's appropriate to share on social media — explain that everything online is permanent, even if it is deleted.

- Have open conversations about the appropriate ways to act online — it is important for kids to understand what cyberbullying is, how to recognize it, and the effects it can have.

- Kids should see their parents and social media as a good thing — model good behavior.

- Teach kids about the value of technology-free or screen-free time.

- Address the effects of social media on children by discussing mental health, cyberbullying, feelings of isolation, and the need to compare.
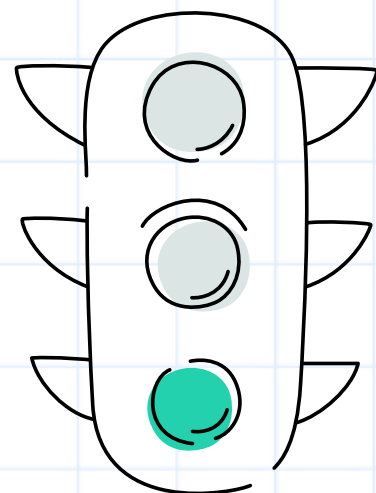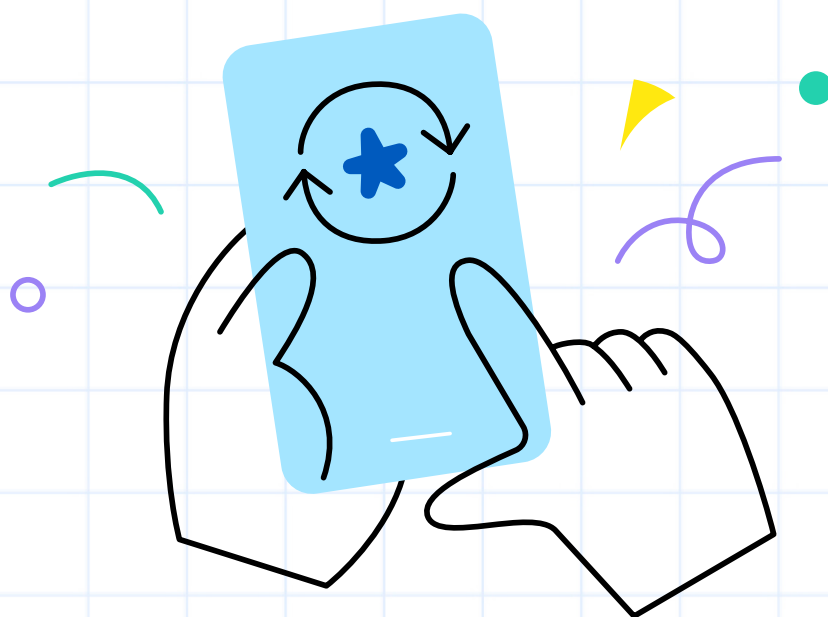
Living in the digital world
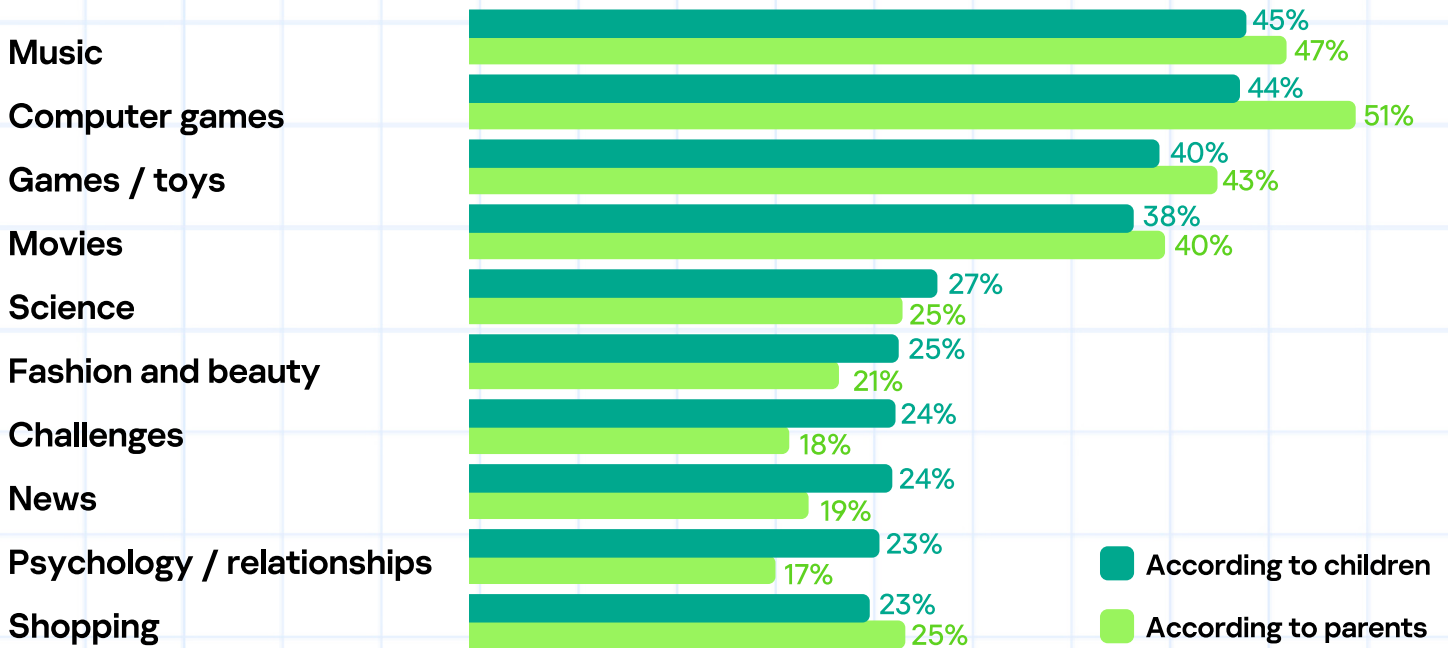## Blogs and bloggers

