



**ADOLESCENT MEDIA USE**

# Mediation and Online Safety Features

Date of Release: March 2023





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# Introduction

## How Do We Keep Kids Safe Online?

Within today's ever-changing digital landscape, young people increasingly rely on screen media as a vehicle for social connection, learning, creativity, and entertainment. In particular, teenagers spend more time watching online videos, using social media, and browsing the web than they did before the pandemic (Rideout et al., 2022). While youth who spend more time online have more opportunities to engage in activities that are positively associated with well-being, such as communicating with peers, they also encounter higher rates of potentially harmful content like violence and hate speech (Vissenberg & D'Haenens, 2020).

As a result, promoting safe and healthy online behaviors can potentially improve their virtual experiences and reduce the risk of poor mental health consequences. For adolescents, guidance and tools to foster more positive online experiences tend to come from two primary sources: their parents/caregivers and online platforms themselves.

Understanding how young people react to the rules and guidance from their parents/caregivers and how they utilize the tools and features provided by the platforms can help inform the most effective mediation and safety strategies in both areas.

## The Role of Parental Mediation

Parents\* and caregivers play a critical role in ensuring their children have healthy and safe experiences online. In [our last Pulse Survey](#), we asked adolescents about parental mediation, or how their parents set rules around media use, and their feelings about those rules. In that survey, over half of respondents (54%) felt that their family media rules were appropriately restrictive, and only 34% felt that they were too restrictive (Bickham et al., 2022). Further exploration of the data revealed that when parents set fewer rules but enforced and followed them consistently, adolescents saw these rules as more reasonable and reported less problematic media use (Yue et al., 2023).

These findings corroborate other research linking consistent, autonomy-supportive mediation strategies with better outcomes, such as less family conflict, more positive social behaviors, and lower rates of problematic mobile device use among youth (Valkenburg et al., 2013; Meeus et al., 2019). However, questions remain regarding parental mediation in the context of digital media. For instance, how do different communication strategies (i.e., controlling vs. autonomy-supportive) influence adolescents' feelings about media-related rules and their overall relationship with digital media?

*\*In the survey, we noted for participants that we used the term "parents" to refer to both parents and caregivers.*



## Adolescents' Online Experiences are Multifaceted

Our previous survey also shed light on the types of interactions adolescents are having online, such as connecting with friends and meeting new people, as well as youths' opinions about online safety. For instance, a large proportion of the teens sampled reported that safety features like blocking and reporting content or other users were very or extremely important to them (74% for blocking, 69% for reporting) (Bickham et al., 2022). Previous studies have found that young people are aware of basic safety tools, such as the ability to block or report other users on social media, but also express concerns about the anonymity and effectiveness of these tools (Milosevic & Vladisavljevic, 2020; Thorn, 2021).

Understanding the interplay between parent-child dynamics, online safety, and adolescents' media habits is an integral step toward establishing best practices for improving digital wellness among youth, fostering adolescents' health and safety online while supporting their growing independence.





## Research Questions

In this Pulse Survey of adolescents (ages 13–17), we sought to better understand their experiences of parental mediation and online safety by exploring the following questions:

1. How do adolescents perceive common **parental mediation strategies** around digital media use, and how do parents enforce and communicate about these media rules?
2. How do adolescents describe their **media use** (especially social media) and **its effects** on their well-being?
3. How do adolescents **manage negative experiences** online?
4. What are adolescents' perceptions of **platforms' safety features and guidelines**?

## How to Use These Findings

This report illuminates the varied mediation strategies families are using to moderate adolescents' media use and begins to describe how adolescents mediate their own use, particularly when it comes to matters of safety in online spaces. It also provides insight into the kinds of content youth are encountering online, and their opinions on social media platforms' ability to regulate that content.

The results of our survey can be used as a starting point for parents and caregivers to engage with their children about their media use, highlighting specific areas where young people may be more at risk for negative outcomes. Technology companies can also take these results into account as they design products and features with adolescents' well-being in mind.

These data add to the ongoing mission of the Digital Wellness Lab to understand and promote positive and productive digital media experiences for young people, from birth through young adulthood.

## Notes About the Findings

- For ease of reporting, we have sometimes combined the top two response options (e.g., a little better, a lot better) and bottom two response options (e.g., a little worse, a lot worse) of a five-point scale into a single concept (e.g., better, worse).
- Gender and age mean differences were calculated for questions using a five- or seven-point scale. Differences reported were significant at  $P < 0.05$  or higher.





# KEY FINDINGS

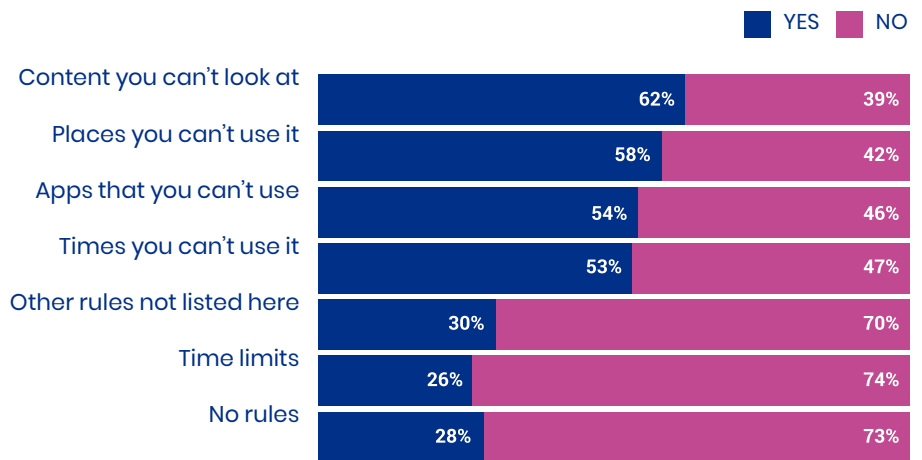


## Family Media Rules

In our [last Pulse Survey](#), we began exploring the relationship between different parental mediation strategies and adolescents' media use. With this survey, we also asked about rule enforcement and how parents communicate about rules with their kids.

In line with our previous findings, parents seemed less likely to set time limits (25.7%) and more likely to specify content kids can't look at (61.5%) or apps they can't use (54.4%). Parents also tended to regulate the context of adolescents' media use: over half of our participants reported rules about places (57.7%) or times (52.7%) they can't use digital media. Only 27.5% of respondents reported having no rules at all. On average, boys (M = 2.96) reported slightly more media-related rules than girls (M = 2.72), and older adolescents reported fewer media-related rules in their household (M = 2.35) than younger adolescents (M = 3.49).

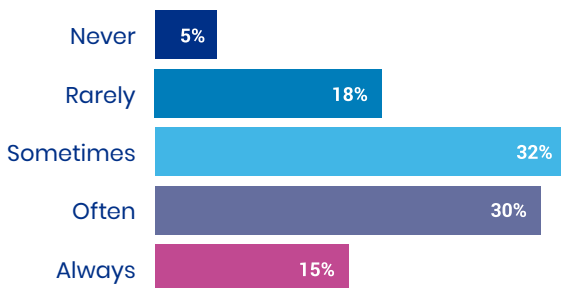
### What rules does your family have about digital media use?



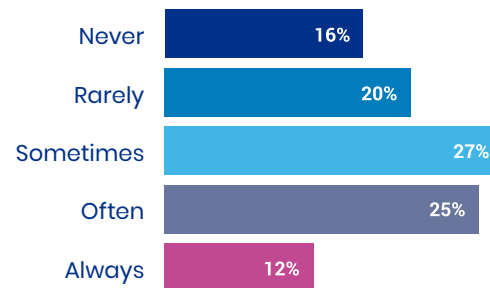
## Rule Enforcement and Parental Modeling

**Overall:** 45.2% of adolescents reported that their parents often or always enforced media-related rules, while 23% reported rules never or rarely being enforced. Additionally, 37% said their parents followed those same rules often or always; however, nearly as many (36%) said their parents never or rarely followed those rules themselves.

### How often do your parents enforce rules about screen media use?



### How often do your parents follow these rules themselves?





## Rule Enforcement and Parental Modeling (cont.)

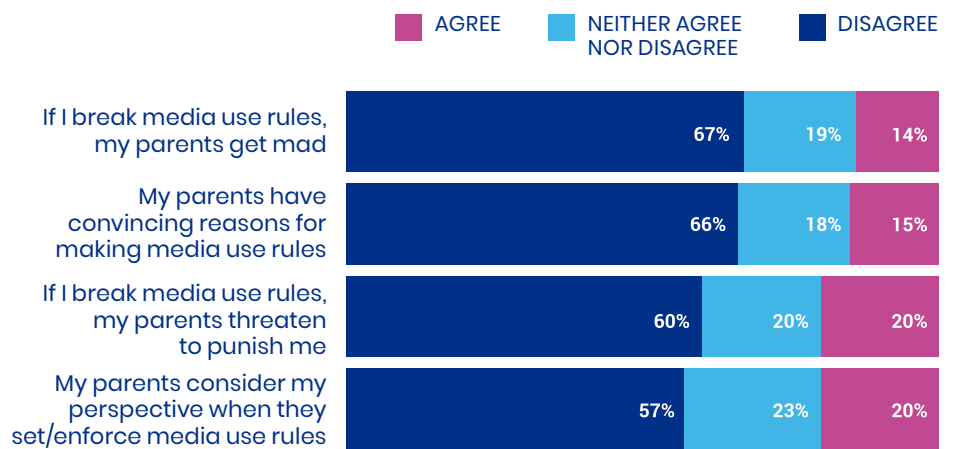
**By Gender:** On average, rules were more frequently enforced for boys ( $M = 3.40$ ) than girls ( $M = 3.26$ ), and more for younger adolescents ( $M = 3.57$ ) than older ones ( $M = 3.12$ ). Boys reported that their parents followed their rules more frequently ( $M = 3.11$ ) than parents of girls ( $M = 2.84$ ).

