Children and parents: media use and attitudes report 2022

Annex 2: Children who may be classed as vulnerable

Contents

Annex

A1. Background

This annex is an accompaniment to the **Children and parents: media use and attitudes report 2022**, which is designed to give an accessible overview of media literacy among children aged 3-17 and their parents.

The promotion of media literacy is a responsibility placed on Ofcom by Section 11 of the Communications Act 2003. Under Section 14 (6a) of the Act we have a duty to make arrangements for the carrying out of research into the matters mentioned in Section 11 (1).

Media literacy enables people to have the skills, knowledge and understanding they need to make full use of the opportunities presented both by traditional and by new communications services. Media literacy also helps people to manage content and communications and protect themselves and their families from the potential risks associated with using these services. Ofcom's definition of media literacy is: "*the ability to use, understand and create media and communications in a variety of contexts*".

The **Children and parents: media use and attitudes report 2020/21**[1] included analysis of vulnerability for the first time, comprising of children in financially vulnerable households, and those with a condition(s) which impacted or limited their daily activities. We have continued this analysis for the 2022 report.

Due to the complex interaction of vulnerability with other demographic factors, we have separated out our analysis of vulnerable children into its own annex. This allows us to set the data in its proper context.

This annex and report form part of Ofcom's wider programme of work, Making Sense of Media, which aims to help improve the online skills, knowledge and understanding of UK adults and children. We do this through providing cutting-edge research, and by bringing together organisations and individuals with expertise in media literacy to share ideas and to support their activities. To find out more about Ofcom's Making Sense of Media programme and for details on how to join the network, please go to our website.

---

[1] Children and parents: media use and attitudes report 2020/21 (ofcom.org.uk)

A2. Children in our sample who may be classed as vulnerable

The experiences of each child are unique, and children can be vulnerable at different points in time, for different reasons, and these can change. In its report 'No child left behind: Understanding and quantifying vulnerability'[2], Public Health England described vulnerable children as *'any children at greater risk of experiencing physical or emotional harm and/ or experiencing poor outcomes because of one or more factors in their lives'*.

Our media literacy research provides us with data on two groups of children who may be considered vulnerable. Those who:

a) have a **health issue, condition or disability which impact or limit their daily activities** (named in this section as having an 'impacting or limiting condition')[3]; and/or

b) are in households considered to be **most financially vulnerable** (named 'MFV' throughout this section).[4]

For clarity we have reported on these separately, although there is some overlap – the proportion of children aged 3 to 17 in both vulnerable groups ranged from 6% to 10% between the three children's media literacy surveys.[5]

This is the second year in which we are reporting on these groups. We note that this research has not been specifically designed to provide robust analysis on vulnerable children in any specific category, but at an overall level there are sufficient base sizes for us to be confident in terms of robustness. The demographic characteristics such as age interact dynamically with the metrics of vulnerability that we are using, which means that the data requires careful interpretation. These considerations are outlined in the introduction to each section.

We recognise that to fully understand the attitudes, behaviours and critical understanding levels of children in these groups, additional bespoke research would be needed. However, in our media literacy research we hope to highlight some of the differences in reported attitudes and experiences among these groups of vulnerable children.

---

[2] No child left behind: understanding and quantifying vulnerability (publishing.service.gov.uk)
[3] Incidence ranged from 19% to 23% between the surveys
[4] Incidence ranged from 26% to 35% between the surveys
[5] Our three media literacy surveys were: Parents only survey, Children's online knowledge and understanding (COKU), Children's online behaviour and attitudes (COBA)

A3. Children in our sample with impacting or limiting conditions

Identification and profile

About one in five children in each of our surveys had an impacting or limiting condition

We asked parents to state whether their child had any health issue or condition that impacted or limited their daily activities. Parents were given a list of conditions to choose from, grouped into social/behavioural, mental abilities, mental health, mobility, dexterity, eyesight, hearing and breathing (see section A5). They could also opt for 'don't know', 'other', 'no impacting or limiting condition', or choose not to provide an answer.

Based on this definition, children in our sample with any of these conditions represented around one in five 3-17-year-olds[6], with some small variation between the surveys[7]. It is also important to note that a minority of parents opted not to answer this question, or selected 'don't know', and therefore some children in the survey who have impacting or limiting conditions may fall outside this analysis.

