Decoding Digital Parenting:

an annual report from Vodafone

vodafone

"48% of parents say **more knowledge would give them confidence** to have a conversation.**"**
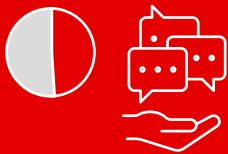
FOREWORD

At Vodafone, we're committed to supporting families as they navigate the evolving digital world. For almost a decade, Digital Parenting has provided the tools, knowledge and advice to keep families happy and safe online.

As part of our commitment, we have commissioned this report to further understand family connectivity and how parents feel about the level of understanding they have on their children's digital lives.

The report showed that almost half (48%) of parents said that better knowledge would help them have conversations about digital behaviours with their children. Despite this, 49% of parents have never actively sought advice about what children do online and how to manage this.

We want to empower families to find a digital-life balance that works for them. Our Digital Parenting programme gathers brilliant people from across the digital landscape - researchers, psychologists, the tech savvy and plenty of busy parents - to explore the ways in which we can build happy and safe digital lives.

January 2020 sees the launch of the Vodafone Digital Family Pledge, a simple online tool which aims to support parents raising the next generation of digital natives and give them an easy way to start family discussions about how they're using devices and behaving online.

We hope you find this report useful.

Helen Lamprell,
Vodafone UK General Counsel and External Affairs Director
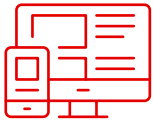
ABOUT DIGITAL PARENTING

Digital Parenting is Vodafone's free resource to keep families happy and safe online. It aims to get parents up to speed on online safety and wellbeing, as well as providing ideas on how to use technology in positive way.

Along with the **Digital Parenting website** and hugely popular magazine, Vodafone also provides free online safety and wellbeing talks across the UK in partnership with leading online safety organisation, Digital Awareness UK.

From screen time to sexting to social media and body image issues, Digital Parenting opens up the conversation about responsible online behaviour and how to get the most out of a digital future.

For advice or information see
Vodafone.co.uk/digitalparenting

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Technology has become part of our social world to the point that there's little difference between online and offline for a lot of young people. The report found that 77% of under 16s are spending time online every day.

While most of children's screen time is spent watching streamed video content, their use of social media increases as they hit their tween and early teen years, an ideal opportunity for more frequent conversations about safe and responsible conduct in cyber space.

However, children are often resistant to discussing their online activity, and parents feel inhibited by a lack of up to date knowledge about everything from the latest apps to new social networks. They feel the Government could do more to help them feel informed and worry that they can't protect their children from negative experiences, especially as they're concerned about online activities being hidden from them.

Amidst concerns about safety, bullying and exposure to inappropriate content, parents feel the advance of digital technology has had a positive impact on their children's lives, reinforcing relationships with extended family, encouraging learning and facilitating offline friendships.
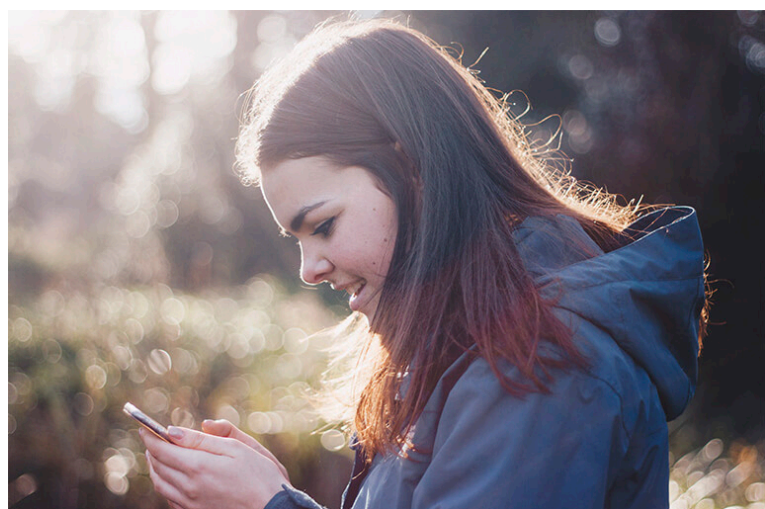
"Our report found that **77% of under 16s** are spending time **online every day**"
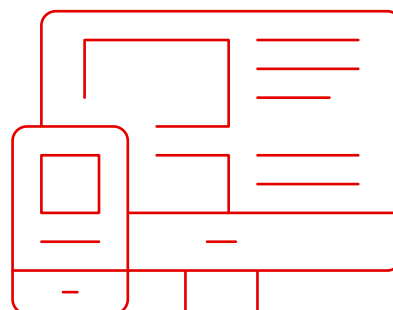
WHAT WE FOUND

"Families navigate the **changing digital world** with little discussion or openness"

In this section:

CONNECTED FAMILIES

For this generation of digital natives, the earliest years of their childhood mean bonding with their parents over on-demand cartoons, e-books, video calls with far-flung members of the family and educational apps, progressing to social and messaging media and streamed music, TV shows and movies.