**By Age:** Older adolescents reported media-related rules being followed less often by their parents ( $M = 2.82$ ) compared to younger adolescents ( $M = 3.16$ ).

## Communication About Rules

Most respondents agreed or strongly agreed that if they break media use rules, their parents get mad (67%) or threaten to punish them (59.9%). On the other hand, adolescents generally agreed that their parents had convincing reasons for setting media-related rules (66.1%), and over half (56.8%) felt that parents considered their perspectives when setting these rules. In other words, parents used a mix of controlling communication styles (e.g., punishment) and autonomy-supportive styles (e.g., considering their child's perspective).

How much do you agree with any of the following?

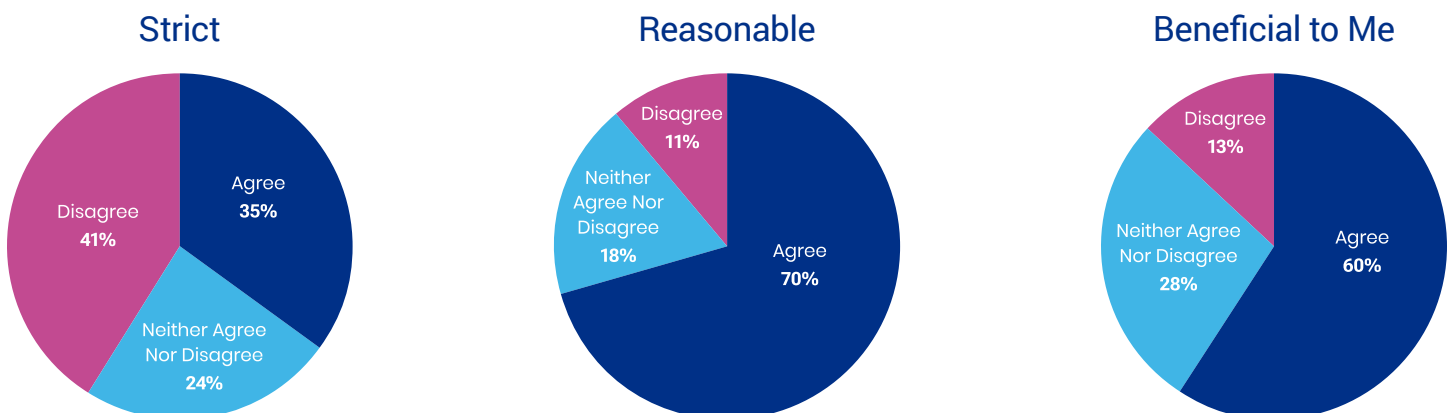


## Perceptions of Family Media Rules

Expanding on our [last Pulse Survey](#), we addressed adolescents' perceptions of media-related rules.

**Overall:** About one-third (35.4%) said their parents' rules were strict; however, 70.4% found them reasonable, and 59.7% found them beneficial.

My parents' rules around media use are...



## Perceptions of Family Media Rules (cont.)

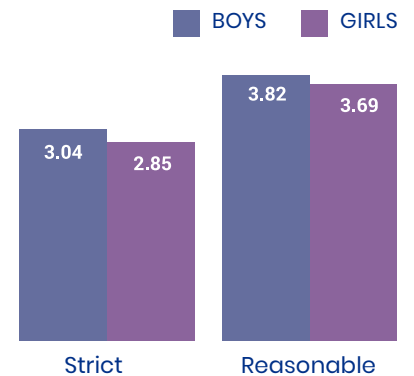
**By Gender:** On average, boys perceived the rules as more strict ( $M = 3.04$ ) than girls ( $M = 2.85$ ), but also found them more reasonable ( $M = 3.82$ ) than girls ( $M = 3.69$ ). These differences are small but consistent across their perceptions of media-related rules.

### BY GENDER

My parents rules around media use are strict and reasonable.

Values are the means of a 5-point response scale:

- 1 strongly disagree
- 2 somewhat disagree
- 3 neither agree nor disagree
- 4 somewhat agree
- 5 strongly agree



**By Age:** Older adolescents tended to perceive the rules as less restrictive ( $M = 2.81$ ) than younger adolescents ( $M = 3.07$ ). There were no significant age or gender differences in how participants perceived the benefits of rules.

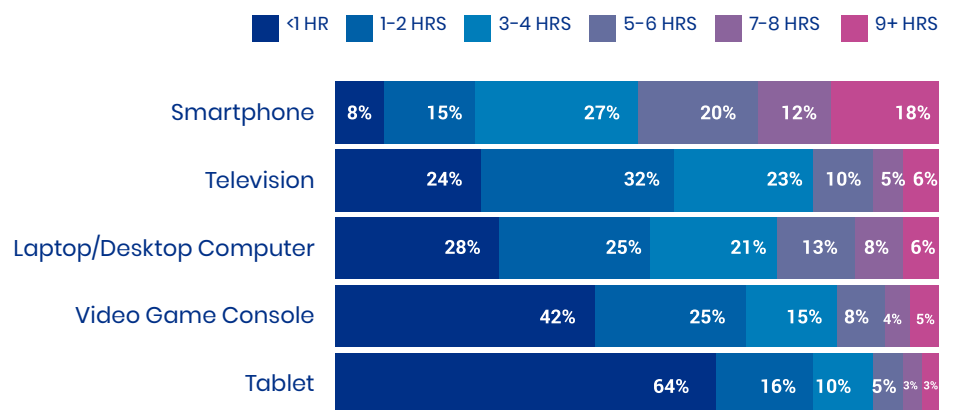
## Media Use & Effects

### KEY FINDINGS

### Device Usage

Nearly half (49.5%) of respondents reported using a smartphone for five hours or more on a typical weekday, and 17.8% of the total sample reported nine hours or more of use. More traditional devices like video games (42% less than one hour per day) and television (24% < 1hr/day) had much lower reported daily use.

On a weekday, how much time do you spend using each of the following devices?

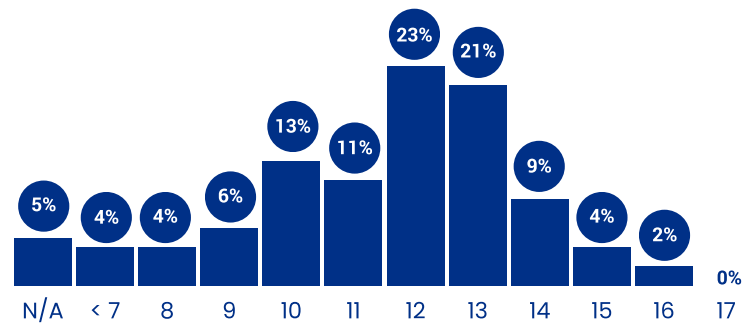


## Social Media Use

Many popular social media platforms restrict use of their platforms for users under the age of 13; however, on average, respondents reported signing up for their first social media account at around 12 years old (M = 11.9), while 25.8% reported getting social media at the age of 10 or younger. The top four platforms youth reported using at least once per day over the past week were YouTube (78.5%), TikTok (70.2%), Snapchat (59.9%), and Instagram (58.7%).

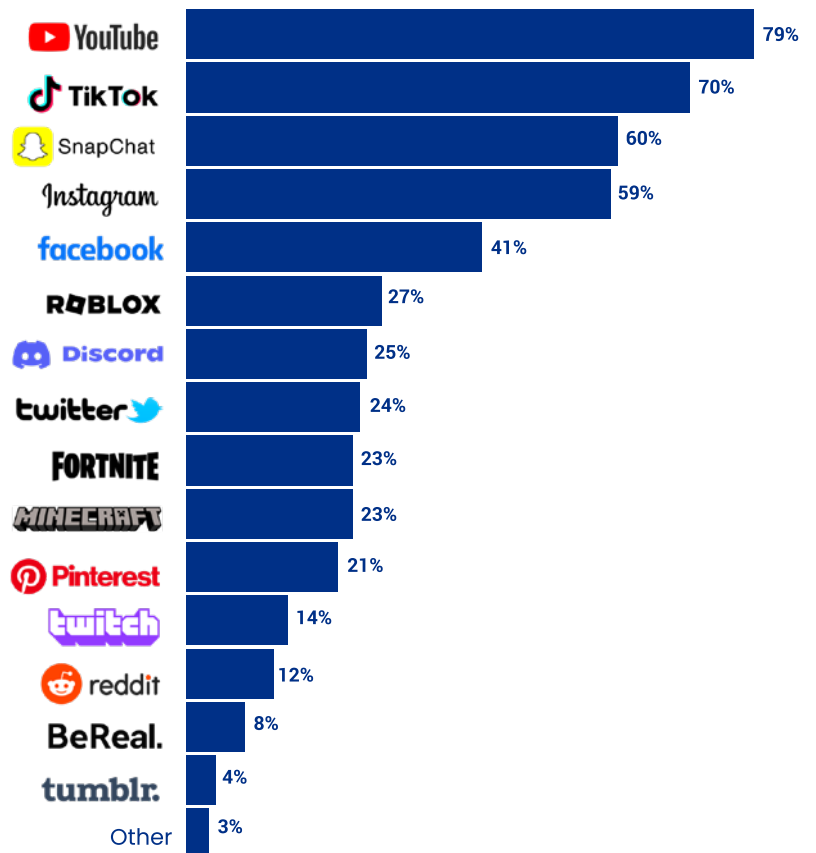
Participants reported doing the following “every time” they used social media: watching videos (35.1%), direct messaging with other people (22.4%), browsing others’ posts (22.2%), and liking/reacting to others’ content (19.2%). In contrast, the least common behavior was going live (i.e. broadcasting over livestream video, 2.9%).