	Parents-only survey	Children's online knowledge and understanding survey (COKU)[8]	Children's online behaviours and attitudes survey (COBA)
	Child aged **3-17**	**Child aged** **8-17**	**Child aged** **3-17**
Proportion of children with an impacting or limiting condition which affects their daily activities	**19%**	**23%**	**19%**
Proportion of children with no condition	75%	73%	77%
Proportion of parents who preferred not to say, or did not know	5%	4%	5%

---

[6] The Department of Education (DfE) published a report in June 2021 stating that 15.9% of children in schools in England received some kind of SEN support (special educational needs) either on the register or through an ECHP (education, health and care plan), which is reasonably comparable with the impacting or limiting condition proportion across the UK from the Children's Media Literacy research: Special educational needs in England, Academic Year 2020/21 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK (explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk)

[7] The difference is probably a result of the difference in the age profile of the surveys.

[8] The COKU survey was conducted among children aged 8-17, without additional contribution from parents of 3-7s.

In this section, we have compared (where relevant) the data for children (aged 3-17 unless otherwise stated) with an impacting or limiting condition with the data for those who were not reported as having any conditions.[9] We have only reported where the difference was indicated as statistically significant at this overall level.

The most prevalent conditions were concerned with mental abilities (4%/5%), social or behavioural (7%/8%) and mental health (6%/8%). There are considerable overlaps between conditions (about a third of children with a condition have more than one), and in some cases there is a low number of interviews for specific types of condition. For these reasons, although we recognise that children with impacting or limiting conditions may experience varying degrees of potential barriers or difficulties[10], we are not able to provide a comparison between all the conditions that were identified by parents.

It is not possible for us to directly attribute the variances between survey responses to the impacting or limiting condition. We know that the experiences, attitudes and behaviour of children can differ with age, and that there is a correlation between the age of the child and their having an impacting or limiting condition. This is likely to be because an impacting or limiting condition may not be visible and may not be identified, or become an issue for the child, until later in their life – for example, mental health difficulties. The breakdown by age and impacting and limiting condition appears in section A5; however, the following bullet points illustrate the variation.

Child with an impacting or limiting condition:

- Parents only survey: 12% of 3-4s vs 24% of 16-17s
- COBA: 14% of 3-4s vs 23% of 16-17s
- COKU (based on 8-17s only): 21% of 8-11s vs 30% of 16-17s

Children with mental health difficulties:

- Parents only survey: 0.5% of 3-4s vs 12% of 16-17s
- COBA: 1% of 3-4s vs 23% of 16-17s
- COKU (8-17s only): 21% of 8-11s to 30% of 16-17s

It is also important to note that there are other differences between the profiles of children with impacting or limiting conditions in our surveys, compared to those without conditions.

Children with an impacting or limiting condition were more likely to have a parent (or someone else in the household) in receipt of benefits (55%-63% vs 28-30% of parents of children without a condition) and similarly, to be in the most financially vulnerable group (42%-46% vs 29%-37%).

---

[9] The comparison does not include children whose parents were unable or preferred not to say whether their child had a listed impact/ limit on their daily activities.

[10] The social model of disability states that people are disabled by barriers in society, not by their impairment or difference. Social model of disability | Disability charity Scope UK.

Across all three surveys, almost twice the proportion of boys than of girls were identified as having 'social/ behavioural' conditions (9%-10% of boys, vs 5%-6% of girls). Within both the COBA and Parents surveys, 'mental abilities' conditions were also higher for boys (5% vs 3%; 7% vs 3%).

Conversely, 'mental health' was indicated to be an issue for a higher proportion of girls than boys in both the COBA and COKU surveys (7% vs 5%, 9% vs 6% of girls).

In each of the children's surveys (COBA and COKU), parents were asked whether their child had received any help while answering the survey questions. Parents of children with any impacting or limiting condition were more likely than parents of those with no impacting or limiting conditions to indicate that they had given their child 'a lot of help' (28% vs 12% of children without a condition for the COKU survey, and 19% vs 10% in the COBA survey.

Our findings

The digital world offers considerable benefits and opportunities for children with impacting and limiting conditions, but also brings concerns around online safety

Our research indicates that children with impacting or limiting conditions were as likely to go online as children without any conditions – and almost all did so (99%). For these children the digital world can provide many benefits. As outlined by Cerebra in its report 'Learning Disabilities, Autism and Internet Safety: A guide for parents',[11] the online world allows the exploration of special interests and offers extended support networks and communication tools. The guide quotes a parent saying: *"My son is able to research any new fascinations. His latest one is sheep. He has decided to be a shepherd and has found out all about medicines, farming, different types of sheep and wool, geography etc. Anything that gets him reading and talking is great"*.

However, the guide also highlights the risks that children with an impacting or limiting condition may encounter online. For example, in regard to sharing inappropriate information, the guide quotes a parent saying: *"My son doesn't use the internet to chat or use Facebook etc because he doesn't have the capacity to make judgements about sharing inappropriate information and as he can be (and has been) quite easily manipulated by boys in school I've made the decision to avoid problems by not allowing him on any chat or Facebook sites"*.

