

# Digital friendships:

the role of technology in  
young people's relationships



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### About

This report has been published by the UK Safer Internet Centre and launched for Safer Internet Day 2018.

The UK Safer Internet Centre ([www.saferinternet.org.uk](http://www.saferinternet.org.uk)) is a partnership of three leading organisations; Childnet, the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) and South West Grid for Learning (SWGfL) co-funded by the European Commission and part of the joint Insafe-INHOPE networks. Coordinated in the UK by the UK Safer Internet Centre, Safer Internet Day sees over a thousand organisations get involved to help promote the safe, responsible and positive use of digital technology for children and young people.

### Methodology

The survey was conducted online by Censuswide between 15-18th December 2017 with a representative sample of 2000 young people aged 8-17 years olds in the United Kingdom.

Censuswide is a full-service research consultancy specialising in consumer and B2B research. This research was conducted on Censuswide’s education network and participants under the age of 16 were contacted via their parents or guardians.

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## Foreword

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**Will Gardner, Director, UK Safer Internet Centre/CEO, Childnet**

The internet has opened new ways for people to connect with their friends and family and this report reveals how it plays a central role in young people's friendships.

What is clear from our research is the diversity of ways in which young people connect and interact with their friends online. From maintaining a Snapchat streak and expressing themselves with selfies and emojis, to chatting with friends while gaming online.

Technology is embedded throughout their relationships and the majority of young people in our survey said that they would feel isolated if they couldn't talk to friends via technology.

With this growing prominence, we see that technology is beginning to shift the expectations that young people have around what makes a good friend.

Young people now believe it is important for friends to reply to their messages once they've seen them, and on average say that you need to maintain a Snapchat streak for at least 73 days to show you are good friends – over two months of images being exchanged daily on Snapchat between two people.

These new norms can give rise to new pressures to be 'always on', while the public nature of digital friendship can magnify the pressure to be popular.

Exclusion and meanness are a common experience, with around half of young people we surveyed saying they had experienced this online in the last year. Over two in five young people said they had felt anxious or worried in the last week because of something online.

Despite the challenges of navigating the complexities of friendship in a digital age, it is clear from this research that the internet also plays a hugely positive role in young people's lives.

The overwhelming majority of young people are regularly experiencing positive emotions and people being kind to them when they're online. Technology provides an important way for them to support their peers who are going through difficult times.

It is this vision, of a kind, respectful and supportive online community, that we are all striving to make a reality for every young person.

In this survey young people told us loud and clear that they want their parents, carers, teachers and friends to help them with this.

This Safer Internet Day we all have an opportunity to move one step closer to making this a reality for all young people. A better internet starts with us.

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## Executive Summary

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For Safer Internet Day 2018, the UK Safer Internet Centre commissioned an online survey of 2000 young people aged 8-17 years, which was conducted by Censuswide.

The findings reveal how central technology is to young people's relationship and the many different platforms they are using to interact with each other. It also highlights both the positive and negative role that technology can play in young people's relationships and that whilst they are proactively helping to build a better internet, they also want support from the adults in their lives to do so.

### Technology's role in young people's friendships

The most popular platforms 8-17 year olds are using to chat to their friends on a daily basis are YouTube (41%), WhatsApp (32%), Snapchat (29%), Instagram (27%) and Facebook or Facebook Messenger (26%).

#### Being online is key for many young people's relationships:

- Over half (54%) of respondents aged 8-17 said they would feel isolated if they couldn't talk to their friends via technology
- Almost two in five (39%) said they have made friends online that they wouldn't have met otherwise

### Changing friendships in a digital world

Young people aged 8-17 are using a variety of methods to express themselves online with emojis being the most popular (84%) followed by slang terms (72%), facial expressions in selfies (70%) and images (63%).

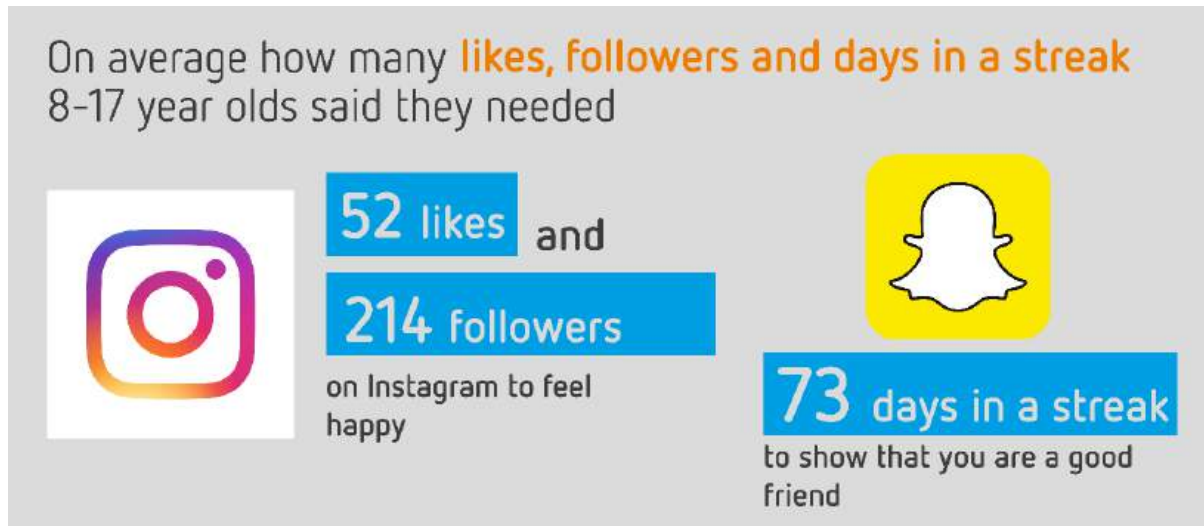
#### There are also certain expectations being formed in young people's online relationships:

- Over seven in ten (73%) think it's important for their friends to **reply to their messages** once they've seen them
- 60% of young people think it's important to be **included in group chats** by their friends
- Over half (51%) of respondents aged 8-17 think it's important that their friends **like their status updates or posts**
- More than two in five (43%) think it's important for their friends to **ignore people that they don't like**

#### Popularity, status and self-esteem can play a role in how young people interact with each other:

- Two in five (40%) respondents say they **feel left out** when people post things they haven't been included in

- Over a third (36%) of young people think that other people's lives **look more exciting** than theirs on social media, with girls more likely to feel this (40%) in comparison to boys (33%)



### Navigating friendships: the positives and negatives

The majority of young people are having positive experiences and interactions online:

- In the last year, more than four in five (83%) of 8-17s have experienced people being **kind** to them online
- 68% of young people said that **chatting to their friends** online cheers them up
- In the last week, young people aged 8-17 say that because of something online they had felt **happy** (89%), **excited** (82%) and **inspired** (74%)

However many young people are having negative experiences online:

- In the last year, almost half (49%) of 8-17s have experienced people being **mean** to them online
- 47% of young people say that in the last year, people have **excluded** them online
- In the last week, young people aged 8-17 say that because of something online they have felt **sad** (56%), **angry** (52%) and **worried or anxious** (42%)

### Strategies and support in a digital world

Young people are managing their online lives in a number of ways:

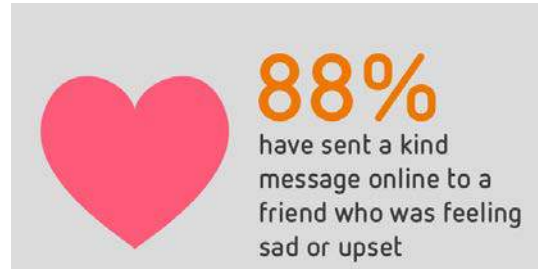
When asked what they would be most likely do if someone upset them online, young people aged 8-17 said:

1. Do something else offline that I enjoy (65%)
2. Do something else online that I enjoy (63%)

3. Speak to a parent or carer (62%)
4. Speak to friends (60%)
5. Report it or block the person (58%)

### They are supporting each other and want to build a better internet:

- In the last year, 88% respondents said they had sent a kind message online to a friend who was feeling upset
- Four in five (80%) of those surveyed said they have stood up for their friend online when other people were being mean
- Almost four in five (78%) young people aged 8-17 believe that every person on the internet has a responsibility to be respectful



### Young people want support from the adults in their lives but can face barriers:

- Over three-quarters (77%) of respondents aged 8-17 say that they want their parents and carers to be there for them if something worries online
- More than seven in ten (72%) of those surveyed want their school to teach them about cyberbullying and how to manage friendships online
- However, almost three in five (58%) respondents aged 8-17 say that they feel that teachers don't always understand their online lives and 28% don't feel like their parents or carers do
- A third (33%) of young people report that they sometimes don't speak up about online worries as they are scared that they will get into trouble.

## Conclusions

This report shines a light on both the positive and negative role that technology can play in young people's relationships. It demonstrates how digital technology is embedded throughout young people's friendships, across a range of platforms and diverse communication methods. It shows how young people want support from their friends, family and school to help them navigate the complexities of digital friendship and the risks and pressures that may arise.

It is essential that we collectively take action to help young people harness the positive opportunities offered by technology for connection, self-expression and support, while empowering them with strategies to cope with any negatives, and help to create an online environment that seeks to promote young people's wellbeing.



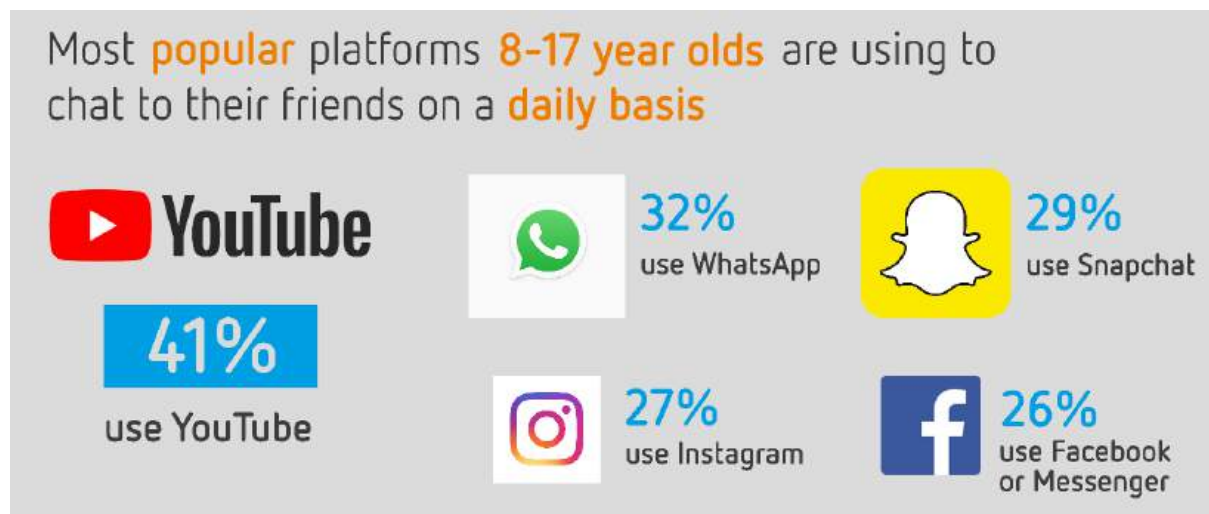
## Technology's role in young people's friendships

A variety of different platforms are being used by children and young people to communicate

Technology plays a significant role in the way that young people communicate and develop friendships. The findings reveal that many children and young people are using a variety of online platforms on a daily basis to communicate with their friends, as well as to create new friendships and maintain existing ones. They are using a wide range of online platforms to do this, ranging from social media, instant messaging, gaming networks, video chats and livestreaming.

