



Parents' views on parental controls

Findings of qualitative research

Prepared for
Ofcom



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1 Executive summary

1.1 Introduction

Parental Controls are filtering tools that make it possible for parents to block or limit their children's access to online content through different devices. The role of parental controls in helping to keep children safe online is currently the subject of considerable debate in the UK and Europe. The European Commission has challenged industry to facilitate "wider availability and use of parental controls" across a range of devices¹ and the UK Government published a discussion paper on this subject in June 2012².

Ofcom's latest quantitative research³ shows that 46% of parents of children that go online at home use parental controls on their PC, laptop or netbook, with lower levels of parental controls on other internet enabled devices. Ofcom wished to develop a more nuanced understanding of the rationale for parents' usage or non usage of, and attitudes to, parental controls to complement this quantitative data. The aims of this research therefore were:

1. To provide evidence of parents' attitudes to, and experience of, parental controls for internet enabled devices; and
2. To understand how parental controls fit within the wider repertoire of parents' mediation of their child's internet/media use.

The research began by exploring overall approaches to parenting. This provided a broader contextual understanding of how parenting approaches influence the response both to parental controls specifically and internet mediation more widely.

The focus of this study was on parents of children aged between 5 and 15, with a weighting towards 8-11 and 12-15 year olds (because it is known from the quantitative research that internet use is more extensive and less supervised amongst these older groups). An equal number of those with and without parental controls were represented, and a small number of lapsed users were included. A number of complementary research methods were used, including a series of extended in-home family interviews, some of which included children, as well as 'standard' mini-groups and 'friendship' mini-groups with parents who knew each other socially. The sample spanned all UK countries and had both urban and rural coverage. In total, close to 100 people⁴ took part during July 2012.

¹http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/sip/docs/ceo_coalition/parental_controls_progress_report.pdf

² <https://www.education.gov.uk/inthenews/inthenews/a00210813/discussion-paper-adult-web-content>

³ Ofcom Children and parents: media use and attitudes report, October 2012, www.ofcom.org.uk/medialiteracy

⁴ A total of 85 parents and 10 children took part in this research.

1.2 Key findings

1.2.1 Key factors influencing parental attitudes in this area

Parenting was perceived to be a constant challenge, characterised by the need to balance a number of often conflicting priorities such as:

- Maintaining an open relationship with children but also setting boundaries;
- Allowing children freedom to explore but also protecting them from threats; and
- Providing children with access to benefits of technology, and the internet specifically, but also protecting them from any negative effects and risks.

Managing children's use of the internet emerged spontaneously as a key part of the parenting balancing act, prior to any specific prompting about technology. It was one of the primary aspects felt to distinguish modern parenting from the experience of previous generations. This lack of precedent, along with the rapidly changing nature of technology, meant parents were unclear what they needed to do to 'get it right'.

1.2.2 Parental attitudes to the internet and their children

Technology, and the internet in particular, tended to be regarded ambivalently by parents in the qualitative research. On the one hand, the internet was perceived to bring benefits for children, particularly in the areas of education and learning, and proficiency online was felt to be essential to children's future prospects. On the other hand, there was seen to be a downside and potentially negative effects related to internet use.

However, it is significant to note that most top-of-mind of potential negatives were not specifically risks related to inappropriate exposure to content or contact-related risks, which few parents felt their children had direct experience of and therefore tended to treat as hypothetical. Instead concerns tended to be focused on other issues and problems that parents were regularly facing related to their children's day-to-day internet usage. These included the struggle to achieve family time away from screen-based devices, the risk of less interest in physical and outdoor activities, and a decline in perceived 'traditional' skills such as handwriting, spelling and the ability to communicate face-to-face.

However, when discussing online risks specifically, it was apparent the internet was felt both to create new risks and to transform traditional ones. New risks were perceived to arise from the unprecedented access to explicit material online and the growing area of user-created content, through social networking sites and video sharing sites like YouTube. Bullying and stranger danger were perceived to be transformed by the online environment into something far greater and more difficult to control.

Parents perceived there to be a hierarchy both in prevalence and seriousness of internet-related risks. 'Transactional' risks (e.g. getting viruses or running up bills) were perceived to be relatively commonplace but limited in their impact on the child's well being. Conversely, 'contact' risks (e.g. cyber-bullying or grooming online) were expected to be relatively rare but considered the most serious in terms of impact or harm.

Both of these risks were more top-of-mind compared to 'content' risks (e.g. accidentally or deliberately accessing unsuitable material). This was because content risks were neither seen as the most common or serious of risks. However, a potential longer-term effect of exposure to inappropriate content was perceived to be desensitisation and inappropriate values with respect

to relationships, sex and body image. In addition, parents noted there was some convergence of content and contact risks seen in the areas of online gaming and social media, and this convergence was perceived to elevate the risk of serious potential harm for children.

There were also some differences perceived in children's vulnerability to risk. Parents considered the most at-risk age group overall to be between 10-14 years, when there was perceived to be the biggest gap between curiosity and judgement. Parents also tended to worry more about girls than boys, as it was girls who were felt to be most vulnerable to 'contact' risks. Personality type was also believed to have a bearing, with curious or naïve children highlighted as being more vulnerable.

In addition, parents were more concerned about online access via some devices than others, with those with greater portability (e.g. of laptops, netbooks, tablets and mobile phones) being generally regarded as more problematic as they were harder for parents to supervise and control.

Overall, ensuring balanced and safe use of the internet was seen as an important parenting challenge, but one where parents were not always clear on how to get it right. This was because they could not necessarily draw on their own experiences growing up, and also because they felt that the issues and risks were constantly developing and shifting.

This led to a feeling of helplessness amongst some parents - particularly those with lower internet confidence- about how to respond. That said, to place concerns about internet-related risks in context, some volunteered in discussion that 'real life' risks (e.g. to personal safety when outside the home) were of more concern to them overall.

1.2.3 Managing children's use of the internet

The approach parents took to mediating in this area was generally consistent with their overall parenting style, and here respondents typically spoke of their aim to balance rules and boundaries with trust and freedom. Instilling the right values and habits in their children was also seen to be critical.

As in Ofcom's quantitative research, almost all stated they were doing something specific to mediate their children's use of the internet, and most claimed to be using a combination of approaches, such as:

- Rules around limiting access - e.g. setting time limits; only allowing child online at certain times; banning access to certain sites; banning certain activities.
- Supervision of activities - e.g. only allowing internet in common view; checking what children are doing.
- Monitoring of activities - e.g. checking child's internet history; vetting social network friends; monitoring social network activity as a 'friend'; knowing child's passwords.
- Communication about staying safe online - e.g. a formal sit down conversation and/or more informal ongoing communication; schools were also felt to be playing an important role here.
- Some were also using parental control tools or other technical controls (e.g. safe searches, safe modes on websites).

However, some admitted that good intentions in this area were not always realised. In particular, rules were not always strictly or consistently enforced, with parents sometimes instead opting for the path of least resistance. With busy lives and relatively few aware of any negative online experiences directly affecting their children, some also admitted that they did not consistently engage with risks on a day-to-day basis.

There were also some parents who felt ill-equipped to intervene, both with respect to parental controls specifically and also other forms of mediation, because of their own lack of confidence or competence online.

1.2.4 Awareness of, and attitudes to, parental controls

The qualitative research found there to be different levels of awareness and understanding of parental controls:

- Those with reasonable awareness of the different options, although even they did not necessarily know about all of the possible features.
- Those who had basic awareness of the existence of parental controls but lacked understanding of how they work or the different options that are available.
- Those who had never heard of internet parental controls or fundamentally misunderstood their nature.

This indicates that understanding of parental controls is a somewhat 'grey area' and that even those who have some level of awareness also have gaps in their understanding.

In general, more knowledgeable parents were more likely to have parental controls in place.

Overall, the potential value of parental controls did not appear to be front-of-mind on a daily basis for parents. In the absence of a specific trigger (e.g. an incident where their child had encountered inappropriate content, changing their Internet Service Provider getting a new device), many without parental controls admitted 'not getting around' to considering them or to reviewing them if they already had them in place. Their reported focus was more on the issues and problems that they were regularly incurring with their children's day-to-day internet use (e.g. children spending too much time online) rather than on the risks (e.g. of physical and psychological harm related to exposure) which few had any direct experience of.

Thus, lack of awareness and understanding of parental controls appeared from this research to be a key reason for the non-take up of parental controls compared, for example, to making a conscious decision to reject them.

In addition, there were some other related factors, including the perception that parental controls were a fairly complex area, and that choosing and installing them would therefore require a considerable investment of time and effort. For those who made a proactive decision to install parental controls, it tended to be because the parent felt that the risk to their children of exposure to inappropriate content outweighed the expected effort to install the controls. By contrast, the risk/effort equation was reversed amongst those who did not have them installed. In other words, they tended to feel that the level of risk was relatively low and did not warrant the effort required to research parental controls, work out what the best option is and actually install them.

1.2.5 Take up and non take up of parental controls

The main reason given for adopting parental controls was that they came pre-installed on the device or that parents were prompted to install them on purchase or set-up. A smaller number claimed to have reacted in response to an incident involving their child or someone they knew encountering inappropriate content. Very few reported that they had implemented parental controls as a precautionary measure. Once parental controls were in place, parents reported that they had tended to forget about them. This could lead to the parental controls falling out of use; for instance where parents had switched them off for their own use and forgotten to turn

them back on, where they had not been updated, or where children were using new or different devices to access the internet on which parental controls had not been installed.

There were a number of inter-related factors for not taking up parental controls. This research strongly suggests the factors mentioned previously to be key 'root causes' of the lack of take-up of parental controls; that is:

- A lack of awareness or gaps in understanding.
- The perceived complexity of parental controls.
- The degree of effort that was expected to be required.
- Busy lives coupled with the absence of a specific trigger (e.g. incident or being prompted at set-up).
- A resultant lack of day-to-day engagement with parental controls.

In addition, the main reasons identified in the quantitative survey - that is, supervising younger children and trusting older ones - were also identified in the qualitative research.

Some parents also gave other specific reasons for not installing parental controls:

- Children being either 'too young' or 'too old' for parental controls to be useful.
- Parental controls 'limit adult use of the internet' by preventing access to certain adult sites, as well as slowing the computer down.
- Parental controls 'do not protect children sufficiently' because they do not cover all devices or 'children will get around them anyway'.
- 'You can't wrap children in cotton wool' and 'exposure to the real world is a positive thing'.

Parents sometimes found it challenging to discuss why they had not taken up parental controls; this was because some parents found it difficult to recall precise reasons, and also because there was some feeling upon discussion that they probably should have installed controls. This led to blurring between factors which had directly contributed to the non take-up and explanations (or post-rationalisations) of the decision after the event. Most of the reasons cited above could be argued to be at least partly the latter. This is further evidenced by the fact that when parents were asked whether they would install parental controls if the process was made very easy, almost all parents said they would do so.