In its report 'Children's Wellbeing in a Digital World: Index Report 2022'[12], Internet Matters explores the dichotomy of the positive and negative impacts on children of digital technology. And the benefits and challenges of the online sphere for autistic people are summarised by the National Autistic Society in an article: 'Autism and the internet: risks and benefits'.[13]

Our data showed some differences in the findings for children with impacting or limiting conditions, which we outline below. To aid reading, and avoid repetitive terminology, we will refer to these as **'children with a condition'** for the remainder of this section.

Children with a condition:

… showed some differences in the devices they used to go online

- Smartphone ownership[14] was higher among children with a condition (69%) than among those without a condition (59%).
- The only device that children with a condition were more likely than those without a condition were more likely to use to go online was a games console or player (58% vs 46%). Use of a tablet to go online was lower among children with a condition (63% vs 72% of those without).

---

[11] https://cerebra.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/internet-safety-june19-low-res.pdf
[12] https://www.internetmatters.org/hub/news-blogs/internet-matters-launches-childrens-wellbeing-in-a-digital-world-index-report-2022/
[13] https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/professional-practice/autism-internet
[14] Ownership of other devices were not asked about in the surveys.

- While children with a condition were as likely as those without to watch TV content on a TV set (more than eight in ten), they were more likely to use a smartphone for this purpose (57% vs 45%).
- As with going online, they were more likely than those without a condition to use a games console to view TV content (37% vs 25%).

… were more likely to use, and be active on, social media

- A higher proportion of children with a condition used social media apps or sites (70% vs 62% of those without).
- Children aged 8-17 with a condition were more likely than those without to be *active* on social media. Two-thirds said they shared, commented, posted, or 'liked' things on social media (67%), compared to six in ten children without a condition (59%).
- When using either social media or messaging apps and sites, children aged 12-17 with a condition were more likely than those without to:
  - send supportive messages to friends (69% vs. 58%);
  - follow activists and campaigners (28% vs. 21%);
  - write their own posts about causes they care about (32% vs. 18%); and
  - follow or interact with political parties or campaign groups (17% vs. 10%).
- Both the children with conditions (85%) and their parents (77%) were more likely to be aware of the existence of minimum age requirements for most social media apps or sites (compared to 81% parents of children without a condition, and to 71% of children without a condition). Although comparable proportions understood the minimum required age was 13 (42%).
- However, 21% of children with a condition thought this was 12 or below, compared with 16% of those without a condition.

… but were also more likely to feel the negative effects of social media

- More than eight in ten (84%) 8-17-year-olds with a condition said they felt that *'people could be mean or unkind to each other on these sorts of apps and sites'* – higher than the 77% of children without a condition who felt like this. And they were more likely to feel this *all* or *most* of the time (51% vs 36%).
- Children aged 8-17 with a condition were also more likely to feel pressure to be popular on these sorts of apps and sites. Almost all (95%) said they had felt this, compared to 88% of children without a condition. And again, they were more likely to feel this *all* or *most* of the time (36% vs 24% without a condition).
- However, many saw the positive side of social media and messaging. Six in ten said it made them feel happy (62%) or closer to their friends (63%) – both measures comparable to children without a condition. And children with a condition were more likely to say they felt that using these made them feel happy *all* the time (20% vs 16% compared to those without a condition).

… were more likely to have multiple profiles on online apps and sites

- Two-thirds said they had registered more than one profile on apps and sites used for social media, video-sharing platforms, and live streaming (65% vs 58% of children without a condition).
- When asked why, children with a condition were more likely to say this was to have different accounts for 'sharing and posting their own content and for following others' (13% vs 9% of children without a condition), and to have separate accounts that were dedicated to a hobby (14% vs 8%).
- They were, however, just as likely as children without a condition to have more than one account for their closest friends or family and an account for everyone else, or to have an account that they used for the 'real me' and one that had edited or filtered posts and photos.

… were more likely to post content and be creative online

- Almost all children with a condition watched video content online, but they were more likely than children without a condition to post their own videos (42% vs 28%) or their own live streams (27% vs 12%).
- Half of children with a condition, and who watched videos online, said that they watched personalities or influencers on platforms like TikTok or YouTube, compared to 40% of children without a condition.
- Being creative online extended beyond posting video content. Overall, children with a condition were more likely than those without to do at least one of the creative activities listed in our survey (87% vs 80%). These included editing photos, making animations, memes or gifs, and finding images online to use in creative or homework tasks.

… were more likely to play games online, but also to talk to strangers within games

- Overall, two-thirds of children with a condition (67%), played games online, compared to 57% of children without a condition.
- There were no differences in the way in which children with a condition played games online (alone, against people they knew, or people they didn't know), or in the likelihood of their talking to others within the game. However, they were more likely than children without a condition to talk to people they did *not* know within a game (41% vs 30%).
- They were also more likely to use the internet for game-related content (half said they had watched game tutorials or walk-through videos online) and to watch others play games, compared to 42% of children without a condition.