How old were you when you signed up for your first social media account (e.g. TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube)?



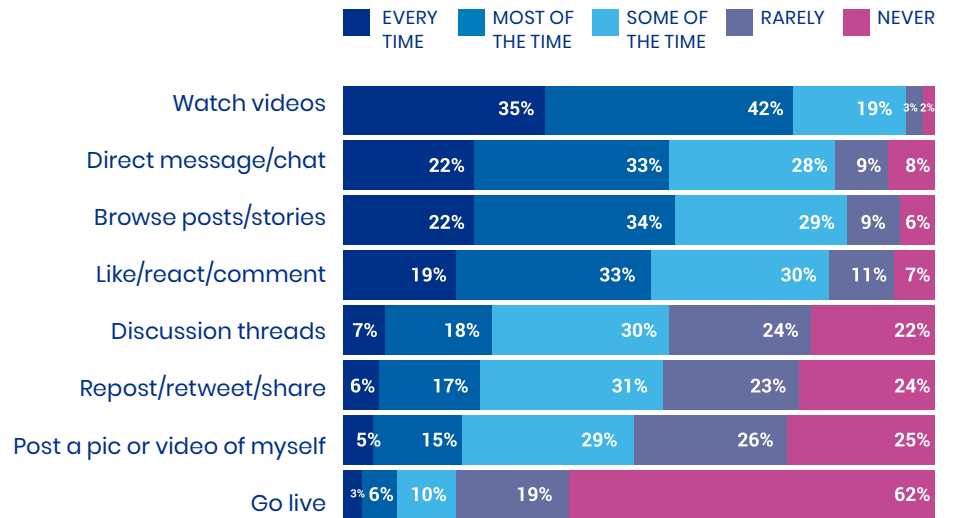
Over the past 7 days, which of the following platforms did you use at least once per day?

(Please select all that apply.)



## Social Media Use (cont.)

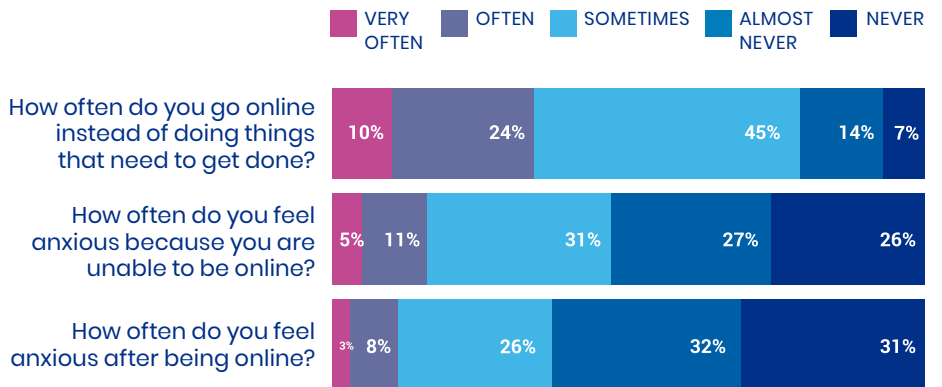
Over the last 7 days, how often did you do each of the following when using social media?



## Indicators of Problematic Use

We asked participants about media-related anxiety during a typical week using a scale commonly used to assess problematic media use. Most respondents (62.6%) reported that they never or almost never felt anxious after being online, and roughly half (53.1%) never or almost never felt anxious (53.1%) when they were unable to be online. Roughly one-third (34.5%) reported going online instead of getting other things done often or very often.

Thinking of a typical week...



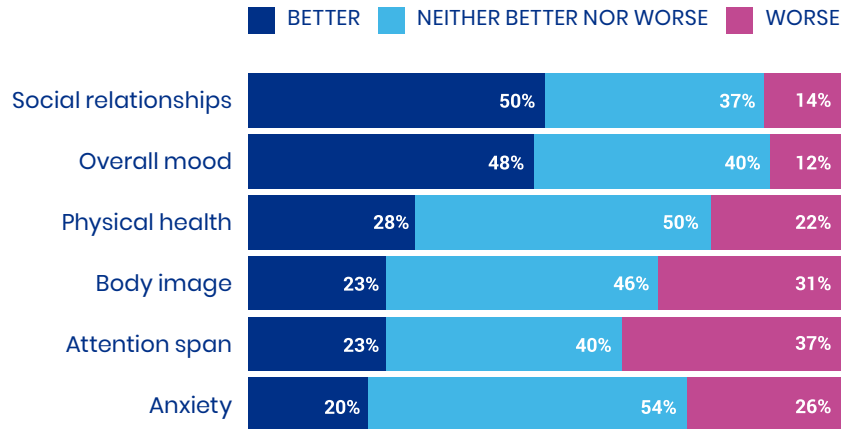
## Effects of Social Media on Well-being

We asked participants if social media made certain aspects of well-being better or worse for them.

**Overall:** Participants reported that social media improves social relationships (50%) and overall mood (47.9%) by a little or a lot. On the other hand, they were more likely to report social media as worsening their attention span (36.8% worse vs 23.3% better), body image (30.8% worse vs 23% better), and anxiety (26.2% worse vs 19.6% better).

### OVERALL

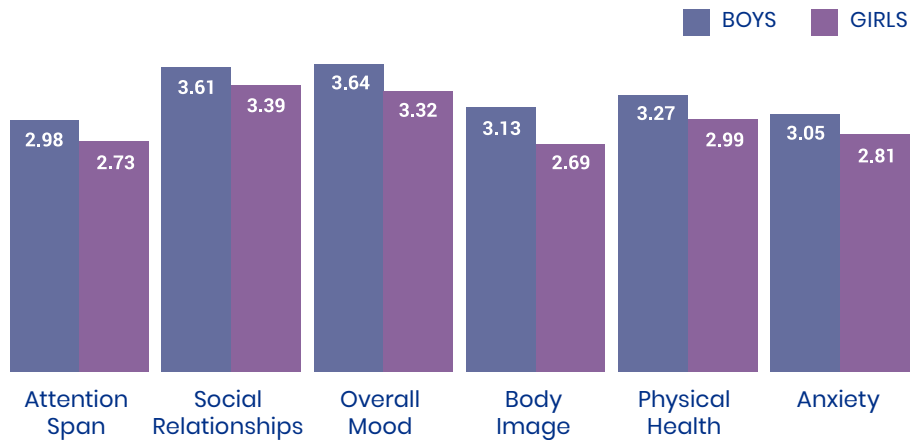
Do you think social media makes each of the following better or worse for you?



**By Gender:** On average, boys reported slightly more positive impacts of using social media overall (M = 3.28) than girls (M = 2.99). In particular, on average, boys reported slightly more positive effects of social media on their attention span (boys = 2.98; girls = 2.73), social relationships (boys = 3.61; girls = 3.39), overall mood (boys = 3.64; girls = 3.32), body image (boys = 3.13; girls = 2.69), physical health (boys = 3.27; girls = 2.99), and anxiety (boys = 3.05; girls = 2.81).

### BY GENDER

Do you think social media makes each of the following better or worse for you?



Values are the means of a 5-point response scale:

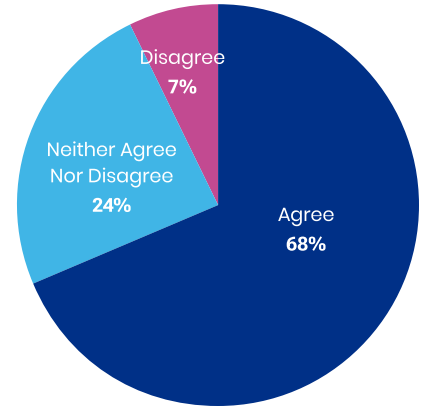
1 - a lot worse, 2 - a little worse, 3 - neither better nor worse, 4 - a little better, 5 - a lot better

**By Age:** Younger adolescents reported slightly more positive impacts of social media on their attention span (younger = 2.99; older = 2.73), social relationships (younger = 3.56; older = 3.44), overall mood (younger = 3.55; older = 3.41), and body image (younger = 3.00; older = 2.84) than their older peers. For both age and gender differences, the differences are small but consistent across each item.

## Customizing Experiences

The majority of participants felt comfortable with their ability to manage their online experiences, such as the content they see or who they interact with (68.3% agreed or strongly agreed).

How much do you agree with the following statement?  
I find it easy to manage my online experiences  
(e.g., content I see, who I interact with) by customizing  
settings on social media.

