

JUNE 2023

LGBTQ+ Youth Perspectives: How LGBTQ+ Youth are Navigating Exploration and Risks of Sexual Exploitation Online

Findings from 2022 qualitative and quantitative research among
13-20-year-olds

Research conducted by Thorn in partnership with Benenson Strategy Group

THORN 

 Benenson
Strategy
Group

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 4 Introduction
- 6 Methodology & Research Design
- 10 Perceptions and Roles of Online Platforms, Communities, and Relationships
- 24 Attitudes and Behaviors Surrounding Online Sexual Exploration
- 33 Protective Conversations
- 40 Navigating and Responding to Online Risks
- 52 Looking Ahead
- 55 Final Thoughts

Acknowledgments

Understanding the complex intersection of technology and child sexual abuse empowers us to safeguard kids from the ever-evolving threats they face online. Without direct insights from kids who are encountering these issues every day, we risk falling behind in developing valuable resources for them to navigate the digital age safely.

THANK YOU

We are grateful to the individuals who took the time to participate in this research. Without their gracious participation, we would not be able to share these key insights about the unique experiences and perspectives of LGBTQ+ youth. In addition to the research and design teams below, we are grateful for the guidance and input of Dr. Amy Green, Ph.D., and The Trevor Project as we navigated the initial design and goals of this research. We are also grateful for the support and contributions of Dr. Ellen Selkie, MD, MPH. Her expertise in this area was invaluable in delivering this report.

This report was commissioned and published by Thorn. Thorn is a 501c(3) organization with a mission to build technology to defend children from sexual abuse. For more information about Thorn, please visit our website: www.thorn.org. For inquiries about this research, please send an email to research@thorn.org.

Research team:

Amanda Goharian, Thorn
Melissa Stroebe, Thorn
Caroline Neiswender, Thorn
Tim O’Gorman, Thorn
James Kerley, Research Editor (Independent)
Joseph Copeland, Benenson Strategy Group
Jacqueline Scott-Douglas, Benenson Strategy Group
Patrick Toomey, Benenson Strategy Group

Design and publication:

Heidi Mihelich, Designer (Independent)
Yena Lee, Thorn
Cassie Coccaro, Thorn

Suggested citation:

Thorn. (2023). LGBTQ+ Youth Perspectives: How LGBTQ+ youth are navigating exploration and risks of sexual exploitation online.

Introduction

Technology and online communities have become inextricably enmeshed with our identities and lives. We use technology to stay in contact with loved ones, explore diverse perspectives and cultures, and to meet and build relationships with new people around the world – in a way that was unfathomable just a few decades ago.

This blending of offline and online holds true for both adults and kids, and in many ways technology has become foundational for young people’s exploration and development today.

Romantic and sexual exploration are among the many areas of our lives technology intersects. For kids, this stands in contrast to how many of the adults in their lives grew up. Young people are participating in the same romantic behavior they always have, but today they’re doing it with a device in hand and an identity that extends into digital spaces.

While most of these experiences are consensual in nature, they also inherently carry a risk of harm that must be addressed. For young people, this can include examples of coercion and abuse through sextortion, non-consensual re-sharing of nude images, and at times grooming and abuse by sexual offenders.

Over the last several years, Thorn has fielded a series of research initiatives aimed at understanding how youth in particular view and respond to online experiences, from consensual exploration to navigating risky and dangerous encounters. This previous research^{1 2} has underscored that LGBTQ+ youth may face heightened risk for harmful online experiences and distinct considerations in how they react to these events.

Previous surveys often have not, however, provided enough detail to more deeply understand the scale of these experiences and the unique perspectives LGBTQ+ youth may hold, presenting challenges to delivering relevant and accessible interventions and safeguarding programming.

Thorn’s latest work sought to build off the existing body of research to ensure strategies to combat online child sexual exploitation are inclusive and relevant to the needs of LGBTQ+ youth. In a survey of nearly 1,700 young people aged 13-20 we explored their perspectives regarding online communities, sexual exploration in a digital age, and how they navigate feeling unsafe online.

1 Thorn. (2023). Responding to Online Threats: Minors’ Perspectives on Disclosing, Reporting, and Blocking in 2021. https://info.thorn.org/hubfs/Research/Thorn_ROT_Monitoring_2021.pdf

2 Thorn. (2022). Self-Generated Child Sexual Abuse Material: Youth Attitudes and Experiences in 2021. https://info.thorn.org/hubfs/Research/Thorn_SG-CSAM_Monitoring_2021.pdf

Key Findings

1. LGBTQ+ teens reported a greater reliance on online communities and spaces. While the internet plays a critical role in socialization and exploration for all minors, LGBTQ+ youth were nearly 20 points more likely to say they felt their online communities were essential to them.

2. LGBTQ+ teens reported higher rates of experiences involving nudes and online sexual interactions. The rate at which all teens are engaging in sexual interactions using technology is notable. However, LGBTQ+ teens were more than twice as likely to report sharing their own nude photos or videos as compared to non-LGBTQ+ teens.

3. Cisgender non-hetero male teens reported higher rates of risky encounters and of attempting to handle unsafe situations alone compared to other teens. More than half of cisgender non-hetero male teens report they have been sent nudes they did not ask for and were roughly 10 points more likely than other members of the LGBTQ+ community to report sharing their own nudes. In addition, nearly half of cisgender non-hetero male teens state they would try to handle feeling unsafe online by themselves.

4. Offline relationships – such as with caregivers and friends – are the preferred people to turn to when young people feel unsafe, including for LGBTQ+ youth. Despite an increased reliance on online communities and spaces, LGBTQ+ teens still overwhelmingly prefer their offline relationships if they feel unsafe. However, for 1 in 3 LGBTQ+ teens, they would rather handle a dangerous situation alone than turn either to their online or offline communities.

Methodology & Research Design

Research into youth experiences – and how they intersect with the potential for harmful online interactions – continues to present unique challenges within an ever-changing digital environment. Survey authors have included here a brief discussion of some of these challenges and their corresponding mitigation strategies.

Challenges

CHALLENGE: The issues and risks associated with online SG-CSAM exist within a dynamic online environment. The technologies and platforms intersecting with this issue area are in constant flux, as are the habits of the kids who use them.

Mitigation strategies: *This research relies on dynamic social research methodologies, which enable faster collection and analysis of data, to ensure it best reflects the current digital landscape. Because design limitations restrict the number of platforms shown to participants, this survey includes a diverse but non-exhaustive list of platforms, with top priority given to social platforms. The final list is informed by historical research, external reports, and expert consultation, and is re-evaluated for the needs of each individual survey.*

CHALLENGE: Attitudes towards sexuality and gender vary widely across demographics.

Mitigation strategies: *This is a universal issue, but the way it impacts kids differs across demographics. This research aims to identify trends among youth overall, as well as within some significant subgroups – most of all among LGBTQ+ youth. A secondary objective was to get a broad understanding of how trends around this issue manifest differently within the LGBTQ+ youth community. To this end, young adults were included in recruitment and enhanced quotas were used to ensure large enough base sizes to examine trends among young people identifying as LGBTQ+. Nevertheless, given sample size limitations, some of the data within subgroups are more appropriately viewed as starting points.*

CHALLENGE: Entrenched stigma and sensitivity surrounding the topic may lead to an undercounting of the scale and frequency.

Mitigation strategies: *Asking individuals – especially youth – to open up about a subject as delicate and personal as sharing nude images of themselves likely activates self-report bias where participants lean into more socially desirable responses. It also*

requires the design of survey instruments that are safe and supportive. Sequence was important in our research instruments; sensitive questions were prefaced with a note acknowledging the difficulty of discussing the topic and reiterating the anonymity of the responses. Questions were also often written in a manner that gave the space or permission for individuals to answer generally about “people they know” in lieu of exclusively asking respondents about their own online experiences. Resources for additional information and referrals for real-time support were highlighted in all survey instruments.

Research Questions

This research focused on teens (aged 13–17) and young adults (aged 18–20).

Both qualitative and quantitative tools were used to collect data.

Collectively, this research sought to examine the following guiding questions.

- Broadly speaking, how are LGBTQ+ youth experiences online, online habits, and preferences distinct from those of non-LGBTQ+ youth? How and where are they the same?
- What are LGBTQ+ youths’ primary motivations for connecting with others online? What are their primary fears in doing so? How do both shape their digital identities and online behaviors? Is there any risk involved? What platforms do they use?
- How do LGBTQ+ youth view risk and danger online? How does their sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or their identity status (i.e., “out”/“not out”) impact their likelihood for a negative online encounter/experience, if they disclose, and the way they disclose?
- Are there nuanced online experiences and risks within discrete LGBTQ+ identities? If so, what are they and what contributes to them?

Research Design

This research was iterative and consisted of two phases:

PHASE 1 - QUALITATIVE ONLINE DIARIES

The qualitative phase was exploratory. Using an online ethnographic journal methodology, we engaged with 24 LGBTQ+ 13–17-year-olds on three occasions over the course of a week. In each interaction, online diarists were prompted with a series of broad, sweeping questions designed to help them share and shed light on their unique online experiences and communities.

The online diaries were designed to provide participants a safe and private space to share their lived experiences in their own words, free from judgment. Hundreds of pages of transcripts were produced and analyzed to help form hypotheses to test in the subsequent quantitative phase.

