

WHEN CHILDREN ARE EXPOSED TO DIGITAL VIOLATIONS

Children and young people's exposure to digital violations and other unpleasant experiences online

10 main findings from a representative survey

September 2026

TrygFonden



Red Barnet



FAR TOO MANY CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ARE EXPOSED TO DIGITAL VIOLATIONS AND OTHER UNPLEASANT EXPERIENCES ONLINE

Two out of three children and young people have been exposed to digital violations and other unpleasant experiences online over the past year. Examples include violent content, images being shared without consent, hate speech, threats and sexual extortion involving intimate videos. Such cases can be serious and have far-reaching consequences.

Despite increased focus on the negative aspects of social media and other online platforms, the figures show that children and young people's digital safety is no better than it was two years ago, when we conducted the same survey.

The survey is representative of children and young people aged 9–17 in Denmark and is based on 2,142 questionnaire responses and 14 interviews. It shows that girls, as well as children and young people who feel lonely or struggle with poor well-being, are particularly likely to be exposed to digital violations and unpleasant experiences online. However, they rarely talk to their parents or other adults about things they find difficult. They turn to chatbots or deal with it on their own. And many say that unpleasant experiences are simply something they have to live with. An inevitable part of being online.

Save the Children's recommendations

The findings of the survey call for action. Ensuring that children and young people are not harmed online is a responsibility that cannot be ignored, and it requires collective action.