Whether they're on TVs, PCs, laptops, tablets or smartphones, when parents sit down with their children to spend time together online, most are watching content on YouTube or other streaming services. This is the modern family's primary shared experience, enjoying unlimited access to on-demand entertainment together.

In terms of behavioural shift, the biggest difference between the two age groups in our study came in the level of communication conducted via digital devices. Just 7% of children under the age of ten spend time connecting with friends and family online, a figure that rises to 43% in the older age group who enjoy increased independence to use social media platforms, email and messaging apps to communicate and share content.

Only one quarter of under 10's spend time browsing the internet with their parents, mostly accessing educational sites, while that figure almost doubles (46%) for 11-16 year-olds, who enjoy increased scope to explore different facets of the web. Online gaming starts early, with a fifth (21%) of under 10's participating, a figure that grows to a third (31%) of 11-16 year-olds.

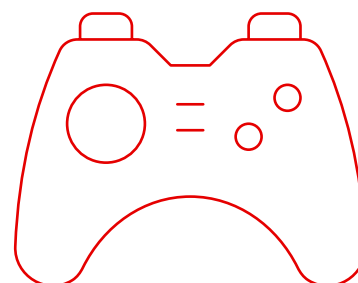**Under 10's** spend an average of

1h 58m

online each day

11-16 year-olds spend an average of

2h 49m

online each day

On average, **under 16's** spend

2h 4m

online each day

PARENTAL CONCERN

22% of parents are **concerned about children's online safety**

51% of parents of children 11-16 are **worried that their children hide online activity**

17% are worried about children's **exposure to inappropriate content**

With increased media attention and school gate debate about the potential perils of online life, it's understandable that parents are concerned for their children's digital future.

In a world where news and information are accessible instantly through the internet, parents have many concerns relating to their children's digital lives. For 22%, online safety is their main worry.

The other top worries of parents are exposure to inappropriate content such as violence and sex (17%), followed by time spent on devices (8%), addiction to online games (5%), exposure to fake news (4%), sharing inappropriate information (4%) and spending money online (2%).*

With a variety of reasons causing concern and the ability to have instant access to content, it's not surprising that almost half (43%) of parents believe their child(ren)'s sleep might be negatively affected by regular use of digital devices.

These concerns are exacerbated by the worry that children might hide their online activities from their parents (a concern for 40% of parents, which rises to 51% in parents of 11-16 year-olds).

What's more, it appears there is a belief amongst parents that the amount of time children spend online could reflect negatively on the child's parenting. Around half (48%) of UK parents think other parents are not honest about the time their children spend online. They feel the main reason for this dishonesty is because it'll reflect negatively on their parenting skills or suggest they're neglecting their children's development.

FAMILY CONVERSATIONS

With devices in hand most of the day, we'd assume that families openly discuss their digital activity. In fact, of those surveyed, 54% admitted that they are not aware of what their children are doing online.

So, what are the reasons for the lack of dialogue about our children's day-to-day digital activities? The overriding factor for many parents is that their children simply don't want to discuss what they are doing when using their devices. Approximately one third (34%) of parents to under 10's claimed this as the reason, and perhaps unsurprisingly this rose to 55% of parents of 11-16 year-olds.

Parents struggle too, with busy lives filled with activities and responsibilities, a quarter stating that time is a barrier to starting a conversation about digital safety. The worry that they won't know what they're talking about also stops openness, with almost half (48%) stating that increased knowledge would give them the confidence to instigate and encourage conversation.

A similar number (46%) of parents believe support from schools would help them break down the barriers to dialogue with their children, while one fifth (21%) feel government support would have a positive impact on their ability to converse in an informed way.

54% of parents are **not aware of what their children are doing online**

Only **23%** of parents **have discussed what their child shares online**

25% state that **time is a barrier for starting conversations**

SEEKING SOLUTIONS

Almost 4 in 10 parents have never been given advice on children's online behaviour

48% said **better knowledge would help them have conversations** with their children

The study found only 38% of parents have discussed digital etiquette with their children.