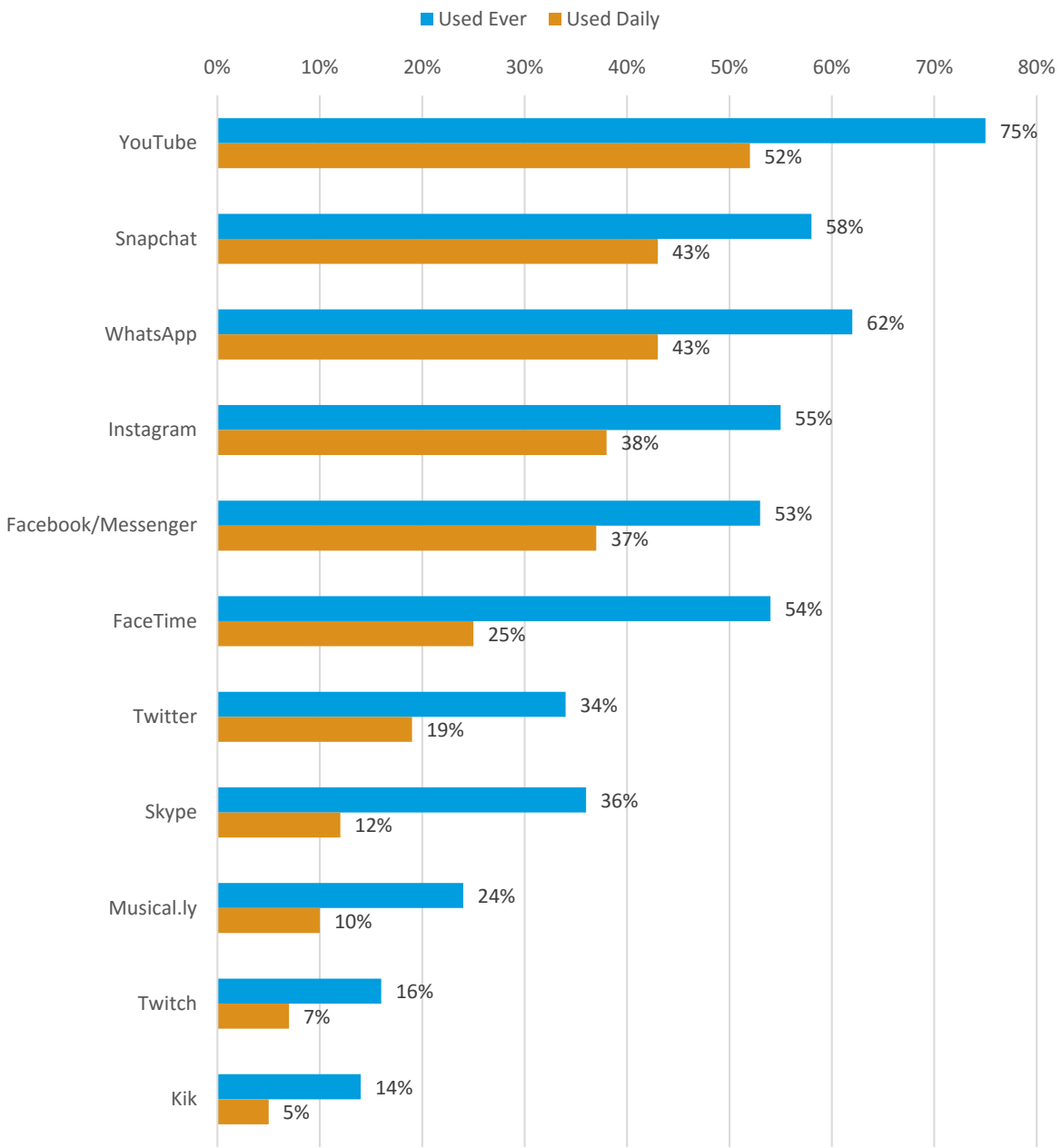
### How young people are using technology to communicate

Over half (52%) of respondents aged 8-17 said they have used YouTube to chat to their friends on a daily basis, with 75% saying they have ever used it, making it the most popular platform to communicate. The next most popular platforms are WhatsApp (43%), Snapchat (43%), Instagram (38%) and Facebook/Messenger (37%).



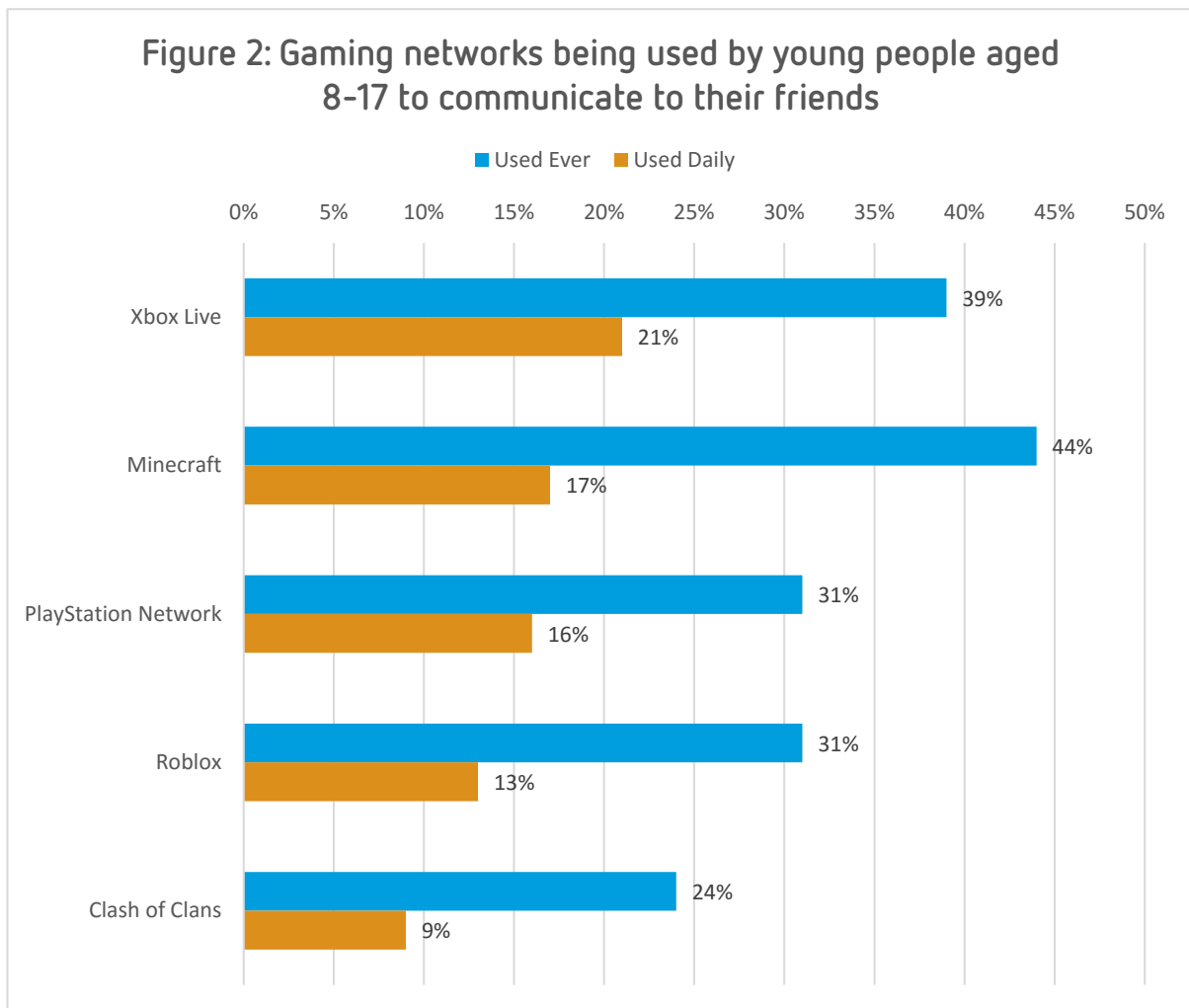
Q: How often do you use the following online services to chat with your friends? Matrix Rating Scale (One Answer Per Row). Answer choices: Hourly, Daily, Weekly, Monthly, Less than once a month, Never. Base: All respondents (2,000 young people aged 8-17 years)

Figure 1: Social media and online platforms being used by young people aged 8-17 to communicate to their friends



Q: How often do you use the following online services to chat with your friends? Matrix Rating Scale (One Answer Per Row). Answer choices: Hourly, Daily, Weekly, Monthly, Less than once a month, Never. Base: All respondents (2,000 young people aged 8-17 years)





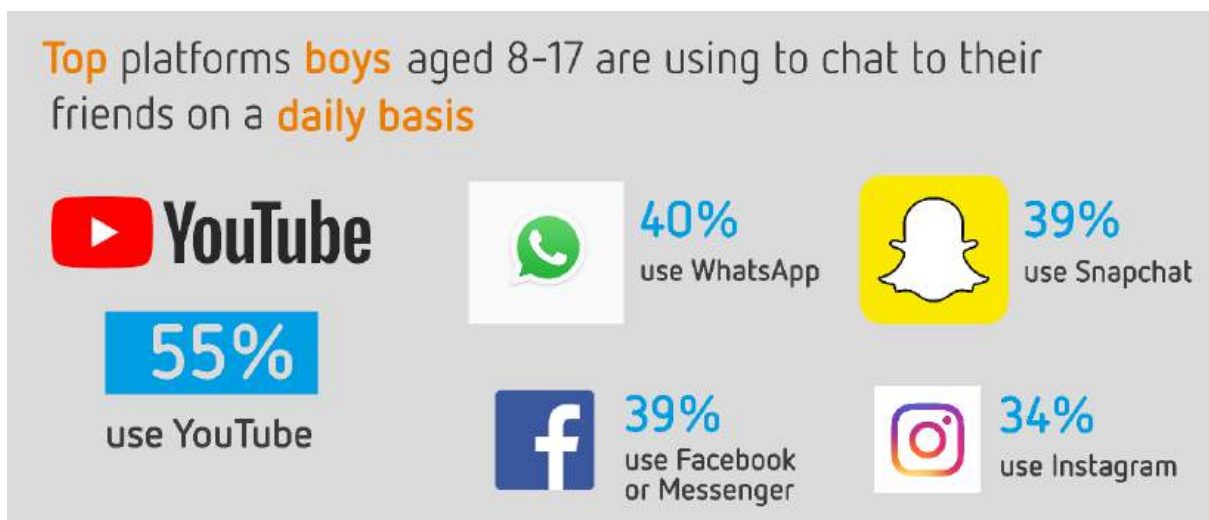
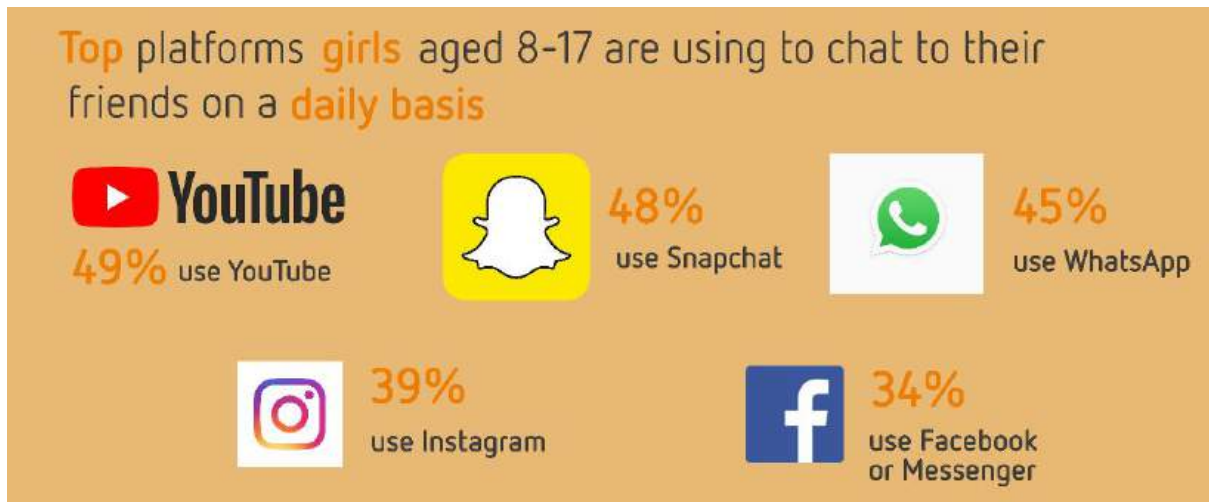
Q: How often do you use the following online services to chat with your friends? Matrix Rating Scale (One Answer Per Row). Answer choices: Hourly, Daily, Weekly, Monthly, Less than once a month, Never. Base: All respondents (2,000 young people aged 8-17 years)

### Boys more likely to use gaming networks and girls more likely to use social media to communicate with friends

There were noticeable gender trends when looking at how young people are communicating online. Girls were more likely to use Snapchat to talk to their friends (48%) in comparison to boys (39%). They were also more likely to use Instagram (42%) in comparison to boys (34%).

Boys were more likely to use platforms such as Xbox Live (32% of boys compared to 9% of girls), PlayStation Network (24% of boys compared to 8% of girls) and Minecraft (22% of boys compared to 12% of girls).