Read Save the Children's recommendations

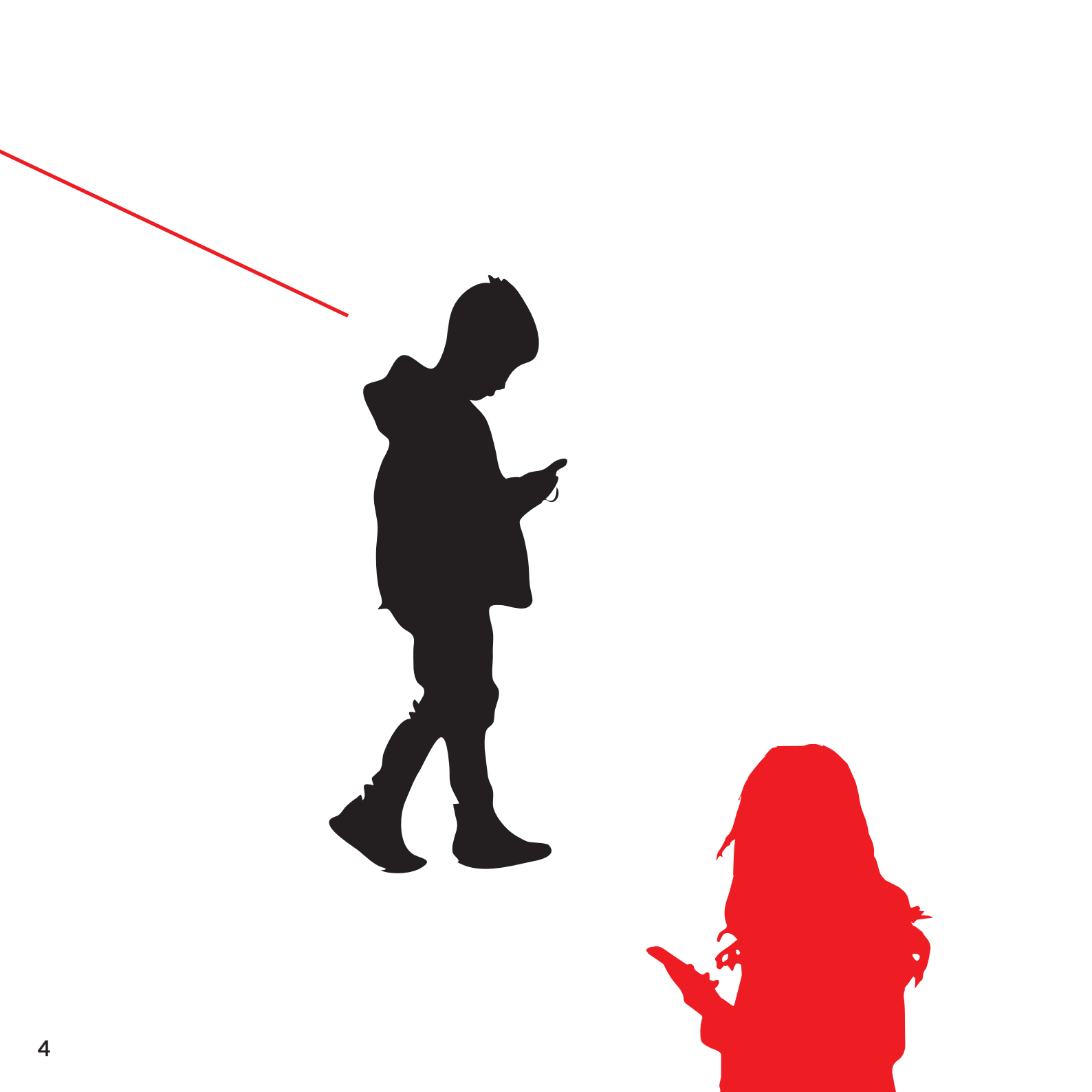




WHAT IS A DIGITAL VIOLATION?

The term 'digital violations and other unpleasant experiences online' covers a wide range of online experiences that cross children and young people's boundaries. In the survey, we asked about the following 12 types:

- Receiving rude (hateful or hurtful) comments online
- Others spreading rumours about me online
- Others threatening or blackmailing me online
- Receiving private/intimate photos or videos that I did not want to see
- Others having shared private/intimate photos or videos of me without my permission
- Being bullied with something about me online (e.g. photos or videos)
- Being excluded on social media or in online games
- Being contacted by someone I did not want to talk or write to
- Being photographed/filmed/screenshotted against my will
- Others altering an image or video of me and using it in a way I did not like, e.g. by putting my head on someone else's body
- Seeing violent images or videos that I did not want to see
- Others pretending to be me online



10 MAIN FINDINGS

- 1:** Two out of three children and young people are exposed to digital violations or other unpleasant experiences online
- 2:** Girls and children and young people who feel lonely or struggle with poor well-being are the most vulnerable
- 3:** More than one in five have been contacted by an adult they did not know
- 4:** One in 20 children and young people have been subjected to digital abuse
- 5:** Most digital violations occur on Snapchat, TikTok and Roblox
- 6:** Most 9–12-year-olds use platforms with a minimum age of 13
- 7:** Children and young people who feel lonely are particularly likely to use an AI chatbot as someone to confide in
- 8:** Only one in five turn to an adult about unpleasant experiences online
- 9:** Many children and young people do not know what to do when others are subjected to digital violations online
- 10:** Children and young people normalise violations on online platforms

1. TWO OUT OF THREE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ARE EXPOSED TO DIGITAL VIOLATIONS OR OTHER UNPLEASANT EXPERIENCES ONLINE

In 2021, 42% of children and young people were exposed to a digital violation or other unpleasant experience online. The figure was 69% in 2024 and is 66% in 2026.

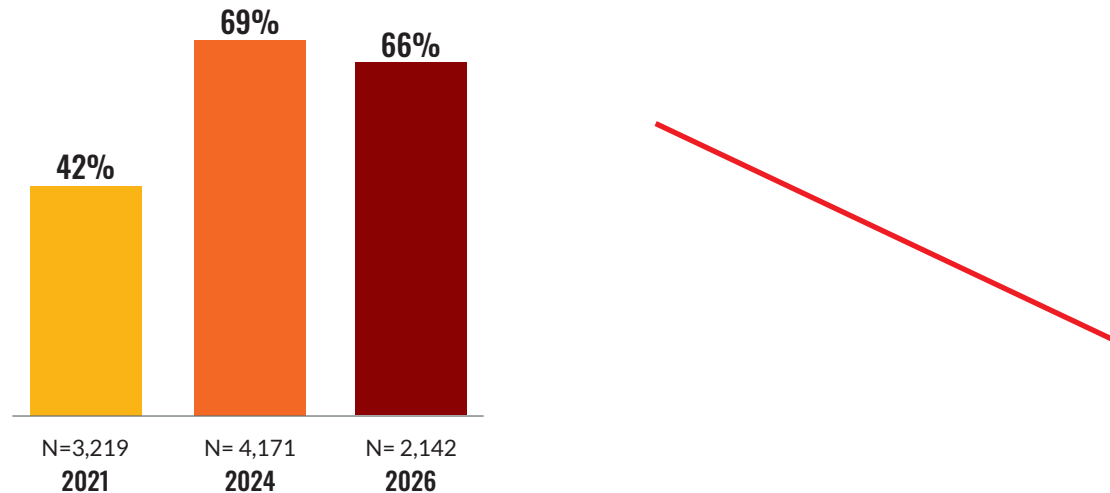
The proportion of children and young people exposed to digital violations or other unpleasant experiences online thus increased significantly from 2021 to 2024 and remains at a high level in 2026.



