

# Parents' Perspectives: Media Use & Remote Learning During the COVID-19 Pandemic



Respondents of a survey said that in the past year, technology has changed the way children connect with others, both in and out of school. In addition, media use has had positive and negative effects on their children's health and well-being.

Information on [the methodology](#) can be found on Page 7 of this report.



**Boston  
Children's  
Hospital**

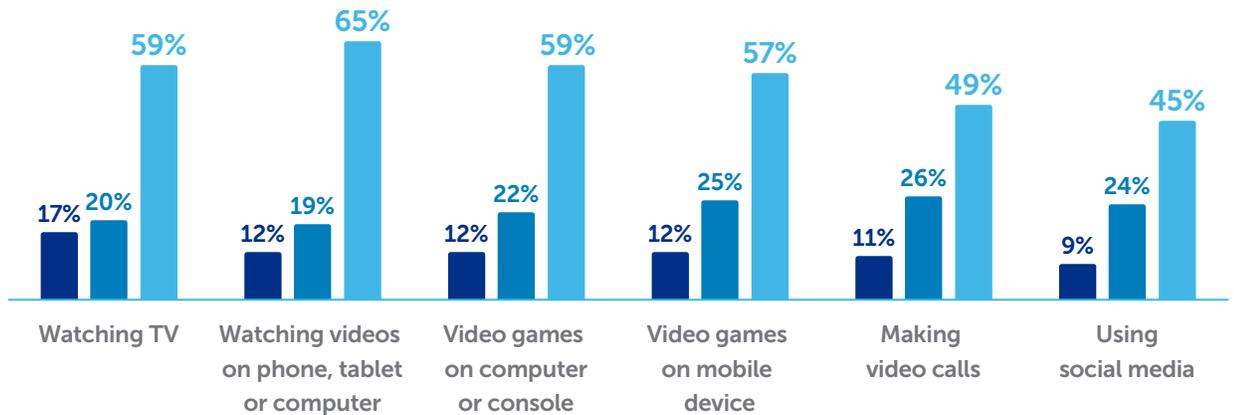
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## According to parents, children's media use has increased during the pandemic

Change in time spent on media by children, according to their parents

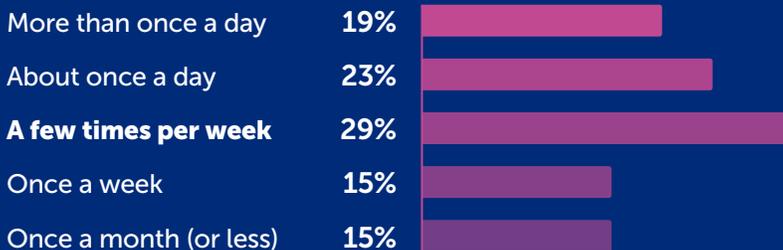
■ More time  
■ No change  
■ Less time



Nearly half of respondents said they are having more frequent arguments with their children over media use.

**36%** of parents surveyed stated that **disagreements are more severe** than before the pandemic

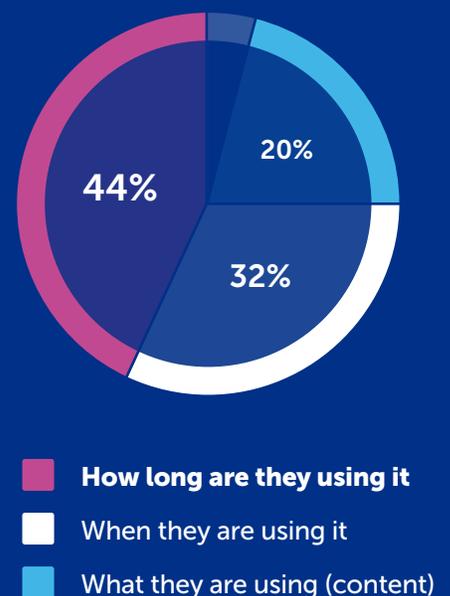
Parents who reported disagreements said they happen:



**62%**

of parents surveyed said their children were multitasking more frequently

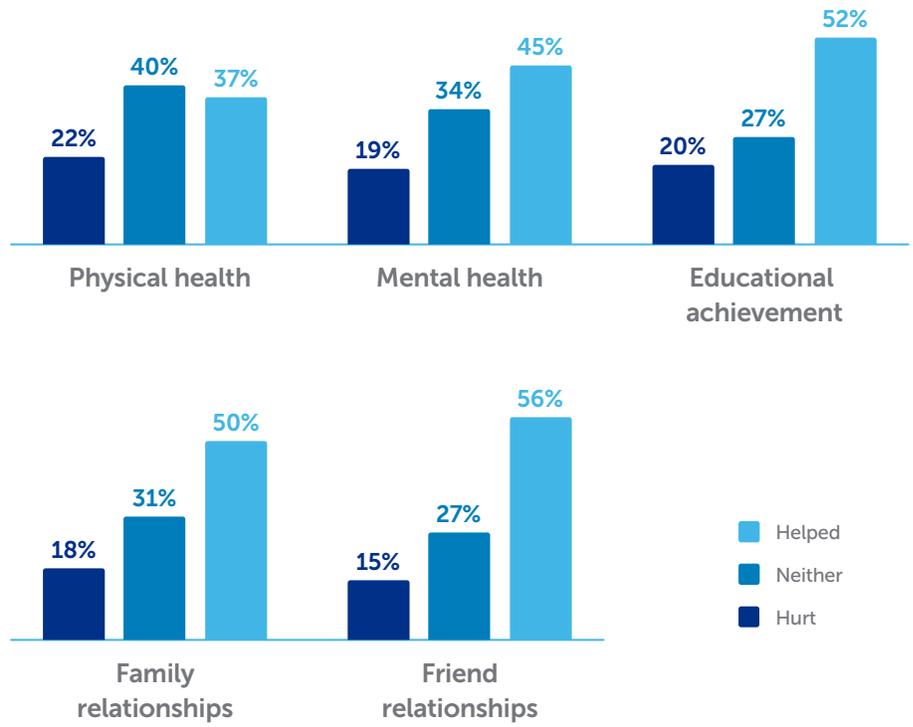
Topics of disagreement



## Parents reported that media use has both helped and hurt their children's health and well-being

More than half of parents said that technology has helped their children in terms of their family relationships, friend relationships and educational achievement.

45% of parents said it was helpful for their children's mental health.



## Meanwhile, parents reported that levels of physical activity, sleep and stress changed during the pandemic year

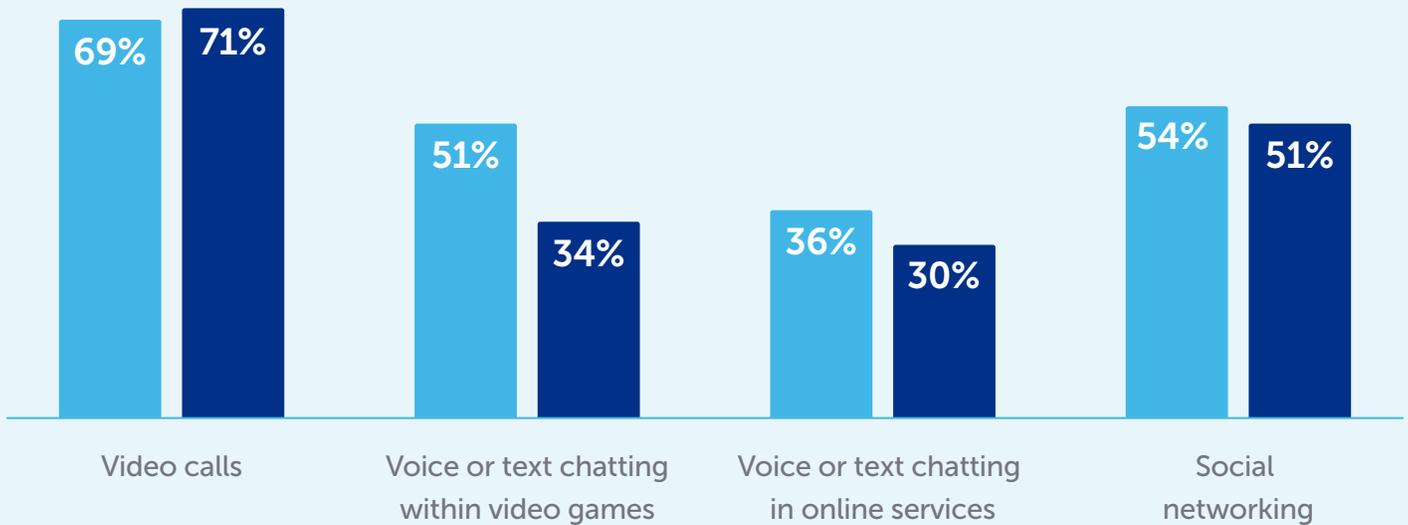
Children's experience during pandemic compared to before the pandemic, according to their parents