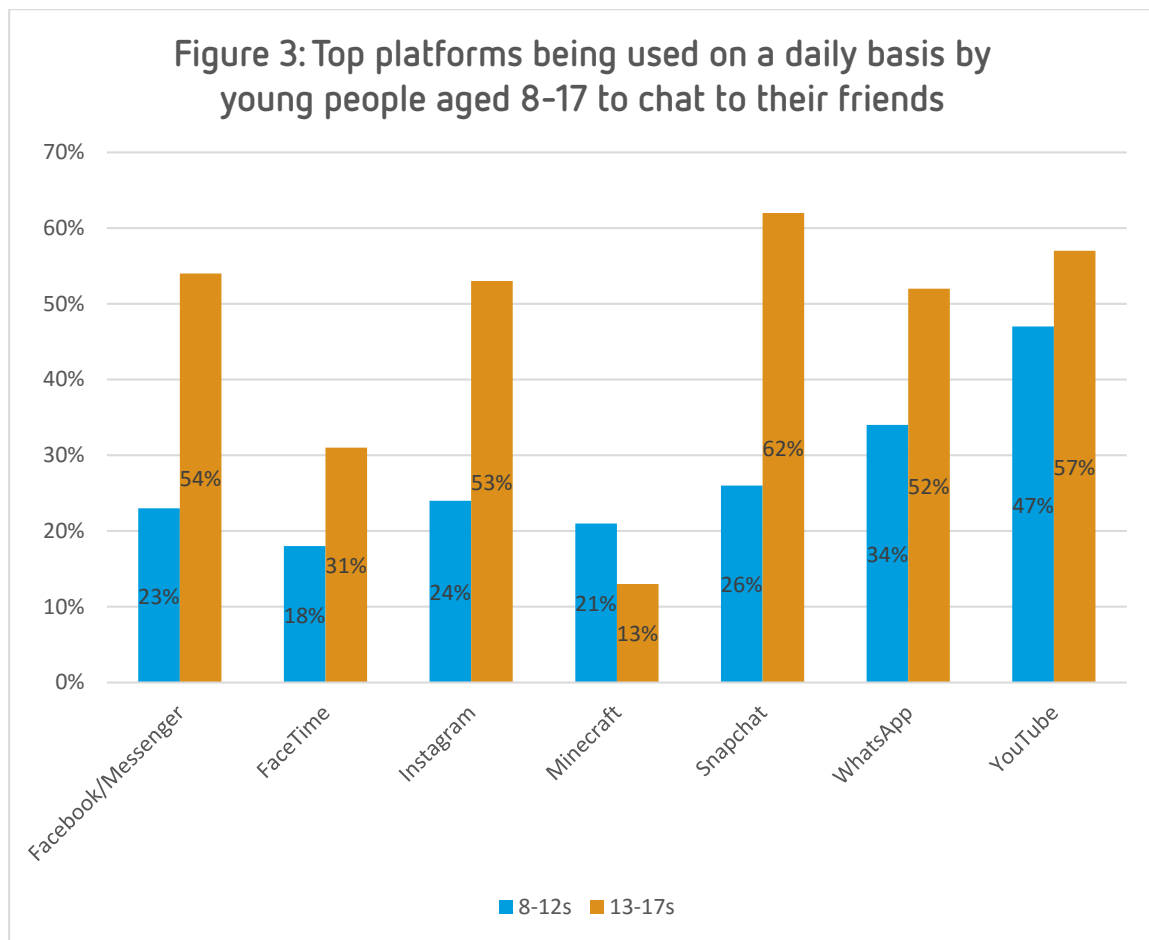
Despite these differences, the top five platforms used by girls and boys to communicate with their friends are broadly the same.



Teens are more likely to communicate with friends online, although many 8-12s are still using online platforms regularly

Respondents aged 13-17 are more likely than 8-12 year olds to use online platforms to communicate to their friends, and on a more regular basis. The biggest age difference is in the use of Snapchat, with 62% of 13-17s using this compared to 26% of 8-12s. Minecraft was the only service that 8-12 year olds were more likely to use (21%) than teens (13%).

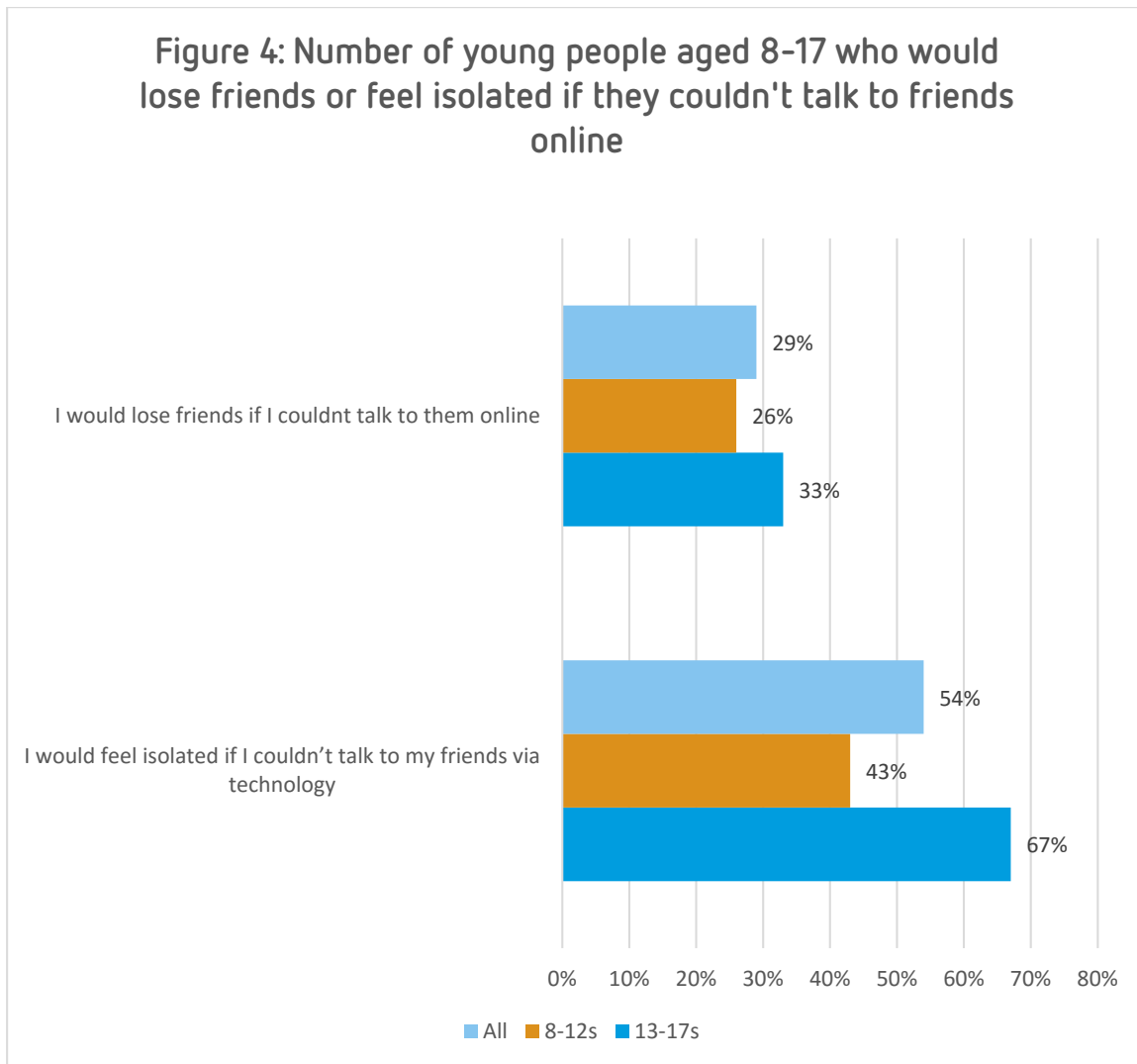
However, many 8-12s are also using online platforms regularly. The five most popular services being used by 8-12s on a daily basis are YouTube, WhatsApp, Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook/Messenger and Minecraft. This is despite a minimum age of 13 on many of these social media services such as Snapchat, Instagram and Facebook and WhatsApp.



Q: How often do you use the following online services to chat with your friends? Matrix Rating Scale (One Answer Per Row). Answer choices: Hourly, Daily, Weekly, Monthly, Less than once a month, Never. Base: All respondents (2,000 young people aged 8-17 years)

## Technology plays a central role for young people in forming and maintaining friendships

For many young people, being online is key to them forming and maintaining their friendships. Over half of respondents aged 8-17 years (54%) reported that they would feel isolated if they couldn’t talk to their friends via technology.



Q: How much do you agree with the following statements? Matrix Rating Scale (One Answer Per Row). Answer choices: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither agree or disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree. Base: All respondents (2,000 young people aged 8-17 years)

Technology plays a more central role in teens' online friendships, with 67% of 13-17s reporting that they would feel isolated if they couldn't talk to their friends via technology in comparison to 43% of 8-12s.

Girls and boys were as likely to report that they would lose friends or feel isolated if they couldn't talk to their friends online.

Many young people are finding new friends online, with 39% of young people saying they have made friends online that they wouldn't have met otherwise. Teens are more likely to report this, with 49% of 13-17s saying they have made friends online that they wouldn't have met otherwise, in comparison to 30% of 8-12s. Boys were more likely to have made new friends online (42%) than girls (35%).

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## Changing friendships in a digital world

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### Technology is changing what friendship means and how young people express themselves

The way friendships are played out in the digital world is changing how young people express themselves, how they define 'good' friendships and interact with each other.

From the regular use of emojis to express how they feel to the online expectations many young people have of each other, it's clear that young people are having to navigate new friendship norms and complex friendship dynamics. At times, these online friendships can bring pressures, with pressure to be popular and the expectation to be 'always-on' playing a part in how young people form and maintain their relationships online.

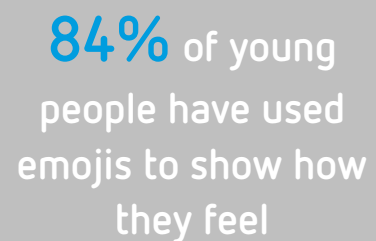
### Expression through technology

#### Methods young people are using to express themselves

Young people are harnessing online platforms to express themselves and communicate their feelings. Two in five (40%) respondents aged 8-17 say that it is easier to tell someone how they feel online than in person.

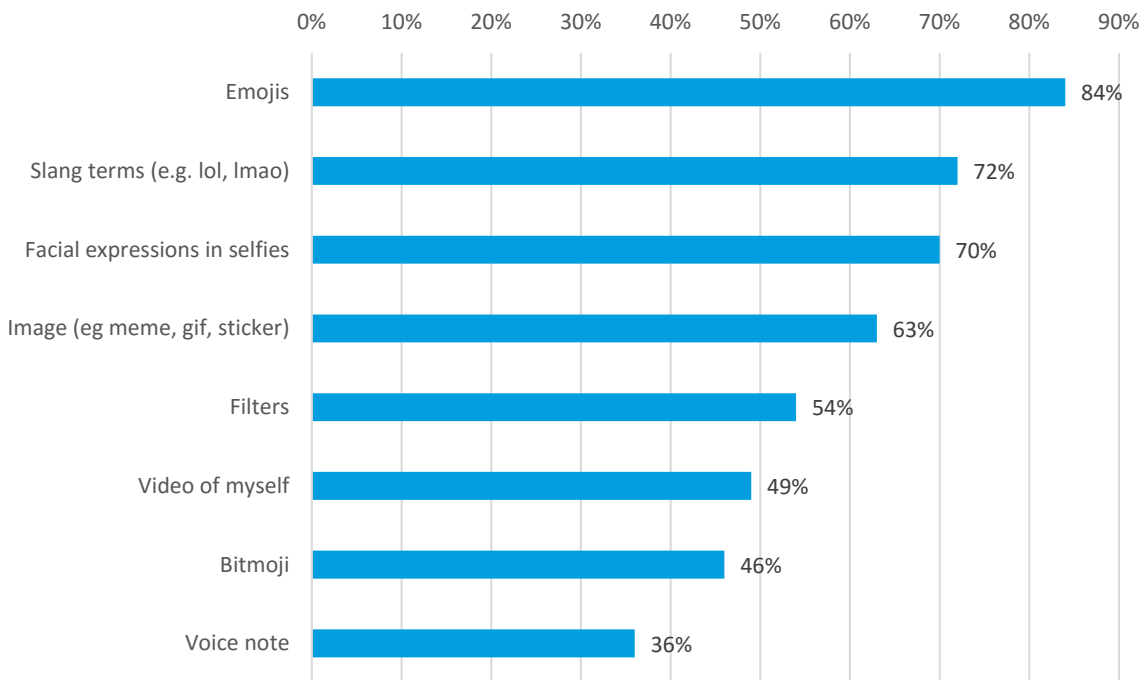
Young people are using a variety of different methods online to communicate how they feel, with emojis (84%), slang terms (72%), facial expressions in selfies (70%) and images (63%) being the most common way of expressing feelings online amongst 8-17 year olds.

Over one in ten (13%) say that they use emojis all the time, with 17% reporting that they use them most of the time.