66

% of children and young people have been exposed to at least one digital violation or other unpleasant experience online over the past year. This means that in an average school class of 20 children, 13 will have been exposed to a digital violation or unpleasant experience online at least once.

Proportion of children and young people who have been exposed to at least one digital violation or other unpleasant experience online over the past year in 2021, 2024 and 2026



A direct comparison with the 2021 figures is not possible because new questions were added in 2024. The decline from 2024 to 2026 is not statistically significant, meaning that the proportion of children and young people exposed to digital violations or other unpleasant experiences online remains at the same high level as in 2024.

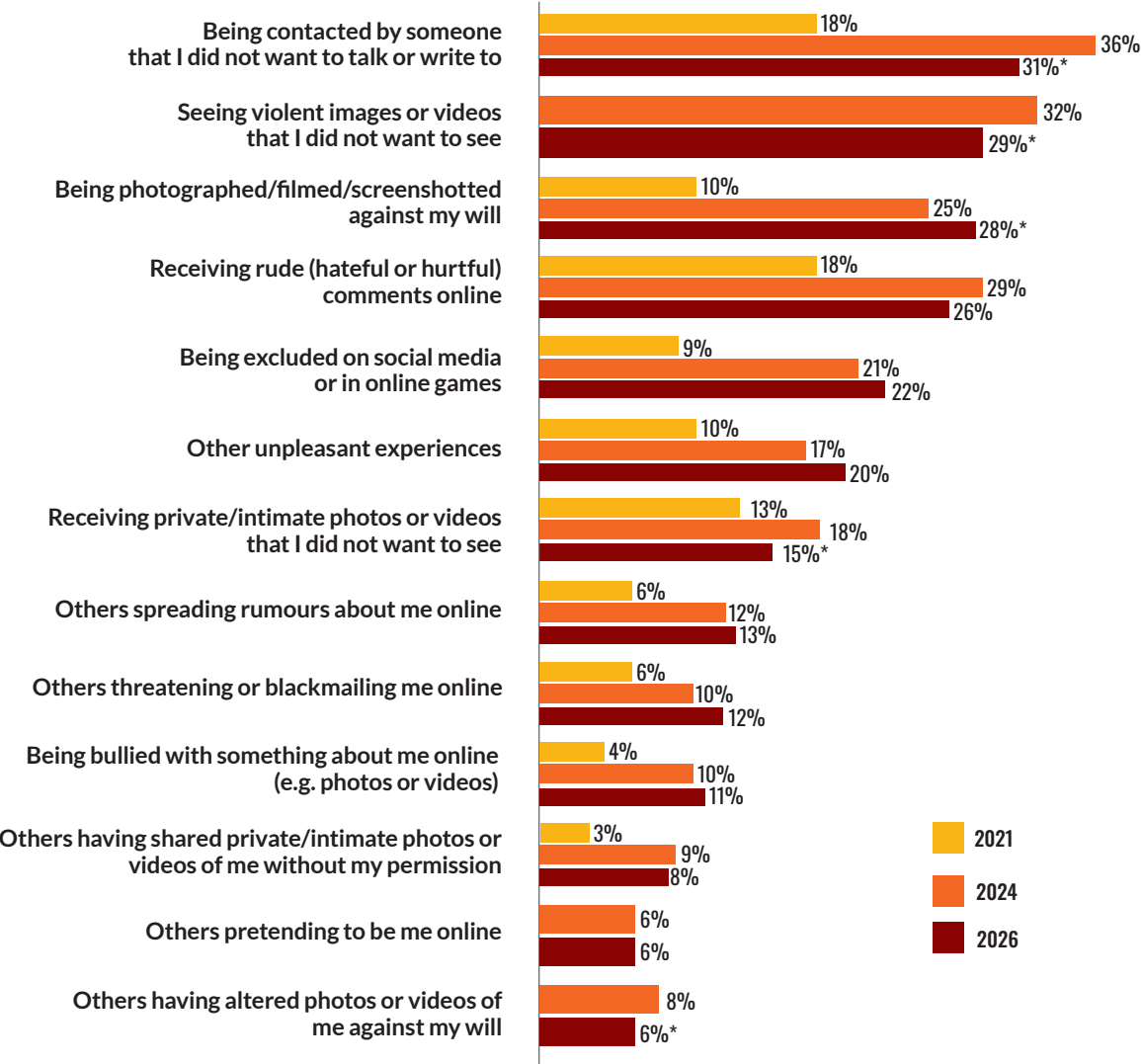
Source: Save the Children, 2026.