Among diarists, 22 answered all of the questions, while another 2 answered about half, for a total of 24 full or partial completes:

- 11 identified as a girl, 7 identified as a boy (including 2 who specified they are trans boys), and 6 identified as non-binary or another identity.
- 6 identified as lesbian, 5 as bisexual, 4 as gay, 4 as pansexual, 3 as queer, 1 as asexual, and 1 as questioning.
- Quotas were set during the recruitment phase to ensure a representative national sample.

PHASE 2 - QUANTITATIVE ONLINE SURVEY

The quantitative research was designed to build on the preliminary insights generated from the qualitative phase. Specifically, phase two was intended to quantify the attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors of teens and young adults, with a particular lens on how the online experiences of LGBTQ+ youth differs from non-LGBTQ+ youth. The breakdown of the audience surveyed in phase two includes:

Total surveyed (n=1,662)		
Non-LGBTQ+ breakdown (n=1,004)		
Age	Ages 13-14	25%
	Ages 15-17	38%
	Ages 18-20	37%
Race	White	59%
	African American/Black/Caribbean American	16%
	Hispanic or Latino/a or Latinx	25%
	Native American or American Indian	2%
	Asian or Pacific Islander	8%
	Middle Eastern	1%
	Other	1%
	Gender	I am male
I am female		48%
I am transgender and identify as a boy or man		-
I am transgender and identify as a girl or woman		-
I am transgender and identify in some other way		-
I am genderqueer or nonbinary		-
I prefer not to disclose		-

LGBTQ+ breakdown (n=658)		
Age	Ages 13-14	26%
	Ages 15-17	39%
	Ages 18-20	35%
Race	White	72%
	African American/Black/Caribbean American	12%
	Hispanic or Latino/a or Latinx	20%
	Native American or American Indian	6%
	Asian or Pacific Islander	6%
	Middle Eastern	1%
	Other	2%
	Orientation	Straight or heterosexual
Lesbian		9%
Gay		9%
Bisexual		45%
Asexual		4%
Queer		2%
Pansexual		14%
Other		3%
Questioning/Not sure		16%
Prefer not to say		1%
Gender	I am male	31%
	I am female	47%
	I am transgender and identify as a boy or man	7%
	I am transgender and identify as a girl or woman	1%
	I am transgender and identify in some other way	2%
	I am genderqueer or nonbinary	14%
	I prefer not to disclose	3%

A Note on Terms

Within our respondent sample, the implications (and even legality) of surveyed experiences differ. In an effort to maintain clarity throughout the report, we will refer to respondents aged 13-17 as “teens” and aged 18-20 as “young adults”. When discussing data and trends across all age groups (13-20), the terms “all participants” and “young people” will be used interchangeably. For added clarity, all tables specify the age ranges corresponding to the presented data.

In other reports, we often refer to sexually explicit content involving a minor as “Child Sexual Abuse Material” (CSAM) and more narrowly, sexually explicit material of a minor with no apparent adult offender present as “Self-Generated Child Sexual Abuse Material” (SG-CSAM). For the purposes of this report, due to the inclusion of both adults and minors in the sample, the more general terminology of “nudes” or “nude imagery” is used throughout.

A Note on Data Reporting

Due to rounding, many of the figures included in this report may not have columns or rows that add up to exactly 100%. Some questions also featured multi-select response options, which has been noted. These instances include footnotes where relevant.

A Note on Privacy and Safety

Ensuring the privacy and safety of those who chose to participate in this research was paramount. All participant responses were anonymized. Minor participants were recruited via existing youth panels or directly through caregivers at the time of this survey. Caregiver consent was required for teens’ participation in youth panels, as well as for those teens recruited directly for the survey. In addition, help resources were provided to participants in the event they wanted to learn more about the topics discussed or desired to speak with a trained counselor about these issues.

Perceptions and Roles of Online Platforms, Communities, and Relationships

While the internet – as both a place for exploration and a tool with which to engage and develop relationships – is ingrained in day-to-day life for many young people, this is especially true for LGBTQ+ youth. Among LGBTQ+ participants, nearly three-quarters agree that “online communities are essential for LGBTQ+ youth.” For many young LGBTQ+ people, the internet feels like a safer, more representative, and in some cases preferred alternative to their offline communities, presenting unique opportunities to explore and connect more openly than they may be able to offline. Many LGBTQ+ participants reported digital forums as places where they can be their true and authentic selves.

Platform Awareness and Usage

When it comes to the many platforms in today’s digital landscape, LGBTQ+ participants reported a wider awareness of what exists and higher overall usage rates across platforms. Their awareness of existing platforms was higher across both established and lesser-known, newer, or upstart platforms.

While, in general, most teens are familiar with the same specific platforms, recognition was more widespread among LGBTQ+ teens than non-LGBTQ+ teens. The platforms where LGBTQ+ teens showed the greatest increased familiarity as compared with their non-LGBTQ+

counterparts were: Discord (+24%), Among Us (+18%), Twitch (+17%), and Omegle (+14%).

The platforms most likely to have ever been used by teens were YouTube (98%), TikTok (85%), Instagram (78%), Snapchat (77%), and Minecraft (73%). Among these popular platforms there was little to no difference in the rates of teens who said they had ever used these platforms, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.

YouTube (78%), TikTok (65%), Snapchat (56%), Instagram (53%), and Facebook (44%), were the most frequently used platforms on a daily basis by teens. While generally, teens reported similar rates of daily use across platforms regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, there were a few platforms for which LGBTQ+ teens were notably more likely to report daily usage, with the greatest gaps reported on Discord (+17%), Reddit (+10%), Twitch (+8%), and TikTok (+8%).

While sample sizes limited the extent of analysis among LGBTQ+ teens, within the wider LGBTQ+ group (aged 13-20), cisgender non-hetero male participants often reported the highest daily usage rates. The platforms with the greatest differences between cisgender non-hetero male participants and other groups were Discord, Twitch, Twitter, and WhatsApp.

Fig 1 | **General platform awareness among young people**

CPLATFORM1. Which of the following platforms are you aware of?

	Ages 13 - 17			Ages 18-20			All Ages		
	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+
Amino	7%	13%	5%	15%	32%	10%	10%	20%	7%
Among Us	46%	60%	42%	74%	79%	73%	57%	67%	54%
Byte	8%	12%	7%	11%	11%	11%	9%	12%	9%
Call of Duty	80%	78%	80%	80%	80%	80%	80%	79%	80%
Chatroulette	5%	10%	4%	13%	17%	12%	8%	13%	7%
Discord	54%	72%	48%	72%	84%	68%	60%	76%	56%
Fortnite	82%	84%	82%	81%	82%	81%	82%	83%	82%
Grand Theft Auto (GTA)	72%	74%	72%	74%	80%	72%	73%	76%	72%
Kik	30%	40%	27%	50%	56%	48%	37%	46%	35%
Live.me	12%	17%	10%	12%	14%	12%	12%	16%	11%
Marco Polo	17%	18%	16%	9%	11%	8%	14%	16%	13%
Minecraft	85%	90%	84%	80%	86%	79%	83%	88%	82%
Monkey	8%	9%	7%	19%	13%	20%	12%	10%	12%
Omegle	17%	28%	14%	65%	75%	62%	35%	44%	32%
Reddit	63%	73%	60%	73%	80%	72%	67%	75%	64%
Roblox	74%	80%	73%	77%	84%	76%	75%	82%	74%
Signal	7%	12%	6%	8%	6%	8%	7%	10%	7%
Tagged	11%	12%	11%	6%	4%	7%	9%	9%	9%
Telegram	23%	27%	22%	34%	29%	35%	27%	27%	27%
Tor/Onion Browser	6%	11%	5%	14%	16%	14%	9%	13%	8%
Triller	10%	13%	9%	21%	19%	21%	14%	15%	13%
Twitch	60%	73%	56%	74%	81%	72%	65%	76%	62%
VSCO	11%	17%	9%	42%	52%	39%	22%	29%	20%
Whisper	9%	15%	7%	13%	22%	11%	11%	18%	9%
Wickr	9%	16%	7%	6%	8%	6%	8%	13%	7%
Wink	11%	17%	9%	8%	10%	8%	10%	14%	8%
Wishbone	8%	11%	7%	23%	27%	22%	14%	17%	13%
YouNow	7%	8%	6%	16%	19%	15%	10%	12%	10%
Yubo	8%	13%	7%	26%	35%	24%	15%	21%	13%

Note: Popular platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, and Facebook were excluded from this list to minimize the burden of time on respondents.

Fig 2 | General platform use by young people

QPLATFORM2IN. How often do you use/check/play each of the following?