**84%** of young people have used emojis to show how they feel

Figure 5: Variety of methods young people aged 8-17 have ever used to communicate their feelings online



Q: How often do you use the following to communicate how you are feeling? Matrix Rating Scale (One Answer Per Row). Answer choices: Never, Occasionally, Often, Most of the time, All of the time. Base: All respondents (2,000 young people aged 8-17 years)

### Girls are more likely to express their feelings online

Girls are more likely to have communicated their feelings online using a variety of methods. Almost nine in ten (88%) of girls say they have used emojis to communicate their feelings in comparison to 79% of boys. Girls were also more likely than boys to use slang terms (75% of girls in comparison to 68% of boys), facial expressions in selfies (77% of girls in comparison to 64% of boys) and images (66% of girls in comparison to 60% of boys) to communicate their emotions. The greatest gender difference was in the use of filters to communicate feelings, with girls more likely to use these (63%) in comparison to boys (46%).

### Glossary

**Filter** – An overlay to alter your images or videos

**Bitmoji** – A personal emoji designed to represent yourself

**Voice note** – A short recorded voice message sent through a messaging app

### How teens are using technology to express their feelings

Respondents aged 13-17 years were more likely than 8-12 year olds to use emojis, slang terms, facial expressions in selfies, images and filters to communicate their feelings. The greatest age differences were in the use of images (71% of 13-17s in comparison to 56% of 8-12s) and filters (62% of 13-17s in comparison to 47% of 8-12s).

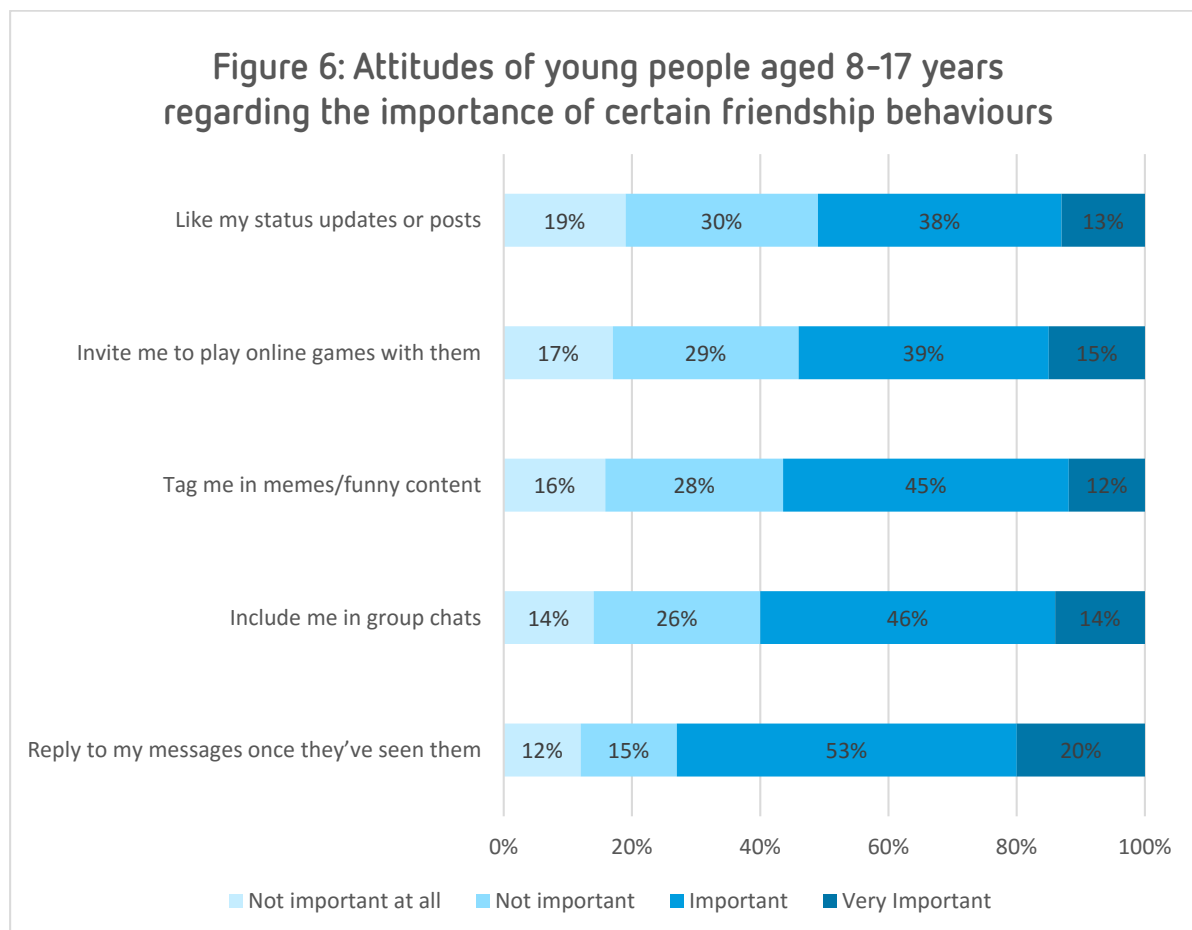
## Online expectations

The research found that many young people had certain expectations of how their friends demonstrated their friendship online, both privately and publicly.

Over half (51%) of respondents aged 8-17 said they think it’s important that their friends like their status updates or posts, with girls more likely (56%) to think this than boys (47%).

Over seven in 10 (73%) young people said they think it’s important for their friends to reply to their messages once they’ve seen them, with 60% saying they think it’s important to be included in group chats by their friends.

Those aged 13-17 years are more likely (82%) to expect their friends to reply to messages once they’ve seen them in comparison to 8-12s (65%). Boys are more likely (64%) to think it’s important for friends to invite them to play online games with them in comparison to girls (42%).

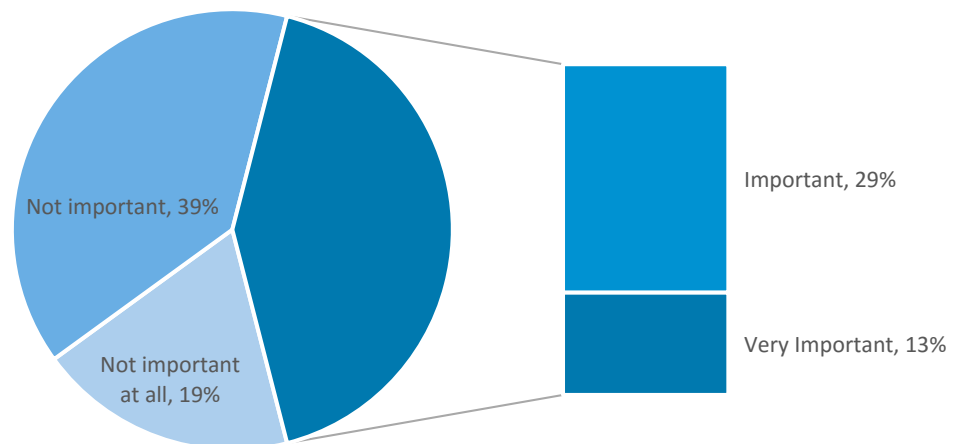


Q: How important do you think it is for your friends to do the following on social media or messaging apps? Matrix Rating Scale (One Answer Per Row). Answer choices: Very important, Important, Not important, Not important at all. Base: All respondents (2,000 young people aged 8-17 years)

More than two in five (43%) of those surveyed think it’s important for their friends to ignore people that they don’t like, with more than one in eight (13%) thinking it’s very important to do so.



Figure 7: Number of young people aged 8-17 who think it is important for their friends to ignore people they don't like online



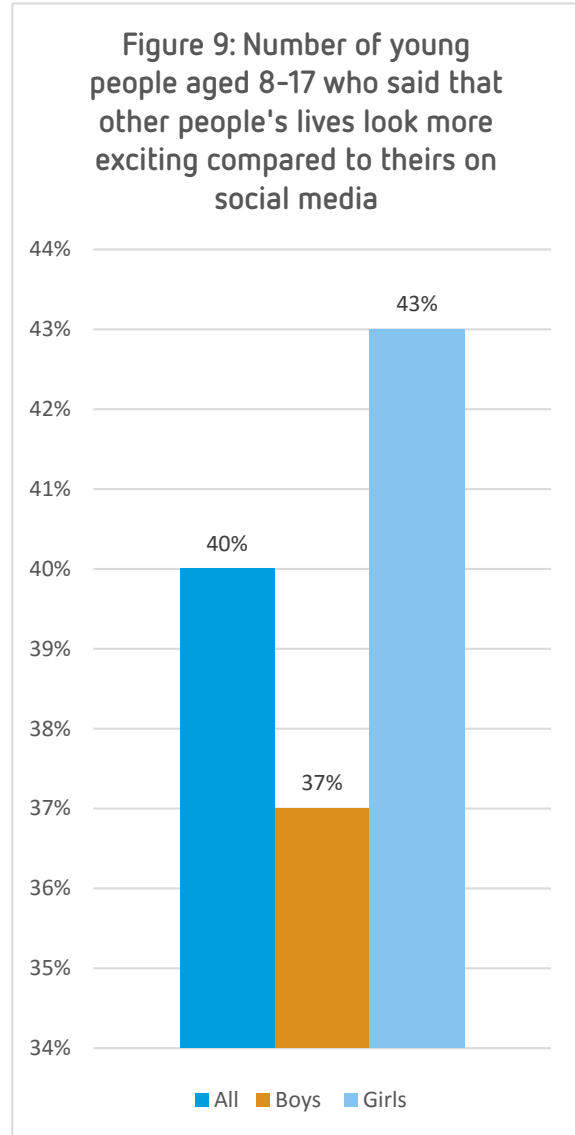
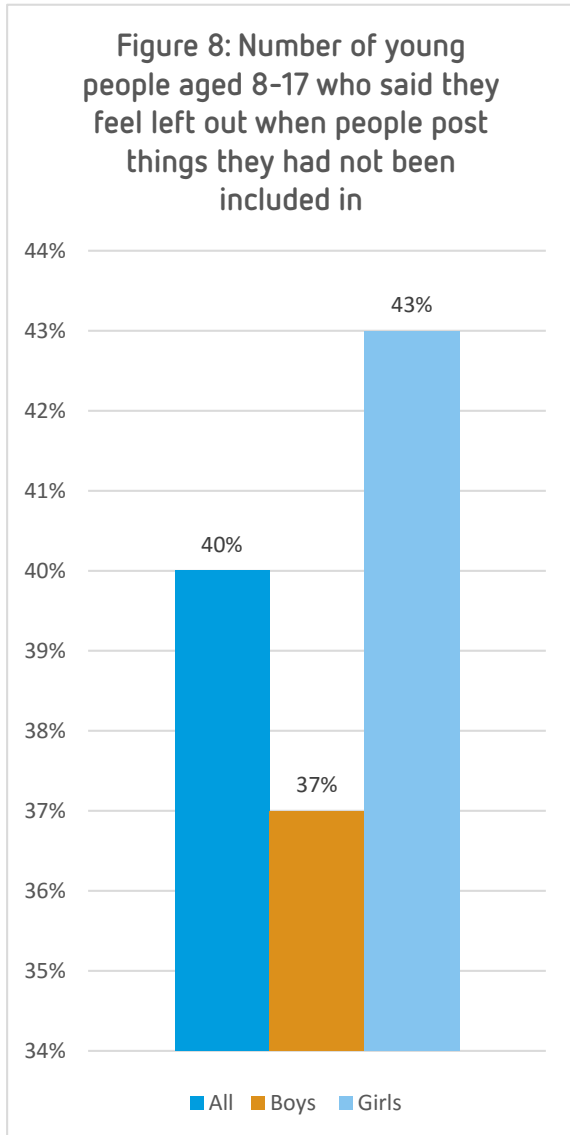
Q: How important do you think it is for your friends to do the following on social media or messaging apps? [Ignore people I don't like] Matrix Rating Scale (One Answer Per Row). Answer choices: Very important, Important, Not important, Not important at all. Base: All respondents (2,000 young people aged 8-17 years)

### Popularity, status and self-esteem

Whilst it's clear that technology plays a significant, and often positive, role in young people's friendships, it can at times have a negative impact on the way they feel, and their self-esteem.