In 2026, the most common digital violations and unpleasant experiences online are:

- Being contacted by someone the child or young person did not want to talk to (31%)
- Seeing violent images or videos that the child or young person did not want to see (29%)
- Being photographed, filmed or screenshotted without consent (28%).

Half of the children and young people who have been exposed to a digital violation or other unpleasant experience online report that they were affected by the experience. For example, they had a stomach ache or felt humiliated or afraid. Children and young people who feel lonely, as well as the youngest children, are particularly affected by their experiences. The experiences that affect the largest number of children and young people are those where they are excluded from a social group or where they perceive the violation as a breach of trust by friends or people they know.

Proportion of children and young people who have been exposed to digital violations and other unpleasant experiences online over the past year in 2021, 2024 and 2026

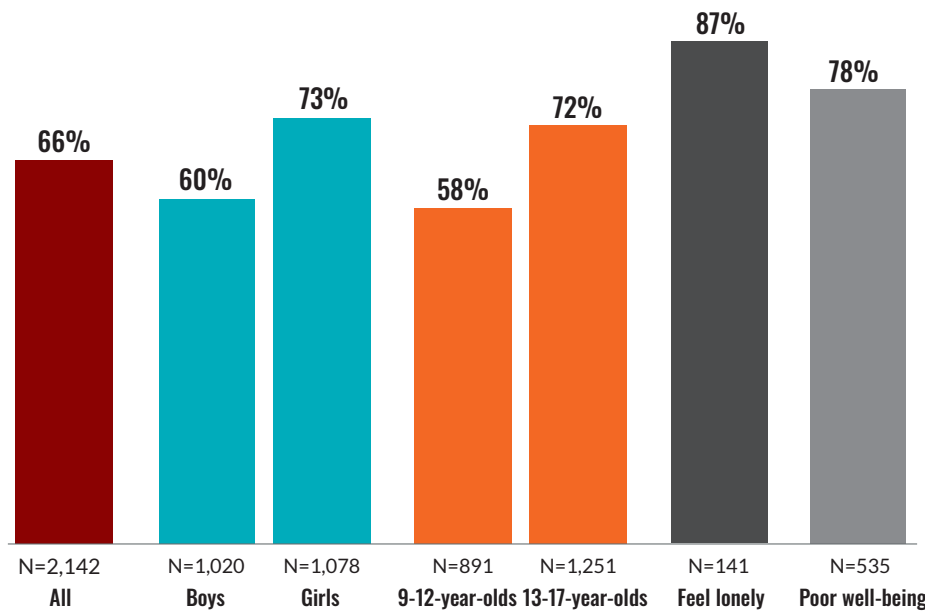


N=3,219 (2021), 4,171 (2024) and 2,142 (2026). A direct comparison with the 2021 figures is not possible because new questions were added in 2024. Statistically significant changes from 2024 to 2026 are marked with an *.
Source: Save the Children, 2026.

2. GIRLS AND CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WHO FEEL LONELY OR STRUGGLE WITH POOR WELL-BEING ARE THE MOST VULNERABLE

Some groups are more likely to be exposed than others. Children and young people who feel lonely or struggle with poor well-being are the most vulnerable. Girls experience more digital violations and unpleasant experiences online than boys, while 13–17-year-olds experience more digital violations and unpleasant experiences online than 9–12-year-olds.

Proportion of children and young people who have been exposed to at least one digital violation or other unpleasant experience online over the past year



The figure is based on responses to the question: “Have you had any of these unpleasant experiences online [referring to 12 response options] over the past year?”
Source: Save the Children, 2026.

3. MORE THAN ONE IN FIVE HAVE BEEN CONTACTED BY AN ADULT THEY DO NOT KNOW

More than one in five children and young people (22%) have been contacted online by an adult they did not know over the past year. Children and young people who feel lonely are the most vulnerable (34%). One in ten of the children and young people contacted by an adult they did not know report that the adult wanted them to do things they did not want to do (e.g. send photos of their body). For some children and young people, the contact with the adult continues, and one in ten report that the adult wanted to meet them in person.