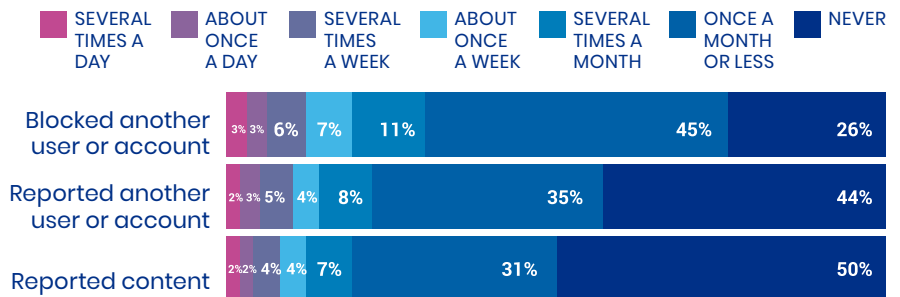


## Blocking and Reporting Frequencies

**Overall:** Most respondents did not frequently block users (45% once a month or less) or report content/users (31%/35% once a month or less); however, on average they were more likely to block another user/account (M = 2.44) than report another user/account (M = 2.06) or content (M = 1.97).

### OVERALL

How often have you done any of the following over social media platforms?

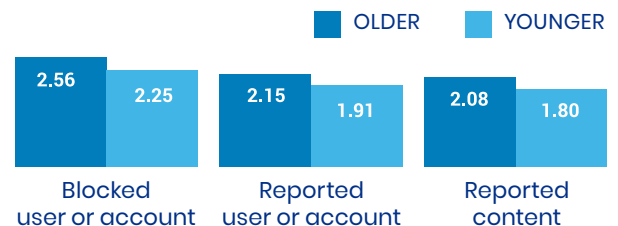


**By Gender:** Girls engaged in more blocking of users/accounts (M = 2.57) than boys (M = 2.31).

**By Age:** Older adolescents engaged in slightly more user blocking (older = 2.56; younger = 2.25), user/account reporting (older = 2.15; younger = 1.91) and content reporting behaviors (older = 2.08; younger = 1.80) in general.

### BY AGE

How often have you done any of the following over social media platforms?



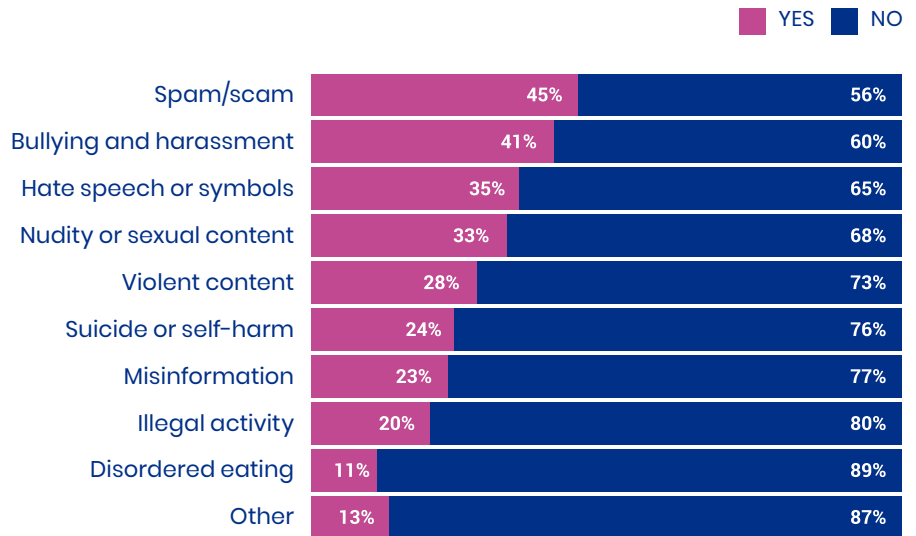
Values are the means of a 7-point response scale: 1 - never, 2 - once a month or less, 3 - several times a month, 4 - about once a week, 5 - several times a week, 6 - about once a day, 7 - several times a day



## Content Reporting

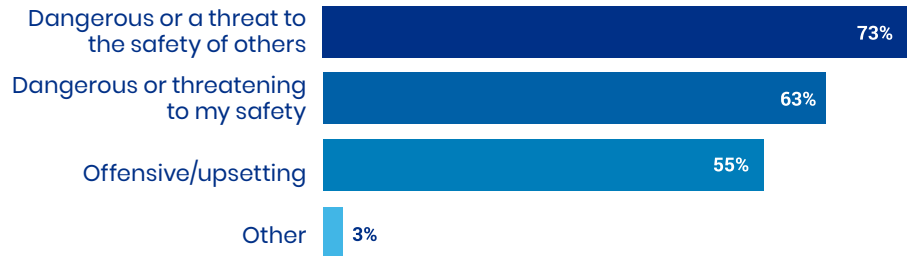
**Overall:** In particular, adolescents in the full sample had reported spam/scams (44.5%), bullying and harassment (40.5%), hate speech or symbols (35.3%), and nudity or sexual content (32.5%). Participants said they would report content if it was offensive/upsetting (55%), a threat to their safety (63%), or, overwhelmingly, a threat to the safety of others (73.4%).

### Have you reported any of the following on social media?



### Why might you want to report content?

(Please select all that apply.)



**By Gender:** There were no significant differences in the reporting motivations between boys and girls.

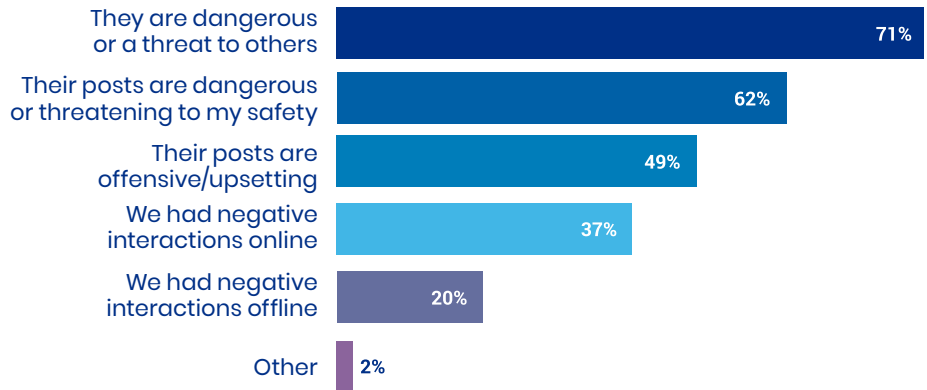
**By Age:** Older adolescents were slightly less likely to report posts that are dangerous or threatening to their own safety (59%) than younger adolescents (69%).

## User Reporting

Similarly, participants said they would report users if they were offensive/upsetting (49%), a threat to their safety (61.9%), and a threat to the safety of others (70.9%). Adolescents appeared to be less likely to report a user if there was a negative interaction online (37.4%) or offline (20.2%).

### Why might you want to report a user?

(Please select all that apply.)

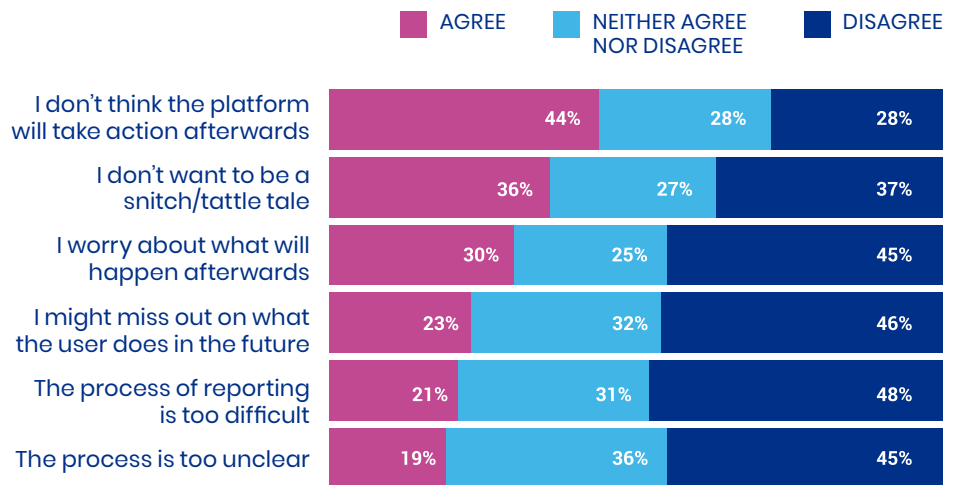


## Deterrents of Reporting

**Overall:** When asked what might prevent them from reporting a user or account, 44.4% of adolescents agreed or strongly agreed that “I don’t think the platform will take action after I report someone.” There was also a concern of the social backlash of reporting, with around one out of three users agreeing that they did not “want to be a snitch/tattle tale” (36.3%) and that they “worry about what will happen after [they] report someone” (30.4%).

### OVERALL

How much do you agree that each of the following prevents you from reporting a user/account?



**By Gender:** On average, girls were somewhat more likely to agree that the process of reporting is too difficult (girls = 2.65) than boys were (boys = 2.51), and they worried more about what would happen after reporting someone (girls = 2.79; boys = 2.66). Girls also were slightly more likely to believe that the platform would not take any actions after they reported someone (girls = 3.25) than boys were (boys = 3.07).

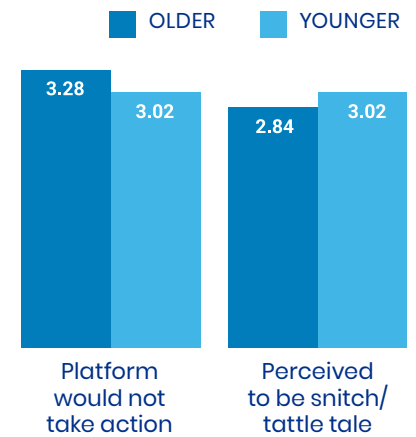
## Deterrents of Reporting (cont.)