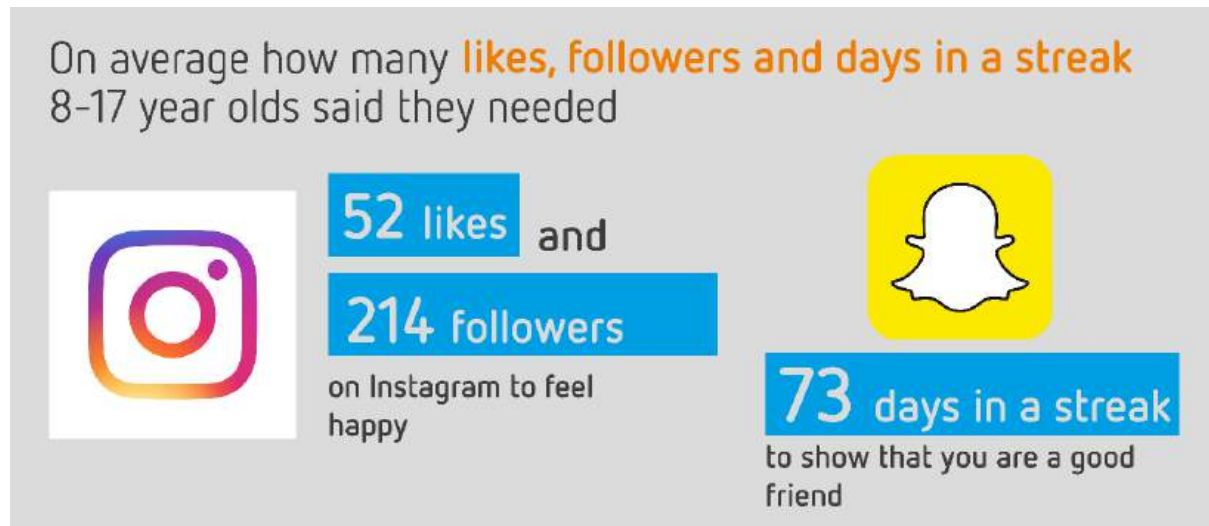
Two in five (40%) respondents aged 8-17 say that they feel left out when people post things that they haven't been included in, with girls more likely to feel this (43%) in comparison to boys (37%).

Over a third of young people (36%) say that they feel that other people's lives look more exciting than theirs on social media with girls, once again, more likely to feel this (40%) in comparison to boys (33%).



Q: How much do you agree with the following statements? [I feel left out when people post things I haven't been included in; On social media other people's lives look more exciting compared to mine] Matrix Rating Scale (One Answer Per Row). Answer choices: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither agree or disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree. Base: All respondents (2,000 young people aged 8-17 years)

On average, respondents aged 8-17 say that they need 214 followers on Instagram before they feel happy and 52 likes on their Instagram post. Young people also say that on average they feel you need at least 73 days in a Snapchat streak to show that you are good friends with someone.



### Boys more likely to need likes, followers and streaks

On average, boys reported that they need more likes and followers than girls to feel happy.

On average, boys required 59 likes on an Instagram post to feel happy, in comparison to girls who said they need 45 likes. The greatest difference between boys and girls was in the number of Instagram followers they needed to feel happy, with boys on average reporting they needed 246 followers in comparison to girls who on average needed 186 followers.

On average, boys also reported needing a longer Snapchat streak to show they are a good friend (77) in comparison to girls (69).

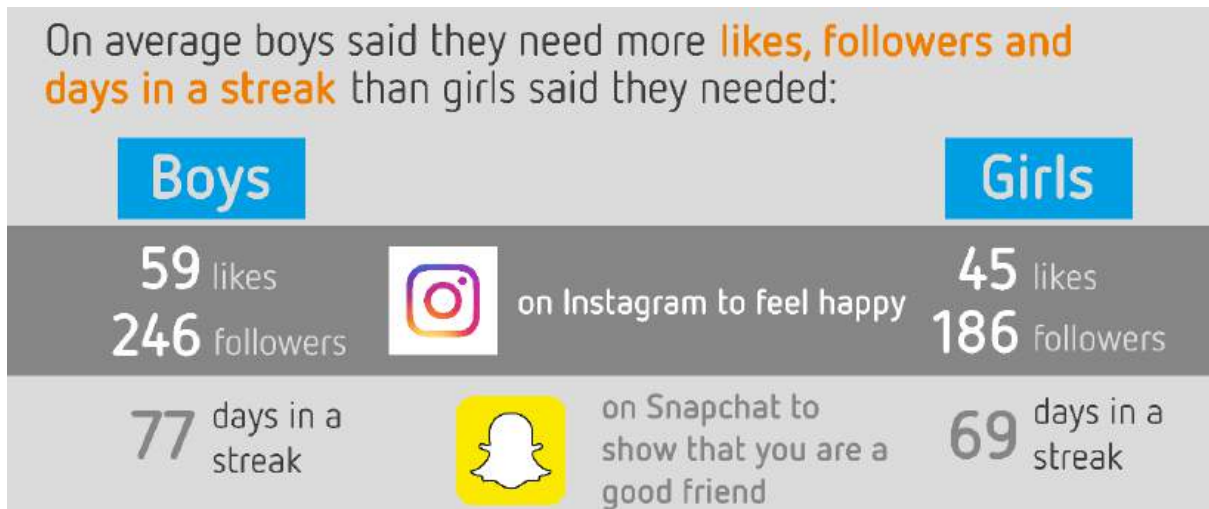


### What is a Snapchat streak?

Snapchat Streaks count how many consecutive days two people have been sending Snaps, or photos, to each other.

Every day they send a Snap their streak gets longer. A streak is shown next to a contact's name on the Snapchat app and is symbolised by a little picture of a flame and the number of days the streaks has gone on for.

Only the two people involved in the streak can see this.



However whilst there are clearly many pressures on young people online, encouragingly over a third (35%) of respondents aged 8-17 said that they didn't feel that they had to use social media to be popular or liked, with 8-12s slightly more likely to feel this way (38%) than 13-17s (32%).

In comparison 32% of all respondents aged 8-17 reported that they did need to use social media to be popular or liked, with this rising from 30% of 8-12s to 35% of 13-17s.

**35%** of young people say that they don't need to use social media to feel popular or liked

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## Navigating friendships: the positives and negatives

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### Online experiences vary for young people, highlighting both the positives and potential negatives of technology

The previous chapter revealed how young people's friendships are adapting to technology use as well as some of the pressures they can face to meet certain friendship expectations or demonstrate their status or popularity.

The majority of young people are experiencing kind and positive online interactions, and also feeling happy, excited or inspired by things they have seen online. However a significant number are also seeing upsetting or offensive content and sometime facing people being mean to them and excluding them. Many young people regularly experience a range of negative emotions as a result of the things they come across online.

Indeed, it is clear that navigating friendships online for young people is varied in its experience and can have both a positive and negative role in their lives.

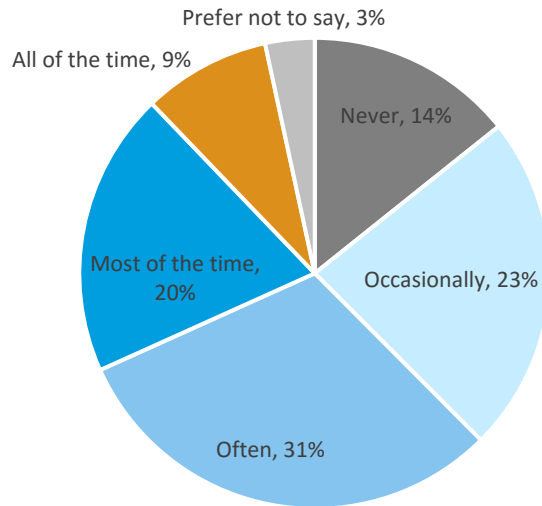
### For the majority of young people technology plays a positive role in their lives

In the last year, four in five (83%) respondents aged 8-17 have experienced people being kind to them, with this rising from 75% of 8-12s to 91% of 13-17s.

A third (33%) of 8-17 year olds said they experienced people being kind to them all or most of the time, while 1 in 7 (14%) said they never experience this.

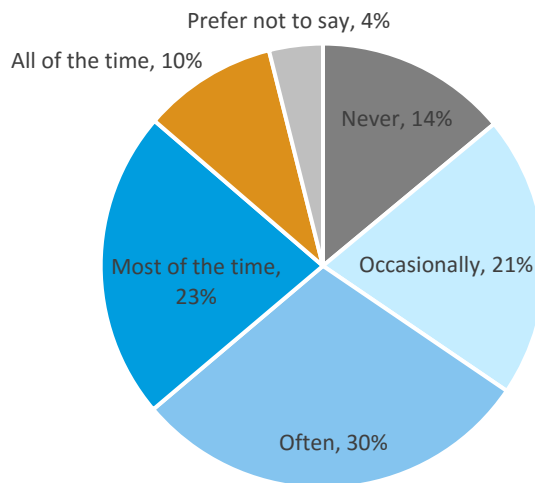
Almost seven in ten (68%) young people said that chatting to their friends online cheered them up, with teens (76%) more likely to report this than 8-12s (60%).

Figure 10: How regularly young people, aged 8-17, have seen people posting supportive, kind or positive things online in the last year



Q: In the last year, how often have you seen the following behaviours on the internet? [People posting things online that are supportive, kind or positive] Matrix Rating Scale (One Answer Per Row). Answer choices: Never, Occasionally, Often, Most of the time, All of the time, Prefer not to say. Base: All respondents (2,000 young people aged 8-17 years)

Figure 11: How regularly young people aged 8-17 have had people being kind to them online in the last year



Q: In the last year, how often have you seen the following behaviours on the internet? [People being kind to me] Matrix Rating Scale (One Answer Per Row). Answer choices: Never, Occasionally, Often, Most of the time, All of the time, Prefer not to say. Base: All respondents (2,000 young people aged 8-17 years)

## Majority of young people experience positive emotions when online

Feeling happy was the most common emotion felt by all young people, with almost nine in ten (89%) young people saying that in the last week something online has made them feel happy and almost one in five (19%) saying they had felt this most of the time in the last week.

More than four in five (82%) young people report that they have felt excited by something online in the last week, with a third (33%) saying they had often felt this and more than one in ten (11%) saying they had felt this most of the time.

Almost three-quarters (74%) of young people have felt inspired by something online in the last week, with 23% saying they had often felt this. Girls were slightly more likely to have felt inspired by something online in the last week with 77% of them saying they had felt this in comparison to 72% of boys.



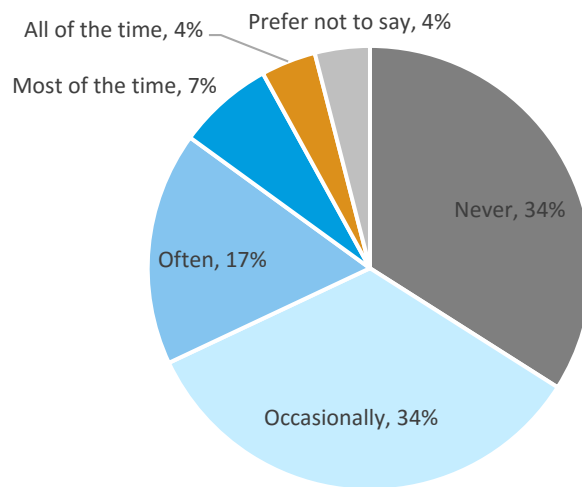
## Bullying and exclusion online

Whilst the majority of young people are having positive experiences online, a significant number of young people are having experiences which are negative.

More than three in five (62%) respondents aged 8-17 have seen people posting offensive, mean or threatening things online in the last year, with 13-17s being more likely to witness this (72%) in comparison to 8-12s (53%). Almost one in five (17%) young people say that they have seen this often in the last year. And over one in ten (11%) say they have seen this all or most of the time.



Figure 12: How regularly young people aged 8-17 have seen people posting offensive, mean or threatening things online in the last year



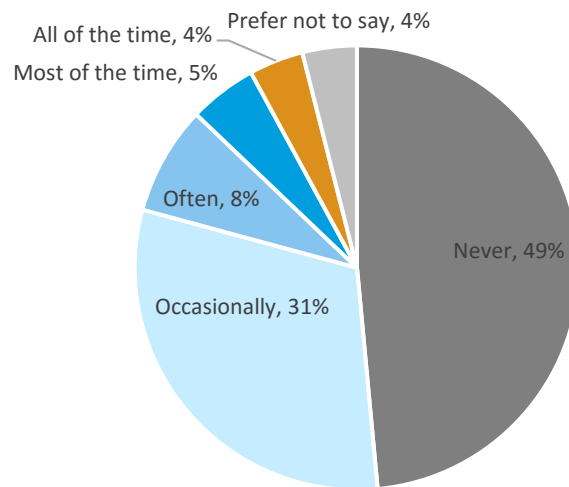
Q: In the last year, how often have you seen the following behaviours on the internet? [People posting offensive, mean or threatening things online] Matrix Rating Scale (One Answer Per Row). Answer choices: Never, Occasionally, Often, Most of the time, All of the time, Prefer not to say. Base: All respondents (2,000 young people aged 8-17 years)

Almost half (49%) of those surveyed have experienced people being mean to them online in the last year, with teens more likely to experience this (52%) in comparison to 8-12s (46%). One in twelve (8%) young people say that they have experienced people being mean to them all or most of the time.

Young people are also facing exclusion with 47% saying that in the last year people have excluded them online (51% of 13-17s in comparison to 44% of 8-12s). Almost one in ten (9%) say that they have been excluded online all or most of the time.