I thought it was probably because he knew I hadn't had sex yet. (...) I'd never had that much attention from boys before, so when I suddenly started getting it, I was like, OMG, he really likes me. When I found out that the boy was actually a 21-year-old man, I got a bit scared and had a stomach ache. I felt really nauseous too. Girl, 14



4. ONE IN 20 CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE BEEN SUBJECTED TO DIGITAL ABUSE

Five percent of children and young people have been subjected to digital abuse over the past year. This means that in every school class, there is one child who has experienced at least one of the following:

- Extortion for intimate material or financial gain
- Sharing of intimate material without consent
- Signs of grooming

What is digital abuse ?

Digital abuse consists of one or more digital acts directed at a child, in which an adult, another child or a young person exploits the child in a way that causes harm or violates their personal boundaries, for example by grooming the child, recording or sharing intimate material or extorting the child for financial or sexual purposes.

Digital abuse can put a child's development and health at risk and can harm their self-image and ability to form trusting relationships.

Digital abuse can be perpetrated by strangers as well as by people close to the child. The child often does not know how many people have witnessed the abuse or who they are, because the image or video material may have been shared with many people.

Digital abuse can also take hybrid forms, for example beginning online and later developing into physical sexual abuse, or vice versa.

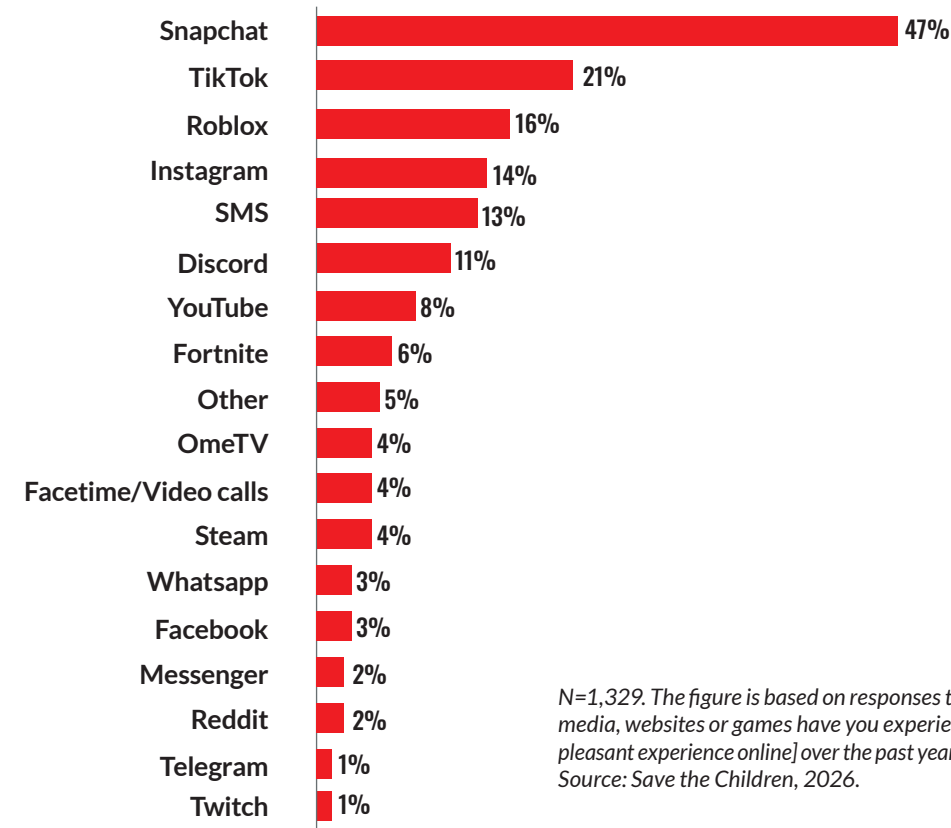
Source: Municipal procedures for preventing, identifying and responding to abuse of children and young people – A guide for local authorities, Danish Authority of Social Services and Housing, 2025.

5. MOST DIGITAL VIOLATIONS OCCUR ON SNAPCHAT, TIKTOK AND ROBLOX

Snapchat is the platform where the largest proportion of children and young people experience digital violations and unpleasant behaviour (47%), followed by TikTok (21%) and Roblox (16%).

Among 13–17-year-olds, most digital violations occur on Snapchat, TikTok and Instagram, while 9–12-year-olds are particularly likely to be exposed to digital violations and unpleasant experiences on the gaming platform Roblox.