**By Age:** In terms of age, older adolescents were more likely to believe that the platform would not take any action if someone was reported (older = 3.28; younger = 3.02), while younger adolescents were more concerned about being viewed as a snitch/tattle tale (older = 2.84; younger = 3.02).

### BY AGE

How much do you agree that each of the following prevents you from reporting a user/account?

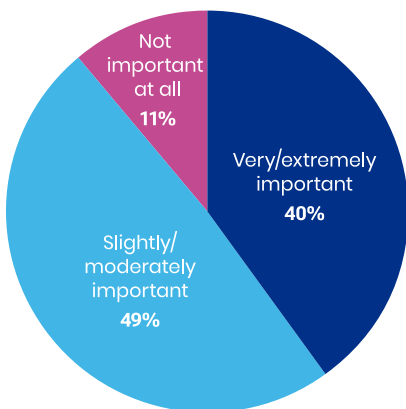
Values are the means of a 5-point response scale: 1- strongly disagree, 2- somewhat disagree, 3- neither agree nor disagree, 4- somewhat agree, 5- strongly agree



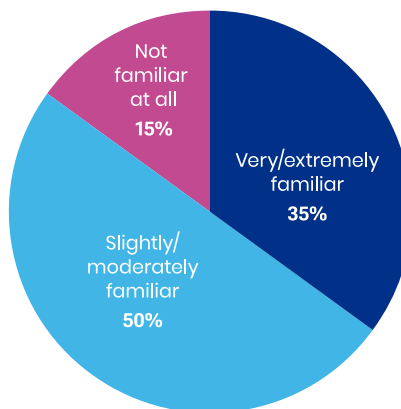
## Community Guidelines

**Overall:** Regarding social media sites' stated rules and regulations, 40.3% of respondents said it was very or extremely important to know a platform's Community Guidelines, while 11.1% reported that this was not important at all. When asked how familiar they are with Community Guidelines, half of participants (50.3%) were only slightly or moderately familiar, with 35% describing themselves as very or extremely familiar. 38.8% of respondents were very or extremely confident in their knowledge of what content is or is not allowed on the platforms they use, and only 7.9% were not confident at all in this knowledge.

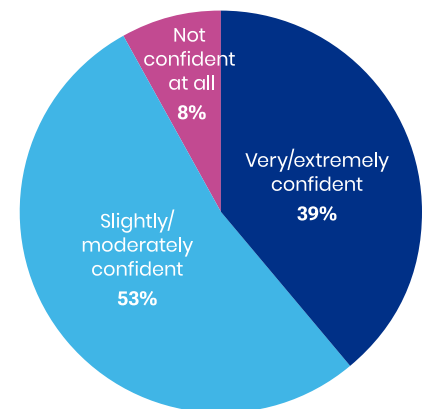
How **important** is it for you to know a platform's Community Guidelines?



How **familiar** are you with the Community Guidelines (e.g. content rules) for the platforms you use?



How **confident** are you that you know what content users are and are not allowed to share on the platforms you use?



**By Gender:** Compared to girls, boys, on average, reported being more familiar with the Community Guidelines (e.g., content rules) of social media platforms (girls = 2.88; boys = 3.06) and feeling more confident that they know what content users are and are not allowed to share (girls = 3.07; boys = 3.26).

## Effectiveness

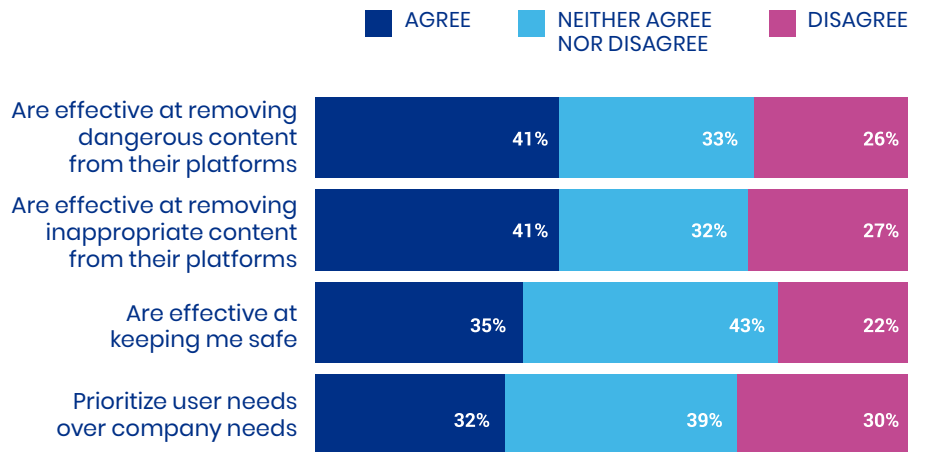
We asked participants to share their perceptions of social media platforms' effectiveness at keeping them safe, such as by handling dangerous or inappropriate content.

**Overall:** Less than half of our participants agreed or strongly agreed that social media platforms were effective at removing dangerous (40.8%) and inappropriate content (41.1%) from their platforms, and only one in three agreed or strongly agreed that social media platforms were effective at keeping them safe (35.4%).

When asked whether they felt that social media platforms prioritize user needs over company needs, the response was nearly split: 31.5% agreed that platforms did prioritize user needs, while 29.8% disagreed.

### OVERALL

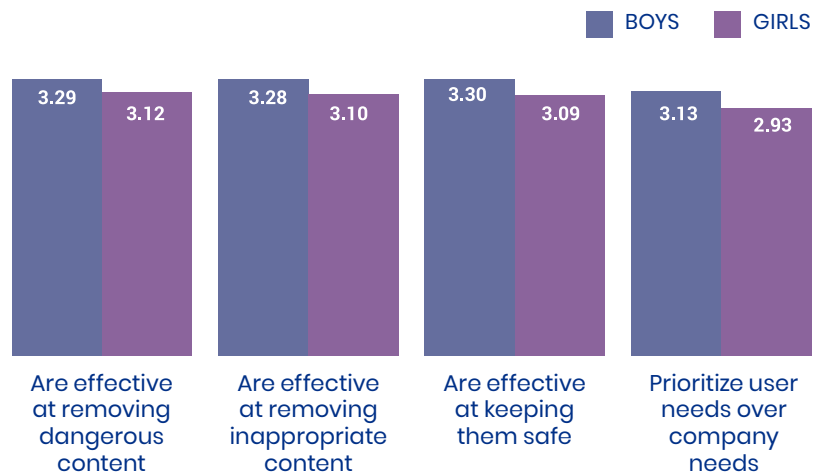
How much do you agree with the following?  
Social media platforms...



**By Gender:** On average, boys were more likely than girls to agree that social media platforms are effective at removing dangerous content (boys = 3.29; girls = 3.12) and inappropriate content (boys = 3.28; girls = 3.10), and keeping them safe (boys = 3.30; girls = 3.09). Boys also agreed more that social media platforms prioritize user needs over company needs (boys = 3.13) than girls did (girls = 2.93). These differences are small but consistent across each item.

### BY GENDER

How much do you agree with the following?  
Social media platforms...



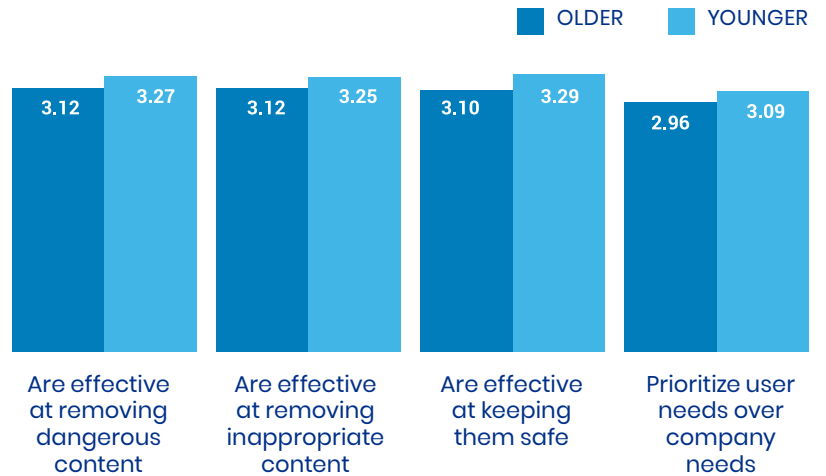
Values are the means of a 5-point response scale: 1 - strongly disagree, 2 - somewhat disagree, 3 - neither agree nor disagree, 4 - somewhat agree, 5 - strongly agree

## Effectiveness (cont.)

**By Age:** Older adolescents tended to believe less in the effectiveness of social media in removing dangerous (older = 3.12; younger = 3.27) or inappropriate content (older = 3.12; younger = 3.25); they were also less likely to believe that social media platforms are effective at keeping them safe (older = 3.10; younger = 3.29). Younger adolescents tended to agree more that social media platforms prioritize user needs over company needs (older = 2.96; younger = 3.09). As with the gender averages, these differences are small but consistent.

### BY AGE

How much do you agree with the following?  
Social media platforms...