Half of all children watch or follow bloggers (**53%** based on interviews with children, and **62%**, according to parents). Blogs are more popular among teenagers (from **65%** among 11-14 year olds to **73%** among 15-17 year olds). However, less than a half of those who follow blogs do it regularly.

The most popular topics of the blogs that children follow on social networks are online games, music and movies. Girls more often follow blogs with fashion-related content (**34% vs 17%**), while boys prefer toys (**44% vs 34%** for girls) and computer games (**50% vs 37%** for girls). Game content is also more attractive to children under 10, while older children more often choose to follow music, fashion and beauty bloggers.

Overall, parents understand their child's interests in blog topics. However, they tend to think that their children follow entertainment content more often than it is in reality, and also they underestimate their children's interests in educative blogs such as news and psychology.

Topics of the blogs or bloggers that children follow

Topic	According to children	According to parents
Music	45%	47%
Computer games	44%	51%
Games / toys	40%	43%
Movies	38%	40%
Science	27%	25%
Fashion and beauty	25%	21%
Challenges	24%	18%
News	24%	19%
Psychology / relationships	23%	17%
Shopping	23%	25%

■ According to children
■ According to parents

Sample: UAE children of all ages in 5 countries who watch/read bloggers (533 interviews) and their parents (621 interviews).

Opinion leaders such as online bloggers are not only a news source but also role models, including in terms of career development. Thus, **47%** of children would like to become bloggers, especially children of 11-14 age group.

It is interesting to note that the share of parents who are ready to support their child in becoming a blogger is bigger (**66%**) than the actual share of children who want to be bloggers. This might be because parents are themselves active social networks users, and they consider blogging as a promising job. However, **40%** of parents would agree on their children becoming bloggers only when they grow up, and **7%** of parents state that being a blogger is acceptable if it is paid.