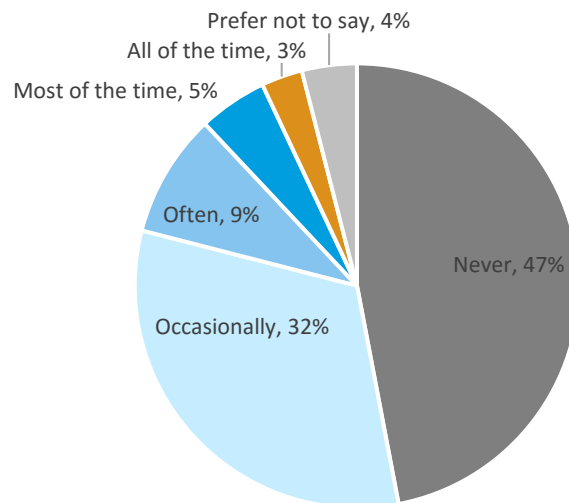
Almost one in five (19%) of respondents aged 8-17 have thought about stopping using social media because it has a negative impact on their mood.

Figure 13: How regularly young people aged 8-17 have been excluded online in the last year



Q: In the last year, how often have you seen the following behaviours on the internet? [People excluding me online] Matrix Rating Scale (One Answer Per Row). Answer choices: Never, Occasionally, Often, Most of the time, All of the time, Prefer not to say. Base: All respondents (2,000 young people aged 8-17 years)

Figure 14: How regularly young people aged 8-17 have experienced people being mean to them online in the last year



Q: In the last year, how often have you seen the following behaviours on the internet? [People being mean to me] Matrix Rating Scale (One Answer Per Row). Answer choices: Never, Occasionally, Often, Most of the time, All of the time, Prefer not to say. Base: All respondents (2,000 young people aged 8-17 years)

In the last week, young people aged 8-17 have said because of something online they have:

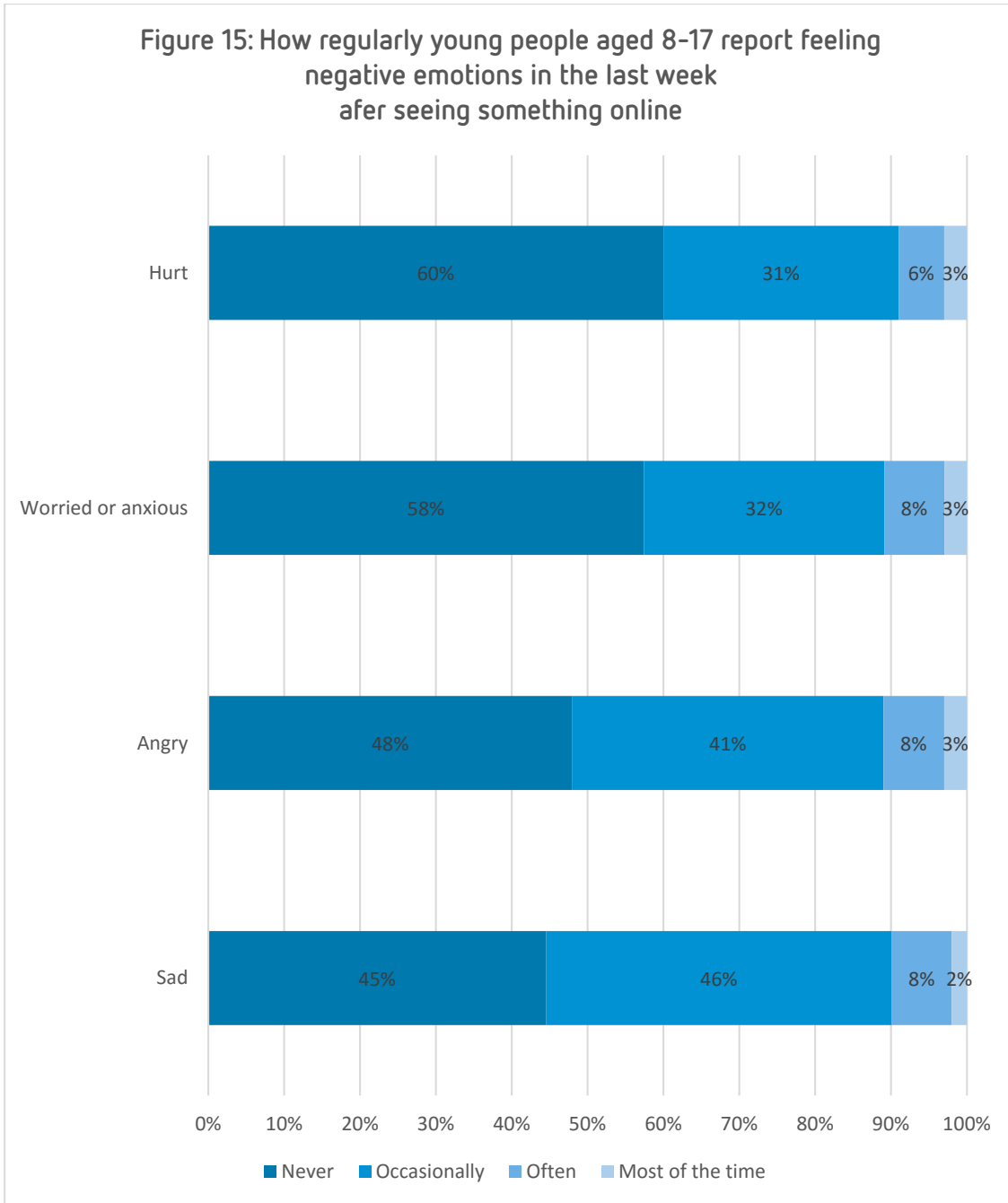


Over half (56%) of respondents aged 8-17 say that they have felt sad in the last week because of something online with one in ten (10%) saying that they have felt this often. Girls are more likely to feel sad (58%) than boys (53%). More than three in five (61%) teens say that they feel sad in comparison to just over half (51%) of 8-12s feeling this way.

Over half (52%) of those surveyed also say that they have felt angry in the last week because of something online in the last week with 11% feeling this often. Whilst boys and girls both responded at the same levels (52%), teens were more likely to feel angry (59%) than 8-12s (45%).

Just over two in five (42%) young people say they have felt worried or anxious because of something they have seen on the internet in the last week, with more than one in ten (11%) saying that they have often felt this. Teens were more likely to feel worried or anxious (46%) than 8-12s (39%).

Two in five (40%) young people say that they have felt hurt by something online in the last week with 9% feeling this often, rising from 37% in 8-12s to 43% in 13-17s.



Q: In the last week, how often has something online made you feel any of the following? Matrix Rating Scale (One Answer Per Row). Answer choices: Never, Occasionally, Often, Most of the time. Base: All respondents (2,000 young people aged 8-17 years)

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## Strategies and support in a digital world

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Young people are active in creating a better internet whilst wanting support from parents, carers and teachers to do so

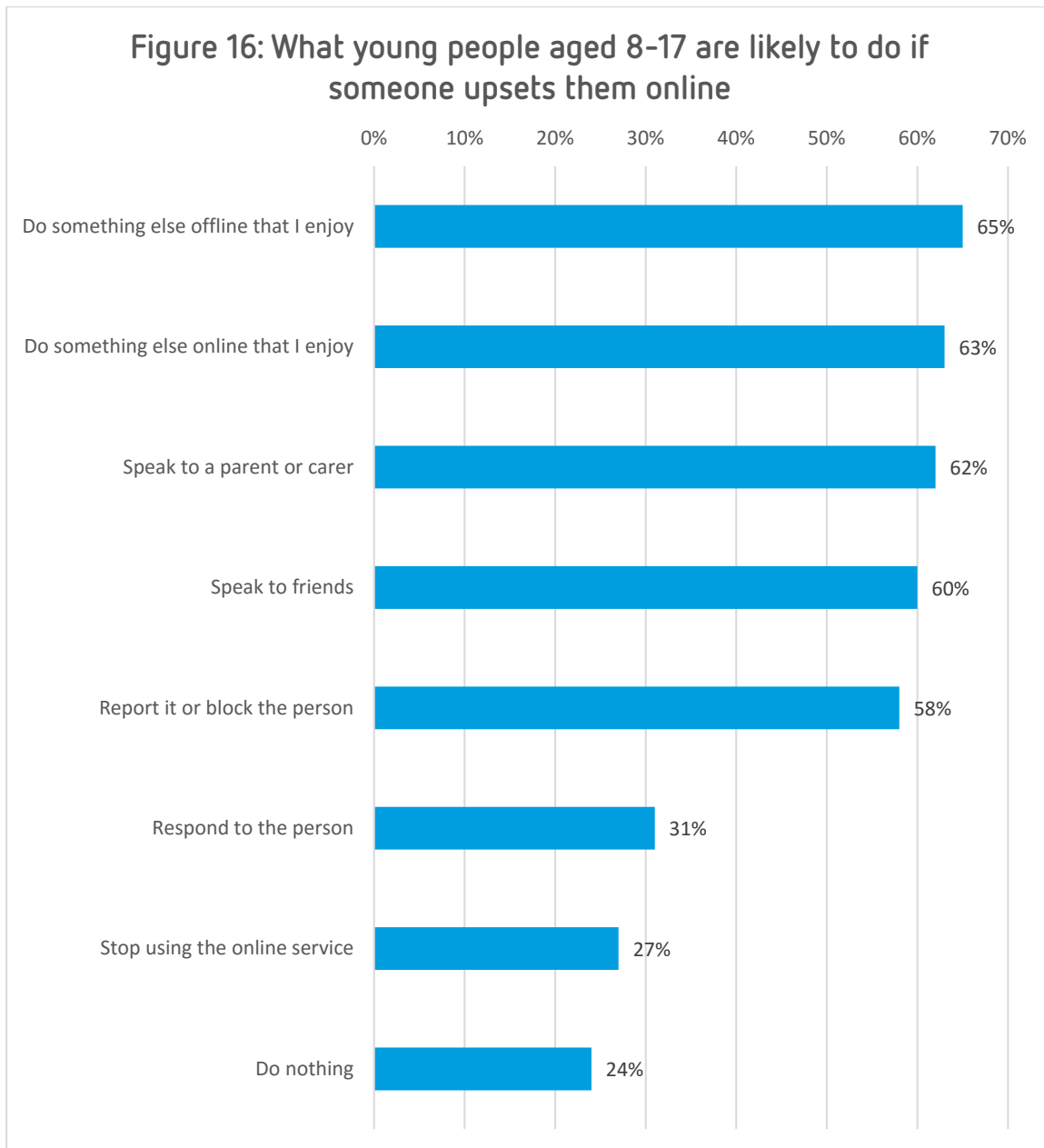
Many young people are showing maturity and initiative in the approaches they are developing to navigate the digital world. They display a wide range of coping strategies from taking a break from technology to speaking to friends or to their parents and carers. They also show how they are supporting each other and acknowledge their responsibility in helping to build a better and more respectful internet.

Young people are also expressing the need for support from the adults in their lives, wanting them to understand and help them when things go wrong. This support is mutual and many young people are also helping their parents and carers online. Whilst many young people clearly want this support from their schools and parents and carers, they are also facing barriers to being able to be open about their online worries to the adults in their lives.

### How young people are managing their online lives

Young people are formulating coping strategies to help them manage the potentially negative aspects of being online. When asked what they would do if someone upset them online, respondents aged 8-17 said they would be most likely to:

1. Do something else offline that I enjoy (65%)
2. Do something else online that I enjoy (63%)
3. Speak to a parent or carer (62%)
4. Speak to friends (60%)
5. Report it or block the person (58%)



Q: If someone upsets you online, how likely are you to do the following? Matrix Rating Scale (One Answer Per Row). Answer choices: Very Unlikely, Unlikely, Neither likely or unlikely, Likely, Very Likely. Base: All respondents (2,000 young people aged 8-17 years)

While boys and girls reported broadly similar strategies, girls were more likely to speak to friends (65%) than boys (56%); whereas boys were more likely to say they would report it or block the person (61%) than girls (56%). Boys were also more likely to say that they would respond to the person (34%) than girls (28%).

There were also broadly similar responses from both age groups except that 8-12s were more likely to say that they would speak to a parent or carer if someone upset them online (69%) in comparison to 13-17s (54%). Teens were also more likely to say that they would respond to the person (34%) in comparison to 8-12s (28%). However they were less likely to stop using the online service, with one in five (21%) 13-17s saying that they would do so compared to a third (33%) of 8-12s.