# Children are using technology to connect with friends and family remotely through various platforms

**Children's remote connections**  
according to parents surveyed:

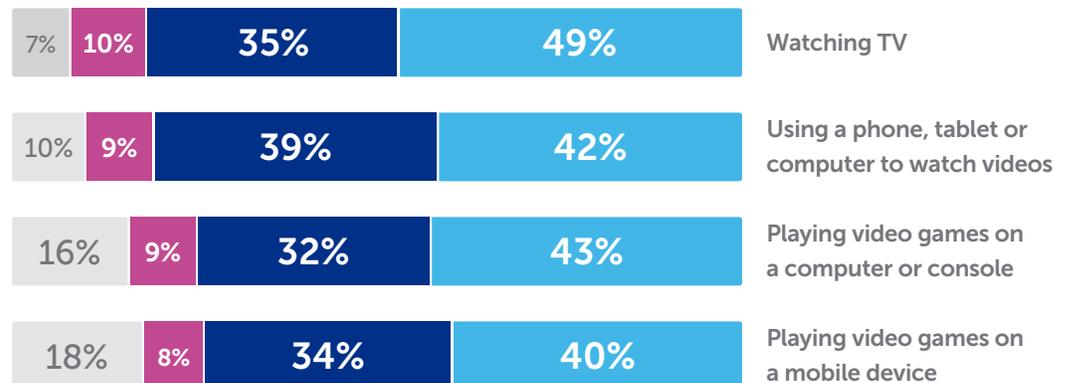
■ Friends ■ Family



## Parents and children are using media together more frequently

Changes in how often parents surveyed use media with their child

- More often
- About the same
- Less often
- We don't do this activity together

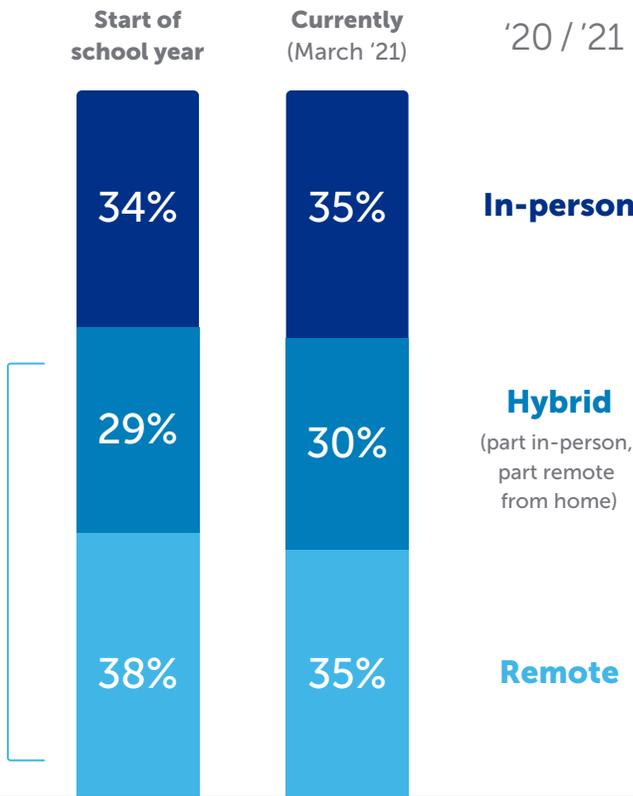


## The majority of parents reported positive experiences with remote learning

Parents surveyed said learning arrangements have not changed much since the beginning of the school year.