The most attractive things for children to become a blogger are the prospect of becoming popular (**56%**), enjoyment of creating creative videos (**53%**), and the opportunity to earn money (**40%**).
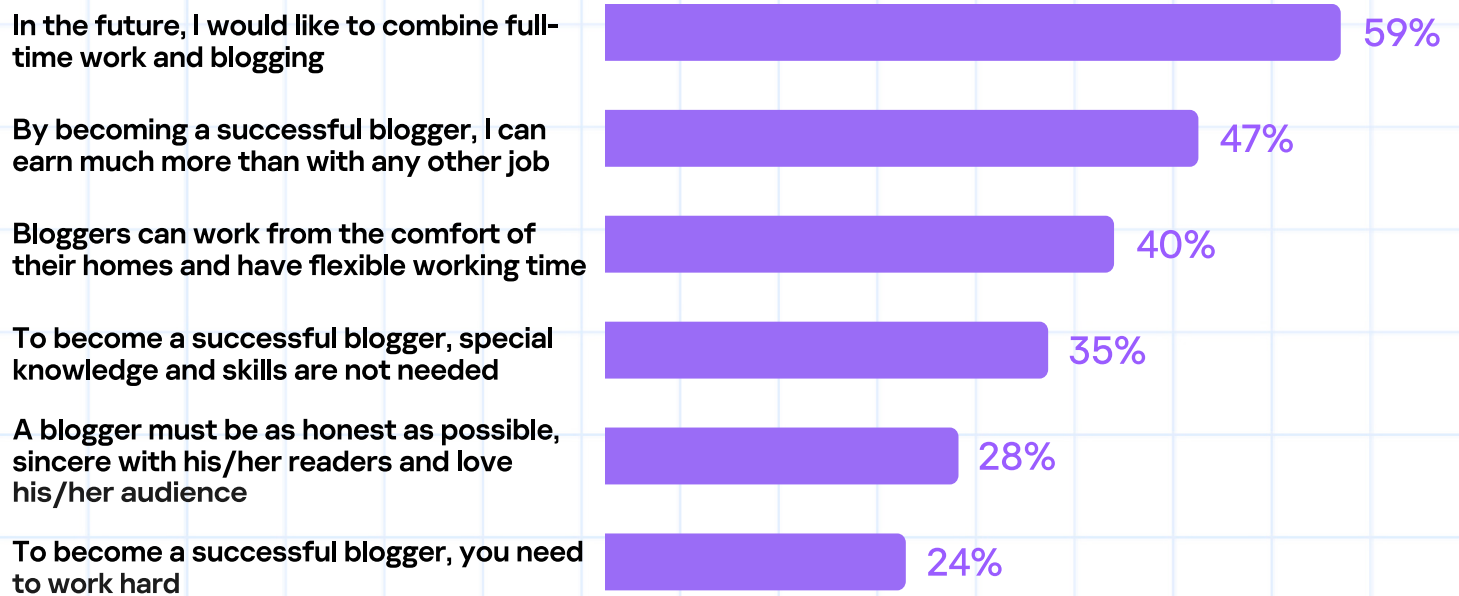
One third of children (**38%**) are already engaged in blogging, while **20%** are working on content for a future blog.

59%

of children who are thinking of becoming a blogger would like to combine full-time work and blogging

Though future bloggers understand certain benefits of having a blog, such as an ability to earn more than with other jobs (**47%**) and to work from home with flexible schedule (**40%**), they still realize that blogging requires special knowledge and skills (**65%**).

Attitudes towards blogging

Statement	Percentage
In the future, I would like to combine full-time work and blogging	59%
By becoming a successful blogger, I can earn much more than with any other job	47%
Bloggers can work from the comfort of their homes and have flexible working time	40%
To become a successful blogger, special knowledge and skills are not needed	35%
A blogger must be as honest as possible, sincere with his/her readers and love his/her audience	28%
To become a successful blogger, you need to work hard	24%

Sample: children of all ages in UAE who would like to become bloggers (473 interviews).

Living in the digital world
Mobile and video games

There is no doubt that children love playing videogames (**91%**). Half of them use smartphone for gaming (**52%**), the second place is taken by computer (**40%**). Based on parents' estimates, **41%** of children play videogames every day.

Boys are slightly more attracted by video games (**92%**) compared to girls (**89%**). Moreover, they choose computer and console games more often than girls. However, according to parents' estimates, there is no difference between boys and girls in the amount of time spent on gaming.

There is quite a good consistency and understanding between parents and children in terms of video games age restrictions. Thus, while one third of parents (**33%**) think that their children play games that were not appropriate for their age, there is only one fourth of all children (**30%**) who actually confessed that they had ever played games that were not suitable for their age. Girls are more obedient to age restrictions of videogames. **78%** of them have never played inappropriate games, while for boys it is **64%.**

Vast majority of parents (**86%**) agree that some videogames might provoke aggression and make children violent. Parents' worries about the content of the games might sound reasonable. **43%** of children mention that they have felt depressed or angry after playing a game.