For lapsed users, the most significant factor appeared to be 'forgetting' to re-install if say parental controls stopped working, or there was a switch to a new ISP or device within the household. This further highlights the lack of ongoing engagement with parental controls amongst some parents.

It is also worth mentioning that there were others who regarded themselves as active users of parental controls but who actually were not. Some of these parents were confused about the definition of parental controls. Others had parental controls which, whilst still physically in place, were obsolete because they did not cover the devices currently being used.

1.2.6 What parents want from parental controls

After detailed discussion, parents felt that technical parental controls offer the potential for added protection, but that the available range of controls is currently too complex and piecemeal, with too many options, most of which do slightly different things. Individual controls were also seen as not offering complete protection as they do not cover all devices or always protect against contact as well as content risks.

There was a consistent desire expressed for simpler and more cohesive provision, with even those who had highlighted other reasons for non-take up prepared to consider parental controls if it was very straightforward to select and install them. Parents' own 'wish list' for parental controls also centred on simplicity and included the desire for an easy way to cover all household devices, and to be prompted to install parental controls at the set-up stage or have them pre-installed.

1.2.7 Overall summary of parents' views on parental controls

The qualitative research found that amongst non-users of parental controls there was a widespread lack of engagement with this technology. This was driven by a combination of:

- The perception, particularly amongst parents with lower levels of confidence about technology, that the process of selecting and installing parental controls was complex and time-consuming; and
- The fact that some of the risks of the internet, particularly exposure to inappropriate material, were not top-of-mind for many parents.

The result was that many of these parents had 'not got around' to installing parental controls. In addition, even amongst those who had installed parental controls, many had not given them much further thought and protections may have become outdated as a result of this lack of continuing engagement.

When parents were tasked to create their ideal parental controls, their response focused on making it as simple as possible to select and implement. However, parents felt that, even if the ideal was feasible, technical parental controls would and should not be the only mediation approach they used, but a complementary part of the portfolio of approaches.

Overall, technical controls were viewed as a supplement to, rather than replacement for, hands-on parenting. Supervision and other forms of parental mediation were felt still to be needed to prevent all of the day-to-day issues as well as risks emanating from children's internet usage.

2 Introduction

2.1 Background

There is growing political and social debate about the role of online parental controls in the context of keeping children safe on the internet, both in the UK and Europe. The multifunctional nature of many new gadgets means that it is increasingly easy to access a wide range of online media content through devices as diverse as mobile phones, games consoles, media players and TV. The European Commission has challenged industry to facilitate “wider availability and use of parental controls” across a range of devices⁵ and the UK Government published a discussion paper on this subject in June 2012⁶.

Ofcom's latest quantitative research⁷ shows that 46% of parents in the UK currently use parental controls on PCs, laptops or netbooks. The figure is higher for use of parental controls on televisions and lower for other devices. Ofcom commissioned this qualitative research to provide a more nuanced picture of attitudes and experiences that may underpin the quantitative responses.

2.2 Research objectives

The overall aims of this research were therefore twofold:

1. To provide evidence of parents' attitudes to, and experience of, parental controls for internet enabled devices; and
2. To understand how parental controls fit within the wider repertoire of parents' mediation of their child's internet/media use.

The more detailed objectives were to develop understanding in the following areas:

- How overall approaches to parenting influence attitudes and behaviour, both to parental controls specifically and to internet mediation more widely.
- The extent to which parents are aware of the different types of parental controls and their function.
- Whether parents have used parental controls:
 - If they have, were they easy to install and use? Have they maintained use?
 - If they haven't, why? What are the barriers to use? What is the relative importance of: awareness; perceived complexity; preference for other approaches, e.g. discussion with child, limiting time spent online etc.
 - If they haven't would anything encourage them to use parental controls? If so, what?
- Whether parents think parental controls are effective at protecting their children online.
- Parents' view of the relative importance of technical parental controls compared with other approaches.

⁵http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/sip/docs/ceo_coalition/parental_controls_progress_report.pdf

⁶ See footnote 2.

⁷Ofcom Children and parents: media use and attitudes report, October 2012, www.ofcom.org.uk/medialiteracy

- Whether attitudes differ depending on: age of child(ren); parents' own confidence/ability online; parenting style; socio-economic group.

2.3 Research approach

A number of complementary approaches were used for this research; these included 10 extended in-home family interviews as well as 5 'standard' mini-groups with parents not known to each other and 5 'friendship' mini-groups with parents who do know each other socially.

The focus was on parents of children aged between 5 and 15, with a weighting towards 8-11 and 12-15 year olds (because it is known from quantitative research that internet use is more extensive and less supervised amongst these older groups).

The sample spanned all UK nations and had both urban and rural coverage. An equal number of those with and without parental controls were represented, and amongst those with parental controls a small number of lapsed users were included. In addition, the sample included a range of internet confidence, social grades and Internet Service Providers (ISPs). In total, 85 adults and 10 children took part during July 2012.

The full sample details, including quotas and locations, are contained in Appendix A. The research materials used in the groups and depth interviews are contained in Appendices B-D.

2.4 This report

This report is organised into the following eight sections:

1. **Key factors influencing parental attitudes in this area:** General approaches to parenting and how technology and the internet fit in.
2. **Parental attitudes to the internet for children:** general attitudes to the internet and their children; perceived risks to their children from the internet; perceived hierarchy of frequency and seriousness of different types of risks; perceived differences in vulnerability to risks based on factors such as age, gender, personality of child and type of device used.
3. **Managing children's use of technology:** General views on parental involvement; specific parental interventions; issues with parental interventions; views of children on parental involvement.
4. **Awareness and understanding of parental controls:** Perceived complexity of parental controls; factors influencing take-up of parental controls; level of engagement with parental controls.
5. **Parents with parental controls:** Reasons for taking up parental controls; the selection and installation process; satisfaction with parental controls once installed.
6. **Parents without parental controls:** Reasons for non-use of parental controls; reasons for lapsing.
7. **What parents want from parental controls:** Response to stimulus material about parental controls; considered views on parental controls following discussion and stimulus; parental wish-list for parental controls.
8. **Overall summary of parents' view on parental controls:** Unprompted and prompted attitudes to parental controls; experience of parental controls; reasons for non-use; desired 'ideal' and impact of this on likely future use of parental controls.

Each section is prefaced with relevant quantitative data from Ofcom's most recent Media Literacy Tracker survey⁸ and verbatim quotes are included throughout to provide a flavour of views expressed.

⁸ See footnote 5

3 Research findings

3.1 Parental attitudes to the internet and their children

Ofcom's Media Literacy Tracker data, published in October 2012 in the Children and parents: media use and attitudes report,⁹ found that:

- *The majority of parents of 5 to 15 year olds who use the internet (70%) agree that 'the benefits of the internet outweigh its risks'.*
- *A minority of parents are concerned about specific risks of the internet to their children (26% are concerned about the child giving out personal details to inappropriate people; 27% are concerned about the child being bullied online; 25% are concerned about the child downloading or getting viruses or harmful software; 17% are concerned about the content the child has access to online).*
- *'Contact-related' concerns amongst parents increase with the age of the child (16% among parents of 5-7 year olds for both giving out personal details and for being bullied online, rising to 24% and 25% among parents of 8-11s and 33% in both cases among parents of 12-15s).*
- *When children were themselves asked about negative experiences online, 11% of 8-11s and 18% of 12-15s said they had seen any online content in the last year that they considered worrying, nasty or offensive.*
- *4% of 8-11s and 9% of 12-15s said they had been bullied online.*
- *One in six 12-15 year olds (17%) have had some other kind of negative online experience, with the most common being gossip being spread.*

3.1.1 Key factors influencing parental attitudes in this area

This qualitative research indicates that parental attitudes to technology and the internet can be best understood in context of evolving attitudes to parenting overall.

Parenting was perceived to be a constant challenge, characterised by the need to balance a number of often conflicting priorities such as:

- Maintaining an open relationship with children but also setting boundaries;
- Allowing children freedom to explore but also protecting them from threats; and
- Providing children access to benefits of technology, and the internet specifically, but also protecting them from possible negative effects and risks.

Parenting was often compared to a previous 'golden age' that may or may not have existed in reality. Not only was parenting perceived to be more challenging for the current generation than for previous generations, there was also felt to be more pressure to get it right. Some of this pressure came from high levels of awareness of the impact parents' actions can have on their children. There was a tendency to be self-analytical, and often self-critical, with parents comparing themselves to others or to the media's views on good parenting.

⁹ See footnote 5

"We worry about being good parents and what our children think of us. I know I don't always get it right...You are constantly comparing yourself with their friends' parents. My parents didn't think about being a parent, they just did it."

London, ABC1, without parental controls

Managing their children's use of the internet emerged spontaneously as one of the key elements that parents need to balance.

"I try to balance the physical and the computer... I mean if they're going to be on the computer, they have to do something physical as well."

London, ABC1, with parental controls

In particular, parents felt it was important to enable their children to have access to the internet but at the same time protect them from any potential associated negative effects or risks.

The increased presence of technology was characterised by respondents as a key difference between their own parenting experiences and that of the previous generation. However, whilst in many areas of modern parenting there was a tendency for parents to compare themselves to peers and to societal expectations, there was not felt to be a clear societal steer on what parents needed to do to keep their children safe online.

"Sometimes it's difficult because when you're a parent you always think of what you were like as a child and you think your experiences will help you. I mean, when I was a kid I never had the internet and Facebook. So it's pretty much new to parents of this generation I think."

London, ABC1, with parental controls

Many of the parents in the research said they felt under pressure to ensure their children had access to the latest technology, both directly from their children and from a desire to ensure their children were able to 'keep up' with their peers. All participants had one or more computers (desktop, laptop, netbook) in their household, and most also had a range of other internet enabled devices (tablets, smart phones, games consoles/devices, multimedia players, e-readers etc.). The fact that it is possible to access the internet using these other devices was not always at the forefront of parents' minds, and for some devices, such as games consoles or e-readers, some parents were unaware that these could be used to access the internet.

3.1.2 General parental attitudes to the internet for children

Parents perceived the internet as presenting both benefits and issues for their children, and therefore they tended to regard the internet ambivalently.

"They've got all the technology at their fingertips which I think is a good thing but I do think there is sometimes a lack of control."

London, C2DE, with parental controls

"There are so many positives, in a sense of how it enhances your lives and your kids' lives in many different ways, but it comes back to that question about the speed at which it has happened. What does this mean for us all, you know? And that's difficult to work out."

Glasgow, ABC1, with parental controls

On the positive side, parents saw the internet as an invaluable homework and learning resource for their children; they also felt that gaining proficiency in using the internet would be critical to their children's future prospects.

