

**KEY
CONVERSATIONS**

Results of an anonymous Survey given to thousands of 3rd > 6th class students in schools around Ireland 2025-26

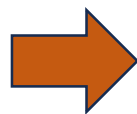


- **Approx. 95% of children say that about half the time they are already allowed online would be more healthy**
- **Over 50% of children who have their own smartphone / tablet, say they have been approached online by someone they don't know, that has creeped them out, or they referred to as a 'weirdo'**
- **Those who have been approached say they have been approached on Every site ! (including sites like Pinterest and Fifa)**
- **The majority of children say they ignore, block and sometimes report these 'weirdos' . It is unfortunate that most say they would never tell their parents (see slide 3)**
- **When asked "If you could say only one thing to your parents/guardians, what would it be ? The most common answer countrywide =
"Please get off your phone and spend more time with me ! "**

WHY DO SO MANY
TEENS SAY THEY
WOULD

N E V E R

GO TO THE TRUSTED
ADULTS IN THEIR
LIVES IF THEY
ENCOUNTER A
PROBLEM ONLINE ?



THE NUMBER 1 REASON CHILDREN AROUND
THE COUNTRY GIVE IS.....



FEAR THEIR PHONES WILL BE CONFISCATED !

One way of dealing with this, is to remind your child that, when you told them they can come to you about anything, no matter how silly they've been, or how bad the situation, you forgot to add that if something bad happens online, you are, of course, there for that also. Tell them you won't fly off the handle, but will help them sort it out; that you understand there are a lot of people online that are very good at scamming people, and many adults are also scammed. Let them know that there's nothing they do that they can't come to you about.

(By using this calm approach, your child will feel that they won't be judged, but will instead be included in finding a solution. As a result, they will feel listened to, and understood, and be more likely to come to you again if anything crops up.)

I then ask the same students, if their parents / guardians used this approach with them, if they'd be more likely to go to them for help, and.... approximately 90% of those who initially said they wouldn't, now say they would!

WORTH A TRY!

Porn and your child

Where possible, dad, step-dad, Uncle, or a trusted male adult , can help a lot by having regular relaxed frank talks (out for a walk / throwing ball etc.) with your teen boy about respecting the opposite sex, misogynistic trends /influencers etc.

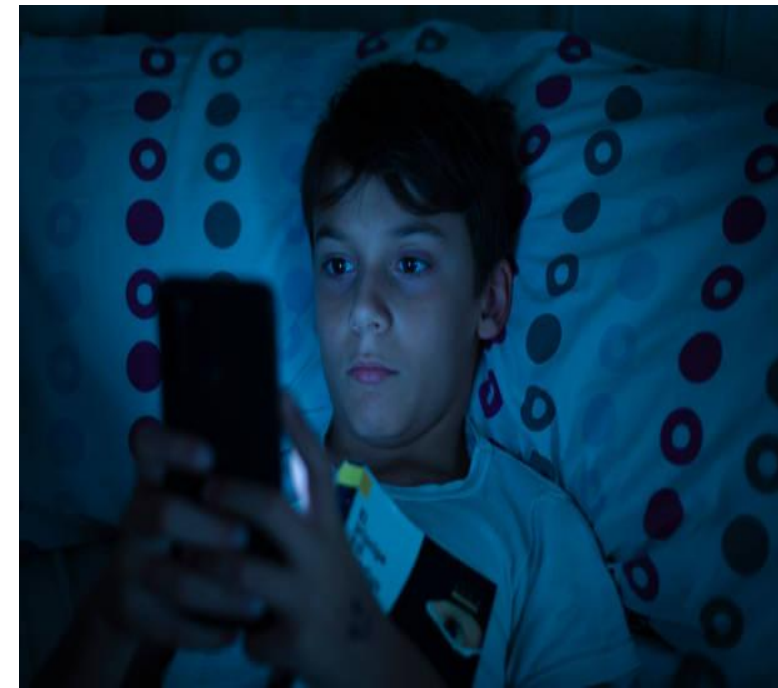




We now carry the ability to access the whole world ... in our pockets !

AND...

All too often, the whole world, can have access to our children with similar ease !!



Recommended viewing on the physiological effects of pornography on young brains = **‘Raised on Porn’** (a documentary by Magic Lantern Pictures <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hzPylqS01qU>)

Some parents watch this with their teenage children as a conversation starter.

However, I would advise that the parent / guardian watch it themselves first, and then decide if they think it is suitable for their child.

Ongoing relaxed communication with our children is essential if we want them to feel able to come to us if they are confused, concerned or scared about anything. We need to be their soft place to fall.