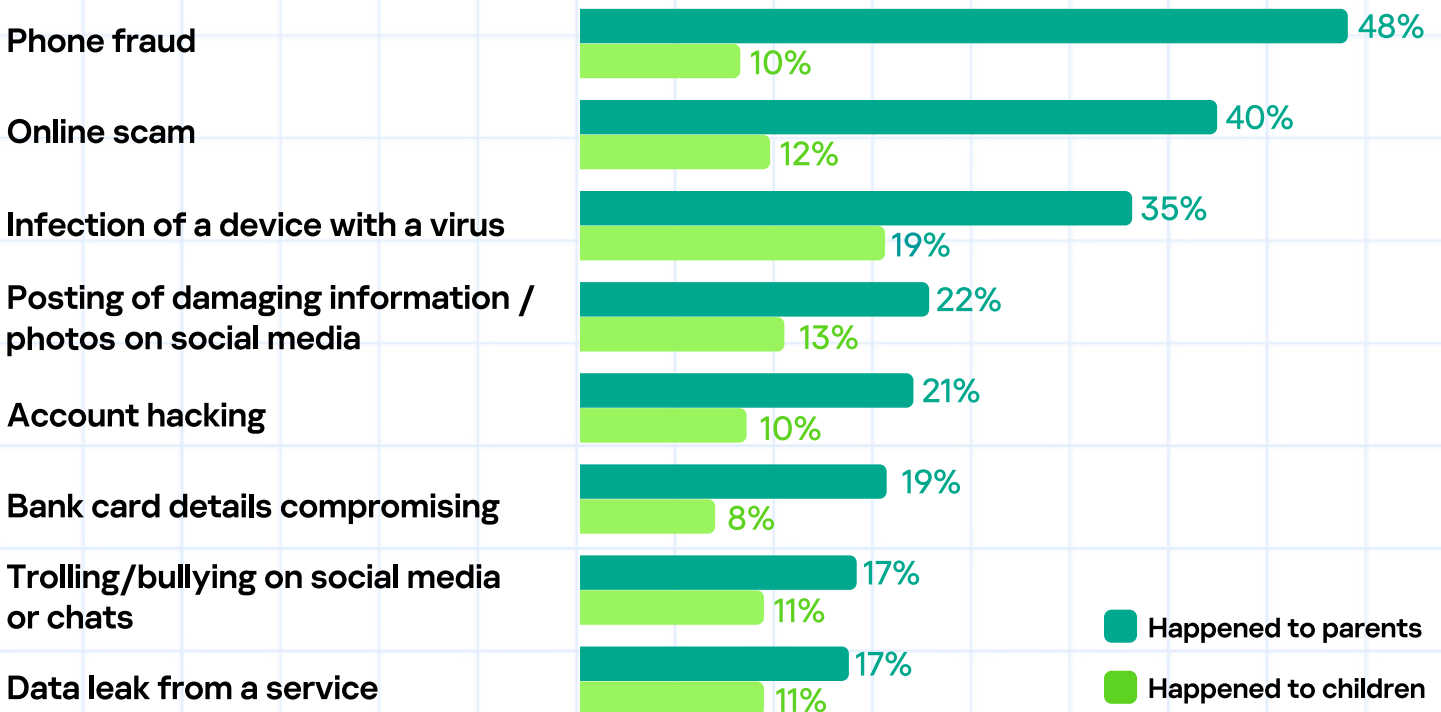**Dr. Mohamed Hamad Al Kuwaiti,** Chairman of the UAE Cybersecurity Council

Parents are raising kids who are digital natives, children who are born exposed to digital devices and the internet. This generation gap often leads to miscommunication as it is a common scenario when a child knows more trends and tricks online than the mom or the dad. While it is understandable for parents to have their worries about their kids' habits online, parental fears associated with video games are sometimes quite objective and sometimes a little far-fetched. There are undeniable harms with too much of it but several researches have also discovered how playing games online can benefit kids. After all, everything is good but moderation and guidance is definitely necessary

Online threats

Parents face most types of online threats more often than their children do.

The most popular threats faced by parents are phone fraud, online scam, and infection of the device with a virus.

Cybersecurity issues in the last two years

Threat	Happened to parents	Happened to children
Phone fraud	48%	10%
Online scam	40%	12%
Infection of a device with a virus	35%	19%
Posting of damaging information / photos on social media	22%	13%
Account hacking	21%	10%
Bank card details compromising	19%	8%
Trolling/bullying on social media or chats	17%	11%
Data leak from a service	17%	11%

- Happened to parents
- Happened to children

Sample: parents of children in the UAE of all ages (1000 interviews).

As for children, the most common threat faced by them over the past two years is infection of the device with a virus (19%). Most often, this was experienced by children aged 15-17 years (32%).

Almost one third of parents (31%) have lost money because of their child's online behavior, in cases like downloading a paid game, buying something online, or experiencing scam.