**62%**  
of parents surveyed said their children have **had a positive experience with remote learning**

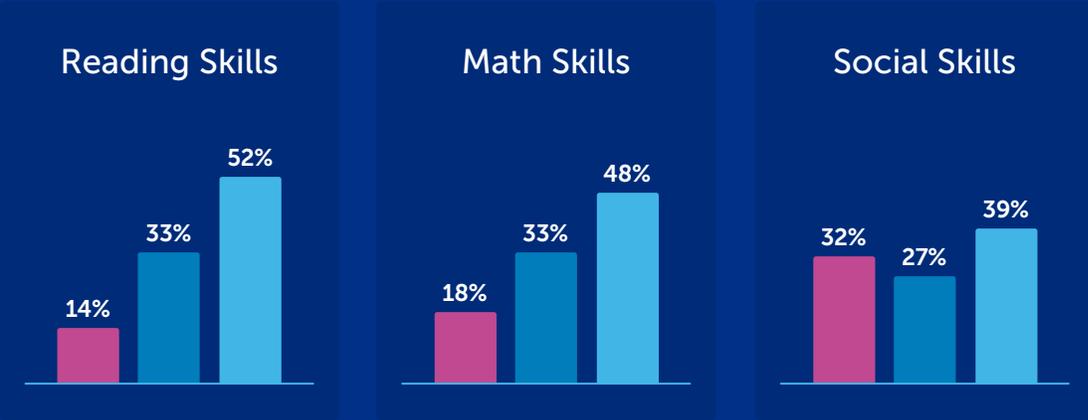
**54%**  
of parents surveyed said they **always or often observe their children's remote learning**



## Parents reported that remote learning helped their children's reading and math skills, but many saw it as harmful to their children's social skills

Impact of remote learning on key skills

- Helped
- Neither
- Hurt

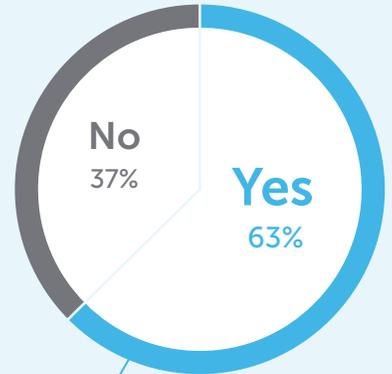


## Most parents reported that their child received a school-supplied device for remote learning



of parents surveyed said their children's school supplied a device for remote learning

Are non-school functions **disabled** on that device?



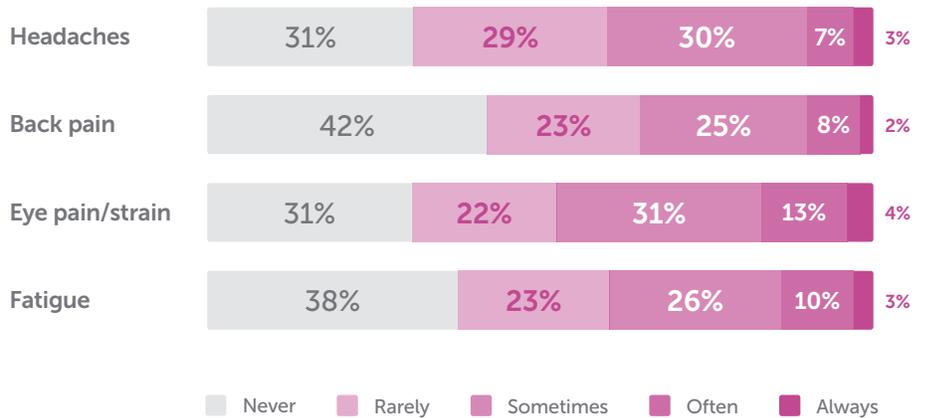
30%

of these parents said their children tried to get around these blocks

## While many have had a positive experience with remote learning, it comes with a physical cost for some children

### More than 1 in 3

parents reported that after a day of remote school, their child sometimes, often or always experienced headaches, back pain, eye pain/strain or fatigue.