"They definitely have more knowledge than when we were at that age...It's amazing and I think it's all because of the internet and TV and modern communications...At school their homework is determined by the computer. They've got to do it online and they have their own email address at the school."

London, C2DE, with parental controls

"I think, going forward, it's crucial for children to be happy and confident using a PC."

Cardiff, C2DE, with parental controls

However, they also identified a number of potentially detrimental impacts for their children. It is significant to note that most top-of-mind of potential negatives were not specifically risks related to inappropriate exposure to content or contact-related risks. Instead, they tended to be other issues and problems that parents were regularly facing related to their children's day-to-day internet usage. These included the struggle to achieve family time away from devices, less interest from children in physical and outdoor activities, a decline in perceived 'traditional' skills such as handwriting, spelling and the ability to communicate face-to-face, pressure to have the latest devices, and the general distraction the internet can provide from doing other things.

Because these day-to-day issues and problems were found to be prevalent they tended to be more top-of-mind and immediate to parents. Conversely, few reported having any direct experience of an incident involving their child's exposure to inappropriate content or contact online, which meant these risks felt largely hypothetical to many parents.

"I find I've really got to get on at my two daughters to get off their backsides, to stop sitting with their laptops and go out and do something."

Glasgow, ABC1, with parental controls

"Their writing has really suffered because they're glued to the Xbox or the Playstation or whatever."

London, C2DE, with parental controls

"It's their social skills, losing the aspect of being able to sit and talk with the family. I find with a lot of kids, if it's not a tablet or computer, it's a phone. They're more willing to sit there with their phone than interacting with family - I think it's quite sad."

London, ABC1, with parental controls

This focus on day-to-day internet-related issues, rather than the contact and content risks, plays an important role in parents' attitudes towards parental controls and their motivation - or lack of motivation - to install them. This is discussed in more detail later in this report (Section 3.3.2).

3.1.3 Perceived risks to children from the internet

Despite contact and content risks not being top-of-mind, when discussing the issue specifically it was apparent that it was an area of concern for parents. The internet was felt both to create new risks and to transform traditional ones.

Perceived new risks were seen to stem from unprecedented access to explicit sexual and violent material, and the rapidly growing area of user-generated content, both generated by other users and by their own children (e.g. on blogs, comments on social networking sites etc).

"There's been some concern about how easy porn is to fall upon. There's also access to real life footage of people being injured and killed, and that's becoming commonplace you know? So there's a kind of desensitisation that can happen."

Glasgow, ABC1, with parental controls

"What goes online stays online and it's there forever. People are always getting told that now because they go for jobs and somebody does a wee search for the name and finds it all. It could have been years ago that they've said a nasty or stupid thing, but that colours other people's opinions of that person forever more."

Glasgow, ABC1, with parental controls

Transformation of traditional risks was felt to occur in two key areas - bullying becoming 'cyber-bullying' and stranger danger becoming 'grooming' - therefore moving each of these onto a much bigger (potentially infinite) scale.

"Years ago if you got bullied as a child and then you went home, it was forgotten about and next day it was pretty much alright. Now they can bully through Facebook, email and text. It doesn't stop does it? It can spread like wildfire and there's no getting away from it."

Cardiff, ABC1, without parental controls

"In my generation there was this thing of stranger danger, so when you saw somebody who you don't know you were taught to be suspicious of them. Now that's diluted because the person isn't (regarded as) a stranger. (The child) might have been chatting to that person online for a couple of weeks or months and, in a young person's mind, that's like the equivalent of a couple of years."

London, C2DE, with parental controls

All of this was seen to mean that traditional parental responses to risks were seen to some extent to be obsolete. The perceived shifting of the agenda in this way could lead some parents to feel helpless in terms of how best to respond. This was particularly the case for parents who had lower internet confidence.

"My big worry is that I just don't understand it. You don't have control."

London, ABC1, without parental controls

However, it is worth noting that 'real life risks' (such as of gangs, knives, street crime, road safety etc.) were still of greater concern to the majority of parents. Some could also see how the internet could help protect children from some of these offline risks, for example by encouraging children to stay inside or enabling closer parental monitoring of their activities (e.g. via social networking sites).

"When they're out and about, especially the oldest one who's sixteen, I worry about their safety... I think my kids have a lot less freedom than I had when I was younger. I mean, I could go out between 6 and 10pm and it was never worried about. Whereas now they're ten minutes out of sight and you're phoning them going 'Where are you? What are doing? Who are you with?'"

Glasgow, C2DE, without parental controls

"For me (Facebook) is like a gateway to her world; I know where she is and who she is with because I am her Facebook friend."

Belfast, C2DE, without parental controls

3.1.4 Perceived differences in level of risks to children

Parents perceived there to be a hierarchy both in frequency and seriousness of internet-related risks. The perceived differences in the intensity of different risks related to the degree of impact each was expected to have on the child's physical or emotional well-being. There was also a perception that some risks are more common-place than others.

'Transactional' risks, such as getting viruses or running up bills, were perceived to have relatively low impact on the child's wellbeing overall as the main effects were mainly seen as practical or financial (which was felt to have a greater impact on the parent than the child). These risks were perceived as being relatively commonplace and some parents had actual experience of them. Thus, with transactional risks, there was a blurring between 'risk' and day-to-day issues and problems that parents reported having experience of with their children's internet use (see Section 3.1.2).

"My daughter managed to log into eBay, set up her own account and start bidding for a phone. She won the bid and came down and told us...She was only twelve at the time."

London, C2DE, with parental controls

'Content' risks, such as such as accidental or deliberate access to inappropriate images or messages, were perceived to have some impact on children's emotional wellbeing, self-image or views of others. However, it was felt that these effects would not be immediate but would require repeated exposure to create a significant or lasting impact. In addition, although inappropriate content was felt to be much more readily available on the internet compared to before its advent, the risk to their own children from accidental or deliberate exposure was not top-of-mind as few were aware of any specific incidents that their children had experienced.

It is worth noting that discussion about inappropriate content was not just confined to pornography but also included violent images (e.g. content of games as well as real life images present on media and social media sites). In addition, there was concern about some of the body images presented by the media both on the internet and offline. On the other hand, there was negligible awareness of some other sources of inappropriate content such as pro-anorexia and pro-suicide sites, perhaps indicating a lack of awareness of some of the types of content children may be exposed to.

"He will think women are just playthings."

Belfast, C2DE, with parental controls

My daughter is obsessed by cellulite, the internet has all these images, all stick thin. I just want to take her laptop away."

London, ABC1, without parental controls

Finally, 'contact' risks, such as cyber-bullying or grooming, were felt to have the greatest potential to cause immediate and serious physical or psychological harm. Therefore, although these risks were assumed to be relatively rare, they were more of a worry than content risks for parents because of the high degree of seriousness perceived.

"It's that somebody might be grooming my child. I think that's what I'm really, really worried about... They can be so naive."

London, ABC1, with parental controls

Overall, it was the 'transactional' and 'contact' risks that tended to be most top-of-mind with parents. With transactional risks, it was because of the perceived greater prevalence, with some parents having actual experience of these. With contact risks, it was because these were felt to be the most serious of the risks overall. By contrast, there was less initial focus on 'content' risks, which is likely to be because they were neither seen to be the most common or most impactful of the risks.

"(Contact risks) are more immediate, they will have more of a direct effect on children than the content. If you look too much (at content) you'll get desensitised, but the fact is that if you see some images one time I don't think it's quite as bad as say bullying which will have much more of a psychological impact."

Glasgow, ABC1, with parental controls

It should also be borne in mind that, upon consideration, where content and contact spheres converge in the areas of user-generated content (e.g. within social networking sites) and gaming (for multiplayer games) parents considered there was greater cause for concern. In particular, there was concern that the opportunity to post comments on social networking sites could provide a fertile platform for online bullying as well as the opportunity for people not otherwise known to their children to make contact with them. There was also a view that games, which were normally thought of as relatively safe, could take on a different level of risk where their child was playing with others they do not know. The perceived impact of content risks was elevated in these contexts.

"I always tell them if there is anything not nice on computer or on text then don't respond to it. Don't put anything in print because then it's there forever and someone could misconstrue what you were trying to say."

Cardiff, C2DE, with parental controls

"My son, he's got an Xbox Live and sometimes I'm a bit wary of that. You can speak to people all over the world playing that game. If he's playing with his friends it's alright but on the odd occasion I've heard other people on there and they do swear, so I have to tell him to get off. It's no good if you've got someone who's verbally abusing you down your Xbox because you've beaten them at a game or something."

London, C2DE, without parental controls

3.1.5 Perceived differences in vulnerability to risks

There were also perceived to be differences in children's vulnerability to risks based on factors including:

- Age of the child - parents perceived the peak age for risk to be 10-14 years (due to their increased technical proficiency coupled with significant peer pressure; gap between curiosity and maturity also perceived to be greatest in this age range).

"My niece is fourteen and you see her and her pals are putting pictures of themselves online...But you don't know who is looking at these pictures."

Glasgow, C2DE, without parental controls

- Gender of the child - particularly within the prime risk age group (10-14), girls were felt to be most at risk (due to their greater interest in social networking sites providing greater opportunities for bullying and grooming; also related to their potentially greater vulnerabilities related to body image).

"I think a teenage boy is more likely to look at porn whereas a teenage girl is probably going to be in chat rooms so you've got to be more worried about her being groomed."

London, ABC1, with parental controls

- Personality of the child - more curious or innocent children were perceived to be most at risk, as they were felt to be more likely to experiment or succumb to peer pressure, and less likely to know how to keep safe.

"She is the kind of child, I think, who is going to push boundaries and learn quickly... She'll ask questions like 'what sorts of sites will pop up?' and 'what is grooming?' and 'what is porn?'"

London, ABC1, with parental controls

- Type of device used by the child to access the internet - laptops, netbooks, tablets and mobiles were perceived to pose the greatest risk as these devices were being used extensively by children to access the internet/communicate with others and parents felt less able to mediate with these devices due to their mobile nature. However, some other devices that are also mobile - such as portable media players and handheld games devices - were mentioned less often because their internet connectivity was less obvious to parents (although when probed most claimed to be aware of this).

"I think the mobile (has more risk) because it's such a portable device. It makes it less detectable."

Glasgow, ABC1, with parental controls

3.2 Managing children's use of the internet

Ofcom's Media Literacy Tracker data, published in October 2012 in the Children and parents: media use and attitudes report, found that

- *85% of parents claim to be mediating their children's internet usage in some way.*
- *The main types of parental mediation reported are setting rules (79%), using safe search settings on search engine websites (46%), installing parental controls on the PC/laptop/netbook the child uses at home (46%) and using the history function to view the websites the child visits (42%).*
- *In addition to these mediation measures, the great majority have spoken to their children about staying safe online (79%), with almost half doing so at least once a month (44%)*
- *However, close to half of all parents (46%), increasing to two-thirds of parents of children aged 12-15 (67%), agree that 'my child knows more about the internet than I do'.*

3.2.1 General views on parental involvement

As in the quantitative research, the qualitative research found there to be a strong consensus that some parental involvement in children's internet usage was needed, and that 'good parents' would be involved in this area. This meant that there was a natural reluctance to admit doing nothing.