	EVER USED						DAILY					
	Ages 13-17			Ages 18-20			Ages 13-17			Ages 18-20		
	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+
Among Us	36%	49%	32%	53%	62%	50%	7%	9%	6%	6%	5%	6%
Call of Duty	59%	53%	60%	56%	51%	57%	19%	15%	20%	17%	13%	18%
Discord	40%	59%	35%	53%	68%	49%	20%	33%	16%	24%	33%	22%
Facebook	71%	70%	72%	73%	67%	74%	44%	40%	45%	35%	26%	37%
Fortnite	65%	59%	66%	50%	42%	52%	21%	18%	22%	12%	8%	13%
Google Hangouts/Google Meet	49%	57%	47%	54%	57%	54%	14%	19%	13%	10%	7%	10%
Grand Theft Auto (GTA)	54%	48%	56%	53%	55%	53%	15%	12%	16%	11%	7%	12%
Instagram	78%	79%	77%	93%	94%	93%	53%	57%	52%	70%	62%	72%
Kik	18%	24%	16%	27%	33%	26%	5%	9%	3%	2%	2%	2%
Messenger (Facebook)	69%	71%	68%	67%	62%	68%	38%	38%	38%	27%	25%	28%
Minecraft	73%	80%	71%	63%	76%	59%	21%	25%	19%	13%	17%	12%
Omegle	9%	*	*	34%	*	*	2%	*	*	3%	*	*
Reddit	43%	53%	40%	52%	65%	49%	12%	20%	10%	19%	20%	19%
Roblox	61%	67%	60%	50%	58%	48%	22%	24%	21%	13%	17%	12%
Snapchat	77%	78%	77%	85%	86%	85%	56%	60%	54%	64%	60%	64%
Telegram	12%	15%	11%	19%	13%	21%	4%	6%	4%	7%	5%	7%
TikTok	85%	87%	84%	84%	91%	83%	65%	71%	63%	69%	71%	68%
Triller	6%	*	*	8%	*	*	1%	*	*	1%	*	*
Tumblr	34%	44%	31%	44%	55%	42%	8%	12%	7%	10%	14%	9%
Twitch	42%	52%	39%	46%	55%	44%	13%	19%	11%	12%	14%	12%
Twitter	57%	59%	56%	75%	83%	72%	25%	28%	24%	35%	32%	35%
VSCO	6%	*	*	22%	*	*	2%	*	*	3%	*	*
WhatsApp	46%	50%	45%	48%	44%	49%	17%	21%	16%	15%	12%	16%
Whisper	5%	*	*	5%	*	*	1%	*	*	1%	*	*
YouTube	98%	98%	98%	98%	98%	97%	78%	83%	76%	75%	75%	75%

Note: Platforms with base sizes <100 were not included in this analysis. Cells with base sizes <100 have been marked with an asterisk (*).

Fig 3 | Daily platform use by young people, by demographics

QPLATFORM2IN. How often do you use/check/play each of the following?

	All Ages				
	Cis Male Non-Hetero	Cis Male Hetero	Cis Female Non-Hetero	Cis Female Hetero	Trans, Non-Binary, and other Non-Cis
Call of Duty	26%	26%	9%	12%	11%
Discord	45%	26%	22%	10%	39%
Facebook	41%	36%	34%	50%	27%
Fortnite	29%	25%	8%	11%	11%
Google Hangouts/Google Meet	22%	12%	8%	12%	17%
Grand Theft Auto (GTA)	20%	21%	7%	7%	7%
Instagram	53%	56%	61%	63%	63%
Messenger (Facebook)	37%	30%	33%	39%	29%
Minecraft	31%	19%	16%	13%	22%
Reddit	30%	18%	12%	8%	22%
Roblox	28%	19%	18%	16%	20%
Snapchat	58%	54%	61%	63%	59%
TikTok	66%	59%	72%	71%	74%
Tumblr	18%	9%	9%	7%	12%
Twitch	31%	15%	9%	8%	15%
Twitter	43%	29%	24%	28%	25%
WhatsApp	31%	18%	12%	14%	13%
YouTube	86%	78%	76%	73%	80%

Note: Platforms with base sizes <100 were not included in this analysis.

Secondary Accounts

1 in 3

Teens with a secondary account report creating it before they turned 13.

In addition to general platform usage, some respondents reported maintaining secondary accounts (sometimes referred to as “finstas”), or multiple accounts on single platforms, in order to share content more privately or outside of the view of others in their social circles. Overall, nearly 1 in 3 participants reported having a secondary account, with young adults aged 18-20 twice as likely to have reported having one compared to teens aged 13-17.

Among teens, the rate of reporting secondary accounts was higher for LGBTQ+ respondents than non-LGBTQ+ respondents, with LGBTQ+ teens twice as likely to have a secondary account (36% vs. 18%). Among teen respondents with a secondary account, 1 in 3 reported creating it before the age of 13.

Across teens, regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation, the primary reason reported for maintaining a secondary account was to keep activity private from parents. Uniquely for LGBTQ+ teens, the second most common reason was because “I can be my authentic or real self.” Compared to LGBTQ+ peers, non-LGBTQ+ teens were nearly 20 points less likely to name this as a reason – 31% compared to 50%. Transgender, non-binary, or other non-cisgender teens were the most likely among all groups to cite this reason for creating a secondary account.

For all teen respondents, interacting with family members was reported as much more likely to happen via primary profiles than secondary: 79% say they do so on primary accounts compared to only 24% who do so on secondary accounts. This reinforces the finding that creating secondary profiles was largely tied to privacy from parents/caregivers.

Fig 4 | **Prevalence of secondary accounts among young people**

QD2. Some people have secondary accounts (such as “finstas”) - or multiple accounts on one social network so that they can share some stuff more privately. Across the social media platforms or apps that you use, do you have any second private account that allows you to share content without certain people such as your parents, family, or people at school seeing it?

	Ages 13-17			Ages 18-20		
	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+
Yes	22%	36%	18%	44%	53%	42%
No	72%	59%	75%	48%	43%	49%
Prefer not to say	6%	5%	6%	8%	4%	9%

Note: Some columns may not total 100 due to rounding.

Fig 5 | **Age at which secondary accounts were created**
Among participants with a secondary account

QD4. Thinking about the first time you created one, how old were you when you created a second account for a platform?

	Ages 13-17			Ages 18-20		
	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+
8 or younger	3%	8%	1%	3%	3%	2%
9	2%	2%	1%	0%	2%	0%
10	4%	6%	3%	2%	3%	2%
11	6%	8%	5%	2%	1%	2%
12	20%	20%	21%	9%	15%	8%
13	24%	23%	25%	9%	9%	9%
14	13%	16%	12%	10%	12%	10%
15	19%	12%	24%	16%	18%	16%
16	3%	4%	3%	16%	16%	16%
17	1%	0%	2%	15%	12%	16%
18+	3%	1%	4%	18%	9%	19%

Note: Some columns may not total 100 due to rounding.

Fig 6 | Reasons for making a secondary account

Among participants with a secondary account

QD5. For each of the platforms on which you have multiple accounts, what are some of the reasons you have a secondary account? Please select all that apply.

Fig 6a

	Ages 13 - 17			Ages 18-20			All Ages		
	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+
To keep content private from my parents	49%	54%	46%	43%	54%	39%	46%	54%	42%
To share inside jokes with my friends	43%	47%	40%	49%	56%	47%	46%	51%	44%
I can be my authentic or real self	38%	50%	31%	50%	58%	47%	44%	54%	40%
To follow or discuss topics/hobbies that I don't want everyone to know I am interested in	38%	41%	37%	43%	55%	39%	41%	47%	38%
I feel safer	36%	34%	37%	37%	46%	35%	37%	39%	35%
To keep content private from school officials (teachers, guidance counselors, coaches, etc.)	35%	45%	29%	37%	50%	32%	36%	47%	31%
To keep content private from other kids my age	24%	30%	20%	31%	38%	29%	28%	34%	25%
I can present myself as older than I actually am	20%	22%	19%	15%	8%	17%	17%	16%	18%
I can be out as an LGBTQ+ person	-	41%	-	-	43%	-	-	42%	-

Fig 6b | Ages 13 - 17

	Total	Cis Non-Hetero Male*	Cishetero Male	Cis Non-Hetero Female	Cishetero Female	Trans, NB, and other Non-Cis*
To keep content private from my parents	49%	57%	56%	55%	35%	51%
To share inside jokes with my friends	43%	31%	39%	54%	41%	55%
I can be my authentic or real self	38%	33%	31%	53%	32%	64%
To follow or discuss topics/hobbies that I don't want everyone to know I am interested in	38%	48%	32%	42%	42%	33%
I feel safer	36%	21%	35%	39%	38%	42%
To keep content private from school officials (teachers, guidance counselors, coaches, etc.)	35%	46%	34%	44%	24%	44%
To keep content private from other kids my age	24%	29%	16%	31%	24%	29%
I can present myself as older than I actually am	20%	21%	20%	20%	19%	25%
I can be out as an LGBTQ+ person	-	36%	-	36%	-	51%

Note: The response option "I can be out as an LGBTQ+ person" was only presented for LGBTQ+ participants. *Base size <100

With the exception of family members, non-LGBTQ+ teens generally interact with the same groups of people on both their primary and secondary accounts, such as people who share their interests, friends from school, and people they know online.

By comparison, LGBTQ+ teens reported much greater separation between the communities they interact with on primary and secondary accounts. Through secondary accounts, LGBTQ+ teens reported being much less likely to interact with kids from school, and much more likely

to interact with people they only know online. More specifically, LGBTQ+ teens with secondary accounts were nearly half as likely to interact with kids from school on their secondary accounts and almost 1.5 times as likely to interact with people they only know online. In addition, this group was much more likely to report interacting with other LGBTQ+ people on secondary accounts compared to primary accounts (71% compared to 51%).

Fig 7 | **Who young people are interacting with by account type**
Among participants with a secondary account

QD61N. Which types of people do you typically interact with using a primary account or a secondary account?