Children and young people’s experiences of digital violations by platform

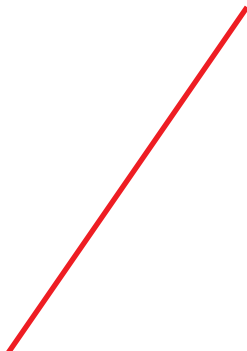


N=1,329. The figure is based on responses to the question: “On which social media, websites or games have you experienced [the digital violation or unpleasant experience online] over the past year? You may tick multiple answers.”
Source: Save the Children, 2026.

6. MOST 9–12-YEAR-OLDS USE PLATFORMS WITH A MINIMUM AGE OF 13

Just under half of 9–12-year-olds (42%) use Instagram, TikTok or Snapchat. All of these platforms have themselves set a minimum age of 13 and feature problematic content, use engagement mechanisms, collect data, display advertising and pose a risk of contact with strangers. This represents a small decrease, with the proportion of younger children using these platforms falling from 56% in 2024. This suggests greater awareness of social media use among children and young people, as well as among their parents.

However, more of the younger children have started using the gaming platform Roblox since 2024, and unpleasant experiences also occur there. This means that, overall, the proportion of children and young people exposed to digital violations and other unpleasant experiences online remains at the same high level as in 2024.



99 % of all children and young people aged 9–17 use on-line platforms. 65% of 9–12-year-olds use platforms that have set a minimum age of 13.

7. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WHO FEEL LONELY ARE PARTICULARLY LIKELY TO USE AN AI CHATBOT AS SOMEONE TO CONFIDE IN

Three out of four children and young people (77%) have tried using AI chatbots. In the interviews, young people describe chatbots as appealing tools for seeking information and advice.

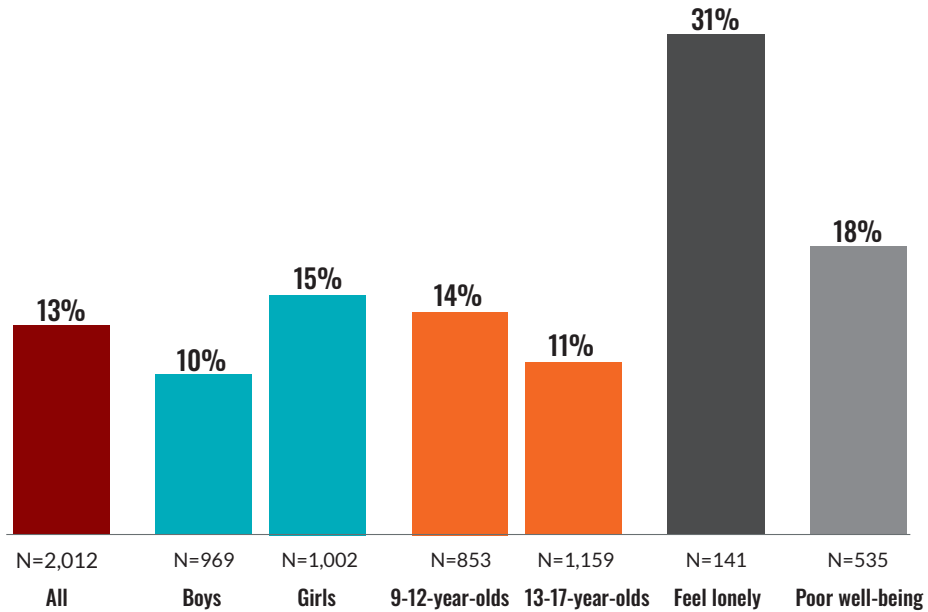
The survey shows that 13% of children and young people use an AI chatbot as someone to confide in when they need emotional support. Among other things, they use chatbots to have conversations similar to those they have with their friends. They tell chatbots about things they find difficult to talk to others about and use them for company when they feel alone.

Among 9–12-year-olds, 14% use AI for emotional support. Among children and young people who feel lonely, the figure is one in three (31%). The higher-than-average use of chatbots among the youngest children is partly because they are more likely to use them for conversations similar to those they have with their friends. Children and young people who feel lonely are also more likely to use chatbots to talk about things they find difficult to discuss with others or to keep them company when they feel alone.

In the interviews, young people say that they seek advice from chatbots because they do not want to disturb or worry their parents. Finally, some young people see AI chatbots as an alternative to turning to the adults closest to them because they want to avoid being told off or facing consequences.