Parents' individual approaches to managing their children's internet use appeared to be consistent with their overall parenting style, except where technical confidence was a barrier. In general, successful parental intervention in this area was felt to require the careful balancing of setting rules and boundaries whilst also demonstrating trust in the child to have the right sort of values and habits to stay safe. Having open and ongoing dialogue with children about the risks was also seen to be important, although not always feasible in real life as will be explained in the next section (see 3.2.2).

"I would just like to make sure they are safe on the computer, but I don't want to invade their privacy and be an overprotective mother either."

Glasgow, C2DE, without parental controls

"It needs to be both ways because if it's either too hard or too soft it won't work. You just have to give them that bit of trust and then you, sort of, reward them if they've kept your trust."

London, ABC1, with parental controls

3.2.2 Specific parental interventions

Almost all of the respondents claimed to be doing something specific to mediate their children's internet use, and most stated that they were using a combination of approaches:

- **Rules around limiting access** - e.g. setting time limits; only allowing child online at certain times; banning access to certain sites; banning certain activities.

"In my household, it's mostly for homework. He goes on Club Penguin at the weekend but he's not allowed to use it unless it's for homework during the week."

London, ABC1, with parental controls

- Supervision of activities - e.g. only allowing children to access the internet outside their bedrooms where parents can more readily view and common view check what they are doing.

"If they're on the internet they have to be down in the living room or we've got an office next to the living room where we keep the door open. We can go past. Sometimes I think you're asking for trouble if they're in their bedroom on their own and you can't see it."

Cardiff, ABC1, without parental controls

- Monitoring of activities - e.g. checking child's internet history; vetting social network friends; monitoring social network activity as a 'friend'; knowing child's passwords.

"I'm her friend on Facebook... I do monitor it; I monitor things she writes, pictures that she uploads."

London, ABC1, without parental controls

- Communication about staying safe online - e.g. formal sit down conversation and/or more informal ongoing communication; schools also felt to be playing an important role here.

"Well I've said to them, you know, 'don't be adding any random people on Facebook and if you are going onto sites make sure they are sites that you know'."

Glasgow, C2DE, without parental controls

- Some were also using parental controls or other technical controls (e.g. safe searches, safe modes on websites) as part of the mix, almost always in conjunction with other mediation methods.

"(Parental controls are) a good support, it's like having a second pair of eyes. You know, you can view what she's been on, things like that."

London, C2DE, with parental controls

These sorts of intervention were mentioned by parents of children of all ages between 5 and 15, but there appeared to be a particular focus of attention on the perceived peak risk age group of 10-14 years. There did not appear to be any significant difference in application of these interventions between girls and boys.

However, it is important to note that the main focus of mediation was reportedly to limit time spent on the internet (in order to avoid the potentially negative social effects mentioned earlier), rather than on preventing contact or content risks.

3.2.3 Issues with parental interventions

In addition, some admitted that good intentions in this area were not always realised. In particular, rules were not always strictly or consistently enforced, with parents admitting that

they sometimes opted for the path of least resistance, either because they were busy on other things or wanted to avoid an argument.

"I take my son's Xbox off him, but then he'll go into a bad mood and he'll come downstairs and start annoying me. So I'll just go 'you know what, he might as well have the Xbox, at least he's up there in his room quietly'. You know what I mean?"

Glasgow, C2DE, without parental controls

"Well, some days you just want peace and quiet. You come home from work and you've had a stressful day and the kids are squabbling. You just say 'go away and do something'. They'll just go straight to their room and you're thinking 'great, it's quiet'."

Cardiff, ACB1, without parental controls

There were also some parents who felt ill-equipped to intervene, both with respect to parental controls specifically and also other forms of mediation, because of their own lack of confidence or competence online.

"We don't know how to use (the internet) ourselves. We don't know what they get up to! They can close down the page before I see it and I don't know how to get it up again."

Belfast, C2DE, without parental controls

There were also some issues reported with specific mediation approaches. For example, some parents admitted to delaying talking to their children about internet safety as it was felt to be an uncomfortable topic, akin to the 'birds and the bees' sex education discussion. Some were also concerned about overly sensitising their children by raising the issues too early. In addition, some of those covertly monitoring their children's activity felt guilty about invading their privacy.

"If you say, 'be careful and don't go and search for things because there are all sorts of things that you shouldn't see', then the child is going to be thinking 'ooh, what's that?' and probably take a look."

London, C2DE, with parental controls

"I feel a bit guilty when I check up on her (on Facebook). It's a bit like reading her diary."

Glasgow, C2DE, without parental controls

In addition, some parents claimed that they were deliberately taking a 'wait and see' approach, both with respect to implementing parental controls and determining how strictly to intervene more generally; this was in order to adapt to the behaviour and experiences of their child. As few parents were aware of their children having had any specific negative experiences online, there was a feeling amongst some parents that the risks were unlikely to befall their own family.

"We don't check on them...There's never been an occasion where, you know, they've kind of gone anywhere too dodgy. So while that continues then we're happy for them to have that freedom. Whether that's too lax I don't know."

London, ABC1, with parental controls

"I've never yet dipped in because I've not seen the signs yet where I think I might have to dip in because I think something's going on. I trust them because any time I have looked over their shoulder it's been something completely innocent."

Glasgow, ABC1, with parental controls

3.2.4 Views of children on parental involvement

Within the family depth interviews children were also asked their views on parental involvement in their activity online.

Younger children (especially those aged under 8 years old) tended to be largely unaware their parents' mediation role. By contrast, older children did have some sense of rules and restrictions being in place. They were also generally aware of the risks of using the internet due both to having conversations at home and lessons at school on internet safety. Therefore, children tended to understand the reasons for their parents' intervention, and it gave them some reassurance that their parents were 'protecting' them. Whilst some older children felt occasional frustration about their parents' involvement, there was no evidence of strongly negative feelings from children in this area.

However, it should be mentioned that these interviews with children were relatively short (as the main focus of this research was on parental attitudes), and they tended to take place in front of parents.

3.3 Awareness of, and attitudes to, parental controls

3.3.1 Awareness and understanding of parental controls

The qualitative research found there to be a range of awareness and understanding levels of parental controls amongst parents.

At one end of the spectrum were people who had never heard of internet parental controls or fundamentally misunderstood their nature (e.g. confusing them for pin protection codes on TVs or set-top boxes).

"I haven't a clue (what is available). It would be good if you could put, like, something in and say there are these sites that they are allowed to go on. That way you know they are getting sites that are recognised and are safe."

Glasgow, C2DE, without parental controls

At the next level up were some who had basic awareness of the existence of parental controls but lacked understanding of how they work or the different options that are available.

"I still want to be able to go to the sites I want. Can you turn them on and off?"

Belfast, C2DE, without parental controls

Finally, there was a group with reasonable awareness of the different options but even they did not necessarily know about all of the possible features (e.g. monitoring and reporting tools that monitor and report what sites children are attempting to access in addition to blocking of sites).

"I didn't realise you could have time limits though. I think that's a good feature."

Cardiff, C2DE, with parental controls

Thus, the qualitative research indicates that understanding of parental controls is a 'grey area' and that even those who have some level of awareness also have gaps in their understanding.

This spectrum of understanding was broadly correlated with take-up of parental controls (in other words, more knowledgeable parents tended to be more likely to have parental controls in place). However, there were some exceptions including:

- A minority of parents with relatively higher levels of knowledge who had consciously chosen not to implement them or to stop using them.

"They can bring their own problems of slowing things down and can battle with other things. In the end it's a bigger problem to you because your computer's not working."

Glasgow, ABC1, lapsed parental controls

- A few parents with relatively lower levels of knowledge who had asked someone else to implement parental controls on their behalf.

"I got my friend Jackie to set them all up, so I don't even know how they work to be honest."

London, C2DE, with parental controls

More information on parents with and without parental controls is contained in Sections 3.4 and 3.5.

3.3.2 Key factors influencing (lack of) take-up of parental controls

- **Perceived complexity of parental controls**

In general, parental controls were regarded as being a fairly complex area, particularly by those with lower internet confidence.

Even those who had relatively higher internet confidence perceived complexity. This was partly related to changes to the way the internet is accessed. Some more confident internet users were able to describe how internet connection is no longer a simple linear path, with wifi and 3G having to a large degree taken over from fixed connectivity within the home, and with a variety of devices that have internet access now being typically present in the household.

Respondents were asked what options for technical controls they were aware of, and then provided stimulus which outlined the main options (e.g. via ISP, set up on individual devices such as mobile phones or games consoles; software packages that could be installed or downloaded onto a PC or laptop; and safe modes on search engines and some content sites e.g. Youtube). Those who were aware without prompting of some of the options for technical controls felt that the absence of a single all-encompassing solution added to the complexity. This was also the common reaction when the respondents were presented with stimulus which summarised the variety of different parental controls options currently available (see Section 3.6.1).

- **Expectation of considerable effort required**

For the reasons outlined above, there was an assumption amongst those without parental controls that choosing and installing them would require a considerable investment of time and effort. This was even prior to being exposed to stimulus material which outlined the variety of options.

Perceptions of effort required were very linked to the online confidence and knowledge of the parent. Those who were more confident and/or knowledgeable generally expected that installing parental controls would require less effort; by contrast the less confident or knowledgeable expected the process to require more effort.

Parents perceived that the easiest way of taking up parental controls would be having them pre-installed or installed upon set-up. For those who made a proactive decision to install parental controls after this point, it tended to be because the parent felt that the risk to their children of exposure to inappropriate content outweighed the expected effort to install the controls. By contrast, the risk/effort equation was reversed amongst those who did not have them installed. In other words, they tended to feel that the level of risk was relatively low and did not warrant the effort required to research parental controls, work out what the best option is and actually install them.

The age of the child also tended to influence the perceived level of risk. Those with children within the 10-14 age range tended to perceive more tangible risk, along with those who had direct experience of an incident, or who knew of someone close to them who had.

- **Lack of engagement with parental controls**

Overall, parental controls do not appear to be front-of-mind on a daily basis for parents. In the absence of a specific trigger - for example an incident where their child was exposed to inappropriate content, or changes such as switching internet service provider or purchasing a new device - many without parental controls admitted 'not getting around' to consider them. Their reported focus was more on the day-to-day issues and problems they were dealing with in terms of their children's internet use (e.g. children spending too much time online) than on what they considered to be the less immediate and more hypothetical content/contact risks that few had direct experience of. In addition, some stated that they were more concerned about 'real life' risks (such as to children's personal safety when outside the home).