Fig 7a	ON A PRIMARY ACCOUNT...						ON A SECONDARY ACCOUNT...					
	Ages 13-17			Ages 18-20			Ages 13-17			Ages 18-20		
	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+
Family members	79%	78%	80%	76%	84%	73%	24%	18%	28%	24%	19%	26%
Kids at my school	72%	76%	69%	69%	70%	68%	47%	38%	52%	52%	47%	53%
People who share my interests	59%	65%	55%	62%	68%	60%	56%	64%	50%	62%	68%	59%
People I know online only	52%	45%	57%	57%	56%	58%	55%	63%	51%	52%	61%	49%
Other LGBTQ+ people	-	51%	-	-	58%	-	-	71%	-	-	67%	-

Note: The response option "Other LGBTQ+ people" was only presented for LGBTQ+ participants. Columns will not total to 100 because question was multiple select.

Fig 8 | **Prevalence of misrepresenting age on a platform**

QE3. On any of these platforms, have you ever indicated that you are older than you really are?

Fig 8a

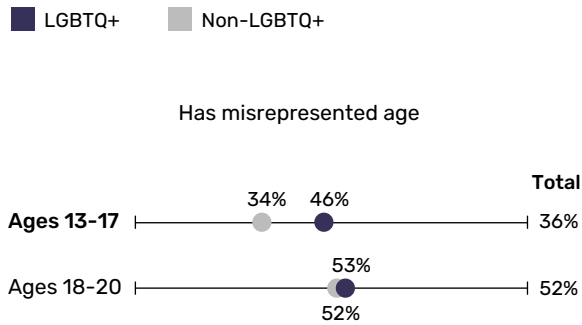
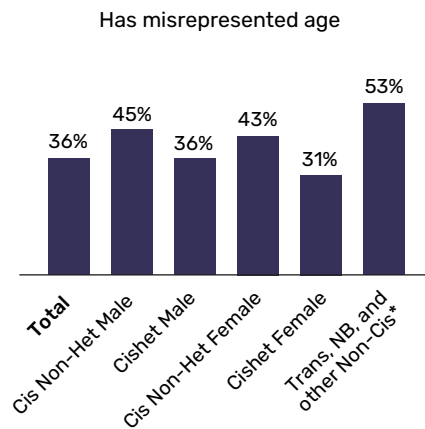


Fig 8b | **Ages 13-17**



Note: Percentages reflect participants who indicated they had misrepresented their age on at least one platform. *Base size <100

Misrepresentation of Age on Platforms and Motivations Behind It

One third (36%) of teens – regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity – reported they had misrepresented their age online. For most teens (83%), this was to gain access to an age-gated platform; however, for 43%, it was for the purpose of interacting with people older than them. LGBTQ+ teens were more likely to have reported misrepresenting their age online, with 46% who said they had done so compared to 34% of non-LGBTQ+ teens. There was little reported difference in the reasoning behind misrepresenting age between LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+ teens.

Among LGBTQ+ teens, not all groups were equally likely to have said they were older online. On average, transgender, non-binary, or other non-cisgender teens were the most likely (53%*) to report misrepresenting their age online. By comparison, 45% of cisgender non-hetero male teens said they had done the same, along with 43% of cisgender non-hetero female respondents in the same age group.

Teen users of Omegle were much more likely to have misrepresented their age compared to teen users of other platforms. More than one-third (38%) of respondents aged 13-17 who reported using Omegle said they had misrepresented their age on the platform. By comparison, the next most frequently named platforms where teen users had misrepresented their age were Facebook (25%), Kik (25%), and Snapchat (19%).³

³ At the time of this research, the listed platforms were available to users under the age of 18 (Omegle has since updated its policy, limiting use only to those 18 and older). User experience for accounts under the age of 18 vary by platform. Some platforms' terms of service state parent consent is required. Some also limit access to platform features and content for under 18 accounts. The practices used by platforms to verify user age and/or parental consent is far ranging and have mixed degrees of efficacy.

Fig 9 | **Reasons for misrepresenting age on a platform**
Among participants who have misrepresented age on a platform

QE4. Which of the following are reasons why you have indicated you are older than you really are on the platforms you use?

	Ages 13-17			Ages 18-20		
	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+
To be able to sign up for the platform	83%	88%	81%	69%	69%	68%
To interact with people older than you are	43%	45%	42%	50%	59%	48%
Other / None of these	6%	5%	5%	11%	11%	10%

Relationships within Online Communities

42%

LGBTQ+ teens report the majority of people they interact with online they only know online, compared to 25% of non-LGBTQ+ teens.

Online-only relationships were more prevalent among LGBTQ+ participants, with 40% of LGBTQ+ participants reporting they have never met the majority of the people they interact with online compared to 25% of non-LGBTQ+ participants. This gap was consistent among participants aged 13-17, where a majority of online interactions with people they only know online was more common among LGBTQ+ teens (42%) compared to non-LGBTQ+ (25%) teens.

Notably, these high rates of online-only relationships did not remain consistent across all demographic groups. Cisgender male non-hetero teens reported notably higher rates, with more than half (55%) saying the majority of people they interact with online are online-only relationships. Trans/non-binary/non-cisgender participants showed the next highest amount (39%*), followed by cisgender non-hetero female (33%), and cisgender hetero male (30%) participants. Cisgender female hetero teens were the least likely group to report a majority of their online contacts were with people they only knew online (20%).

Fig 10 | **Users misrepresenting age by platform**
Among platform users (ever used)

QE3. On any of these platforms, have you ever indicated that you are older than you really are?

	Ages 13-17	Ages 18-20
Among Us	10%	13%
Call of Duty	14%	15%
Discord	18%	15%
Facebook	25%	25%
Fortnite	13%	14%
Google Hangouts/Google Meet	12%	12%
Grand Theft Auto (GTA)	14%	19%
Instagram	18%	22%
Kik	25%	32%
Messenger (Facebook)	19%	19%
Minecraft	8%	10%
Omegle	38%	23%
Reddit	12%	15%
Roblox	9%	20%
Snapchat	19%	22%
Telegram	17%	20%
TikTok	16%	20%
Tumblr	17%	16%
Twitch	13%	17%
Twitter	18%	21%
WhatsApp	16%	18%
YouTube	14%	23%

Note: Platforms with base sizes <100 were not included in this list.

Fig 11 | **Foundational attitudes - importance of online community and exploration**

QB1. How much do you agree or disagree with the following?

Fig 11a

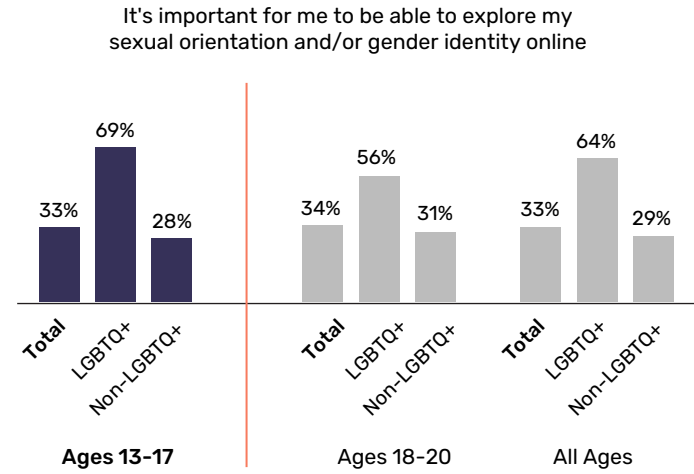
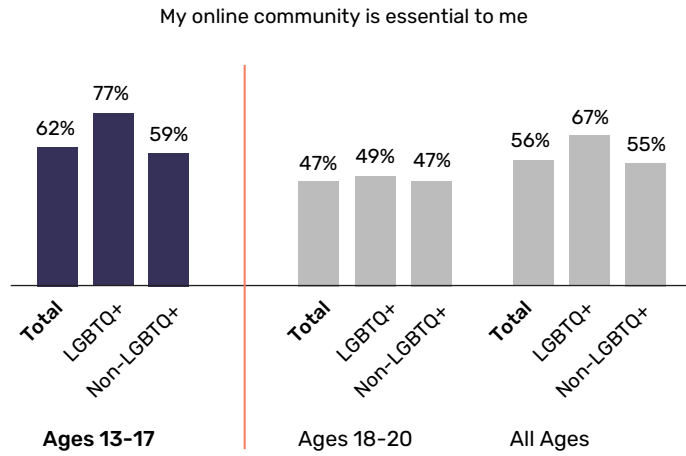


Fig 11b | **Ages 13-17**

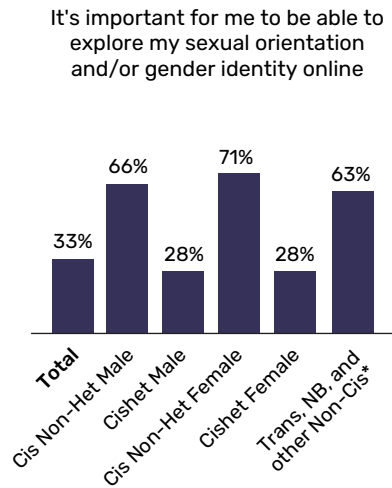
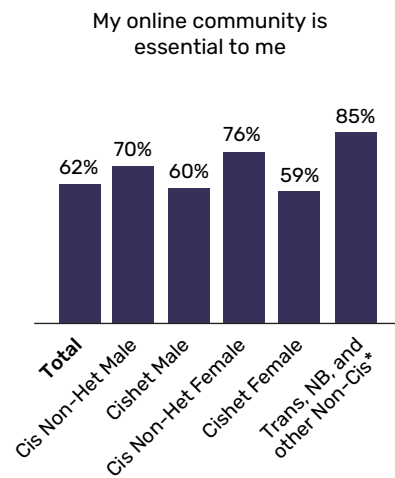
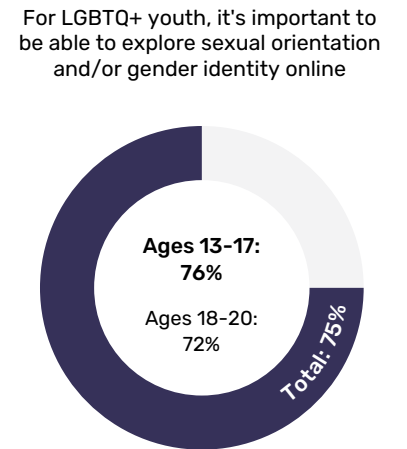
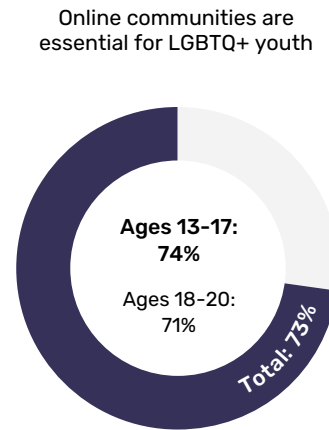