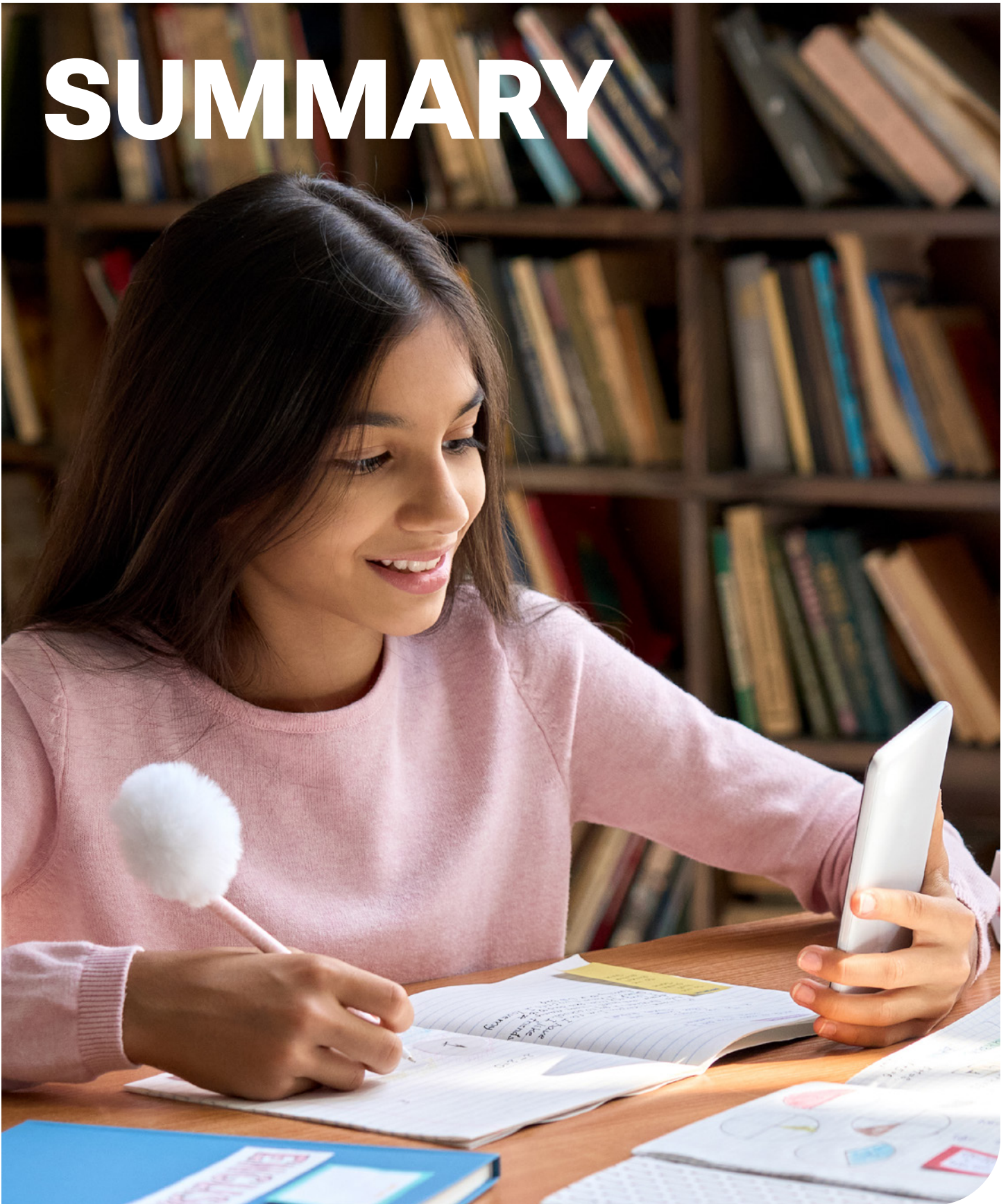


Values are the means of a 5-point response scale: 1 - strongly disagree, 2 - somewhat disagree, 3 - neither agree nor disagree, 4 - somewhat agree, 5 - strongly agree





# SUMMARY





# Summary

## Key Findings

Consistent with previous surveys, our findings show that adolescents continue to be heavy users of digital media, with particularly high use of social media and video streaming platforms. As youth encounter new ways to consume content and interact with others in online spaces, we can help guide their healthy use by better understanding their own and their parents' approach to safety and well-being in those contexts. This survey enhances our understanding of family strategies to support adolescents' healthy and safe use of online media, the perceived effects of media on adolescents' well-being, how young people respond to negative experiences online, and how they view social media platforms' efforts to keep users safe. Key findings include:

1. Most households have several different types of family media rules and adolescents generally report **positive opinions of their parents' mediation strategies**.
  - Most rules are based on content (e.g., certain apps they can't use) or context (e.g., no phones at the dinner table) rather than screen time. This approach likely reflects the challenges of keeping track of screen time as well as the recognition that the amount of time using media is less important than how it's being used.
  - Older adolescents tended to have fewer household media rules and to see them as less restrictive overall.
  - Adolescents generally saw media rules as reasonable and beneficial. This may be particularly true when adolescents feel that parents are considering their perspectives and have convincing reasons for setting rules.
  - According to our sample, fewer than 50% of parents regularly enforced media-related rules or followed the rules themselves. Considering that adolescents generally value fairness and transparency in rules, they may be less likely to push back against rules when they are consistently enforced and modeled by their parents.
2. Young people see **media as having mixed effects** on their health and well-being, differing somewhat based on gender and age.
  - Although most adolescents did not report experiencing anxiety from being online, many did agree that spending time online prevented them from getting other things done.
  - Participants reported that social media enhances their peer relationships and improves their overall mood.
  - Social media use was mainly seen as having a neutral (neither positive nor negative) effect on various aspects of well-being, but girls and older teens rated the effects of social media use on body image, attention span, anxiety, and physical health as more negative than did boys and younger teens.
  - Although many popular social media platforms restrict use of their platforms to those 13 and older, our participants reported having created their first social media account at an average age of 12, and roughly 1 in 4 did so at age 10 or younger.

3. Adolescents reported finding it **fairly easy to manage their online experiences**, including the content they see and the users they interact with. This suggests that knowledge and ease-of-use are not major barriers to using social media safety tools (i.e. blocking, reporting), although not all young people use them in the same ways.
  - Most adolescents did not frequently block or report other users or content; however, when they did take action, they were more likely to block than report.
  - When youth do report content or other users, it is usually for things they find offensive or threatening to their own or others' safety. Adolescents are less likely to report others for interpersonal reasons, including online or offline conflicts.
  - Girls appeared to engage in more blocking than boys. Older adolescents reported engaging in more blocking and reporting behaviors in general, especially if they felt that the safety of others was at risk.
  - Participants are deterred from reporting when they feel that the platform will not take action, when they are worried about what will happen after reporting, or when they fear social repercussions (e.g., being seen as a "snitch/tattletale").
4. While adolescents' **perceptions of platforms' safety features and guidelines are fairly positive**, their responses suggest that some tension exists between user needs and platform policies.
  - Many adolescents reported that knowing a platform's Community Guidelines (e.g., content rules) is only slightly or moderately important, and that they felt slightly or moderately confident in their own knowledge of these guidelines for their platform(s) of choice.
  - While participants reported feeling that platforms are fairly effective at removing harmful content and keeping users safe, they are uncertain if platforms would take direct action against other users.
  - There is some doubt among teens about whether social media platforms sufficiently prioritize their users' needs over their own corporate interests.

## Implications

Overall, these findings paint a picture of adolescents as heavy yet savvy consumers of digital media. They generally support the rules their families have in place to moderate media use, and they may perceive rules even more favorably when parents follow them too (Hefner et al., 2019; Yue et al., 2023).

Adolescents are also aware of the mixed effects stemming from their media use – while social media can improve social relationships, it can negatively impact other aspects of well-being, particularly those tied to mental health. These findings further reveal a range of potentially harmful content young users are encountering online and highlight some ongoing challenges.