Seifallah Jedidi, Head of Consumer Channel in the Middle East, Turkiye and Africa at Kaspersky

When parents think of their children spending time online, their first concern is to protect them from unwanted content on the web. However, there is another important aspect that should not be forgotten, and that is the viruses and scams that their kids may encounter online. Applying parental control is not showing distrust to your child; it's a sensible precaution with which you can, among other things, protect your device and the data on it. It allows parents to control which sites their children visit and which games they play, as well as disallowing file downloads, blocking access to content on unwanted topics and preventing the disclosure of confidential information. This way, Kaspersky's technologies help protect finances and confidential data from cybercriminals, and children from the risks that may lurk in the online environment

Kaspersky Safe Kids is included in Kaspersky Premium security kit.

In order not to lose money online, it's also advised to:

🖾 Use a separate credit or debit card to make online transactions. Set a spending limit on the card which can help keep a track of financial transactions.

🛡 Use reliable security solution such as **Kaspersky Premium** on all your devices which are used for financial transactions. It helps to detect fraudulent or suspicious activity and check the security of visited websites.

Online threats

Dangerous strangers in the digital world

According to the interview results, **24%** of parents are aware of the cases when some unknown adults tried to make friends with their children. This estimate is lower than the real number of children who faced such cases (**32%**).

48%

of children aged 11-14 have been contacted by a stranger online

A large number of children might face the negative consequences of online communication with unknown people. Such strangers might have various motives, including destructive ones. This might include attempts to deceive a child, involve him/her in a fraudulent scheme, find out information about parents, relatives or close friends, or the desire to gain his trust for closer contact.

A big number of children have online friends on social networks whom they do not know in real life: **40%** of them mutually follow their peers, and **4%** have some unknown adults as social networks friends. It is important to note here that it is impossible to estimate the real age of an online friend. So children might not have a full understanding who they are chatting with. It is very crucial to explain to children the risks of online communication with strangers, especially with the adult ones. Parents should remind children not to send their personal photos or videos to people whom they have never met in real life.

Dr. Mohamed Hamad Al Kuwaiti, Chairman of the UAE Cybersecurity Council

Predators can be encountered anywhere on the internet, whether in online gaming chatrooms, social media, or elsewhere. The responsibility of educating children on how to interact with strangers falls on the parents. It is crucial for parents to actively engage in conversations with their children about the potential dangers and the importance of protecting their personal information online. By fostering an open dialogue, parents can create a safe space where children feel comfortable discussing their online experiences and any uncomfortable encounters they may face
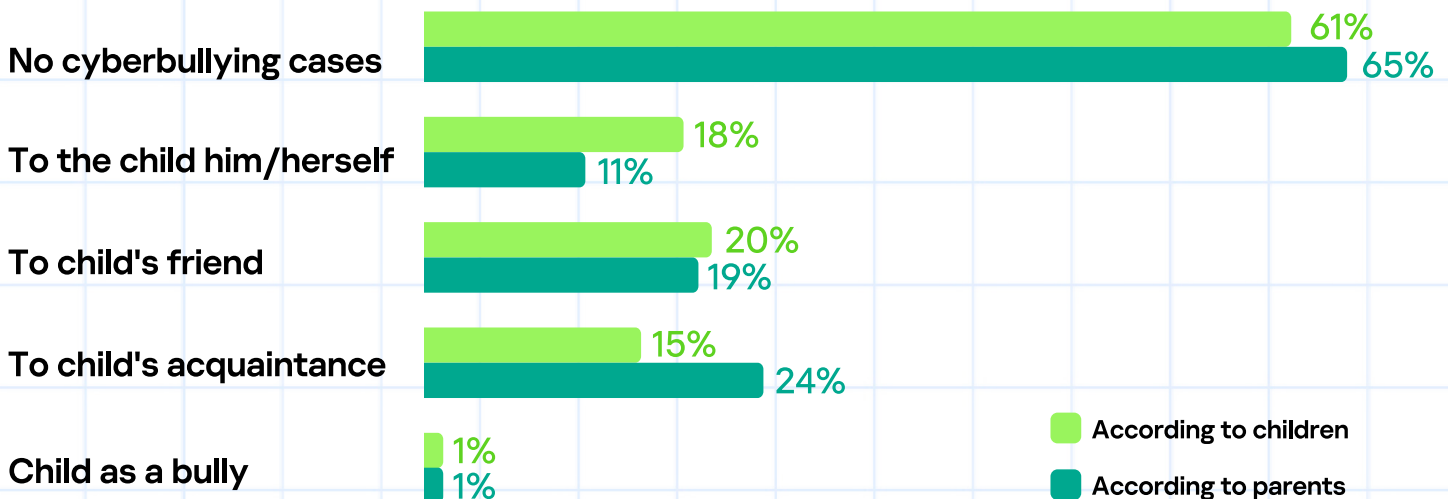
Online threats
Cyberbullying

Online communication is a natural process. It can have both positive and negative nature. A child could become a cyberbullying victim of his/her peers, as well as of strangers of various ages. Though sometimes parents might underestimate the effect of cyberbullying on their child, later it could harm child's physical and mental health.