Significantly, many of those with parental controls similarly admitted that they had not thought about reviewing the tools since they were installed. As a result, upon discussion there was a realisation among some parents that initial solutions may now be obsolete. This could be the case if, for example, children now use different devices to access the internet.

3.4 Take up and experience of parental controls

Ofcom's Media Literacy Tracker data, published in October 2012 in the Children and parents: media use and attitudes report, found that:

- *Those with parental controls claim that the main reasons for them having them are that the controls came pre-installed (46%), or they installed them as a precautionary measure (43%); far fewer said that they were installed in response to their child seeing something inappropriate on the internet (8%).*
- *There is a high degree of parental confidence in parental controls (89% agree that 'I am confident that the parental controls we have in place are effective' and 87% agree that 'I feel that my child is safer as a result').*
- *Parental controls are often used in conjunction with other measures: 20% of parents use some form of technical mediation (including parental controls), talk regularly to their children about staying safe online and have rules about parental supervision of their child's internet use; 16% use technical mediation and have rules about parental supervision; and 11% use technical mediation and talk regularly to their children.*
- *Parents are less likely to install controls on other devices that have internet connectivity compared to PCs/laptops/netbooks (46% on PCs/laptops/notebooks vs. 31% on mobile phones, 16% on fixed games consoles and 14% on handheld games devices).*
- *13% of parents with parental controls say that they get in the way of things that they, or other family members, want to access online.*

3.4.1 Reasons for taking up parental controls

Similar to the quantitative survey, there appeared to be three types of reasons for taking up parental controls identified in this qualitative research:

- 'Prompted' - Parental controls came pre-installed or parents were alerted to install during purchase or set-up process.

"It comes when you get a new computer then you get the software. Then it says 'do you want different parental controls?' That's one of the main ways."

London, C2DE, with parental controls

- 'Reactive' - Parental controls were installed in response to an incident involving children being exposed to inappropriate content; or responding to reports of incidents from close friends or family.

"(I decided to install parental controls) when I started getting pop-ups and they were becoming more and more inappropriate...I remember once looking at something online with my son and this picture came up and, 'oh god!', the first thing you do is cover your child's eyes and say 'don't look', but they've already seen it."

London, C2DE, with parental controls

- 'Anticipatory' - Parental Controls were installed as a precautionary measure as children reached a certain age or in response to changing usage patterns.

"They reach a certain age and, it's like, automatically as a parent something goes off in your head that makes you think of looking into it and you investigate what you need to do."

London, ABC1, with parental controls

However, unlike in the quantitative research, in this qualitative research 'installation in response to an incident appeared to be more common than installation as a precautionary measure. Whilst some talked about 'anticipatory' installation, this tended to referred to something they are planning to do in the future, rather than a reflection of past behaviour¹⁰.

3.4.2 Selection and installation process

The process of selecting and installing parental controls varied, depending on factors such as the reason for installation and the parent's level of internet confidence.

However, in general parents with parental controls had not done much research or active shopping around. Instead, it was common for parents to take what was being offered if they were prompted (e.g. when selecting a new ISP or installing a new device).

"I use what's on the computer already."

London, C2DE, with parental controls

Where parents had done some of their own investigation, it was typically to ask for recommendations from one or two people they knew and expected to have knowledge in this area. They then tended to adopt the same approach as the friend or family member whose advice they sought.

"One of my friends told me about putting parental controls on a good while ago now. She came around to my house and was going through a lot of websites, you know, and she showed me how easy it was to get anything that says eighteen or over."

London, ABC1, with parental controls

Those with lowest levels of internet confidence reported delegating the whole selection and installation process to a more confident friend or family member. Those with greater confidence tended to install parental controls themselves and found the process to be relatively straightforward.

"I took it to work and one of them set it up for me, the guy that comes in and fixes computers. Everyone takes him in things."

Cardiff, C2DE, with parental controls

"I put the disc in, it downloaded, I pressed run. It did all the bits of pieces and then I clicked on an icon on my computer and it came up with two screens - one's green and one's red with a big cross through it. Whatever sites I don't want I put onto there so he can't actually go on there."

London, C2DE, with parental controls

¹⁰ This could relate to differences in the sample (the quantitative survey was with a larger sample which can be considered representative of the UK population). However, it could also due to differences in methodology (respondents in the qualitative research had longer to discuss the issues, and they were able to share their views with others in similar situations).

Whilst most parents felt their children were as or more competent than themselves online, parents were not generally involving their children in decision-making or installation of parental controls.

3.4.3 Satisfaction with parental controls once installed

Once parental controls were installed, they provided parents with a sense of satisfaction from having done 'the right thing' as parents. As a result, many did not give parental controls much thought once they were set up; a lack of experience of specific incidents also contributed to the lack of ongoing engagement.

"Nothing's come up. They work because, touch wood, at the moment she's never come across anything untoward that would make her feel uncomfortable. So for me it works."

London, C2DE, with parental controls

As in the quantitative research, only a minority of those with parental controls spontaneously raised anything negative about them. These tended mainly to be around perceived over-sensitivity of controls and limiting the user experience both for adults and for older children (e.g. limiting access to certain sites such as banking sites, or slowing down the computer).

"My kids are constantly shouting from their room, 'mum, why is it that I can't get through to this site?' Then they get annoyed. They find it a nuisance."

London, ABC1, with parental controls

In addition, upon further consideration a perceived lack of protection against 'contact risks' (via social networks etc.) was felt to be a limitation of parental controls.

Ultimately, almost all with technical controls claimed still to use other forms of mediation of their children's internet use (as mentioned in Section 3.2.2). They tended to regard parental controls as 'an additional pair of eyes in case of accidents or curiosity', and therefore as complementing rather than replacing other forms of intervention. This also accords with the quantitative data.

"This works as an insurance policy in case something goes wrong. But the most important thing is you have to talk to them, you have to explain."

London, C2DE, with parental controls

3.5 Reasons for non-use and lapsed use of parental controls

Ofcom's Media Literacy Tracker data, published in October 2012 in the Children and parents: media use and attitudes report, found that:

- *For parents of younger children (5-7, 8-11 years) who are without parental controls on their PC/laptop/netbook, the main reason given for not having parental controls is that the child is normally supervised (63% amongst both age groups).*
- *For parents with older children (12-15 years) who are without parental controls on their PC/laptop/network, the main reason given for not having parental controls is that they trust the child to be responsible (67%).*
- *Lack of awareness of the availability of controls or understanding on how to install or activate them is also an issue for some, cited by 10% of parents in relation to PCs, laptops or netbooks (increasing to 15% of parents who said they were not aware when specifically prompted on the issue), and rising to 21%-25% of parents for controls on fixed/mobile games consoles and 35% of parents for controls on mobile phones.*

3.5.1 Reasons for non-use of parental controls

The qualitative research found there to be a number of inter-related factors for not taking up parental controls.

The main reasons identified in the quantitative survey - that is, supervising younger children and trusting older children - were also reported by respondents in the qualitative research.

"I haven't got any parental controls on mine because I can, like, go in and check everything to see what they've accessed. Then I can sit them down and talk to them about the consequences."

Cardiff, ABC1, without parental controls (child 8-11 years)

"I think you've got to give them trust haven't you?... I think it comes down to what we were saying at the beginning about parenting... Like we are more open with our kids now and there's a level of respect and trust between each other I think."

London, C2DE, without parental controls (child 12-15 years)

In addition, this research strongly suggests that the factors mentioned previously (in Section 3.3) are key 'root causes' of the lack of take-up of parental controls:

- A lack of awareness or gaps in understanding;
- The perceived complexity of parental controls;
- The degree of effort that was expected to be required; and
- A lack of day-to-day engagement with parental controls.

Overall, the lack of engagement of some parents with technical controls appeared, to some extent, to be an outcome of the other three factors mentioned above (that is, lack of awareness, perceived complexity and expected effort). However, prior to the research, some had not even got to the point of considering what parental controls are, how they work and how to set them up. Lack of engagement was also a consequence of busy lives, the lack of day-to-day focus on

internet-related risks, and the absence in most cases of a trigger (for example a specific incident or being prompted to install at set-up). All of this contributed to some parents admitting that that they simply 'hadn't got round to considering' parental controls.

"A lot of parents nowadays have got busy jobs. Myself, I've got quite a demanding job so I'm out of the house quite a lot doing a long day, travelling, and then I come home. I think that's why a lot of parents don't think about things like that. There is too much going on with the juggling of work, house, kids and everything."

London, C2DE, without parental controls

"We obviously haven't been that bothered about looking into it, have we? I'm sure that if we'd looked into it we'd know (more about it)...I think it's because, touch wood, nothing bad has happened."

Cardiff, ABC1, without parental controls

Findings highlighted previously in this report (in Section 3.3) suggest that limitations or gaps in their understanding are a significant reason for not taking up parental controls.

By comparison, one in ten in the quantitative research said that they had not installed parental controls on PCs, laptops, or netbooks because they did not know it was possible or how to do this. However, this figure rose to 15% when parents were specifically prompted on the issue and the figures were also higher for other devices, suggesting that the findings are not as divergent as they initially appear.

In addition, some potential reasons for the apparent difference are suggested by the qualitative research. For example, when first asked, parents were not always able to articulate lack of awareness as a reason for not taking up parental controls. After more discussion, it became apparent that lack of awareness contributed to perceptions of significant effort required and to the resultant inertia in this area. In addition, the qualitative research indicates that there is a broad spectrum of understanding of parental controls, with even those who felt they were aware of parental controls often having gaps or limitations in their knowledge.

Some parents also gave other specific reasons for not installing parental controls:

- Children being either 'too young' or 'too old' for parental controls to be useful. Those with younger children claimed that will consider parental controls in the future (e.g. when their child is closer to the peak at-risk age of 10 years+ as reported in Section 3.1.5).

"It's on my mind to look into when she's a couple of years older; she's only six now."

Glasgow, C2DE, without parental controls

"There's not much point for my fifteen year old because he'd get around it. He's got the phone and the iPad and he's of an age that he's going to get around it."

Cardiff, ABC1, without parental controls

- Parental controls 'limit adult use of the internet'. This reason was predominantly given by more confident internet users and examples of the perceived limitations included preventing access to certain adult sites, as well as slowing the computer down.

"I had to switch it off because I couldn't get online banking."

Cardiff, C2DE, lapsed parental controls

- Parental controls 'do not protect children sufficiently'. Whilst not emerging as a top-of-mind barrier to implementation, upon further discussion there was seen to be a lack of an all encompassing solution covering all devices and all risks (as reported in Section 3.3.2). A related view expressed by some parents was that parental controls lacked efficacy because 'children will get around them anyway'.

"It doesn't cover iPads, I checked."