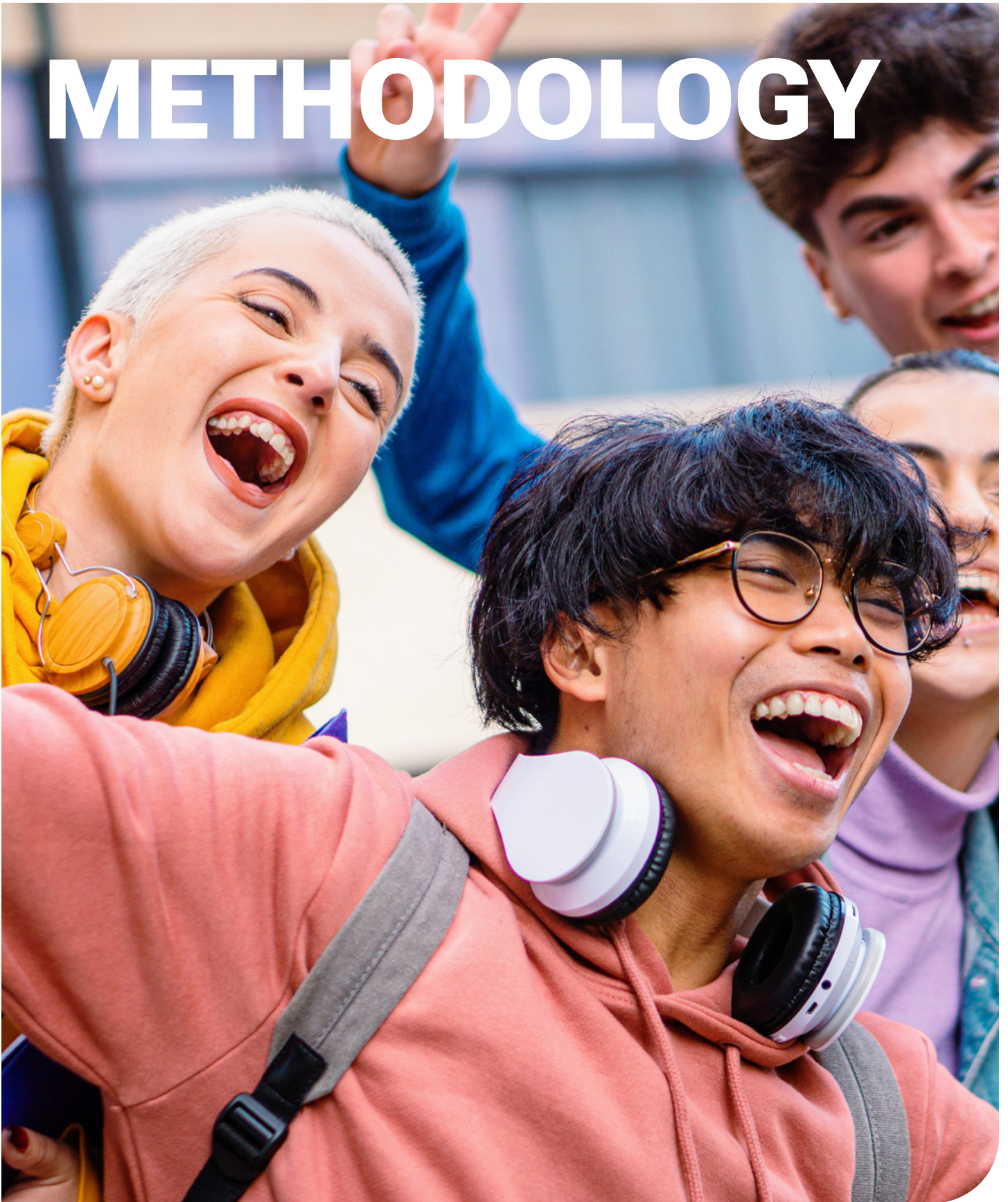
Past research has found that children who begin using social media at an earlier age may be at greater risk for problematic digital media use during adolescence (Charmaraman et al., 2022), and this survey indicates that early social media use may be a fairly common occurrence.

Further, while youth are somewhat confident in their knowledge of community guidelines and online safety features, there are barriers to utilizing them, particularly the concern that reporting content or users on social media will be ineffective or have social repercussions.

Finally, the significant differences by gender and age suggest that individual characteristics may play a role in how adolescents approach these issues, highlighting the need for researchers, technology companies, and regulators to move beyond a one-size-fits-all approach when trying to promote adolescents' health and well-being within online spaces.



# METHODOLOGY





# Methodology

The findings reported here come from a nationwide online survey of 1,502 adolescents between the ages of 13 and 17 years old. Participants were recruited through Alchemer, an online research service that partners with over 350 existing survey panels with a total reach of over 437 million users worldwide. Adolescents in the United States who had pre-registered with one of these panels were invited to respond. Quotas for age, gender identity, and race/ethnicity were used to obtain a broadly diverse sample with at least 1 participant from each of the 50 states. The breakdown was as follows:

- **By age:** 20% 13-year-olds; 20.2% 14-year-olds; 19.8 % 15-year-olds; 20.2% 16-year-olds; and 19.8% 17-year-olds
- **By gender identity:** 48.1% male; 48.2% female; 3.0% other
- **By race/ethnicity\*:** 57.2% White/non-Hispanic; 13% Black/non-Hispanic; 4.0% Asian; 16.2% Hispanic/Latino; 1% American Indian or Alaskan Native; 0.1% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander; 0.3% Middle Eastern or North African; 6.3% multi-racial; 0.4% other; and 1.4% prefer not to answer/no response
- **By grade:** Adolescents in middle school (5–8, 26%); high school (9–12, 72.4%); and not in school (1.6%)
- **By type of school:** Public school, including charter schools (87.9%); private school, religious or secular (8.6%); and homeschool (3.5%).

During December, 2022, participants completed a survey of up to 41 questions asking about their family media rules, social media use, perceived impact of media on well-being, and strategies for addressing negative experiences on social media platforms. Most questions provided responses on a five-point scale with the mid-point being a neutral option (e.g., “a lot worse”, “a little worse”, “neither better nor worse”, “a little better”, “a lot better”). For ease of reporting, we have sometimes combined the top two options (e.g., “a little better”, “a lot better”) and the bottom two options (e.g., “a lot worse”, “a little worse”) into a single concept (e.g., “better”, “worse”). For questions that used the five-point scale “never, rarely, sometimes, often, always,” we sometimes report a percentage that combines the results for “sometimes, often, and always” and refer to it as occurring “at least sometimes.”

The Boston Children’s Hospital IRB reviewed and approved this study. Data were collected from December 5 to December 17, 2022. Wording for all the questions can be found in the Appendix at the end of this report.

**Parent and Participant Consent.** Because this was a fully anonymous survey and recruitment was done through Alchemer, parental consent was waived for this survey. All participants had opted in to the survey network allowing them to be contacted directly about survey opportunities, thus having already provided one layer of consent. Participant consent was obtained at the start of the survey. A passage outlined the details of the survey, risks, compensation information, details about the research team (including contact information), and other relevant information, followed by this language: “By selecting the “next button”, you acknowledge that you have read the above statements, that you may withdraw from the study at any time, and that you consent to participate in this study.”

**Compensation.** Participants were compensated by their respective survey company with accrued points based on length of the survey (the amount of points per length is determined by each respective survey company). These points can be “cashed in” for Amazon gift cards, PayPal deposits, upgrades to certain services that they use, or other ways established through the survey company agreement. Compensation systems vary slightly across companies.

**Quality Control.** “Attention check” questions were placed throughout the survey to ensure that participants were paying attention as they moved through the questions. If a participant answered an attention check question incorrectly, they were disqualified and redirected to an external webpage. Final data were reviewed and cleaned to remove any incomplete and low quality responses.

**Rounding.** For figures throughout the report, values may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding, multiple response options, or skipped question or response choices.

**Mean Differences.** The reported means are calculated for questions that used a five-point scale (e.g., 1= never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often, 5 = always; 1 = a lot worse, 2 = a little worse, 3 = neither better nor worse, 4 = a little better, 5 = a lot worse). There is one exception: frequency of blocking/reporting behaviors was measured on a 7-point scale (never = 1; once a month or less = 2; several times a month = 3; about once a week = 4; several times a week = 5; about once a day = 6; several times a day = 7). Means were compared by gender (boy, girl) and age (older, younger) using ANOVAs. Any differences reported were significant at  $P < 0.05$  or higher.

**Age Categories.** Throughout this report we report findings for “younger adolescents” and “older adolescents.” In our analyses, younger adolescents refer to participants aged 13-14 years, and older adolescents refer to participants aged 15-17 years.

**Gender Identity Categories.** For many of the included measures, we compare responses of youth identifying as “boy” and “girl” but not for adolescents who identified another way (e.g., non-binary, genderfluid). Because only 3% identified as other than “boy” or “girl,” the group is not large enough to yield meaningful comparisons.

*\*Note: Respondents could choose as many categories as they wanted. In order to avoid counting participants twice, participants who selected multiple choices are included in the “Mixed race” category. Any respondent who selected “Hispanic” was included only in the Hispanic category regardless of other race/ethnicity selections they made. This approach results in the above-listed mutually exclusive categories.*



# APPENDIX





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APPENDIX

# Survey Questions

**P1. Are you an adolescent between the ages of 13–17 years?**

Yes No

**P2. How old are you? (please only use numbers)**

13 14 15 16 17

**P3. What country do you currently live in?**

United States Outside the United States

**P4. What state do you live in?**

Alabama	Hawaii	Massachusetts	New Mexico	South Dakota
Alaska	Idaho	Michigan	New York	Tennessee
Arizona	Illinois	Minnesota	North Carolina	Texas
Arkansas	Indiana	Mississippi	North Dakota	Utah
California	Iowa	Missouri	Ohio	Vermont
Colorado	Kansas	Montana	Oklahoma	Virginia
Connecticut	Kentucky	Nebraska	Oregon	Washington
Delaware	Louisiana	Nevada	Pennsylvania	West Virginia
Florida	Maine	New Hampshire	Rhode Island	Wisconsin
Georgia	Maryland	New Jersey	South Carolina	Wyoming

**P5. What year were you born?**

2004 2006 2008  
2005 2007 2009

**P6. What grade are you currently in?**

5th grade 7th grade 9th grade 11th grade Not in school  
6th grade 8th grade 10th grade 12th grade

**P7. What kind of school do you attend?**

Public school (including charter schools)  
Private school (religious or secular)  
Homeschool

**P8. What is your gender identity?**

Girl Non-binary Different identity Prefer not to answer  
Boy (please specify)

**P9. Do you identify as transgender?**

Yes                                      No

**P10. What is your race/ethnicity? (check all that apply)**

American Indian or Alaskan Native                                      Middle Eastern or North African  
Asian    White  
Black or African American    Other (write-in)  
Hispanic or Latino    Prefer not to answer  
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander

**P11. What is the highest degree of education one of your parents has obtained?**

No degree    Master's degree  
High school degree or GED    PhD/MD/JD or other advanced degree  
Associate's degree    I'm not sure  
Bachelor's degree