# Survey Overview & Methodology

While the pandemic has made a massive impact on the lives of all of us, school-aged children and adolescents have faced some unique and especially consequential disruptions. Who could have imagined even a year ago that the 2020-2021 school year would be so unlike any other before it? Remote schooling replaced face-to-face learning across the country and families stayed home, relying on technology to serve many of their critical social and academic needs. Although school is primarily a place for young people to grow academically, for most students, it also serves as a key opportunity for socialization. Staying home changed everything. Kindergarteners missed what was, for many of them, their first chance to experience a classroom setting and high schoolers missed meaningful life events like prom and graduation that typically culminate their education. The COVID-19 pandemic presented us with an unprecedented situation and the goal of this survey is to document both the challenging and beneficial experiences that families have had with media.

## **This survey sought to address the following three questions:**

1. How has the overall use of media changed for children during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. What do parents see as the impact these changes have had on their child's behaviors and mental health?
3. What has been families' experience with remote schooling and how do parents feel it has impacted students' learning?

The results reported here come from a nationwide online survey of 1,569 parents of children in grades K–12. The sample was recruited through Alchemer, an online research service, and their network of partners that includes over 350 existing survey panels with a total reach of over 437 million users worldwide. Upon opting into this network, respondents provide a standard profile of information, agree to have survey invitations sent to them, and are compensated through a point system according to the length of each survey completed. Adults in the U.S. with a child between the ages of five and 17 were invited to respond with the goal of obtaining at least 1,500 responses. Quotas for grade of child and race/ethnicity were used to obtain a sample diverse in these areas resulting in the following breakdown by grade — parents of elementary school children (K-4, 38%); middle school (5-8, 33%); and high school (9-12, 29%) — and race/ethnicity — 70.8% White/non-Hispanic; 13.4% Black/non-Hispanic; 6.1% Asian; 5.5% Hispanic; and 4.2% other or mixed race. The Boston Children's Hospital IRB reviewed the survey methodology and classified the study as exempt. The survey was conducted from March 9–15, 2021.

The majority of parents reported that their school-aged children's media use increased during the pandemic. Accompanying this increase were more frequent disagreements about their use (49%) as well as increased multitasking (62%)—the use of multiple devices or apps simultaneously. Parents also report that their children are using video calls, such as FaceTime and Zoom, to connect with their friends (69%) and family (71%) and indicated an increase in using media with their children in the home including TV (49%), using mobile devices (42%), and video games (43%).

Half of the parents said that technology has helped their child in term of their family relationships (50%), friend relationships (56%), and educational achievement (52%). A substantial number of parents (45%) reported that media use has been helpful for their child's mental health during the pandemic. On the other hand, many parents indicated concerns about their children's well-being during the pandemic, with 39% saying their child was getting less physical activity and 22% worried that media use was impacting their child's physical health. Additionally, more than 1 out of 3 parents reported that their child experienced some sort of physical problem at least sometimes after a day of remote schooling including headaches (40%), back pain (35%), eye pain/strain (47%), and fatigue (39%).

The majority of parents (55%) report that their child is currently attending hybrid or fully remote school. Most respondents experienced fairly stable internet service, but there was a non-inconsequential number (22%) who reported an unstable internet connection 4 or more days a week. While the majority of these students are online in a private space with the door closed (56%), most parents (53%) report observing their child's schooling "often" or "always." Over 60% of parents reported a somewhat or very positive experience with remote schooling, with the experience being helpful for their child's math (48%), reading (52%) and speaking skills (45%). About 1 in 3, however, reported that they saw remote learning as hurting their child's social skills (32%).

Overall, this survey shows a somewhat mixed experience with media used by families during the pandemic. Media and technology have provided access to learning and social opportunities but also lead to family disagreements and some physical health concerns. While parents saw the academic opportunities provided by remote learning as generally helpful, many were concerned that it may be detrimental to their child's social skills. This survey, conducted nearly 1 year after the COVID-19 pandemic sent many families into lockdown and children in and out of remote learning, makes clear that media played a central role in keeping children connected to family, friends and school. Additional research is needed to better understand the short- and long-term benefits and harms of such altered use of media and to determine how this unique experience will affect children into the future.

**For the full topline results of this survey as well as the specific questions that were asked, please see the report available at [digitalwellnesslab.org/research](https://digitalwellnesslab.org/research).**

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## Our Mission

The Digital Wellness Lab exists to understand and promote wellness in the digital age. By synergizing thought leaders from tech, entertainment and health sciences globally, we can build a digital environment that advances the well-being of families, society and humanity at large.