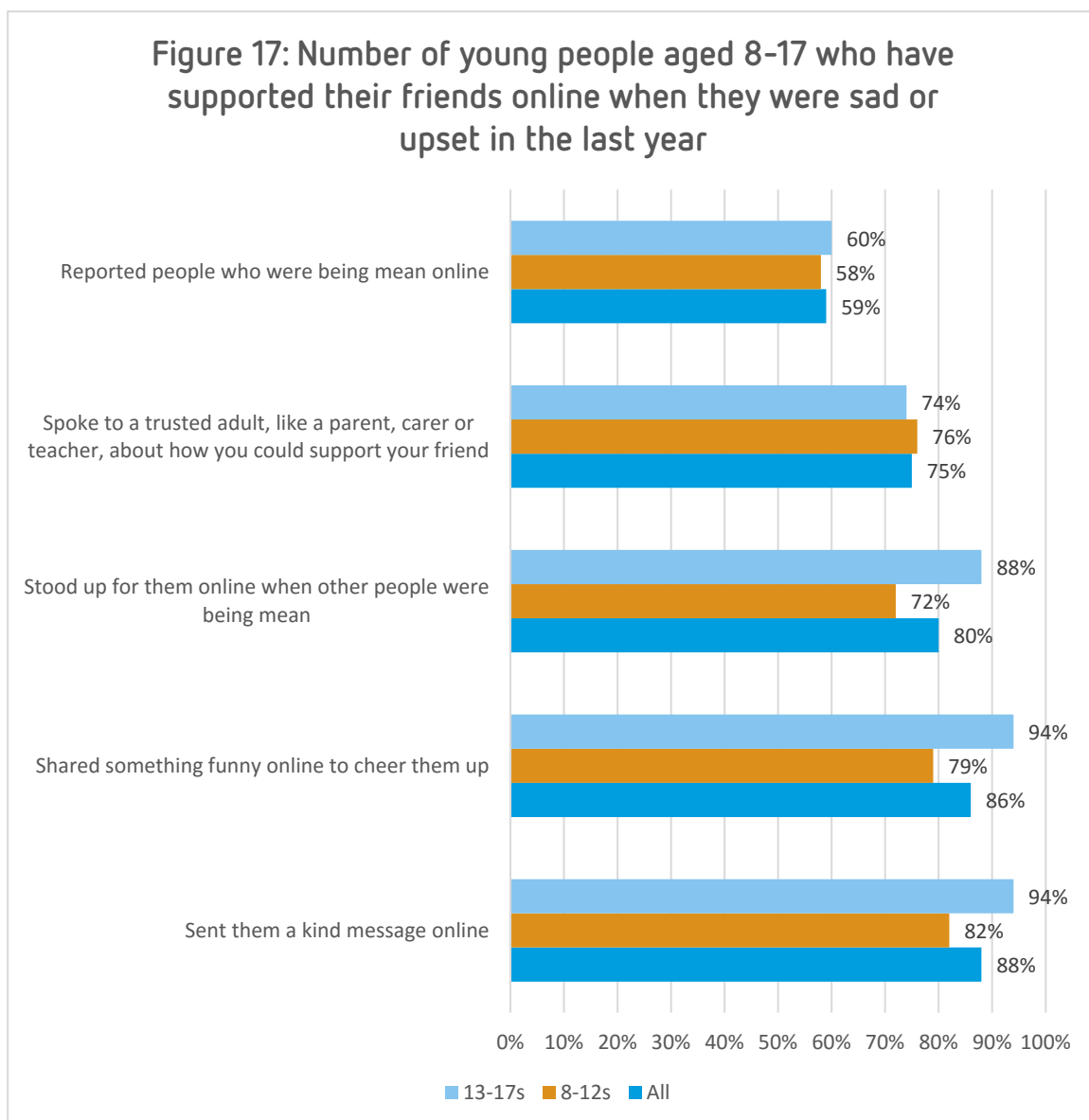
## Supporting friends and creating a respectful internet

The majority of young people (78%) believe that every person on the internet has a responsibility to be respectful.

Three in five (60%) respondents aged 8-17 said that they would speak to friends if someone upset them online. In turn, many young people had supported their friends online if they felt sad or upset in the last year.

**78%** of young people think that every person on the internet has a responsibility to be respectful

Figure 17: Number of young people aged 8-17 who have supported their friends online when they were sad or upset in the last year

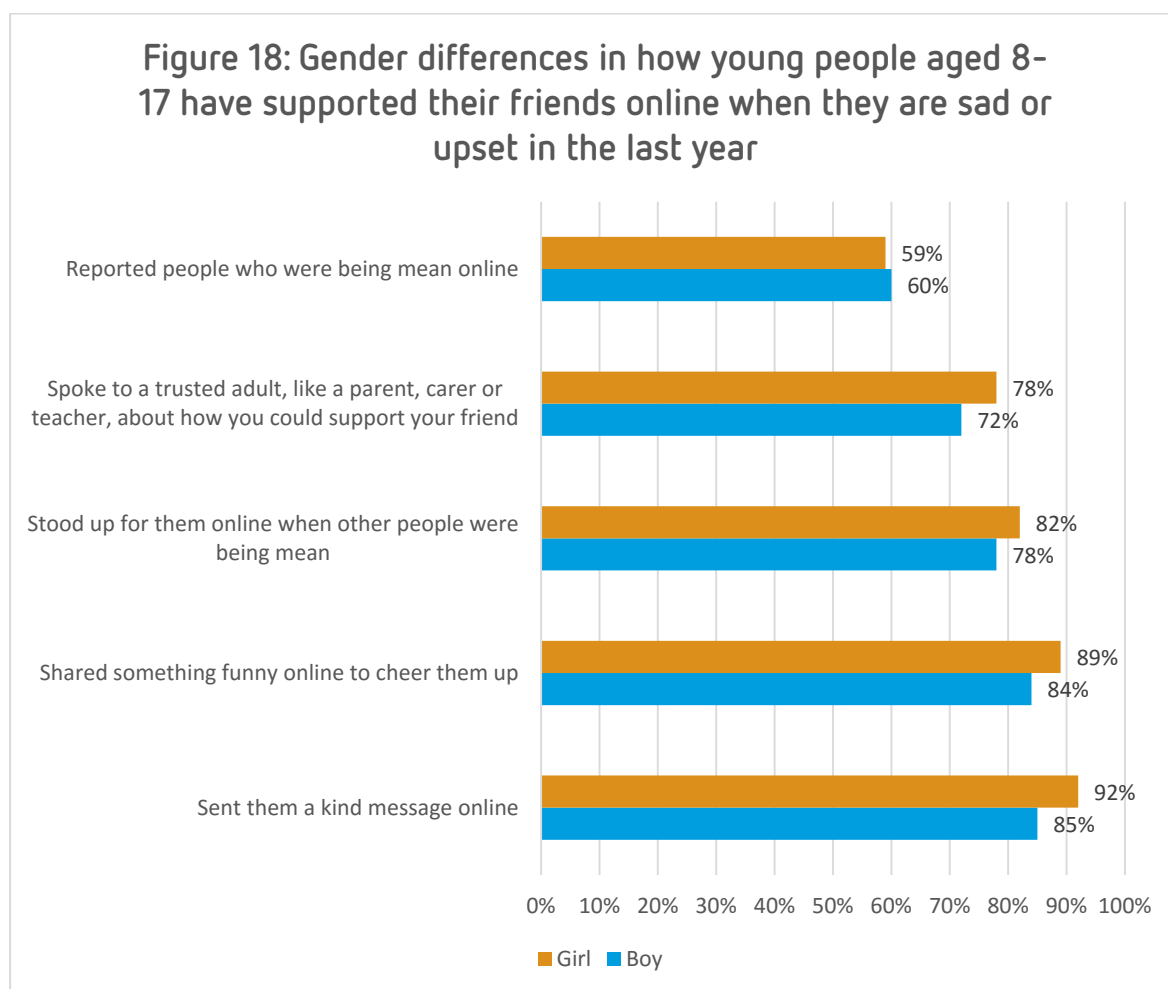


Q: In the last year, how often have you supported your friends in the following ways if they felt sad or upset? Matrix Rating Scale (One Answer Per Row). Answer choices: Never, Occasionally, Often, Always, N/A – a friend hasn’t felt sad or upset. Base: All respondents (2,000 young people aged 8-17 years)



Almost nine in ten (88%) respondents aged 8-17 said that in the last year they have sent a kind message online to a friend who was feeling upset, rising from 82% of 8-12s to 94% of 13-17s. In the last year, 86% of young people said they have shared something funny online to cheer their friend up. Four in five (80%) of those surveyed said they have stood up for their friend online when other people were being mean. Three quarters (75%) of young people spoke to a trusted adult about how they could support their friend in the last year and 59% had reported people who were being mean online.

The findings show that 13-17s are more likely to take action online than the 8-12s. In the last year, teens were more likely to stand up for a friend online (88%) than 8-12s (72%). They were also more likely to send their friend a kind message (94%) than 8-12s (82%). Both age groups are broadly similar in speaking to a trusted adult or reporting mean behaviour online.



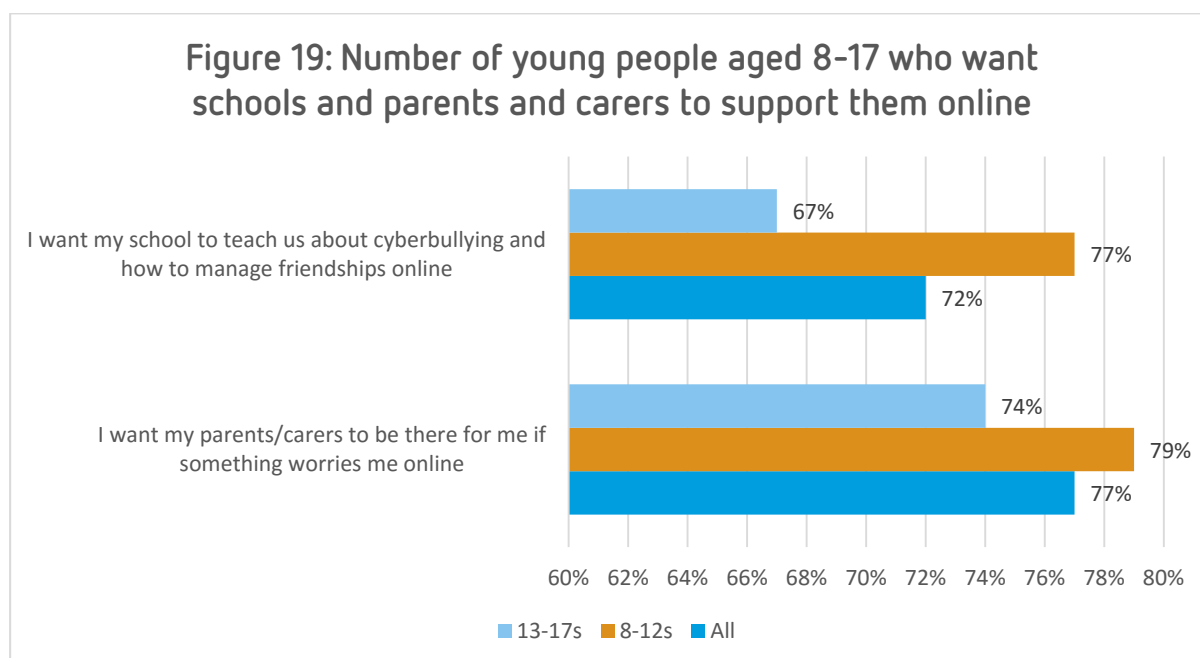
Q: In the last year, how often have you supported your friends in the following ways if they felt sad or upset? Matrix Rating Scale (One Answer Per Row). Answer choices: Never, Occasionally, Often, Always, N/A – a friend hasn't felt sad or upset. Base: All respondents (2,000 young people aged 8-17 years)

There are small but key differences in the way girls and boys say they had supported their friends online in the last year. More than nine in ten (92%) girls surveyed said that they had sent a kind message online to their friend, compared to 85% of boys. Girls were more likely to share something funny online to cheer their friend up (89%) than boys (84%) and also more likely to speak to a trusted adult about how to support a friend (78%) than boys (72%). Both girls and boys surveyed showed very similar levels of reporting people who were being mean online to their friends.

### Support, education and understanding for young people

#### Young people are seeking support from adults

Whilst young people are clearly supporting each other when they have negative experiences online, they also want the adults in their life to support and help them navigate the digital world.