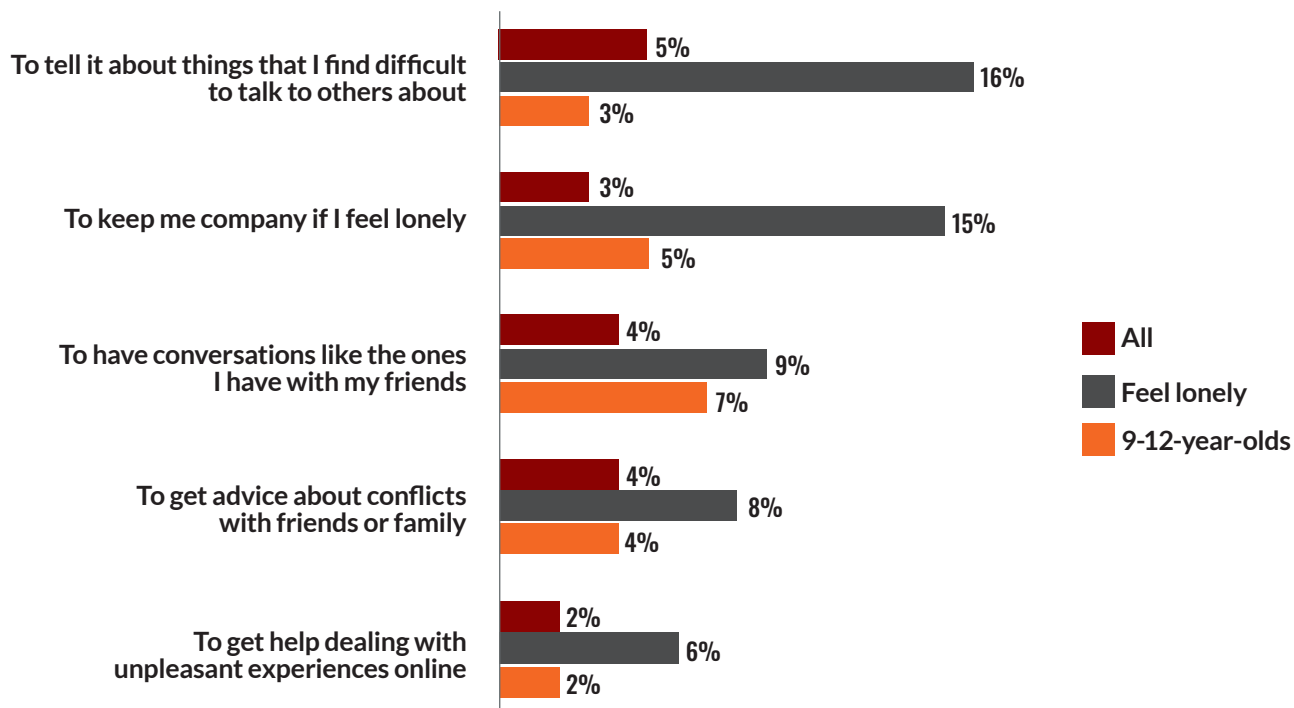


Proportion of all children and young people who use chatbots for emotional support



The figure is based on responses to the question: "What do you use the chatbot for? You may tick multiple answers."
Source: Save the Children, 2026.

Proportion of all children and young people who use chatbots for emotional support, by type of use



N=2,012. The figure is based on responses to the question: "What do you use the chatbot for? You may tick multiple answers."
Source: Save the Children, 2026.

8. ONLY ONE IN FIVE TURN TO AN ADULT ABOUT UNPLEASANT EXPERIENCES ONLINE

Just over half (54%) of children and young people who experience digital violations or other unpleasant experiences on online platforms take action. The most common action is to block the person responsible. Only 4% turn to a teacher or educator. 17% tell a parent or another adult in their family. Taken together, this means that only one in five children and young people turn to an adult they know when they are exposed to digital violations or other unpleasant experiences online.

In the interviews, young people say that it can often be easier to share the experience with someone their own age than with an adult. Among other things, they are afraid that adults will respond by forbidding them to use a particular platform, and they generally feel that adults do not understand the digital world they are part of.