… were less likely to feel some benefits of being online, than children without a condition

- Overall, almost all children felt there were benefits to being online (98% of 12-17s, regardless of having or not having an impacting or limiting condition). However, children with a condition were less likely than children without a condition to experience several of the benefits listed in the survey:

  – 'To help with my school/ homework' – 67% with a condition vs 80% without
  – 'To learn a new skill' – 53% vs 39%
  – 'To build and maintain friendships' – 56% vs. 67%
  – Among 16-17s, 'to find useful information about any problems or issues they had' – 51% vs 66%
  – And among 16-17s, 'to find out about the news' – 36% vs 52%.

… more likely to say that they had experienced nasty or hurtful behaviour from others

- Almost half (48%) of the children aged 8 to 17 with a condition said they had seen something online that they found 'worrying or nasty'; a higher proportion than among those without a condition (32%).
- Echoing this, parents of children with a condition were more than twice as likely as parents of children without a condition to say that over the past 12 months their child had told them about something they had seen online that had scared or upset them (35% vs 16%).
- Personal experience of being bullied was also more likely to have happened to 8-17-year-olds with a condition (56% vs 33% of 8-17s without a condition).

… were able to display critical understanding when identifying some reliable indicators of a genuine social media post

- When presented with an image from social media (a genuine NHS post), children aged 12-17 with a condition were more likely than children the same age without a condition to correctly recognise any 'reliable identifiers' that showed it was a genuine post (72% vs 65%).[15]
- This was driven by the proportion who recognised that 'links to other websites' within the post were classed as a reliable identifier (26% vs 19%).
- Children aged 16-17 with a condition were more likely than those without to correctly identify the profile name as a reliable identifier (31% vs 20%).
- When considering recognition of unreliable identifiers, children aged 12-17 with a condition were just as likely as children this age without a condition to cite any of these (more than eight in ten). However, 12-15s with a condition were more likely than those

---

[15] See 'Understanding the online space' section in the main report for further details on this.

without to incorrectly think that the number of likes on a post indicated it was genuine (19% vs 13%).

… but were more likely to trust the information on social media

- Children with a condition had the same levels of scepticism about news apps and sites or school and homework apps and sites as children without a condition.
- However, they were more likely to trust the information they found on social media apps and sites. Almost a fifth (17%) believed that this information was *always* true, compared to 10% of children without a condition.
- And they were less likely to think that just *some* of the information was true (55%) than those without a condition (67%).

Parents of children with a condition:

… spoke to their child more frequently about staying safe online

- Overall, parents of children with a condition were no more likely than parents of those without a condition to have rules in place about their child's online use.
- However, they were more likely to check their child's browser or device history after they had been online (44% vs 32% of parents of children without a condition).
- And while they were just as likely to have ever talked to their child about staying safe online (91% vs 85%), they did this more frequently than parents of children without a condition. Six in ten parents of children with a condition said they talked to their child about this at least every few weeks (59%), compared to half of other parents (49%). Parents of children without a condition were more likely than other parents to do this less frequently – 29% doing it every few months, compared to 19% of parents of children with a condition.

… were more likely than other parents to be concerned about their child's personal details being online

- In general, parents of children with a condition were as likely to be concerned about many elements of their child's online use as parents of children without a condition. However, one concern was more prominent for these parents: the possibility of their child giving out their personal details to inappropriate people (69% vs 59% of parents of children without a condition).
- Children's responses in the area of personal data aligned with parents' concerns. One in five 12-17s with a condition said that they *'always share personal information, even though I'm not always comfortable about it'* (19%), and although this was a minority, it was almost double the proportion of children without a condition saying this (11%).
- A fifth (19%) said they were *'comfortable about sharing personal information on apps and sites, so always do'* – and again, this was more likely than for children without a condition (12%). But they were less likely to say '*I'm never comfortable about sharing personal information online'* (14% vs 23%).

- More than two-thirds (68%) of parents of 16-17-year-olds with a condition were concerned about their child seeing content that might encourage them to hurt or harm themselves – higher than the proportion of parents of this age group without a condition (51%).
- Parents of children with a condition were also more likely to have a particular concern in relation to their child's online gaming, namely the pressure on children to make in-game purchases. Six in ten shared this concern, compared to 48% of parents of those without a condition.

… were more likely to disagree that their child had a good balance between screen time and doing other things

- Overall, almost six in ten (57%) parents of children with a condition agreed that their child had a good balance between screen time and doing other things; comparable to parents of those without a condition (65%).
- However, parents of children without a condition were more likely than parents of children without a condition to *strongly agree* that their child had a good balance (33% vs 23%). And they were less likely than parents of children with a condition to disagree with this (22% vs 34%).