However, one of the most significant statistics to emerge from the study was that 49% of parents have never actively sought advice about their children's online behaviour, despite widespread concern about screen time, social media, safety and general wellbeing. This rises for parents of 11-16 year-olds with 64% claiming they had never sought advice on their child's online behaviour.

A quarter of parents of all under 16's say that their child's school has given advice (19% of under 10's, rising to 35% of 11-16 year-olds), indicating the significant role of the education sector in guiding parents and children through the fast-changing digital world. However, more than a third of parents think the government is not doing enough to support the digital generation.
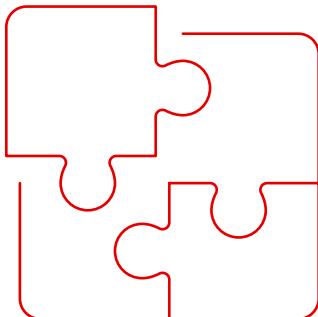
"We want to get more families engaged in conversation about what they're doing online. By encouraging families to talk, we hope we can help everyone feel more confident navigating the digital landscape safely and responsibly."

Helen Lamprell, Vodafone UK General Counsel and External Affairs Director

ADDITIONAL FINDINGS

A Positive Force ✚

Almost six in 10 parents believe the digital revolution has been a force for good, offering a wealth of opportunities for the next generation to explore, learn and live a more fulfilled life. Two thirds (65%) of parents say the internet offers vast scope to develop skills through online learning and tutorials, while half suggest it is a great way to explore and share interests with likeminded people.

Even amid growing concerns about fake news, 44% of parents believe the digital generation have a better awareness of current affairs, while a quarter (27%) praise the way the online space facilitates the easy organisation of offline activities.
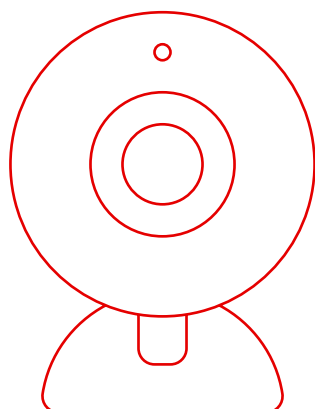
Social Media 💬

Although platforms such as Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter, TikTok and Instagram set 13 years of age as the minimum age limit, one quarter of parents (26%) of under 10's and four fifths (82%) of 11-16 year olds in our survey said their children had their own social media accounts.

But where do the boundaries lay when it comes to parental oversight of children's social media activity? For those under 10's who use social media, our study found that it was the norm (85%) for parents to actively monitor how they are interacting with others, but for older children, who naturally become more protective of their privacy, that figure dropped to just over half of parents.

Setting Rules ✓

Approximately half of parents have rules about time spent online (49%) and what their children are permitted to do (56%), with 69% claiming they are likely to have conversations about those rules.

Given the growing autonomy of older children, plus increased independent access to multiple digital devices and the connected world, a significantly larger proportion of parents had addressed the issues of online security and social protocols with the 11-16 age group.

Therefore, a higher number of parents set rules about online behaviour in this age group, with 57% placing limits on screen time and three quarters (73%) placing boundaries on permitted online activities.

KEY TAKE-OUTS

Children's online use is increasing:
Technology is facilitating children accessing more content, both educational and entertainment.

Parents feel ill-equipped to manage children's digital lives:
An ever-changing digital world leaves parents feeling concerned about their children's online safety.

There is a lack of digital openness within families:
A lack of time, willingness and knowledge stunts positive family discussions.

Parents seek support:
There is the desire to have conversations, parents are just unsure where to turn to for advice.

Methodology

Vodafone commissioned YouGov to conduct an in-depth piece of flagship research amongst 2,321 adults with children under the age of 16. The study was conducted between 20th - 26th September 2019. The figures are weighted and representative of all UK adults (age 18+)

On average*, children in Britain get their own mobile phone at the age of 10, so for the purposes of this research, we have banded research statistics into two age groups: 0-10 years and 11-16 years, assuming a natural shift in access to personal mobile devices and more autonomous usage around this point.

*According to research by Internet Matters

About YouGov

YouGov is an international research data and analytics group, based in London. With a proprietary panel of over 8 million people globally and operations in the UK, North America, Mainland Europe, the Nordics, the Middle East and Asia Pacific, YouGov has one of the world's largest research networks. As the pioneer of online market research, we have a strong record for data accuracy and innovation. A study by the Pew Research Center concluded YouGov "consistently outperforms competitors on accuracy"