Fig 11c | **LGBTQ+**



Note: Percentages reflect participants who selected the response option "Agree". *Base size <100

Perception of Risks and Lived Experiences

The internet can offer more inclusive and private places for exploration and connection as compared to some offline communities; however, there’s widespread acknowledgement across all groups – regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity – that young LGBTQ+ people face unique challenges when it comes to online safety in general (79%). Bullying, harassment, and trolling are among the top challenges identified by participants as uniquely or disproportionately impacting LGBTQ+ young people online.

“There’s still a lot of hate towards LGBTQIA out there. I’ve been called all kinds of names, and if I’m not called names, or being told I don’t know yet because I’m not old enough, then I’m being hit on even though I’m way too young. It’s gross.”

CIS FEMALE, 16, WHITE, NORTHEAST, LGBTQ+

“I have seen what people write on LGBTQ’s pictures and it’s ugly. I don’t have to understand or agree and I don’t have to be mean.”

CIS FEMALE, 15, WHITE, SOUTH, NOT LGBTQ+

Fig 12 | **Online interactions with strangers**

QC1. Overall, if you had to say, roughly what percent (%) of the people you interact with online are people you only know online and have never met in person?

Fig 12a	Ages 13 - 17			Ages 18-20			All Ages		
	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+
NONE	12%	8%	13%	11%	7%	12%	11%	8%	12%
NET <50%	71%	58%	75%	72%	62%	74%	71%	60%	75%
NET 50%+	29%	42%	25%	28%	38%	26%	29%	40%	25%

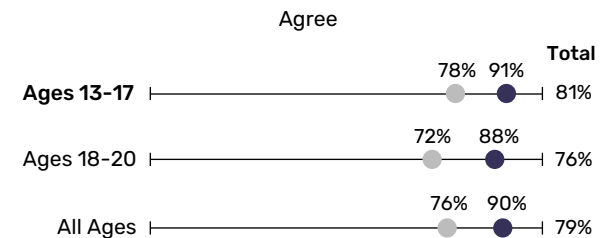
Fig 12b Ages 13-17	Total	Cis Non-Het Male	Cishet Male	Cis Non-Het Female	Cishet Female	Trans, NB, and other Non-Cis*
NONE	12%	5%	9%	10%	17%	10%
NET <50%	71%	45%	70%	67%	80%	61%
NET 50%+	29%	55%	30%	33%	20%	39%

Note: Some columns may not total 100 due to rounding. *Base size <100

Fig 13 | **Percentage of young people who agree LGBTQ+ youth face unique challenges with online safety**

QC6. Do you agree or disagree with this?

■ LGBTQ+ ■ Non-LGBTQ+



Those who disagree that LGBTQ+ young people face unique challenges in online spaces tend to fall into one of two groups: either they are inclined to believe all young people, irrespective of gender identity or sexual orientation, face similar threats or challenges online, or they articulate a belief that these threats are somewhat self-imposed.

I don't think it's any harder for LGBTQ community than others. Being bullied sucks regardless of your orientation.

CIS FEMALE, 14, WHITE, SOUTH, LGBTQ+

I think they bring a lot of the problems on themselves.

CIS MALE, 14, WHITE, MIDWEST, NOT LGBTQ+

LGBTQ+ participants' personal perception of their vulnerability to online risks and their lived experiences of these risks outpaces non-LGBTQ+ young people by notable margins. Compared to non-LGBTQ+ participants, LGBTQ+ participants report higher anticipation of being bullied (81% vs. 63%), witnessing potentially distressing content – such as racist, sexist, or anti-LGBTQ+ comments (87% vs. 73%) – or receiving unsolicited requests for nudes from strangers (33% vs. 22%). These differences were consistent, if not more pronounced, among teen participants.

Fig 14 | Likelihood of experiencing risky online events

QG2. How likely is it that this would happen to you?

	LIKELY TO HAPPEN TO ME								
	Ages 13-17			Ages 18-20			All Ages		
	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+
Witnessing potentially distressing content	75%	90%	70%	79%	81%	78%	76%	87%	73%
Being bullied	64%	83%	58%	70%	75%	70%	67%	81%	63%
Adults trying to befriend and manipulate me	32%	38%	30%	29%	33%	27%	31%	36%	29%
Being recontacted after blocking or reporting someone	28%	34%	26%	27%	28%	26%	27%	32%	26%
Receiving requests for nudes from people I don't know	25%	33%	23%	24%	33%	22%	25%	33%	22%
Getting blackmailed or receiving threats	19%	24%	17%	23%	26%	22%	20%	25%	19%

	HAS HAPPENED TO ME								
	Ages 13-17			Ages 18-20			All Ages		
	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+
Witnessing potentially distressing content	18%	35%	13%	29%	42%	25%	22%	38%	18%
Being bullied	16%	33%	12%	26%	43%	22%	20%	37%	15%
Adults trying to befriend and manipulate me	9%	19%	6%	14%	21%	13%	11%	20%	9%
Being recontacted after blocking or reporting someone	9%	13%	8%	16%	23%	14%	12%	17%	10%
Receiving requests for nudes from people I don't know	10%	19%	8%	19%	31%	16%	14%	23%	11%
Getting blackmailed or receiving threats	6%	10%	5%	12%	20%	10%	8%	14%	7%

Note: "Being bullied" refers to participants who indicated that they had been bullied for race, gender, and/or other reasons. "Witnessing potentially distressing content" refers to participants who indicated that they had seen content that was anti-LGBTQ+, racist, sexist, and/or made them feel bad about their bodies.

1.5-2x

LGBTQ+ participants were 1.5 to 2 times more likely to indicate prior experience of unwanted or potentially risky encounters online than non-LGBTQ+ participants.

While LGBTQ+ participants viewed the likelihood of many online harms occurring as higher than non-LGBTQ+ participants, the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ respondents – experiences they don’t just anticipate happening, but have already lived through – reveal even larger gaps compared to their non-LGBTQ+ peers. LGBTQ+ participants were between 1.5 to 2 times more likely to indicate prior experience of unwanted or potentially risky interactions online.

1 in 5

LGBTQ+ teens have received a request for nudes from someone they don’t know online.

These gaps were also seen among teens, and in some cases were larger for teens compared to young adults. For example, LGBTQ+ teens were more than twice as likely as non-LGBTQ+ teens to have reported receiving a request for nudes from someone they don’t know online (19% vs 8%); twice as likely to have reported getting blackmailed or receiving threats (10% v. 5%); 3 times more likely to have had an adult attempt to befriend and manipulate them online (19% vs 6%); and nearly 3 times as likely to have reported being bullied (33% v. 12%).

Awareness or Understanding of Grooming Harms or Threats

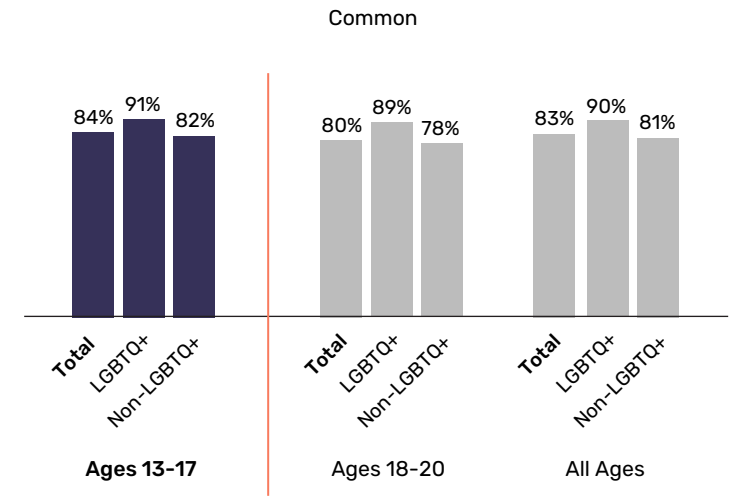
84%

Teens believe the likelihood of an adult attempting to befriend and manipulate a minor online is at least somewhat common.

Among all participants, with little difference between teens and young adults, there is widespread recognition of the dangers posed by the online grooming of minors. The overwhelming majority (84%) of all teens view the likelihood of adults attempting to befriend and manipulate a minor online as at least somewhat common. Views of this risk are even higher among LGBTQ+ teens, with 91% who reported this as a likely experience online. While LGBTQ+ teens are more likely than non-LGBTQ+ peers to view this experience as at least somewhat common, recognition is high among both groups (91% vs 82%, respectively).