If a teacher finds out that a child has been through something, I think it would be really helpful if the teacher made it clear that you can actually come and talk to them. So you don't feel like your parents are the only people you can turn to. There are other adults you can talk to as well. The teacher could maybe take the child aside and say, 'Hey, do you want to come out and have a chat?' Don't do it in front of the other children, but ask them more discreetly or in private. Girl, 15



9. MANY DO NOT KNOW WHAT TO DO WHEN OTHERS ARE SUBJECTED TO DIGITAL VIOLATIONS ONLINE

Young people are unsure what to do if they witness the unlawful sharing of intimate material or online bullying.

More than half (52%) of young people who receive an intimate photo or video of another person that has been shared without consent take no action. Among the reasons they give are that they do not know the person in the photo or video or do not believe that taking action would make a difference. The most common actions are to report the content to the platform (12%) or tell a friend or sibling (11%).

More take action when they witness someone else being bullied online. In these cases, just under half (46%) choose to talk to the person being bullied. However, one in four (26%) take no action.

10. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE NORMALISE VIOLATIONS ON ONLINE PLATFORMS

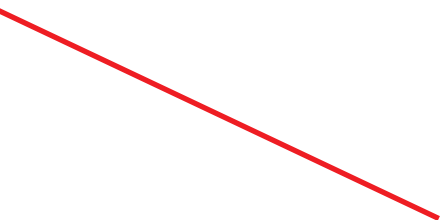
The survey suggests that children and young people see digital violations and unpleasant experiences as something they simply have to accept when using online platforms. In the interviews, young people emphasise that this is something you just have to brush off because it is an inevitable part of being online.

The questionnaire survey also shows signs of this type of normalisation. Half of the children and young people who have experienced digital violations and unpleasant content over the past year say that they were not affected by it.



One of the pictures showed a woman lying on a bathroom floor with her body cut into pieces, and it said LEGO at the top. Like a joke. As if it was a building set. Yeah, and then there are executions too, and a video of a cat being cut open. They're these little videos that can be anything from a second to half a minute long. Yeah, I get sent stuff like that. It doesn't really upset me, but then it's just there on my computer. And that's kind of... not great. Boy, 14





SLETDET (DELETE-IT) HELPLINE

Run by Save the Children Denmark, the SletDet (Delete-It) helpline is Denmark's only professional helpline providing support and assistance to children and young people who have been exposed to digital violations or other unpleasant experiences online. The SletDet helpline also helps professionals and parents, as well as children and young people who have themselves subjected others to digital violations.

The SletDet helpline provides support and guidance when an image is shared without consent, when children and young people see violent or harmful content, are bullied online, are blackmailed into sharing sexual and intimate material or are groomed.

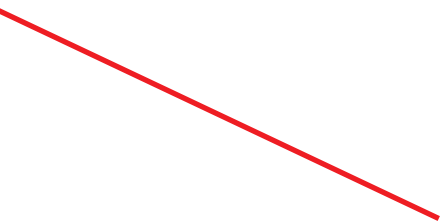
Over the past ten years, the SletDet helpline has built up unique expertise and is now a specialist knowledge centre that conducts surveys and analyses, raises awareness and educates children and young people about digital literacy. It also has extensive expertise in children and young people's digital lives and online activities.

The SletDet helpline offers confidential counselling by telephone, email and chat. The helpline's special status as an official trusted flagger also means that, under EU law, online platforms are required to give priority to Save the Children Denmark's notices of illegal content and process and decide upon them without undue delay.

Learn more about the SletDet helpline here:



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ABOUT THE SURVEY

The survey comprises a questionnaire survey that is representative of children and young people aged 9–17 in Denmark. A total of 2,012 children and young people completed the entire questionnaire, while 130 completed parts of it.

The questionnaires were distributed to all primary and lower secondary schools, special schools, independent schools, continuation schools and upper secondary and vocational education institutions throughout Denmark. Children and young people completed the questionnaire as part of their lessons. Rambøll Management Consulting was responsible for collecting the questionnaire responses, while Save the Children Denmark was responsible for the analysis and reporting.

In addition, Save the Children Denmark conducted qualitative interviews with 14 young people aged 13–17.

The survey findings are supplemented by insights from Save the Children's SletDet helpline.

This is the third time Save the Children Denmark has conducted a survey of children and young people's exposure to digital violations and other unpleasant experiences online.

You can read the full survey and learn more about the underlying data and methodology here:



Thank you to TrygFonden for making it possible to conduct this comprehensive survey as part of the Digital First Aid partnership.

This mini-report presents 10 main findings from the survey. You can read the full survey and Save the Children's recommendations here:



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