… but agreed that being online helped support their child

- Overall, nearly all parents of children with a condition felt that for their child, being online had beneficial factors (97%); for most of these factors, comparable to parents of children without a condition.
- Parents of children aged 12-15 with a condition were more likely than parents of children without a condition to agree that the internet helped their child to find useful information about problems and issues they might have (66% vs 46%).
- But parents of 8-11-year-olds with a condition were less likely than parents of this group without a condition to identify school/ homework as a benefit (78% vs 93%).

A4. Children in financially vulnerable households

The Child Poverty Action Group states that all areas of a child's life can be adversely affected by poverty.[16] In this section we examine our survey data through the lens of financial vulnerability. This is a measure that has been devised by Ofcom to better understand the impact of household income[17] and composition on ownership and use of communications services.

Identification and profile

Our financial analysis creates three distinct household types by combining household income and the size of the household (including the number of children):

- Most financially vulnerable (MFV)
- Potentially financially vulnerable (PFV)
- Least financially vulnerable (LFV)

Further details about how financial vulnerability is calculated and used can be found in section A6 of this annex.

This section looks at the differences between those children (aged 3-17 unless otherwise stated) who are most financially vulnerable (MFV) and where relevant, compares them to those categorised as least financially vulnerable (LFV). We have reported only where there were statistically significant differences between the two.

As the table below illustrates, broadly around three in ten families taking part in the surveys (either children or parents) were in the MFV category, and around two in ten in the LFV category, although there were small variations between the surveys, due to their differing profiles.

The MFV category does not necessarily include *all children within households on a low income*, because income is a question that some respondents prefer not to answer. It is also important to note that the profile of those in the MFV category is skewed towards younger children, households with a parent who stays at home full time, and households where someone is in receipt of benefits.

---

[16] The effects of poverty | CPAG
[17] The Department of Education uses household income levels as a way of identifying and targeting additional educational funding to children they consider to be at a disadvantage: Pupil premium - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

	Parents-only survey	Children's online Knowledge and understanding survey (COKU)[18]	Children's online behaviour and attitudes survey (COBA)
	Child aged 3-17	**Child aged 3-17**	**Child aged 8-17**
Proportion of children in most financially vulnerable households (MFV)	**26%**	**35%**	**30%**
Proportion of children in potentially financially vulnerable households (PFV)	31%	39%	42%
Proportion of children in least financially vulnerable households (LFV)	**23%**	**16%**	**17%**
Proportion who preferred not to say (that is, did not answer the household income question), or did not know	21%	10%	11%

We are not able to directly attribute the variances between the MFV and LFV categories in the survey responses to financial disadvantage rather than to other demographic factors. As with children with impacting or limiting conditions, we know that many shifts in experience, attitudes and behaviour correlate with age, which is also a demographic feature linked with being in the MFV category.

Our findings:

Children in the most financially vulnerable households:

… were less likely to use certain devices to go online, but more likely than LFV children to use *only* a mobile phone for internet access

Just 2% of children in either MFV or LFV households did not go online in 2021, either at home or elsewhere. However, there were differences in the means of access.

---

[18] The COKU survey was conducted among children aged 8-17, without additional contribution from parents of 3-7s.

- Children in MFV households were less likely to use a tablet to go online (61% vs 75% LFV) or a laptop or netbook (34% vs 61% LFV). Although there was comparable use of a desktop computer, when combined with use of a laptop or netbook, children in MFV households were less likely than those in LFV households to use these (i.e., computer devices) to go online (42% vs 69%). And they were more likely to use *only* a device other than a computer to go online (56% vs 29% LFV).
- While less than one in ten children in MFV households *only* used a mobile phone to go online (8%), this was higher than for those in LFV households (2%).
- While all the children from LFV households had access to broadband at home, this was true for 98% of children from MFV households, with 2% relying solely on a 3G/ 4G or 5G connection.

… were less likely to watch TV on a TV set than LFV children

- Children in MFV households were less likely than those in LFV households to watch TV content on a TV set (81% vs 93%). This was also the case when using a tablet for this purpose: 48% compared to 63% LFV.
- Although there was comparable use of other devices for watching TV content, overall, three times as many children in the MFV category watched TV *only* on a device *other than* a TV set (16%) compared to LFVs (5%).
- And compared to LFVs, the MFV children were less likely to watch TV or films in *all* the ways measured in the survey. For example:
  - seven in ten MFV children watched paid-for on-demand content (72%) compared to almost nine in ten LFV (86%);
  - four in ten watched PSB catch-up services (39%) compared to 63% of LFV;
  - just over four in ten watched broadcast TV (43%) compared to more than half of LFV children (54%).