Fig 15 | Perceptions of normalcy – adults attempting to befriend and manipulate minors online

QG6. Sometimes adults use the internet to befriend and manipulate minors (people under 18 years old). How common do you think this is?



Note: Percentages reflect participants who selected the response option "common".

Attitudes and Behaviors Surrounding Online Sexual Exploration

Platforms and technology are being used as both a *tool* for sexual exploration – such as texting flirty messages or photos to a romantic partner known offline – as well as a *place* for sexual exploration, such as seeking out sexual imagery on adult websites or meeting someone on a dating app. This is true for both adults and minors. In fact, in a prior survey of caregivers, 1 in 3 had themselves shared nudes and 3 in 4 agreed “[i]t’s normal for minors to want to explore sexuality, including through the use of technology, but it is important to stay safe.”⁴

Beyond the drivers even for cisgender and/or heterosexual respondents, young LGBTQ+ people may find the internet to be a safer and more private place for sexual exploration as compared to their offline worlds, and a place with greater inclusion and representation. In fact, 3 in 4 (75%) LGBTQ+ participants agree that “for LGBTQ+ youth, it’s important to be able to explore sexual orientation and/or gender identity online.”

Usage of Dating Apps and Pornography Platforms

The use of dating apps and websites geared toward sexually explicit content is not uncommon, and for many, particularly LGBTQ+ youth, it is a tool for exploration and identity formation. In some cases, the use of these services may be an attempt to find material that is representative

of non-cisgender or non-heterosexual relationships which LGBTQ+ communities find lacking in their offline worlds.

Among young adults (aged 18-20), 1 in 3 (34%) have used one of a selection of common dating apps (Tinder, Grindr, Hinge, or Bumble), half (54%) have used a pornography website, and 1 in 5 have used OnlyFans. While the use of these services is geared toward adults, many minors are also accessing these platforms. Nearly 1 in 6 teens report having used one of the listed dating apps, one-quarter (24%) have used a pornography website, and 1 in 10 (11%) reported having used OnlyFans.

In general, use of these sites was more common among LGBTQ+ teens. For example, the use of dating platforms is nearly twice as high among LGBTQ+ teens than their non-LGBTQ+ peers: 24% of LGBTQ+ teens reported having used at least one of the dating apps included in the survey compared to 13% of non-LGBTQ+ respondents of the same age group. Use of platforms that cater to sexually explicit content or pornography was also higher among LGBTQ+ teens, who reported twice the likelihood to have ever visited one compared to their non-LGBTQ+ peers: 2 in 5 LGBTQ+ teens (41%) have used a pornography site compared to 1 in 5 (19%) non-LGBTQ+ teens. Additionally, 1 in 5 (19%) LGBTQ+ respondents aged 13-17 said they have used OnlyFans compared to 1 in 10 (9%) non-LGBTQ+ respondents the same age.

⁴ The Role of Caregivers: Safeguarding & Enhancing Youth Resilience Against Harmful Sexual Encounters Online. <https://info.thorn.org/hubfs/Research/Thorn-RoleOfCaregivers-2022-FullReport.pdf>

Higher use of both dating apps and sexually explicit or pornography platforms among LGBTQ+ teens was largely driven by cisgender non-hetero male teens. This group was the most likely to have reported using dating apps in the past (32%) and the most likely to report having visited pornography sites (63%). On average, cisgender non-hetero male teens were between 1.5 and 8 times more likely than any other grouping based on sexual orientation or gender identity to have reported using dating apps or pornography websites.

Perceptions of Producing and Sharing Nude Content Among Peers

Beyond exploration via websites or apps, the practice of using technology – whether direct messaging, live streams, disappearing images, or many other digital pathways – to share personal sexually explicit content, or nudes, is becoming viewed as increasingly common. Nearly 1 in 3 (32%) participants reported their friends have asked someone to send them

nudes and 1 in 3 (32%) reported their friends have shared their own nudes. Teens reported similar rates of these same experiences: 29% have asked someone to send nudes, and 28% have shared their own nudes.

When asked about perspectives specifically within the LGBTQ+ community, nearly half of LGBTQ+ teens (43%) agreed that it’s normal for LGBTQ+ people their age to share nudes with each other. This sense of normalization grows with age: a majority (59%) of LGBTQ+ young adults (aged 18-20) agreed that sending nudes is normal, compared to 1 in 3 (35%) LGBTQ+ teens.

While some of these experiences are part of a consensual sexual exchange, they can also represent experiences of coercion and non-consensual exposure. Nearly half of all participants (43%) reported their friends have received unsolicited nudes, including more than 1 in 3 (38%) teens aged 13-17.

1 in 3
Teens have been sent sexually explicit imagery online unsolicited.

Fig 16 | **Prevalence of dating app and pornography site usage by young people**

qApps11N. And do you ever use any of the following apps or websites?

	Ages 13-17						Ages 18-20
	Total	Cis Non-Hetero Male	Cishetero Male	Cis Non-Hetero Female	Cishetero Female	Trans, NB, and other Non-Cis*	Total
Any Dating App	16%	32%	16%	17%	10%	24%	34%
OnlyFans	11%	32%	13%	10%	5%	16%	20%
Pornography Site	24%	63%	28%	27%	8%	39%	54%

Note: "Any dating app" includes participant selection for Tinder, Grindr, Bumble, or Hinge. *Base size <100

Fig 17 | **Frequency of sending and receiving of nudes by close friends**

QF1IN. How often do your close friends...?

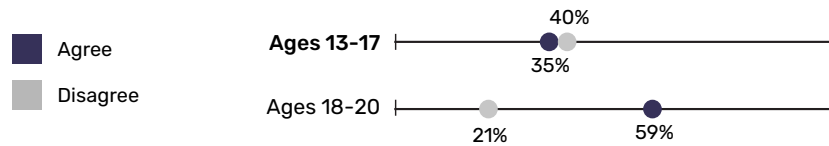
Fig 17a	Ages 13 - 17			Ages 18-20			All Ages		
	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+
Send or share photos or videos of someone who is nude to others	25%	32%	23%	29%	32%	29%	27%	32%	25%
Send or share photos or videos of themselves that are nude to others	28%	40%	24%	39%	44%	37%	32%	41%	29%
Send or share photos or videos of another kid that is nude to others	20%	27%	18%	26%	20%	28%	22%	25%	21%
Receive or get sent photos or videos that are nude that they did not ask to receive	38%	58%	32%	51%	64%	48%	43%	60%	38%
Ask someone to send them photos or videos that are nude	29%	40%	26%	37%	40%	37%	32%	40%	30%
Have nude photos or videos of themselves shared or leaked without their permission	26%	35%	23%	31%	32%	30%	28%	34%	26%

Fig 17b Ages 13-17	Total	Cis Non-Hetero Male	Cishetero Male	Cis Non-Hetero Female	Cishetero Female	Trans, NB, and other Non-Cis*
Send or share photos or videos of someone who is nude to others	25%	42%	27%	26%	20%	29%
Send or share photos or videos of themselves that are nude to others	28%	44%	27%	37%	21%	38%
Send or share photos or videos of another kid that is nude to others	20%	37%	21%	22%	14%	25%
Receive or get sent photos or videos that are nude that they did not ask to receive	38%	63%	34%	56%	29%	57%
Ask someone to send them photos or videos that are nude	29%	52%	28%	35%	23%	35%
Have nude photos or videos of themselves shared or leaked without their permission	26%	41%	25%	31%	21%	34%

Note: Percentages are representative of participants whose response was categorized as "not never". *Base size <100

Fig 18 | **Perceptions of normalcy of sharing nudes, among LGBTQ+ participants**

QF4. How strongly do you agree with the following statement? It's normal for LGBTQ+ people my age to share nudes with each other.



Across all age groups involved in the study, LGBTQ+ participants reported higher rates of experiences with nude images or videos than non-LGBTQ+ participants. For example, LGBTQ+ participants were 22 points more likely to report their friends had received unsolicited nudes than their non-LGBTQ+ peers (60% vs. 38%) and were 12 points more likely to report their friends had shared their own nudes than their non-LGBTQ+ peers (41% vs. 29%).

These trends were also notable among teens more specifically. LGBTQ+ teens reported more involvement with nudes among their friendship groups compared to their non-LGBTQ+ peers. For example, LGBTQ+ teens were more likely to say their friends are sharing their own nudes (40%) compared to non-LGBTQ+ teens (24%) and were more likely to have reported their friends have had experiences with their own nudes being leaked or re-shared without their permission (35% vs. 23%). In addition, LGBTQ+ teens were much more likely to be subjected to receiving unsolicited nudes (58%) than non-LGBTQ+ teens (32%).

These higher rates of experiences among LGBTQ+ teens are very similar to those seen among young adult participants, such that one might interpret this as LGBTQ+ teens having earlier exposure to friends having experiences related to the production or sharing of nudes. For example, 40% of LGBTQ+ teens said they believe they have a close friend who has

shared nudes (similar to 44% for LGBTQ+ young adults and 37% for non-LGBTQ+ young adults), far higher than the 24% of non-LGBTQ teens who reported the same. Similarly, 40% of LGBTQ+ teens said they have a close friend who has requested nude images from someone else, similar to the rate for LGBTQ+ young adults (40%) and non-LGBTQ+ young adults (37%), but far higher than the 26% of non-LGBTQ+ teens.