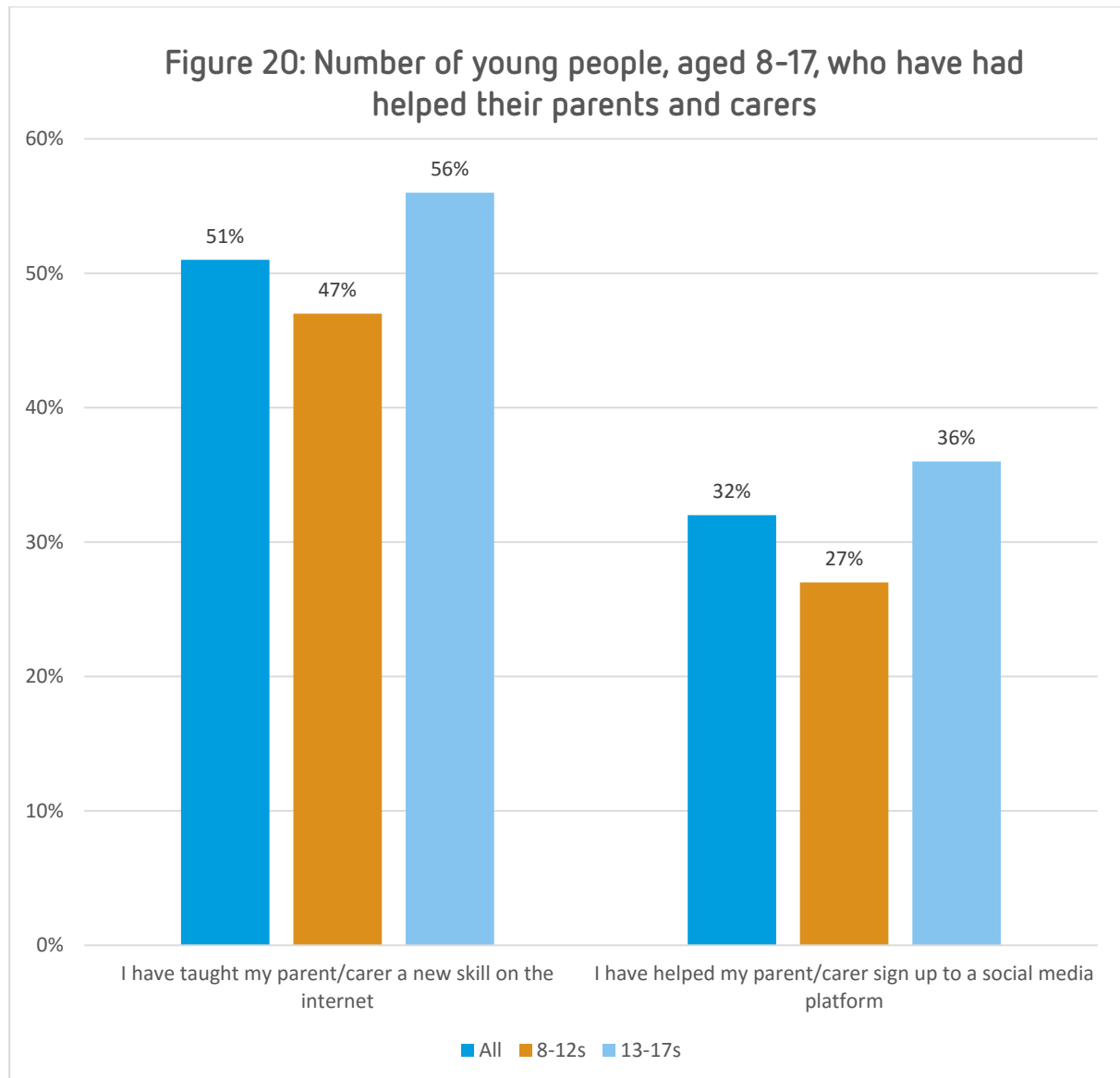
Q: How much do you agree with the following statements? Matrix Rating Scale (One Answer Per Row). Answer choices: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither agree or disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree. Base: All respondents (2,000 young people aged 8-17 years)

Over three quarters (77%) of respondents aged 8-17 say that they want their parents and carers to be there for them if something worries online, rising from 74% of 13-17s to 79% of 8-12s.

More than seven in ten (72%) of those surveyed want their school to teach them about cyberbullying and how to manage friendships online, with 77% of 8-12s wanting this compared to 66% of 13-17s. 65% of young people have learnt about cyberbullying and how to manage friendships online.

## Young people are supporting their parents and carers too

Young people are also having many positive interactions with parents and carers. Over half (51%) of young people have taught their parents or carers a new skill on the internet, rising from 47% of 8-12s to 56% of 13-17s. A third (32%) of young people have helped their parent or carer sign up to a social media platform with 13-17s more likely to do this (36%) in comparison to 8-12s (27%).



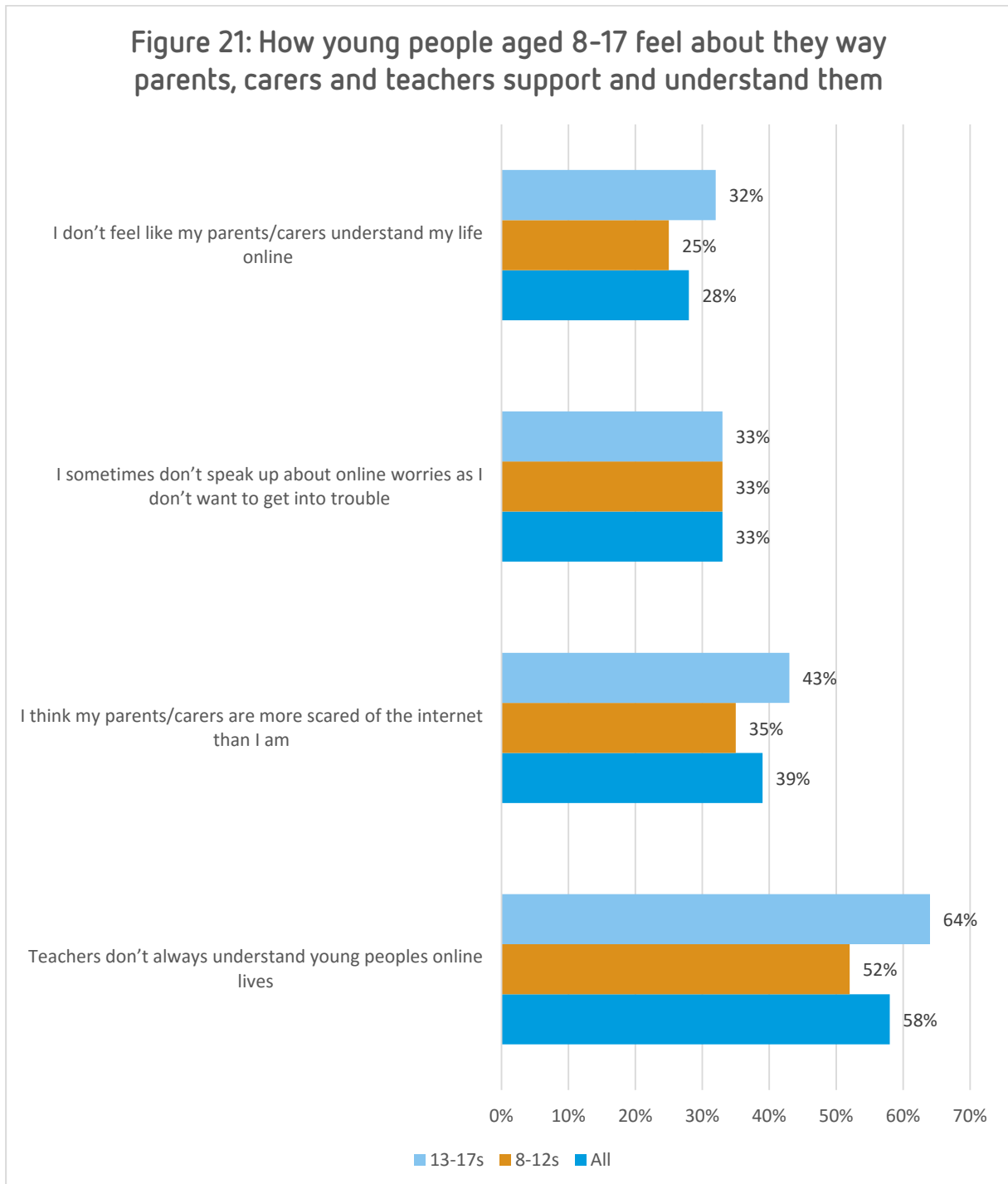
Q: How much do you agree with the following statements? Matrix Rating Scale (One Answer Per Row). Answer choices: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither agree or disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree. Base: All respondents (2,000 young people aged 8-17 years)

## Barriers for young people and lack of understanding

Although it is clear that many young people have had positive experiences and have received support from adults, as well as often supported them, some do not always feel supported or understood by the adults in their lives. Almost three in five (58%) respondents aged 8-17 say that they feel that teachers don't always understand their online lives with 15% strongly agreeing that this is the case. Teens are particularly likely to feel this with 64%

thinking this in comparison to 52% of 8-12s. A third (33%) of young people report that they sometimes don't speak up about online worries as they are scared that they will get into trouble.

Overall, 28% of young people said that they don't feel like their parents or carers understand their online life, rising from a quarter (25%) of 8-12s to almost a third of 13-17s (32%).



Q: How much do you agree with the following statements? Matrix Rating Scale (One Answer Per Row). Answer choices: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither agree or disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree. Base: All respondents (2,000 young people aged 8-17 years)

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## Conclusions & recommendations

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This report shines a light on both the positive and negative role that technology can play in young people's relationships.

It demonstrates how digital technology is embedded throughout young people's friendships, across a range of platforms and diverse communication methods.

It shows how young people want support from their friends, family and school to help them navigate the complexities of digital friendship and the risks and pressures that may arise.

It is essential that we collectively take action to help young people harness the positive opportunities offered by technology for connection, self-expression and support, while empowering them with strategies to cope with any negatives, and help to create an online environment that seeks to promote young people's wellbeing.

We all play a role in this.

**Young people** play a crucial role in creating kind, respectful and supportive online communications, by empathising with others and being there for their peers. This generation can help to establish healthy relationship norms online that are based on mutual trust, respect and consent. Young people also need to be empowered to take control of their digital wellbeing, by recognising their emotions and the way that their use of digital technology can impact on their self-esteem and mood, so that they are able to implement strategies to achieve a healthy relationship with technology. It is important too that young people have support networks – whether friends, family or school – so they feel confident to speak up about any worries they have and can get the support they need.

**Parents and carers** are an important source of support for children and young people. Children and young people do want their parents and carers to be there for them, and are turning to them in moments of need. However, young people can feel like their parents don't understand their online lives, so it is essential that parents and carers take the time to listen and empathise with children. That doesn't mean understanding in detail all the ways that children communicate online, but it does mean respecting the importance of digital technology in young people's relationships and understanding the challenges they can sometimes face. Parents need to reassure children that they can turn to them about any concerns without getting into trouble, as well as giving young people strategies to help them navigate the challenges and pressures they may experience. It is also important for parents to also focus on the positives and give young people engaging opportunities to create and connect, while helping them to create a positive digital footprint.

**Schools** play an important role in educating and empowering children and young people to use technology respectfully, responsibly, critically and creatively, and in establishing a culture of kindness and supportiveness that promotes student wellbeing. From Computing to Relationships Education and PSHE, it is essential that education keeps pace with changes in technology, to ensure that interventions are relevant, engaging and effective. Schools play an important role in offering positive opportunities for learning and creativity, as well as helping young people to harness the power of technology to make a positive difference. This report shows the range of strategies that young people would use if something upset them online and schools can help to ensure young people both know and use these strategies to cope with any difficulties they experience.

**Technology companies** need to create an online environment that puts young people's wellbeing first, helping them to foster positive relationships with each other and with technology. This includes recognising the pressures that young people face to be popular and 'always on', and the ways that young people's use of technology can impact on their emotions in both positive and negative ways. Technology companies have a responsibility to provide young people with the information and tools they need to manage these challenges. While tools like reporting and blocking are very important ways of equipping young people to manage bullying and abuse, it is also important to understand that behaviours like social exclusion can have just as much of a damaging impact on young people but may not be easy to detect and manage in digital spaces. To ensure that young people's needs are understood and prioritised, it is essential for technology companies to hear directly from young people to shape the design and delivery of their services.

**Government** need to provide the culture in which all of the above can function and thrive – for example, by ensuring that there are opportunities in the curriculum for children to learn about online safety, ensuring that parents and carers have access to appropriate information and sources of support, and that industry embed child safety by design. They must also take the lead in governance and legislation, and ultimately ensure the safety and wellbeing of children and young people through effective child protection strategies for the online world.

**Everyone** has a responsibility to make a positive difference online. We can all promote the positive by being kind and respectful to others and seeking out positive opportunities to create and connect. We can all respond to the negative by reporting any inappropriate or illegal content, and by being there for our friends and family.

Safer Internet Day aims to not only create a safer internet but also a better internet, where everyone is empowered to use technology responsibly, respectfully, critically and creatively.

Together we can create a better internet.



**Safer  
Internet  
Day 2018** | Tuesday  
6 February

Create, connect and share respect:  
A better internet starts with you

[www.saferinternetday.org.uk](http://www.saferinternetday.org.uk)



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