… were less likely to be allowed to use social media if they were under the minimum age requirement

- Use of social media was comparable between the two categories: more than six in ten children aged 3-17 in either MFV or LFV households used at least one social media app or site.
- Parents in MFV households who were aware that there are minimum age requirements for most social media apps or sites were more likely than parents in LFV households to correctly cite the minimum age as 13 (44% vs 39%). However, they were just as likely to incorrectly say it was under the age of 12 (around a fifth).
- MFV parents were less likely to agree that they would allow their child to use social media before they had reached the minimum age required by the platform (34% vs 39% LFV parents).

… and were less likely to feel the positive benefits of social media *all* the time

- Children in MFV households were less likely to say that social media and messaging apps and sites made them feel happy *all* the time (15% vs 22% LFV children), or that using these platforms made them feel closer to their friends *all* the time (25% vs 29% LFV children).
- But 8-17-year-old users of these platforms in MFV households were no more likely to feel that people can be mean to each other on social media, or that there is pressure to be popular there, than those in LFV households.
- However, 12-17s in MFV households were less likely to disagree with the statement *'it is important that people can say what they want online even if it upsets or offends other people'* (33% vs 47% LFV).

… were less likely to use the internet to help them learn new things

- About eight in ten children aged 3-17 who go online had undertaken at least one of the 'creative' activities listed in our survey. However, there were differences between the types of activity.
- Children aged 5-7 in MFV households:
  - were less likely than children of this age in LFV households to use the internet to follow 'how to' tutorials to create or do something of their own (47% vs 63%);
  - were less likely than LFVs to have made a drawing or picture online (64% vs 80%); and
  - were less likely to go online to learn about coding and programming (6% compared to 14% of LFVs).
- Fewer 8-17s in MFV households went online to make or edit music (6% vs 11% LFV).
- And among the 12-17s who went online, those in MFV households were less likely than LFV children this age to feel that being online could help develop their skills with reading and numbers (34% vs 43%).

… were more likely to apply caution in using unknown apps or sites, but displayed lower levels of critical understanding in recognising advertising and what is genuine online

- Children in MFV households aged 8-17 who went online were more likely than those in LFV households to *only* use apps or sites they had used before (60% vs 46%).
- Children aged 12-17 in MFV households were just as likely as those in LFV households to think about whether the information in apps or sites can be trusted, and to use the same checking behaviours if they were using apps or sites not previously used.
- Half (49%) of search engine users from MFV households aged 8-17 were able to identify, in the Google ad survey scenario, that the top four listings were sponsored ads; lower than the proportion of LFV 8-17s (61%). However, just a third of these search engine users chose *only* the correct reason for these ad placements (33%),

compared to 43% in LFV households, with the remainder also selecting other reasons such as these being the best or most popular results.

- Children aged 12-17 who go online in MFV households were as likely as those in LFV households to identify at least one reliable indicator which might suggest that a social media post was genuine (74% MFV vs 71% LFV). However, those in MFV households were more likely to incorrectly think that the logo shown in the post was a reliable indicator (73% vs 64% LFV).

… were more likely to tell someone if they saw something worrying or nasty online, and were less likely to be aware of potentially risky behaviours online

- Almost four in ten children aged 8-17 in MFV households said that they had seen something online that they found worrying or nasty in the past 12 months (37%), comparable to LFV children (38%). However, the MFV aged 8-11 were more likely than the LFV 8-11s to say this (33% vs 22%).
- There was no difference by financial vulnerability in the proportion of 8-17s who had been bullied, either at an overall level or by age group (41% of MFV children, 35% LFV children).
- There were some differences in children's overall approach in keeping themselves safe online.

    – Six in ten 8-17s in MFV households would *always* tell someone if they found something worrying or nasty online (61% vs 52% LFV) and would be more likely to rely on solely telling a family member (50% vs 39%).

    – 12-17-year-olds in MFV households were less likely to be aware of activities that might be risky (58% vs 68% LFV). In particular, they were less aware of how to delete their online search history (36% vs 49% LFV). And they were, therefore, also less likely to have ever undertaken this behaviour (15% vs 28% LFV) or to have used privacy or incognito modes (19% vs 27%).

Parents of children in MFV households:

… were less likely to have issues with their child's screen time, and had fewer rules in place for this

- Around 8 in 10 parents in MFV households (79%), where the child watched TV programmes or films, had at least one rule in place regarding TV viewing, comparable to those in LFV households. However, the MFV parents were more relaxed than LFV parents about the following rules:

    – what their child could watch (63% vs 71% LFV parents);
    – how much time their child could spend watching TV (44% vs 56% LFV parents); and
    – when their child could watch TV (36% vs 56% LFV parents).