Broadly speaking, cisgender non-hetero males aged 13-17 said they believe experiences with nudes are happening among their friendship groups most frequently compared to other groups surveyed. This group was around 10-20 points more likely than any other group to have reported their friends re-share someone else's nudes. They were also more likely to say they will ask someone to send them photos or videos that are nude than others the same age, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.

Personal Experiences with or Exposure to Nude Imagery

When teen respondents reflected and reported on their own experiences, not just those of their friendship groups at large, the sending and receiving of nudes appears to be less common. It's important to note the likelihood of underreporting that is inherent with sensitive topics such as this. However, even with a possible self-report bias there are several notable and consistent demographic trends that emerge across the data.

Overall, approximately 1 in 6 (17%) participants reported having personally shared their own nude photos or videos. And while the likelihood to report having shared nude content increased with age – young adult participants were roughly 3 times more likely to report having shared nudes than teens – still 1 in 10 (11%) teenage participants reported they had shared their own nude imagery. For the majority of teens (86%) who had ever shared their own nudes, this happened within the year prior to completing the survey.

1 in 5

LGBTQ+ teens have shared their own nudes.

LGBTQ+ teens were almost twice as likely to have reported sharing their own nude photos or videos, with nearly 1 in 5 (19%) LGBTQ+ teens who said they had done so, compared to slightly under 1 in 10 (8%) non-LGBTQ+ teens who said the same.

Rates of experiences with nudes differed across segments of LGBTQ+ teens depending on gender identity or sexual orientation. However, cisgender non-hetero male teens reported the highest rates of experiences across multiple types of encounters.

Cisgender non-hetero male teens were the most likely to have shared their own nudes, with 1 in 4 (25%) having reported this experience, compared to 1 in 6 (16%) cisgender non-hetero females or transgender, non-binary, or other non-cisgender respondents in the same age group. Cisgender non-hetero male teens were also two or more times as likely as other minors to have reported asking someone else to send them nudes, and two or more times as likely to have reported they had re-shared nude photos or videos of someone else.

Fig 19 | Experiences sharing nudes

QF5. Have you ever sent or shared a nude photo or video of yourself either directly with someone else or with your social media followers?

Fig 19a	Ages 13 - 17			Ages 18-20			All Ages		
	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+
Yes	11%	19%	8%	28%	38%	25%	17%	26%	15%
No	86%	76%	89%	64%	53%	67%	78%	68%	81%
Prefer not to say	3%	5%	2%	8%	10%	8%	5%	7%	4%

Fig 19b Ages 13-17	Total	Cis Non-Hetero Male	Cishetero Male	Cis Non-Hetero Female	Cishetero Female	Trans, NB, and other Non-Cis*
Yes	11%	25%	9%	16%	8%	16%
No	86%	68%	88%	79%	91%	81%
Prefer not to say	3%	7%	3%	5%	1%	3%

Note: Some columns may not total 100 due to rounding. *Base size <100

Fig 20 | Experience sharing nudes in the last year
Among participants who've shared nudes

QF6. And have you sent or shared a nude photo or video of yourself either directly with someone else or with your social media followers in the past year?

Ages 13 - 17	
Yes	86%
No	13%
Prefer not to say	1%

Perspectives of Participants Who Have Not Shared Nude Imagery

Of those teens who have not previously shared nudes, nearly 20% said they have considered doing so. LGBTQ+ teens were nearly twice as likely as their non-LGBTQ+ peers to say that though they hadn't shared nudes, they had considered it (26% vs 15%).

Most often, a teen's decision not to share nudes was driven by a fear of the content being leaked or shown to others. But between LGBTQ+

teens and non-LGBTQ+ teens there were nuances as to what drives the concern of leaked content. Among LGBTQ+ teens, fears of losing control of imagery plays a larger role, whereas for non-LGBTQ+ teens there are particular concerns about parents or caregivers coming across this material or a general sense that it is wrong to share it based on principle.

For LGBTQ+ teens, a further inhibitor centers around body image and insecurity. Namely, not feeling good about one's image or body holds many LGBTQ+ teens back from sharing nudes.

Fig 21 | Frequency of sending and receiving nudes

QF21N. How often do you personally...?

	Total	Ages 13-17				
		Cis Non-Hetero Male	Cis Hetero Male	Cis Non-Hetero Female	Cis Hetero Female	Trans, NB, and other Non-Cis*
Send or share photos or videos of someone who is nude to others	12%	27%	15%	13%	7%	12%
Receive or get sent photos or videos that are nude that you did not ask to receive	29%	54%	26%	36%	24%	40%
Ask someone to send you photos or videos that are nude	14%	32%	16%	17%	8%	12%
Have nude photos or videos of yourself shared or leaked without your permission	10%	21%	11%	8%	6%	14%

Note: Percentages are representative of participants whose response was categorized as "not never". *Base size <100

Fig 22 | Percentage of young people who considered sharing a nude, but chose not to

Among participants who have never sent nudes

QF7. Even though you have never shared a nude photo, have you ever considered doing so?

	Ages 13-17			Ages 18-20			All Ages		
	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+
Yes	17%	26%	15%	20%	34%	17%	18%	28%	16%
No	83%	74%	85%	80%	66%	83%	82%	72%	84%

Nature of Online and Offline Relationships With Recipients of Nudes

Sharing nudes is not an experience exclusive to online-only relationships. In fact, for the majority (84%) of participants who said they have shared nudes, they reported doing so with someone they already knew offline. By comparison, nearly half (43%) of participants who reported sharing nudes did so with someone they did not know offline. In other words, technology serves both as a tool for sexual exploration in offline relationships as well as a place for digital sexual exploration.

For teens as well as young adults, those identifying as LGBTQ+ reported higher rates of having shared nudes with someone they only knew online. Among teens who reported having shared nude content, while nearly 1 in 3 (30%**) who did not identify as LGBTQ+ had previously sent images to someone they only knew online, nearly half (46%*) who identified as LGBTQ+ reported having shared with someone they only knew online. The reported rates from both groups underscores the perceived normalcy of sexual exploration beyond only those known to young people offline, particularly for LGBTQ+ teens.

A little over 1 in 3 teens who have shared nude imagery said they have done so with someone over the age of 18. While sample sizes are too small to examine differences between LGBTQ+ and non LGBTQ+ teens, across all teen participants sharing with adults occurs predominantly online, with 63% reporting they knew the adult they shared with only online.

They were strangers and said they were my age but they looked older and I was nervous about what they would do with my photo.

CIS FEMALE, 19, WHITE, WEST, LGBTQ+

My mom would have a fit if she found out. She always finds out.

CIS MALE, 15, LATINX, NORTHEAST, LGBTQ+

If me and the girl broke up there was a chance she would leak it and that's what I really thought about.

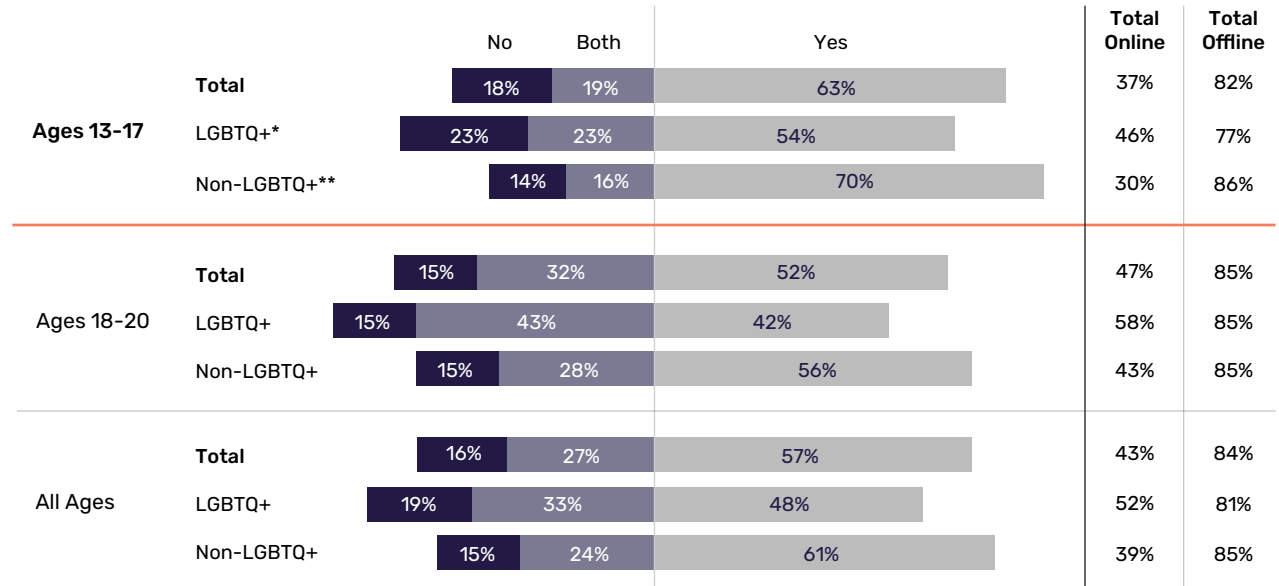
CIS MALE, 19, BLACK, SOUTH, NOT LGBTQ+

Fig 23 | Degree of familiarity with recipients of nudes

Among participants who've shared nudes

QF10. And had you met the person or people you shared this nude photo/video with in real life before you shared it?