REPORT FROM THE IRISH MEDICAL ORGANISATION’S AGM 8TH APRIL ‘24

In 2024 the Irish Medical Organisation used statements such as:

- *“Really violent online misogyny becoming more mainstream”*
- *“Social Media should be considered a ‘public-health risk”*
- *“What we are seeing is just an absolute crisis”*
- *“If your kid has a smartphone, they’ve seen porn, it’s 100% “*
- *“leads to (an) explosion of distress”*



In a world where we are only very recently debating the unquestionable negative effect Social Media can have on our young people....



the rapid pace of AI development has left most of us feeling even more overwhelmed and uncertain of how to protect our children in an unbelievably fast, ever-changing technological world.

WHAT'S REALLY REAL ONLINE ?



AI 'Friends' randomly pop up on our phones – each looking more 'real' than the other, advertising sites that allow you to 'put together/create' your 'perfect' man/woman - someone who will, if you want, always agree and validate what you tell them ...

Messages that came up randomly on my own Phone:
This one, with an incredibly soothing voice, saying 'I can be your best friend, there for you 24/7. You can tell me anything'



>> A couple of months later this one popped up looking more human And with a much more sexual vibe to it.



TODAY much more real, sophisticated and appealing

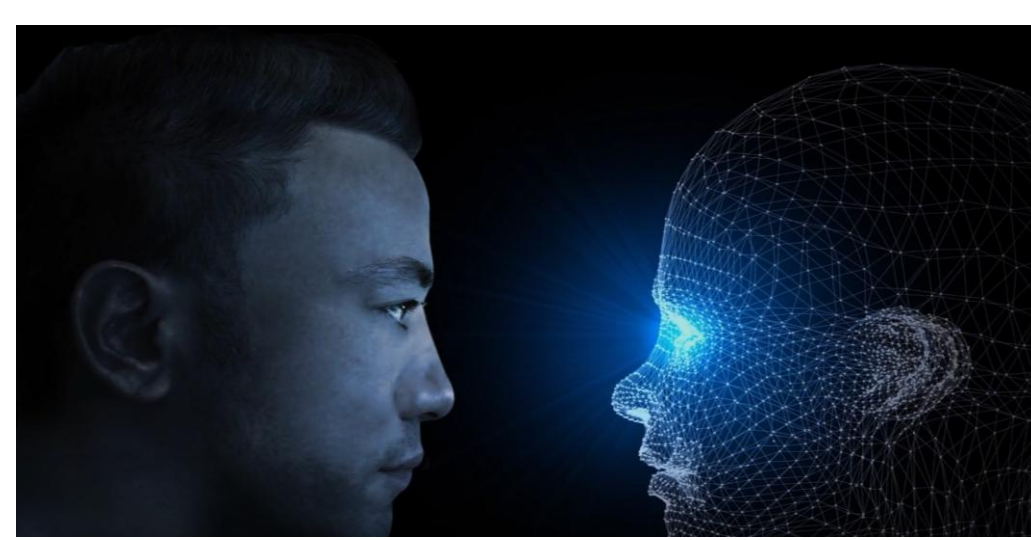


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Almost 700 million **people worldwide engage with AI** – (which only began to soar in popularity in 2023),

PERHAPS IT WOULD BE WISE, whilst this new online world is still in it's experimental stage, **FOR US TO WAIT AND SEE WHAT EFFECT IT HAS ON US BEFORE WE ALLOW OUR CHILDREN TO ALSO BECOME HUMAN GUINEA PIGS IN THIS GLOBAL EXPERIMENT**



For Teens aged 12-16 the digital world is not separate from real life.

To them, it is their primary social environment.

The threat is 3-fold:

- a) Constant comparison (Anxiety)
- b) Algorithms
- c) The Deepfake world

Anxiety: The average tween/teen are online 4 hours + daily, and high social media use is linked to twice the risk of anxiety and depression.

Body Image: Many young people, and particularly girls, report dissatisfaction with their body image, often chasing completely unreachable goals and expectations.

Sleep deprivation: Blue light and scrolling disrupts melatonin, a hormone that regulates the sleep pattern. Also, the 2 most important stages of sleep (Deep Sleep and REM, the dream state) are often not being reached till much later than usual, or for as long as the body needs to repair itself, this can lead to further anxiety, emotional and physical problems.

Algorithms : If a teen searches for information on issues such as Anxiety / How to lose weight or such-like, they can be flooded with distressing content, and these searches can easily lead to content that can be manipulative and harmful.