- As with their rules about TV, parents in MFV households where the child goes online were less likely to have rules in place about when their child could go online (43% vs. 54% LFV).
- And regarding online gaming, MFV parents of 3-17s who gamed online were also less likely to have rules about when their child could play games (44% vs 59% LFV parents).
- Parents of children in MFV households aged 3-17 and with a mobile phone were as likely as those in LFV households to have any rules in place about their child's use of their phone (83%), with comparable proportions for each rule in our survey. However, they were less likely to have rules about downloading apps (42% vs 54% LFV).
- These differences in the incidence of rules about screen use may be driven by the fact that MFV parents considered this less of a potential issue. Four in ten parents of 3-17s in MFV households (39%) said that they found it hard to control their child's screen time, compared to 49% of parents in LFV households, with the difference mostly attributable to MFV parents of 16-17-year-olds.

… were less likely than LFV parents to agree that the benefits to their child of using certain online services outweighed the risks

- When evaluating the benefits to their child of using the internet for gathering information, parents in MFV households were less likely than LFV parents to agree that the benefits outweighed the risks (50% vs 73%), and less likely to *strongly* agree with this (16% vs 36% of LFV parents).
- This was also the case for online gaming. Just over a third (36%) of MFV parents agreed that the benefits of their child doing this activity outweighed the risks, compared to 46% of LFV parents.
- But when asked about their child using social media, messaging, or video-sharing apps and sites, MFV parents (29%) were as likely as LFV parents to agree that the benefits outweighed the risks for their child.
- However, significant proportions were undecided on this, for each of the activities:

  - just over a third (35%) were undecided in relation to information gathering (lower than the 15% of LFV parents);
  - the same proportion (35%) were undecided about social media, messaging, and video sharing (compared to 24% of LFV parents); and
  - 45% were undecided in regard to their child's online gaming (vs 29% of LFV parents).

… were more likely to be neutral about their levels of concern in regard to their child's online use

- In terms of potential online risks, parents from MFV households were, in general, likely to have similar levels of concern as LFV parents.
- However, one concern where responses differed was that of their child damaging their reputation: 46% of MFV parents shared this concern, lower than the proportion of LFV

parents (57%). But MFV parents were more likely to be neutral about this particular concern: 27% compared to 15% of LFV parents.

- There was also greater neutrality in MFV parents' concerns around their child seeing content online which might encourage them to hurt or harm themselves (17% vs 9% of LFV parents), or about companies collecting information about what their child is doing online (22% vs 14%). However, overall, MFV parents are as likely to be concerned about these as LFV parents (around six in ten for both measures).

… were more likely to talk to their child about online safety on a frequent basis

- Overall, almost eight in ten parents in MFV households whose child goes online felt that they knew enough to keep their child safe online (78%) – comparable with parents in LFV households (76%).
- Less than one in ten parents in MFV households (8%) said that they did not know enough to keep their child safe, half the proportion of LFV parents (16%).
- And half (49%) of MFV parents said they talked to their child about staying safe online at least every few weeks, higher than the proportion of parents in LFV households (36%).
- Although seven in ten parents in both MFV and LFV households used at least one type of technical tool or control to manage their child's online use, there were some differences in the types of tool used:

  - just over a quarter (27%) of MFV parents used parental controls built into devices by the manufacturer, compared to 35% of LFV parents;
  - a fifth (19%) changed the settings on their child's phone or tablet to stop apps being downloaded or to stop in-app purchases, compared to 36% of LFV parents; and
  - 14% used parental control software, settings or apps on their child's phone or tablet to restrict access to content, or to manage the child's use of the device (compared to 25% of LFV parents).

… agreed, in the main, that going online had benefits for their child

- Overall, almost all parents in both MFV and LFV households agreed that there was at least one benefit for their child in being online (97%). However, there were a few specific benefits which were less apparent to them.
- While nearly seven in ten in MFV households (68%) agreed that being online could help with their child's schoolwork and homework, this was lower than the 84% of LFV parents selecting this response.
- And while four in ten parents in MFV households (39%) felt that being online could help to build or maintain friendships for their child, this was lower than the 53% of LFV parents who felt this, particularly among parents of 12-15-year-olds (61% vs 85% LFV).
- For the remainder of benefits asked about in our survey, the proportions were comparable between the two groups. These included helping the child to develop

reading or creative skills, or to learn new skills, and to find useful information about any problems or issues they might have.

A5. Further details of the categories of impacting or limiting conditions in our surveys

We asked parents in our surveys to state whether their child had any health issue or condition that impacted or limited their daily activities. Parents were given a list of conditions to choose from, or they could opt for 'don't know', 'other', 'no impacting or limiting condition', or refuse to provide an answer.