Cardiff, ABC1, without parental controls

"If they go to someone else's house you don't know what they're seeing anyway."

London, C2DE, without parental controls

- 'You can't wrap children in cotton wool' and 'exposure to the real world is a positive thing'. These sentiments tended to be expressed by parents of older children and those who reported not having parental controls because they 'trusted their children'.

"They're growing up so they're going to see things... You can't be with them 24 hours a day... And if you keep saying no it makes them more and more curious doesn't it?"

London, C2DE, no parental controls

Parents sometimes found it challenging to discuss why they had not taken up parental controls; this was because some parents found it difficult to recall precise reasons, and also because there was some feeling upon discussion that they probably should have installed controls. This led to blurring between factors which had directly contributed to the non take-up and explanations (or post-rationalisations) of the decision after the event. Most of the reasons cited above could be argued to be at least partly the latter.

Most agreed that they would install parental controls if it was very simple to do so, notwithstanding the various reasons for non-use given above. This was even true of some of the more confident internet users who claimed they had made an active and informed choice not to implement parental controls.

3.5.2 Reasons for lapsing

The sample for this research also included a small number of former or 'lapsed' users of parental controls.

Some lapsed users reported actively choosing to disable controls because their children are older or their experience of parental controls was felt to inhibit adult use (e.g. prevent access to sites or slow down computer).

"We'd still have them if they didn't restrict our lives as much. If we didn't have to turn them on and off because you wanted to buy a new book on Amazon or something."

Cardiff, ABC1, lapsed parental controls

A more significant factor appeared to be forgetting to re-install if parental controls expired or stopped working, or there was a switch to a new ISP or device within the household. This is further evidence of a lack of ongoing engagement in parental controls amongst some parents.

"I think what it is, you take it off and then you forget to put it on again."

Glasgow, C2DE, lapsed parental controls

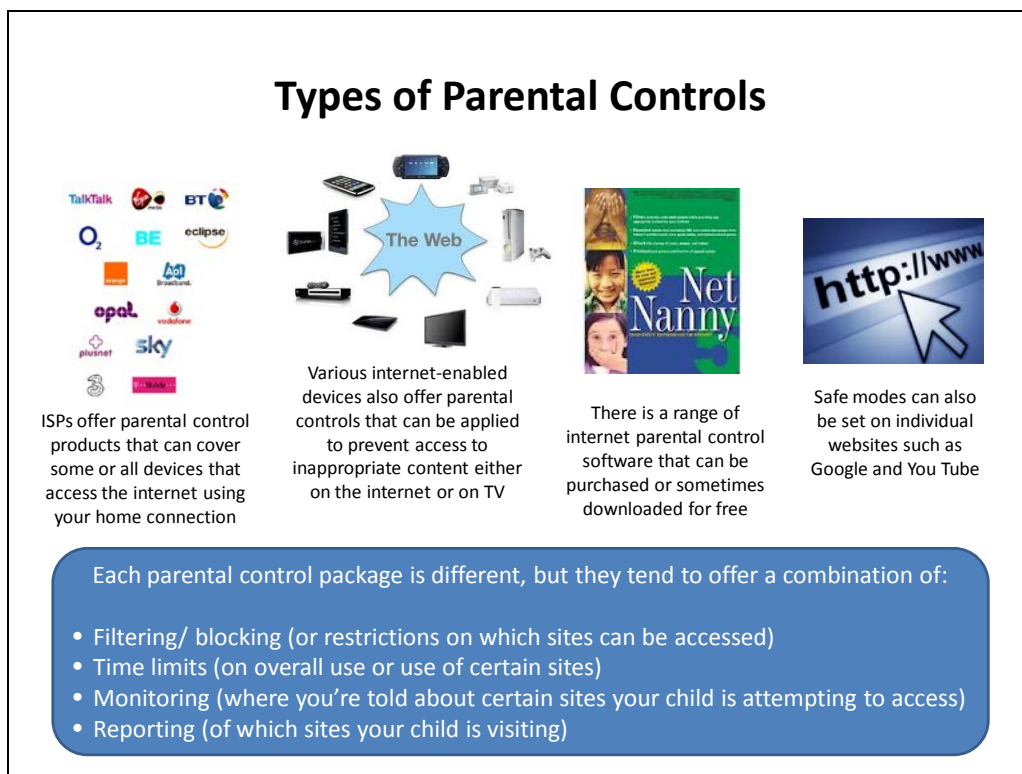
There were others who regarded themselves as active users of parental controls but who actually were not. In some cases this was because they were confused about the definition of parental controls, for example the respondent who thought the pin on her TV was an internet parental control. In other cases parents had parental controls in place but they had become obsolete, for instance because they had been installed on one device but children were now accessing the internet through other devices without parental controls set up on them.

3.6 What parents want from parental controls

3.6.1 Response to parental controls stimulus

Towards the end of the discussions, respondents were shown stimulus which summarised the different types of parental controls currently available and different features offered.

Figure 1: Parental Controls stimulus



Exposure to this stimulus further contributed to the perceived complexity of parental controls as respondents felt it would be difficult for them to compare different options and to determine the best solution for them.

On the other hand, seeing this stimulus also increased the appeal of parental controls to some. This was related to being made aware of some of the additional available functions, particularly those around monitoring and reporting on attempted website access, which were regarded as appealing value-added features.

3.6.2 Considered views on parental controls

The concluding view on parental controls, following discussion and stimulus, tended to be that parental controls offer a degree of protection at present, but have the potential to do more. Participants felt that this potential is limited by the complexity of the range of parental controls, with too many options offering slightly different things. Upon consideration, some participants also felt that individual parental controls do not currently offer all-round protection as they generally do not cover all devices and do not necessarily provide protection against contact as well as content-related risks.

When thinking about their ideal parental controls solution parents expressed a preference for a single solution for all devices, rather than picking and mixing between the different options. Most preferred the idea of an ISP-level solution overall because they expected - or hoped - it would:

- Be easiest to implement (ideally a one-button solution);
- Offer greater protection (covering multiple devices within the household); and
- Provide the possibility to access advice and help (as customers have a relationship with their ISP).

"I'd probably say I'm one of those people who would take the easy option. For example, with the Net Nanny thing (software option) I wouldn't be 100% confident that it was right. With Virgin or Sky or whatever you would know that they are the people who have set up the connection and hopefully it would only need a phone call for them to activate it."

Glasgow, C2DE, without parental controls

3.6.3 Parental wish-list for parental controls

As mentioned in the previous section, even those who had given specific reasons for not taking up parental controls said they would consider them if it was very easy to do so. This would make parental controls a 'no brainer' in the view of most.

"I just want to be told or shown what to do."

Belfast, C2DE, without parental controls

In addition, responses suggest that parents would tolerate some impact on their own use for the sake of their children's protection, as long as parental controls were straightforward both to select and install.

When asked to create their own 'ideal' for parental controls, suggestions also centred on a simpler and more cohesive system; in particular:

- A one-button solution to cover all devices; and
- Being prompted to install at set-up or having pre-installed.

"I suppose the simplest way would be just to click on something that says 'do you want parental controls switched on?'"

London, ABC1, without parental controls

"Maybe one device that does everything that goes into the house might be useful."

London, C2DE, with parental controls

"When they install the computer, they should be able to do the whole thing, you know what I mean? I'm not very technical with things like that."

London, C2DE, without parental controls

Additional suggestions were made for parental controls to:

- Include reminders to review and update if required (in a similar way to the updates offered by anti-virus software);
- Offer monitoring/reporting as well as blocking as standard;
- Protect against contact as well as content risks;

- Be easy to switch on and off in order to minimise adult impact (but not too easy for children to get around); and
- Be free (ideally) or low cost.

It should be noted that parents were given a 'blank sheet' to suggest their ideal-world solution, and therefore their suggestions are not all necessarily technically feasible or practical.

Parents felt that an improved 'product' would also need to be backed up by awareness-raising, with a variety of channels suggested by respondents including through information from schools, correspondence from ISPs, training offered in the workplace and government advertising campaigns.

"It's also about making parents aware. It's just that you sort of don't hear it in front of you, the dangers of content getting to kids and the effect this has on kids. So I think parents need to be a bit more educated."

London, ABC1, with parental controls

3.6.4 Summing up parents' views on parental controls

The qualitative research found that amongst non-users of parental controls there was a widespread lack of engagement with this technology. This was driven by a combination of:

- The perception, particularly amongst parents with lower levels of confidence about technology, that the process of selecting and installing parental controls was complex and time-consuming; and
- The fact that some of the risks of the internet, particularly exposure to inappropriate material, were not top-of-mind for many parents.

The result was that many of these parents had 'not got around' to installing parental controls. In addition, even amongst those who had installed parental controls, many had not given them much further thought and protections may have become outdated as a result of this lack of continuing engagement.

When parents were tasked to create their ideal parental control, their response focused on making it as simple as possible. Their suggestions may not all be practically possible to implement.

Finally, it is worth restating the finding (reported previously in Section 3.4) that, in line with the quantitative findings, even with an 'ideal world' solution parents in this research still felt that technical parental controls would and should not be the only mediation approach they used for keeping their children safe online, but a complementary tool. Supervision and other forms of parental mediation were felt still to be needed to prevent all of the day-to-day issues as well as risks emanating from children's internet usage.