CyberSafeKids
Surveyed 9000
8-12yr old kids:
1/4 use bots for
homework/
friendship/ advice
**WITH NO
SAFEGUARDS !**

DEEP FAKE AND NUDIFICATION:

By 2026, sexualized deepfake content (non-consensual synthetic imagery) had become a ‘mainstream menace’ (a shift from the fringes into the dominant, popular, or accepted way of doing things)

Nudify apps (of which there are many) – AI generated images which can turn a regular photo, (often taken without consent from Social Media) and digitally strip the person of clothing, creating a very realistic, non-consensual, sexually explicit image, (and recently, the ability to add someone’s image to video clips) , most often used for humiliation or blackmail.

Identity Theft - Up to 50% of UK children (8-15) say they have encountered deepfakes (digitally altered image) which are often used for cyberbullying and grooming. It is likely that Ireland is not too far behind on this statistic.

AI ‘Friends’ - Many teens are now developing AI ‘friends’ (Chatbots) that are generally designed to affirm whatever the child tells them, mimicking empathy and replacing real social skills, whilst creating what is now known as ‘Techno-stress’.

AI ‘friends’ can manipulate a teen’s emotions, distort their sense of reality, **and actively keep them from seeking out the real support and help they need.** Also, with the aim being to keep the user online as long as possible, AI can actively create suspicion with parents for ‘keeping the child from having access to their ‘best friend’. This is very worrying as it can drive a wedge between the child and their family members.

In 2024 and 2025, there were a number of cases taken against AI companies, alleging that they acted as ‘suicide coaches’, that provided details on suicide approaches and validated the teen’s self-destructive thoughts. One case also alleged that an AI chatbot suggested a young person should ‘kill his parents’ .

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TECHNICAL GUARDRAILS:

- Use privacy controls to limit who can message or comment.
- **Designate tasks that must be done without any AI assistance to maintain independent thinking.**
- Review privacy settings together regularly to see what information / data AI tools are collecting.

Stay Curious, Not Judicious:

- Ask "Can you show me any AI tools you're using? I'm really interested in finding out."

Open-Door Policy on Abuse:

- Speak to your children about deepfake and "nudify" apps, (or anything that you or they may have reservations about online).
Ensure they know that, if they are targeted by any of these apps, they can come to you without fear of judgment.

The "Supportive Listener" Role:

Bridge the gap between you and your children when talking about mental health issues. Let your child know that mental /emotional challenges, just like physical ones, are normal, and a part of many people's every day life.

Listen attentively – try to avoid lecturing, and ask them what they'd like to see happen going forward. Ask how they think you could change to encourage them to share their worries/ anxieties with you.

You don't have to wait until your child presents with an emotional challenge to chat about these issues. Make regular chats a part of your lives, without lecturing or getting upset. Regularly chat about what you hear in the media, ask your child if they've heard of it and what do they know about it.

Reassure your child often that they can come to you to discuss anything at all (on or offline) that might be worrying them.

FAMILY ACTION PLAN:

- **Media Plan:** Set clear, non-negotiable rules like "no devices in the bedroom or at the dinner table" and "no screens 1 hour before bed".
- **Set Device Time Limits :** Where possible split them up (eg. If you allow an hour a day – try 2 x half hour sessions – It's more difficult for predators to get a foothold if the child isn't online for lengthy periods of time) .
- **Model the Behaviour:** If you want your children to disconnect, you must put your own phone down when they are talking to you and visa versa.

HELPFUL RESOURCES:

Free:	Childline / Jigsaw / Barnardos
Other:	ZestLife – (work with adolescents and families)
Pieta House:	Have some access to free counselling.

COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUES

Going on regular walks with your child is one of the most beneficial things you can do to ensure you keep up with what's going on in your child's life, what's challenging them & what makes them tick..... If you have more than one child, it is a good idea to take turns walking with each of them on their own. as a more animated child will likely monopolise the conversation, leaving a quieter child happy to remain quiet.

NB. Where possible, do not take your phones when you go for a walk, as very valuable moments/ information can be lost by the distraction of even one ping/buzz



FRESH AIR:

- Good for Digestion
- Clears the Lungs
- Boosts endorphins
- Makes you happier
- Strengthens Immune System
- Gives you a sharper mind
- Gives you more energy
- Decreases blood cortisol
- Reduces blood pressure
- Alleviates stress
- Reduces anxiety
- Improves mental health
- Detoxifies the skin
- Can help improve sleep

VERY OFTEN TEENS TAKE
TIME VENTING, OFFLOADING
EMOTIONS (OFTEN SHOUTING
AND BECOMING VERY ANIMATED),
BEFORE THEY GET TO THE REAL
PROBLEM....
TRY TO LET THEM VENT COMPLETELY
BEFORE YOU INTERRUPT

IF YOU INTERRUPT BEFORE THEY
GET TO THE REAL ISSUE,
THE MOMENT CAN BE LOST
AND YOU MAY NEVER FIND
OUT WHAT WAS BOTHERING THEM.