**Q1. What rules does your family have about digital media use?**

	Yes	No
Content you can't look at		
Apps that you can't use		
Places you can't use it (e.g., no phones at the dinner table)		
Times you can't use it (e.g., no screens after 9 PM)		
Time limits (e.g., 1 hour per day)		
Some other rule(s) not listed here		
No rules		

**Q2. How often do your parents enforce rules about screen media use?**

Never                                      Sometimes                                      Always  
Rarely                                      Often

**Q3. How often do your parents follow these rules themselves?**

Never                                      Sometimes                                      Always  
Rarely                                      Often

**Q4. How much do you agree with any of the following?**

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
If I break media use rules, my parent(s) get mad					
If I break media use rules, my parent(s) threaten to punish me					
My parent(s) have convincing reasons for making media use rules					
My parent(s) consider my perspective when they set/enforce media use rules					

**Q5. My parents' rules around media use are strict.**

Strongly disagree      Disagree      Neither agree nor disagree      Agree      Strongly agree

**Q6. My parents' rules around media use are reasonable.**

Strongly disagree      Disagree      Neither agree nor disagree      Agree      Strongly agree

**Q7. My parents' rules around media use are beneficial to me.**

Strongly disagree      Disagree      Neither agree nor disagree      Agree      Strongly agree

**Q8. This is an attention check question. Please select C as the answer choice.**

A      B      C      D

**Q9. How true are the following statements for you?**

	Not at all true	Somewhat true	Neither true nor untrue	Somewhat true	Extremely true
I can't stop myself from doing something, even if I should be doing something else					
Play and fun keep me from getting my schoolwork done					
I am able to work towards my goals					

**Q10. Have you ever been diagnosed by a doctor with the following?**

	Yes	No
ADHD		
Depression		
Anxiety		
Eating Disorder		
Autism Spectrum Disorder		
Learning Disabilities		
Other mental health or behavioral diagnosis not listed		

**Q11. On a weekday, how much time do you spend using each of the following devices?**

	0 hours	Less than 1 hour	1-2 hours	3-4 hours	5-6 hours	7-8 hours	9 or more hours
Smartphone							
Tablet							
Laptop/desktop computer							
Television							
Video game console							

**Q12. How old were you when you signed up for your first social media account (e.g., TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat, Youtube)?**

7 or younger	11	15	I do not have any social media accounts
8	12	16	
9	13	17	
10	14		

**Q13. Over the past 7 days, which of the following platforms did you use at least once per day? (Please select all that apply.)**

Instagram	Reddit	Fortnite	Other (write in platform full name)
Snapchat	Tumblr	BeReal	
TikTok	Facebook	Twitch	
YouTube	Roblox	Discord	
Twitter	Minecraft	Pinterest	

**Q14. Over the last 7 days, how often did you do each of the following when using social media?**

	Never	Rarely	Some of the time	Most of the time	Every time
Direct message/chat with other people					
Have conversations with others in the comments section or a discussion thread					
Like, react, or comment on others' content					
Browse others' posts/stories					
Repost/retweet/share others' content					
Watch videos					
Post a picture or video about myself					
Go live (e.g. broadcasting myself over a livestream video)					

**Q15. Thinking of a typical week ...**

	Never	Almost never	Sometimes	Often	Very often
How often do you feel anxious after being online?					
How often do you feel anxious because you are unable to be online?					
How often do you go online instead of doing things that need to get done?					

**Q16. Over the last 7 days, how often have you felt the following emotions?**

	Never	Almost never	Sometimes	Often	Very often
Jealous					
Anxious					
Lonely/isolated					
Sad/depressed					
Socially connected					
Happy					



**Q17. Do you think social media makes each of the following better or worse for you?**

	A lot worse	A little worse	Neither better nor worse	Better	A lot better
Attention span					
Social relationships					
Overall mood					
Body image					
Physical health					
Anxiety					

**Q18. This is an attention check question. Please select 7 as the answer choice.**

One                      4                      7                      Fifteen

**Q19. How much do you agree with the following statement? I find it easy to manage my online experiences (e.g., content I see, who I interact with) by customizing settings on social media.**

Strongly disagree              Disagree              Neither agree nor disagree              Agree              Strongly agree

**Q20. How often have you done any of the following over social media platforms?**

	Several times a day	About once a day	Several times a week	About once a week	Several times a month	Once a month or less	Never
Blocked another user/account							
Reported another user/account							
Reported content							

**Q21. Have you reported any of the following on social media?**

Yes No

	Yes	No
Spam/scam		
Nudity or sexual content		
Hate speech or symbols		
Violent content		
Bullying and harassment		
Illegal activity (e.g. drug or underage alcohol use)		
Suicide or self-harm		
Disordered eating		
Misinformation		
Other		

**Q22. Why might you want to report content? (Please select all that apply.)**

If I find the post offensive/upsetting

If I find the post dangerous or threatening to my safety

If I think the post is dangerous or a threat to the safety of others

Other - write in

**Q23. Why might you want to report a user? (Please select all that apply.)**

I find their post offensive/upsetting

I think they are dangerous or a threat to others

Their posts are dangerous or threatening to my safety

The user and I had negative interactions online (for example: via a direct message)

The user and I had negative interactions offline

Other - write in

**Q24. How much do you agree that each of the following prevents you from reporting a user/account?**

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
The process of reporting is too difficult (e.g., requires too many steps, takes too much time)					
The process is too unclear (e.g., the instructions are hard to follow)					
I worry about what will happen after I report someone					
I don't think the platform will take action after I report someone					
I might miss out on what the user does or says in the future					
I don't want to be a snitch/tattle tale					

**Q25. Think about a situation where you have come across content or user activity that you reported or wanted to report while using social media. Tell us about what happened. [For example...What kind of content/activity was it? Where did it occur (e.g., platform, in-app section/page)? Who was involved (e.g., sibling, friend, peer, stranger, acquaintance)? How did the experience make you feel? What did you do in response to the situation?] If you have never wanted to report anything on social media, please write N/A.**

(open-ended response)

**Q26. How important is it for you to know a platform's Community Guidelines?**

Not important at all      Slightly important      Moderately important      Very important      Extremely important

**Q27. How familiar are you with the Community Guidelines (e.g. content rules) for the platforms you use?**

Not familiar at all      Slightly familiar      Moderately familiar      Very familiar      Extremely familiar

**Q28. How confident are you that you know what content users are and are not allowed to share on the platforms you use?**

Not confident at all      Slightly confident      Moderately confident      Very confident      Extremely confident

**Q29. How much do you agree with the following?**

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Social media platforms are effective at removing dangerous content from their platforms					
Social media platforms are effective at removing inappropriate content from their platforms					
Social media platforms are effective at keeping me safe					
Social media platforms prioritize user needs over company needs					

**Q30. Regardless of your answers, did you answer the previous questions to the best of your ability?**

- I've answered all questions to my best ability
- I'm not really paying attention
- I'm answering randomly
- None of the above

# How We Create Impact

The Digital Wellness Lab conducts, translates, and distributes rigorous research on the positive and negative effects of technology and interactive media use on young people to inform our progress towards positive health and development for every child, teen, and young adult.

Through our research, we seek to:

**Advance digital wellness focused design, delivery, and marketing practices in the tech industry** by working to understand their current and future challenges and to translate our research outcomes into actionable insights to share with company decision-makers to enable healthy interactive media experiences for youth.

**Embed digital wellness in healthcare strategies** by providing evidence-based knowledge and tools designed to move towards a more standardized understanding of, and approach to digital well-being, and to empower clinicians in their ability to help young people and their families build and maintain healthy behaviors.

Our work is supported in part by unrestricted donations from technology, entertainment, and healthcare companies, however we do not evaluate, endorse, or give preference to any products or platforms.

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## Boston Children's Digital Wellness Lab

The Digital Wellness Lab at Boston Children's Hospital and Harvard Medical School seeks to understand and promote positive and healthy digital media experiences for young people, from birth through young adulthood.

The Digital Wellness Lab is made up of a dynamic and collaborative team of experts and thought leaders from health sciences, tech, academics and entertainment. We are ever-evolving and welcome others to join us on our mission. Here are some ways you can get involved in our work:

### **BECOME A SUPPORTER**

The Digital Wellness Lab convenes supporters from healthcare, technology, media, and entertainment to deepen our understanding and address the future of young people's healthy engagement with media and technology. If your organization is interested in becoming involved as a financial supporter, please email us at [dwl@childrens.harvard.edu](mailto:dwl@childrens.harvard.edu)

### **JOIN OUR TEAM**

The Digital Wellness Lab at Boston Children's Hospital, the country's top pediatric hospital, is a mission-driven organization dedicated to understanding and promoting wellness in the digital age. We maintain a lean team but anticipate hiring for some key roles in the coming year. If you are interested in joining the Lab, learn more at [digitalwellnesslab.org/get-involved/#join](https://digitalwellnesslab.org/get-involved/#join)

### **VISITING SCHOLAR AND INTERNSHIP OPPORTUNITIES**

The Digital Wellness Lab can host graduate students and post-doctoral researchers who are interested in learning more about digital wellness topics while leveraging their academic expertise to strengthen our global impact. If you are interested in joining us as a visiting scholar or intern, please email your CV and area of academic interest to [dwl@childrens.harvard.edu](mailto:dwl@childrens.harvard.edu).

For more information about our work, please contact Cori Stott, Administrative Director, at [dwl@childrens.harvard.edu](mailto:dwl@childrens.harvard.edu)