APPENDIX

A. Full sample details

Group programme

Group	Parental controls	SEG	Internet confidence	Gender	Age of primary child	Location
Standard 1	Yes	ABC1	Higher	Mixed	8-11	London
S2	No	C2DE	Higher	Mixed	12-15	Glasgow
S3	Yes	C2DE	Lower	Mixed	12-15	Cardiff
S4	No	ABC1	Lower	Mixed	8-11	London
S5	Yes	ABC1	Higher	Mixed	5-7	London
Friendship 1	No	C2DE	Lower	Female	12-15	Belfast
F2	Yes	ABC1	Lower	Male	8-11	Glasgow
F3	No	ABC1	Higher	Couples	8-11	Cardiff
F4	Yes	C2DE	Higher	Female	12-15	London
F5	No	C2DE	Lower	Male	5-7	Belfast

Additional notes:

- 7 recruited for all mini-groups
- Group length 1¾ hours
- All had fixed internet access (through cable or wireless, mobile only not sufficient) at home and children who use the internet at home
- Additional quotas:
 - At least 3 in groups with 12-15 year old children, and 1 in groups with 8-12 year old children, allowed child to access the internet privately e.g. in bedrooms
 - In parental control groups, 1-2 previously had controls (lapsed users)
 - 1-2 in each group were sole parents
 - Mix of parents in each group whose primary child had older siblings and those who are oldest and only children
 - Each group reflected parental views on children of both genders
 - Each group reflected a mix of age of parents
 - Each group reflected a mix of Internet Service Providers (ISPs)

Depth programme

Depth	Parental controls	SEG	Internet confidence	Age of primary child	Location
1	Yes	ABC1	Higher	8-11	Greater London
2	No	C2DE	Higher	12-15	Bridgend
3	Yes	C2DE	Lower	12-15	Greater London
4	No	ABC1	Lower	8-11	Ballymena (NI)
5	Yes	ABC1	Higher	5-7	Glasgow outskirts
6	No	C2DE	Lower	12-15	Glasgow outskirts
7	Yes	ABC1	Lower	8-11	Bridgend
8	No	ABC1	Higher	8-11	Greater London
9	Yes	C2DE	Higher	12-15	Ballymena (NI)
10	No	C2DE	Lower	5-7	Greater London

Additional notes:

- Family depth length 120 minutes, split approximately 75-100 mins with parent(s) and 20-45 minutes with primary child
- All had broadband at home and children who use the internet at home
- 6 out of the 10 participants completed a parenting journal as a pre-task
- Depths were all outside city centre - either in suburban or rural locations (Greater London, Glasgow outskirts, Bridgend in Wales and Ballymena in Northern Ireland)
- Additional quotas across whole sample:
 - In at least 2 depths with parents of 12-15 year old children, and 1 depth 8-12 year old children, parent allowed child to access the internet privately e.g. in bedrooms
 - In parental control depths, 1-2 included who previously had controls (lapsed users)
 - At least 2 depths were with sole parents
 - Mix of parents represented whose primary child had older siblings as well as those who are oldest and only children
 - Mix of gender of children represented
 - Mix of age of parents represented
 - Mix of Internet Service Providers (ISPs) represented

In total, 85 parents and 10 children were involved in the research.

B. Pre-task parental journal (used in some depths)

Parenting Journal

Instructions

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research project. We will be coming and talking to you (and meeting the family!) in the next couple of weeks. For the week prior to the interview, we would like you to fill in a 'parenting journal'. This is intended to be an informal exercise where parents record, and have the opportunity to think about, their day-to-day parenting activity.

The journal will be an **online journal** and you will receive log on and password details in due course. However, if you don't feel confident in completing it online, we can send you a paper version instead.

We want you to fill in the journal for **7 days prior to your interview** - and record anything related to parenting that you feel is relevant. The most important thing to remember is that this is your 'space' and your opportunity to tell us about you as a parent before we come and meet you. There is no 'right or wrong' way of completing it as long as you spend around **half an hour** each day on it.

Be as **creative** in how you keep the journal as you like. Please consider **uploading photographs** or other images if this will help you tell the story or express your feelings.

A small group of people on the project team (including the person who will be interviewing you) will be able to look at your journal during the time you are completing it online. We may ask some **additional questions** during the course of you completing the journal, or seek some clarification on one of your entries. You will be alerted about these additional questions by email.

The questions

1) Daily questions (Please allow up to 30 minutes a day)

- We want to get a sense of your 'parenting' day. Please list and describe any events or interactions where you were in parenting mode.
- Think about all types of parent/child interaction, not just discipline (e.g. supervising activities, providing advice and encouragement etc.)
- Please answer as fully as possible and as near to the time as possible
- Be creative and download photos if it helps to tell the story

Date_____	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What happened? • Who was involved • How did you feel • What was the outcome (if any)
Morning	1 2 3 4
Afternoon	1 2 3 4
Evening	1 2 3 4

Overall	Highlights Issues or problems
---------	--------------------------------------

2) One-off questions (only need to answer once, towards the end of the journal period)

1) What are the main high points about being a parent?
2) What are the main things that preoccupy and worry you about being a parent?
3) If you could give any advice to your younger parenting self - or to another parent starting out - what would it be and why?
4) What role do you think the internet plays in your child's life?
5) What do you see as are the positive aspects of the internet in your children's life?
6) What do you see as are the negative aspects of the internet in your children's life?

C. Discussion Guides

Parental Controls Group discussion Guide

<p>Groups are of 1 hour 45 duration</p> <p>Pre-group task</p> <p>Each respondent will fill in individual household technology audit immediately prior to session (<i>aim of including all gadgets and technology is to get a sense of whether respondents are clear about what gadgets can access internet or are associated with internet access - not just PCs and laptops but also portable game players and smartphones</i>)</p> <p>Audit will detail:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Devices and gadgets in the household/how long they've had them ○ Who use them, where and for what purpose? ○ Which of these devices are connected to the internet? ○ What type of internet activity are they used for/by who and where? <p>This document will then be used for reference in 'internet usage and attitude' section of group discussion and then collected in by moderator.</p> <p>Projective toolbox is at end of document - techniques will be used if, as and when appropriate</p> <p>This guide will be used for both standard and friendship groups (dynamic rather than content is differentiator)</p>	
<p>(10 mins)</p>	<p>Introductions and warm-up</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Moderator introduction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Exploring attitudes to parenting on behalf of Ofcom ○ We want to get a sense of their personal parenting style as well as their feelings surrounding the role ○ We want to talk about children and their usage of the internet ○ Introduce Jigsaw and research process: independent research agency, not judging, views confidential, taping et cetera ● Group introduction/Warm up: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Family situation/Number of children ○ Light hearted introduction question e.g. in what way do your children/child take after you? ○ For friendship group - how did you all meet etc.

<p>(10 mins)</p>	<p>Parenting in general (Internet access will only be explored in this section if spontaneously raised by respondents):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is it like being a parent in 2012? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The pleasures and high points, frustrations and concerns... • How does the modern parenting experience compare to those faced by their parents? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What are the specific challenges of parenting today? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Prompt if necessary - local vs. wider issues (e.g. media, global factors) • How would they describe their parenting values and style? • What sort of relationship do they strive to have with their children? • (For friendship group) Is parenting something you discuss together? Do differences in approach ever come to the fore? • What advice would they give to a new parent based upon their experience? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What advice do they wish they had received? • What boundaries do they (as parents) put in place and how are these enforced/policed? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What is their approach to rules, supervision etc.? • What worries and concerns them about their children? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Vary by gender or age? ○ What parents can do in each scenario
<p>(20 mins)</p>	<p>Internet usage and attitudes</p> <p>OK we want change tack for a minute and talk about technology in the home. You'll see how this is relevant to our conversation in a few minutes!</p> <p>(Respondents should refer to household technology audit but not present it):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ When they think of internet activity in the home, what devices first come to mind? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Prompt - would they have remembered all of the devices they have if not given the list? ○ What type of devices in household that are internet connected? (e.g. Laptop, smartphone, tablet, games console, portable media player etc.) ○ Are is each of these (go through one by one) used to access internet (yes, no, don't know) ○ Main type of internet activity by location/device COLLECT IN AUDIT FOR RECORDS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How long had internet in household • Who in family uses internet and where they use it

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do different members of the family use/access the internet in different ways? • Thinking about their child, what do they tend to do online <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ General uses (surfing, communicating with friends, homework, uploading/downloading content etc) ○ What sites do they tend to visit? ○ Does internet behaviour vary by child? (for multiple child households) • Does internet behaviour vary by type of device child is using, or location of use? • How confident using internet are adults in household? How confident are children? • What are pros and cons does internet access bring for the family? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ For adults vs. children? ○ What are the opportunities and risks specifically for children? ○ What risks concern them most and why? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ If risks identified mainly related to pornography probe a about other risks e.g. violent content, anorexia/self-harm sites, cyberbullying, communication with unknown people ○ How do they feel the extent of the risk varies by age of child/gender/personality of child etc • Are they aware of any problems or issues their children or other (e.g. friends') children have encountered online? • Do they associate different risks with different access channels? (e.g. smartphone vs. laptop) • Do they associate risk with different sorts of activity e.g. Facebook vs. downloading audio visual content? • (For friendship groups) Are potential risks from the internet something you have discussed together as friends?
(20 mins)	<p>Parenting and the internet</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We now want to talk about parenting and the internet - how feel about this aspect of parenting specifically? • How involved do they get/have they been in their child's internet activity and behaviour? (allow them to interpret 'involvement' at this point) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Is it something they specifically discuss and, if so, how often and in what circumstances? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How do children react? ○ Do they monitor what their children do and, if so, how • What role should parents play in this area (if any)? • How does involvement in this area 'match' their wider parenting - e.g. more/less/same of a priority, more/less/same strictness than in other areas? • How much of a concern is this issue compared with other risks parents

	<p>consider their children are exposed to?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What specific risks are these actions intended to guard against? • Generate list of potential actions that parents might consider in this context and explore pros and cons (allow spontaneous list to be generated and prompt if necessary) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Rules (e.g. time limitations, only specific uses/websites, no social network sites et cetera) ○ Supervision/no 'private' access ○ Dialogue/warning - has there been a conversation and what was said? ○ Monitoring (e.g. checking browsing history, being friends with them on social networking sites, logging in with their passwords, using reporting functions on parental controls) ○ Technical or parental controls (If mentioned probe for what sort of controls they mean) • Who else gets involved in this area e.g. school providing internet safety education? • Does the need for parental involvement depend on the child (age, gender, personality etc)
<p>20 mins</p>	<p>Parental controls -Spontaneous awareness and understanding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What kinds of 'technical' controls can be applied by parents to restrict their children's internet access? • How found out about them (e.g. ISP, word of mouth)? • How do they work? • How do they feel about parental controls? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Pros and cons in general ○ Pros and cons of different types • (For friendship groups) are these types of parental controls something you have discussed together and, if so, in what context? <p>If they have parental controls:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Type(s) chosen and rationale for choice: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Did they ask advice as to which type of control to select and, if so, from who? ○ What type of controls were considered and were any rejected? • What prompted installation? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Incident? ○ Just in case? • Within 2 parent families who is seen as responsible for decision? • Who installed and how was this experience? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Probe for any installation or usage issues

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Did they seek help and from who? • When implemented/by who (e.g. new device/ISP etc) • Perceived effectiveness/satisfaction criteria (and how is this assessed) • How did they feel once the controls were installed? (e.g. sense of relief, having 'done the right thing, 'job done' etc) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Has installation allowed them to put concerns to back of mind? ○ Have they replaced need for other type of mediation/monitoring? • Did they inform/ have conversation with children about them? How do they feel the children felt about the installation? (Annoyed/reassured etc.) • Did older siblings get involved - and in what role? <p>If no parent controls:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have they considered parental controls as an option? What was the thinking process they went through? • Some parents opt for parental controls whereas others do not - what might explain these differences? • Do they associate a particular type of parent or parental style with installation of parental controls? • Would they consider getting controls in the future: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ When? ○ In what circumstances? ○ What type of controls? • To what extent was the decision not to install parental controls an active, considered one? • What other reasons may there be for parents not installing these controls (listen out and prompt if necessary on): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Lack of awareness ○ Didn't get around to it (inertia) ○ Technological barriers ○ Low priority (other more pressing parental concerns) ○ Reliance on other approaches (conversation/time limits etc) ○ Trust/feeling child is sensible or benefits from freedom • If lapsed probe on reasons (kids older, controls too limiting, product shortcomings etc) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What , if anything, would persuade them to re-consider parental controls?
(15 mins)	<p>Parental controls - briefing</p> <p>Researcher will hand out parent controls stimulus document and read it out</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reassure that not a test - don't expect people to know all the different types

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reactions to range - does knowledge change attitudes to parental controls? • Perceived pros and cons of each tool? Overall preferences? • How would they describe available choices to friends in most simple manner? • Explain that not saying that parental controls are the only/best solution to internet safety but only one method (alongside others discussed earlier) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What if anything would persuade them personally to opt for parental controls? ○ What if anything might increase take up of parental controls on societal level (currently only 40% of parents have these in place in the UK)? <p>Summing up</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Round group: Main things taken from discussion and if/how changed mind on anything
Close	<p>THANK AND CLOSE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thank for all input and hard work!