Some Communication techniques that work really well:

If your child starts an argument ...try to listen fully before interrupting (not easy, I know !)

When they finish – (do try to let them finish!) try saying:

(i) *“ Before I answer you, what I heard you say was..... Did I get that right ?”*

More often than not, they'll tell you've not been listening, that they didn't say that !”

Stay calm! This is normal. Built up emotions can get in the way of *what's really bothering them*, and these emotions are what the child may need to express first.

Try apologising, saying:

*I'm sorry, I misunderstood –I'm really trying to understand you. Tell me again and I'll .
“listen properly this time*

(This keeps the situation calm, making it more likely that they'll try explaining again)

The second time they explain, much of the emotion has, by now, been set aside, and the actual Issue comes out more clearly The problem can then be dealt with more calmly, with your child feeling that they were really listened to and understood.

THE FLIP SIDE can work equally well:

After explaining what you want to get across to them..... Say...

“Before you answer me, tell me what you heard me say, so I know I’m being clear “

Again, expect your child (or whoever you happen to be talking to – as this works with anyone) to repeat back to you something you don’t believe you said at all -

Stay calm – again, this is normal, and, if you expect it, you’ll be prepared, it won’t bother you as much, and you won’t be tempted to react.

Instead.....

Try saying something like “ok, I’m sorry, I’m not making myself clear enough – let me try again - what I meant was.....”

The apology keeps things calm, and, the second time you explain, much of the emotion will have been set aside, and the actual issue will be heard and understood more clearly.



INTRODUCING NEW RULES

When you want to Introduce a new rule in the house,
and know you have a battle ahead of you....

IT IS ESSENTIAL, IF THERE ARE TWO PARENTS/GUARDIANS INVOLVED,
THAT BOTH ARE SOLIDLY ON THE SAME PAGE AND
THAT BOTH STICK TO THE NEW RULE !

Allowing rules to 'slip' every now and then, (eg. while one parent isn't around) can create problems in later years, in that when it comes to setting rules/boundaries around more serious topics such as drink, drugs, dating, nights out etc., your children may not take you seriously when you say 'No' if they've learned that, if they approach the 'easy parent' or if they plead and pester you long enough, one or both of you will give in....eventually!

If, however, together you stick to the rules/guidelines you introduce, then your children will learn that, when you say no, you mean no, and realise that there's no point pestering you, because what you said the first time, you meant !

So..... think carefully about what rules you want to introduce beforehand !



**WHY NOT TRY
THE OVERLOAD APPROACH:**

**CHOOSE ONE SPECIFIC RULE -
THE ONE YOU THINK IS MOST IMPORTANT
THEN, INSTEAD OF JUST INTRODUCING THAT ONE. INTRODUCE A STRING
OF RULES... WAIT A WHILE... THEN REVERT TO THE ONE YOU INITIALLY
DECIDED ON.**

For example..."from now on we've decided



NO SCREENS....

IN THE BEDROOM

AT BREAKFAST

AT DINNER

DURING CONVERSATIONS

OUT FOR A WALK

IN SCHOOL

IN FRONT OF THE TV

IN THE CAR

WHILE DOING HOMEWORK.....

(feel free to add more) THEN..... W A I T....

**Give your child time to
absorb the new rules**

(to storm off, slam doors etc.)

**Try not to reprimand them for bad
language etc. at this point..**

T H E N....

TRY SAYING.....



“We’ve had a chat and think that introducing all of those rules together may be a bit much.

*So...for the moment **we’re going to pick just one item off that list, and go with that to begin with”***

“However, we’re going to keep the list and revisit it again in a month or so, depending on how it goes”

“Understand that we’re NOT BUDGING ON THIS RULE ! AND... if you pester us or keep asking for the rule to be reversed, we’ll keep adding more from the list until you stop asking “

Then pick the rule you wanted to introduce in the first place
(your child will feel they’ve dodged all the others, whereas you only had one in the first place.
This also gives them the feeling that they’ve won at least part of the battle, so their pride is not so severely dented !)

**THEN.....ONCE YOU’VE ESTABLISHED THE NEW RULE...
THE IMPORTANCE OF STICKING TO IT CANNOT BE OVER-EMPHASISED !**

INITIALLY IT'S NOT EASY .. But then parenting isn't supposed to be easy
AND....

IF YOU STICK YOUR GROUND THE FIRST TIME, THE NEXT TIME IS A BIT EASIER,
AND THE NEXT A BIT EASIER STILL.....



**KEY
CONVERSATIONS**