One third of parents (**35%**) are aware of their child being involved in cyberbullying, either as a victim, bully, or as a witness. According to children, **18%** of them have been cyberbullying victims, and **35%** of them are aware of such cases happening to their friends or someone they know.

Cyberbullying cases among children

No cyberbullying cases
61%
65%

To the child him/herself
18%
11%

To child's friend
20%
19%

To child's acquaintance
15%
24%

Child as a bully
1%
1%

According to children
According to parents

Sample: UAE children of all ages (1000 interviews) and their parents (1000 interviews).

In most cases, parents note that cyberbullying leads to negative consequences among children who face it. The most frequent consequences are self-esteem and social activity decrease, as well as depression. Another negative effect of cyberbullying are decreased self-esteem and academic decline, which are more spread among girls (**58% vs 48%** for self-esteem and **45% vs 36%** for academic decline).

This is the checklist of top tips for keeping your children safe and prevent cyberbullying:

1. Talk to your children about potential dangers.

2. Encourage them to talk to you about their online experience and, in particular, anything that makes them feel uncomfortable or threatened. Protecting children from cyberbullies is especially challenging with smartphones, as they can be targeted in so many ways, especially out of view of their parents. Deal with cyberbullying as you would deal with bullying in real life: encourage children to be open and talk to a trusted adult if they receive any threatening or inappropriate messages. Numbers and contacts on apps can both be blocked if they are making children uncomfortable or unhappy.

3. Set clear ground rules about what they can and can't do online and explain why you have put them in place. You should review these as your child gets older.

4. Use parental control software to establish the framework for what's acceptable – how much time (and when) they can spend online, what content should be blocked, what types of activity should be blocked (chat rooms, forums, and so on). Parental control filters can be configured for different computer profiles, allowing you to customize the filters for different children.

5. Don't forget to make use of settings provided by your ISP, device manufacturer and mobile phone network provider. For example, most phones allow you to prevent in-app purchases, so you can avoid them running up hefty bills when they play games.

6. Protect the computer using trusted security software, like **Kaspersky Premium.**

Kaspersky Safe Kids is included in Kaspersky Premium security kit.

7. Don't forget about your children's smartphones – these are sophisticated computers, not just phones. Most smartphones come with parental controls and security software providers may offer apps to filter out inappropriate content, senders of nuisance SMS messages, etc.

8. Lastly, teach your children about the harm they may cause to others when saying something mean, rude or hurtful. To them, it might sound funny and unserious, but it could hurt or affect their school peers. And most importantly, parents should lead by example.

Prevention of threats in the digital world

The vast majority of parents (**90%**) discuss the rules of behavior on the Internet with their children, including online safety rules (**78%**) and rules of ethics (**49%**).

95%

of parents control their child's online activities.

Parents of younger children tend to pay closer attention to protecting their child from online threats. They limit the amount of time spent online, install parental control programs and try to control a child when they are online. With older children, the most effective measure is to talk about online threats and warn them to be careful while using the Internet.

Most of the parents (95%) have installed parental control on their children's devices, which is a more common measure for younger children.

The most controlled devices are tablets (**65-77%**, depending on the OS), smartphones (**61%** for iPhone and **58%** for Android).

Seifallah Jedidi, Head of Consumer Channel in the Middle East, Turkiye and Africa at Kaspersky

Due to the fact that modern children from early childhood use smartphones and other gadgets, they perceive the digital space as something natural and familiar, like taking a walk. At the same time, the digital space also has its own rules of secure behavior, which many teach from childhood, such as not communicating with strangers or going to unfamiliar and unknown places. Parents can make their children's digital world more secure by shielding them from inappropriate content and helping them learn how to be secure in a digital environment by using various tools and methods. For instance, adults can encourage certain digital habits within the family or use parental control apps, which can help filter out desirable and undesirable content categories, as well as check child's online activity