Parental Controls 'Family interview' Discussion Guide

<p>90 -120 minute session comprising:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to family • Interview with parents 60- 90 minutes • 'Technology house tour' • 20- 45 minutes interviewing children <p>Online journals will be used as stimulus/source of probes in relevant interviews</p>	
<p>(10 mins)</p>	<p>Introductions and warm-up</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moderator introduction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Exploring attitudes to parenting on behalf of Ofcom ○ We want to get a sense of their personal parenting style as well as their feelings surrounding the role ○ We want to talk about children and their usage of the internet ○ For those who have completed journals, explain we will refer to them for clarification/ elaboration ○ Introduce Jigsaw and research process: independent research agency, not judging, views confidential, taping ○ Explain presence of videographer (where necessary) and reassure about usage of the film
<p>(30 mins)</p>	<p>Parenting in general (Internet access will only be explored in this section if spontaneously raised by respondents):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How would they describe their parenting style and approach? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How has this evolved over the years and why? • Comparison with their parents generation style and approach - similarities/differences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What are the specific challenges of modern parenting? • Who do they regard as their parenting role models and why? • (In 2 parent families) Different approaches and roles between partners? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Areas of disagreement/conflict • Parenting pleasures and high points: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ (for multiple child families) Has their parenting experience varied between children (by age/gender/personality?) • Frustrations and challenges: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ (for multiple child families) Has their parenting experience varied between children (by age/gender/personality?) • What do they think they get right as parents Vs what do they feel they need to work on?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In terms of discipline are there things which they tend to be more relaxed about Vs things that they are very hot on? • What boundaries do they (as parents) put in place and how are these enforced/policed? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What is their approach to rules and supervision etc? • What worries and concerns them about their children? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Vary by gender or age? ○ What parents can do in each scenario • What things worry or concern their children - and how do they react as parents? • Explore reality of day-to-day parenting with examples (reference journal where completed): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Highs/lows ○ Areas of friction ○ Approach to rules, supervision
(20 mins)	<p>Internet usage and attitudes</p> <p>OK we want change tack for a minute and talk about technology in the home. You'll see how this is relevant to our conversation in a few minutes!</p> <p>'Technology house tour':</p> <p>Respondent take moderator on a 'technology house tour' to show where interaction with technology takes place:</p> <p><i>Explain we want to get a sense of the where technology is used, what type of technology, by who and where.</i></p> <p><i>(Aim of including all gadgets and technology is to get a sense of whether respondents are clear about what gadgets can access internet or are associated with internet access - not just PC's and laptops but also portable game players and Smartphones)</i></p> <p><i>Where relevant probe on internet usage by 'location':</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Communal Vs individual internet access, areas used by different members of family etc ○ Different modes of access used in different locations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Presence/location of laptop, Smartphone, Tablet, games consoles, portable media player etc <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How would they describe the family's relationship with the internet? • When did the first get access and how has usage evolved over the years? • Which ISP do they use? • How do they anticipate family usage changing in the future? • How do different members of the family use/access the internet in different ways? • General uses - Thinking about the children, what do they tend to do online (surfing, communicating with friends, homework, uploading/downloading

	<p>content etc)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What sites does the child tend to visit? • Does behaviour vary by child? (for multiple child households) • Does internet behaviour vary by type of device child is using, or by location of use? • How confident are using internet are adults in the household? How confident are parents? • What are pros and cons does internet access bring for the family? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ For adults Vs children? ○ What are the opportunities and risks? ○ What risks concern them most and why? ○ How do they feel the extent of the risk varies by age of child/gender/personality of child etc • Can they imagine what life would be like if the family home was completely were cut off from the internet? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What would be the advantages and disadvantages? ○ How would life for the parents change? ○ How would life for the children change? ○ What would be the positive impacts on behaviour • Do they associate different risks with different access channels?
(15 mins)	<p>Parenting and the internet</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We now want to talk about parenting and the internet...how do you feel about this aspect of parenting specifically? • How do they know what children do online? Is it something they discuss openly or monitor in anyway? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Monitoring (e.g. checking browsing history, being friends with them on social networking sites, logging in with their passwords, using reporting functions on parental controls) • How involved do they get/have they been in their child's internet activity and behaviour? (Allow them to interpret 'involvement' and at this point) • What specific risks - are these actions intended to guard against? • What other methods or types of parental involvement are they aware of and which have the considered/in past? (Allow for spontaneous mention and probe if necessary - assess pros and cons of each) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Rules (e.g. time limitations, only specific use/websites, no social network sites et cetera) ○ Supervision/no 'private' access ○ Dialogue/warning - has there been a conversation and what was said? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How often does conversation come up and in what circumstances?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How do children react? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 'Technical controls' (If mentioned probe for what sort of controls they mean) • Who else gets involved in this area? e.g. school providing internet safety education? • Does the need for parental involvement depend on the child (age, gender, personality et cetera) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How is this managed if children are different ages?
<p>20 mins</p>	<p>Parental controls</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What kinds of technical controls are you aware of can be applied by parents to restrict children's internet access? • How have they found out about them? (e.g. word of mouth, ISP etc) • Types available/used? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Pros and cons in general ○ Pros and cons of different types • Awareness and knowledge sources <p>If they have parental controls:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Type(s) chosen and rationale for choice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Did they ask advice as to which type of control to select and from who? • What prompted installation? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Incident? ○ Just in case? • Within 2 parent families who is seen as responsible for decision? (E.g. is it Father because it is deemed a technical?) • Who installed and how was this experience? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Probe for any installation or usage issues ○ Did they seek help and from who? • When implemented/by who (e.g. new device/ISP et cetera) • Perceived effectiveness/satisfaction criteria (and how is this assessed) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Probe for any issues with over or under blocking of content</i> ○ <i>Does it interfere with ability of others to use the internet?</i> • How did they feel once they were installed? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Has installation allowed them to put concerns to back of mind? ○ Has they replaced need for other type of mediation/monitoring? • Did older siblings get involved - and in what role? • Did they inform/ have conversation with children about them? How do they

	<p>feel the children felt about the installation? (Annoyed/reassured etc)</p> <p>If no parent controls:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have they considered parental controls as an option? What was the thinking process they went through? • Some parents opt for parental controls whereas others do not - what might explain these differences? • Do they associate a particular type of parent or parental style with installation of parental controls? • Would they consider getting controls in the future: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ When? ○ In what circumstances? ○ What type of controls? • To what extent was the decision not to install parental controls an active, considered one? • What other reasons may there be for parents not installing these controls (listen out and prompt if necessary on): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Lack of awareness ○ Inertia ○ Technological barriers ○ Low priority (other more pressing parental concerns) ○ Reliance on other approaches (conversation/time limits etc) ○ Trust/feeling child is sensible or benefits from freedom • Would they consider in future and if so when, why and what type • If lapsed probe on reasons (kids older, controls too limiting, product shortcomings, software lapse etc) <p>(Time allowing) Researcher will hand out parent controls stimulus document and read it out</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Reactions to range - does knowledge change attitudes to Parental controls ? ○ Perceived pros and cons of each tool? Overall preferences? • What, if anything, would persuade them personally to opt for parental controls? • What, if anything, would increase take up of parental controls on societal level?
<p>20 - 45 mins</p>	<p>Mini-depth with child</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current internet behaviour (if possible researcher to compare with parental impression): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Where, when, how long, types of uses, websites • Encourage child to show the researcher some of the cool stuff they like to

	<p>do on the internet</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What they like best about the internet? What don't they like? • Favourite site of the moment? • Have they ever seen anything on the internet that they haven't liked or have made them feel uncomfortable? • Have they ever seen anything that felt too old for them? • How involved do their parents get in their internet activity? (if possible researcher to compare this with what parents have said) • Do they think their parents know what they do when they are online? • Do they talk to their parents about what they do on the internet? • Who have you spoken or listened to about online safety: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Friends, parents, TV, school teachers etc • Has it been discussed at school? • How do they feel when their parents do get involved? • Do they know what parental controls are? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Explore levels of knowledge and understanding ○ What are their feelings about them? ○ What difference would these controls make to their internet experience/activities ○ If controls are installed and they are aware of this - how does it make them feel? (Reassured/resentful etc.) • How do they feel about their parents installing these sorts of controls? • How might it impact their internet activity/experience? <p>For older children only:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do they think young people can and should be protected online? • Do they think that parental controls are effective in this regard?
<p>CLOSE</p>	<p>THANK AND CLOSE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thank for all input and hard work!

D. Stimulus

Technology Audit

	Tick if you have this	Tick if your child/ren use it	Tick if it used to access the internet
Desktop computer/PC			
Laptop computer/netbook			
Mobile phone/smartphone (e.g. iPhone, Blackberry)			
Tablet computer (e.g. iPad)			
Portable media player (e.g. iPod Touch)			
E-reader (e.g. Kindle)			
Games console connected to a TV (e.g. Playstation, Xbox, Wii)			
Portable or handheld games player (e.g. Nintendo DS/Sony PSP)			
Other type of device (WRITE IN) _____			

Explanation of Parental Controls

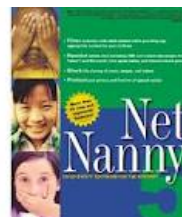
Types of Parental Controls



ISPs offer parental control products that can cover some or all devices that access the internet using your home connection



Various internet-enabled devices also offer parental controls that can be applied to prevent access to inappropriate content either on the internet or on TV



There is a range of internet parental control software that can be purchased or sometimes downloaded for free



Safe modes can also be set on individual websites such as Google and You Tube

Each parental control package is different, but they tend to offer a combination of:

- Filtering/ blocking (or restrictions on which sites can be accessed)
- Time limits (on overall use or use of certain sites)
- Monitoring (where you're told about certain sites your child is attempting to access)
- Reporting (of which sites your child is visiting)