The table below details the categories of health conditions that parents identified for their child, with proportions very similar between our three surveys.

	Parents only survey	Children's online knowledge and understanding survey (COKU)[19]	Children's online behaviours and attitudes survey (COBA)
	Child aged 3-17	**Child aged 8-17**	**Child aged 3-17**
Hearing	2%	3%	2%
Eyesight	4%	4%	4%
Mobility	1%	4%	2%
Dexterity	1%	2%	1%
Breathing	1%	2%	2%
Mental abilities	5%	5%	4%
Social/ behavioural	7%	8%	7%
Mental health	6%	8%	6%
Other illnesses/ conditions which impact or limit their daily activities	2%	2%	2%
Nothing – no impairments or conditions that impact or limit their daily activities	75%	73%	77%
Don't know	2%	2%	2%
Prefer not to say	3%	2%	3%
ANY IMPACTING OR LIMITING CONDITION	**19%**	**23%**	**19%**
More than one impacting or limiting condition	**6%**	**8%**	**7%**

---

[19] The COKU survey was conducted among children aged 8-17, without additional contribution from parents of 3-7s.

The table below details the proportion of children identified as having an impacting or limiting condition by age group, and for specific categories of health condition that differed significantly by age.[20]

	Total 3-17s	3-4	5-7	8-11	12-15	16-17
Parents-only survey						
All children	(2444)	(501)	(501)	(501)	(503)	(438)
Overall impacting/limiting conditions	19% (457)	12% (58)	14% (72)	21% (100)	22% (121)	24% (106)
Mental health	6% (135)	<0.5% (1)	2% (8)	7% (28)	8% (49)	12% (49)
Mental abilities	5% (109)	2% (16)	3% (13)	8% (30)	6% (31)	4% (19)
Children's online knowledge and understanding survey (COKU)[21]						
All children	(1935)	/	/	(811)	(752)	(372)
Overall impacting/ limiting conditions	23% (413)	/	/	21% (190)	23% (101	30% (122)
Mental health	8% (123)	/	/	4% (41)	8% (28)	13% (54)
Hearing	3% (53)	/	/	2% (22)	3% (11)	5% (20)
Eyesight	4% (89)	/	/	4% (48)	3% (14)	7% (27)
Children's online behaviour and understanding survey (COBA)						
All children	(6662)	(1184)	(1480)	(1628)	(1569)	(799)
Overall limiting/ impacting conditions	19% (1229)	14% (154)	17% (258)	18% (284)	21% (344)	23% (189)
Mental health	6% (358)	1% (7)	2% (35)	4% (70)	9% (152)	11% (94)
Mental abilities	5% (285)	2% (34)	5% (72)	5% (73)	5% (69)	5% (37)

---

[20] Unweighted base sizes in brackets.
[21] The COKU survey was conducted among children aged 8-17, without additional contribution from parents of 3-7s.

A6. Further details of calculations of financially vulnerable households

Financial vulnerability is a measure we have devised to better understand the impact of income and household composition on ownership and use of communications services. The analysis creates three distinct household types by combining household income and household size (including the number of children):

- Most financially vulnerable households (MFV)
- Potentially vulnerable households (PFV)
- Least financially vulnerable households (LFV)

The next table shows how the three variables are combined for the three different groups. For example, a single parent who is earning £37,000 would be allocated to the 'least financially vulnerable' category if they have one child, but if they have more than three children they would be classed as 'most financially vulnerable'.

Most financially vulnerable	Potentially financially vulnerable	Least financially vulnerable
Household income under £10,399 All respondents		
Earning between £10,400 - £25,599 1 adult, 2+ children 2 adults, 2+ children 3+ adults, 0+ children	**Earning between £10,400 - £25,599** 1 adult, 0-1 child 2 adults, 0-1 child 3 adults, no children	
Earning between £26,000 - 36,399 1 adult, 4+ children 2 adults, >3 children 3 adults, 2+ children 4 adults, 1+ children 5+ adults, 0+ children	**Earning between £26,000 - £36,399** 1 adult, 1 to 3 children 2 adults, 0 to 3 children 3 adults, 0 to 1 child 4 adults, no children	**Earning between £26,600 - £36,399** 1 adult, 0 children
Earning between £36,400 - 51,999 1 adult, >3 children 2 adults, 3+ children 3 adults, 3+ children 4 adults, 2+ children 5+ adults, 0+ children	**Earning between £36,400 - 51,999** 1 adult, 2-3 children 2 adults, 1-2 children 3 adults, 0-2 children 4 adults, 0-1 child 5 adults, 0 children	**Earning between 36,400 - £51,999** 1 adult, 0-1 child 2 adults, 0 children
		Household income £52,000+ All households