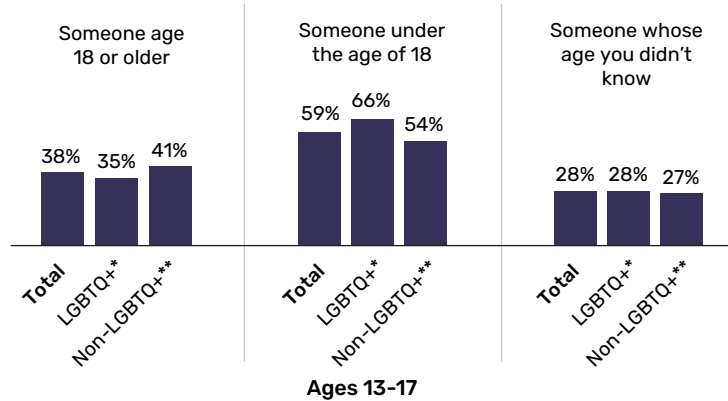
- No** - I had met the person/people offline before
- Both** - I had met some of the people offline, but not all of them
- Yes** - I had met the person/people offline before



Note: Columns will not total to 100 because question was multiple select. *Base size <100 **Base size <50

Fig 24 | Age of recipient of nudes
Among participants who've shared nudes

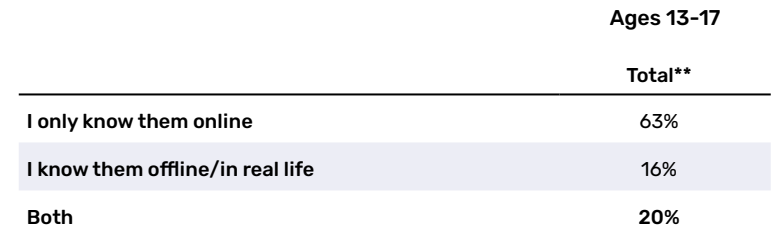
QF13. Have you ever sent or shared nude photo(s)/video(s) of yourself with any of the following... ?



Note: *Base size <100 **Base size <50

Fig 25 | Degree of familiarity with adult recipients of nude imagery
Among participant's who've shared nudes with an adult

QF14. When you've shared a nude photo or video with someone age 18 or older, how do you know them?



Note: Some columns may not total 100 due to rounding. **Base size <50

Habits or Methods of Sharing Nudes

Among those participants who'd previously shared nudes, regardless of whether they are a minor or young adult, the leading ways nudes are shared are via one-on-one platforms or means of communication. These tend to take two main forms: DMs (direct messages) and native messaging applications on their devices.

DMs in apps where content disappears were reported as the most popular means of distribution for all participants, along with DMs in the messaging feature of social media apps (43% and 33% respectively).

Among teens in particular, native applications and private messaging apps were reported as a particularly popular means for sharing nude imagery. Forty-one percent of teens who said they had sent nudes did so either through texting or messaging apps, compared to 32% of young adult sharers.

While less common sharing mechanisms overall, roughly 1 in 6 teens reported they had shared nudes using a livestream app or functionality, and another 1 in 6 stated they'd shared using a cloud storage account. In both instances, teen respondents were 2.5 times more likely to have shared nudes using these methods than the young adult sharers in the survey.

While private exchange either via in-app messaging, native messaging, or video call remain the leading places to share self-generated sexually explicit content among teens, apps catering to adults for dating or explicit content are also being used. Despite age-gating policies on platforms such as these, approximately 1 in 6 teens reported using these services to share nudes.

Fig 26 | **Methods for sharing nudes**

Among participants who've shared nudes

QF9. And when you have shared a nude photo or video of yourself, how did you share it?
Please remember that your answers are anonymous

	Ages 13-17	Ages 18-20	All Ages		
	Total	Total	Total	LGBTQ+	Non- LGBTQ+
Texting, or messaging apps like WhatsApp	41%	32%	36%	37%	35%
DM (Direct Message) in apps where content disappears, like Snapchat	39%	46%	43%	50%	41%
DM (Direct Message) in the messaging feature of a social media app like Instagram or Twitter	30%	34%	33%	39%	30%
FaceTime or other video call/chat	29%	27%	28%	30%	27%
Story, reels, or other posts in social media apps like Snapchat or Instagram	21%	15%	17%	12%	20%
A general use livestream app or function like Instagram or YouTube	18%	7%	11%	8%	13%
Sites and apps specifically for sharing of nude images and pornography with followers, such as OnlyFans or camming sites	16%	12%	14%	14%	14%
Cloud storage accounts, like DropBox	15%	6%	10%	6%	11%
Dating and hookup apps like Tinder or Grindr	15%	10%	12%	18%	9%
Blogs or Tumblr	5%	4%	5%	3%	5%

Note: Columns will not total to 100 because question was multiple select.

Protective Conversations

Young people are learning to navigate potentially risky situations online as they mature, informed by a mixture of conversations with family and friends, events around them, and firsthand experience. Unfortunately, in many cases, conversations about sensitive topics – the content, the participants, and the timing – are slow to catch up with the reality young people face. They are left without relevant and relatable information to help them navigate the risks that come with some sexual experiences that are occurring via technology. And while online relationships and forums offer important privacy and anonymity for young people, particularly those who identify as LGBTQ+, the people in their offline worlds – family and friends – remain the preferred source of support as they navigate online risks.

Discussing Sensitive or Risky Coming of Age Topics with Friends and Family

The likelihood of discussing a range of common coming-of-age topics – such as puberty, substance abuse, safe sex, and others – differs somewhat across participant groups and with whom they might discuss the topic (e.g., parents, friends, and other online-only or offline connections).

Generally across teens, certain topics were reported as more or less likely to be discussed than others. For example, on average two-thirds to three-

quarters of teens say they've had a conversation with a family member, friend, or other trusted adult about common coming-of-age topics like puberty, safe sex, or substance abuse. Topics more directly related to sexual exploration are less frequently discussed: on average, half of teens say they've had a conversation with someone about pornography, sexting, or re-sharing someone else's nude imagery.

While the likelihood of having any of these conversations decreased with age, the order of topics discussed was generally stable across groups with topics surrounding nudes and pornography the least likely to be discussed.

Teens were most likely to report having these conversations with someone in their family, followed by friends. While LGBTQ+ teens reported similar, or slightly higher, rates of conversations with their families than did their non-LGBTQ+ peers, they showed notably higher rates of discussions on these topics with friends. For example, while slightly more than 1 in 4 (28%) non-LGBTQ+ teens reported discussing bullying with their friends, one-half (51%) of LGBTQ+ teens have done the same. While 1 in 7 non-LGBTQ+ teens have discussed online sexual predators with friends, one-third (32%) of LGBTQ+ teens have done the same.

1 in 3

LGBTQ+ teens have discussed online sexual predators with their friends compared to 1 in 7 non-LGBTQ+ teens.

Fig 27 | Rates of conversations by topic - family vs. friends

QH11N. Which of these topics have you discussed with each of the following people?

Fig 27a NET Totals	Ages 13-17			Ages 18-20			All Ages		
	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+
Substance use (alcohol and/or drugs)									
Family	55%	60%	53%	33%	31%	33%	47%	50%	46%
Friends	28%	42%	24%	36%	42%	34%	31%	42%	28%
None of the these	29%	21%	31%	39%	39%	39%	33%	27%	34%
Bullying									
Family	63%	69%	61%	31%	33%	30%	51%	56%	50%
Friends	34%	51%	28%	33%	41%	31%	34%	48%	29%
None of the these	21%	14%	23%	43%	39%	44%	29%	23%	31%
Mental health									
Family	62%	76%	58%	38%	44%	36%	53%	64%	50%
Friends	29%	51%	23%	46%	57%	44%	36%	53%	31%
None of the these	23%	10%	27%	29%	23%	31%	25%	15%	28%
Puberty									
Family	64%	70%	63%	40%	40%	41%	55%	60%	54%
Friends	28%	40%	24%	32%	37%	30%	29%	39%	27%
None of the these	21%	16%	22%	34%	34%	34%	26%	22%	27%
Consent and healthy relationships									
Family	57%	65%	55%	32%	31%	33%	48%	53%	47%
Friends	29%	42%	26%	40%	49%	38%	33%	44%	30%
None of the these	24%	17%	27%	35%	34%	35%	28%	23%	30%
Safe sex/STIs/STDs/Contraception									
Family	52%	59%	50%	33%	29%	34%	45%	48%	44%
Friends	25%	32%	22%	32%	38%	31%	27%	34%	26%
None of the these	31%	24%	33%	41%	41%	41%	35%	30%	36%
Pornography									
Family	36%	37%	36%	17%	14%	18%	29%	29%	29%
Friends	22%	33%	19%	34%	38%	32%	26%	35%	24%
None of the these	46%	39%	48%	52%	52%	51%	48%	44%	49%
Sexting/sharing of nude photos/videos of yourself									
Family	36%	33%	37%	17%	14%	18%	29%	26%	30%
Friends	21%	33%	17%	29%	37%	27%	24%	35%	21%
None of the these	48%	44%	49%	54%	52%	55%	50%	47%	51%
Re-sharing nude photos/videos of other people in general									
Family	32%	31%	33%	16%	12%	17%	26%	24%	27%
Friends	17%	23%	16%	26%	27%	25%	20%	24%	19%
None of the these	53%	54%	53%	59%	61%	59%	56%	57%	55%
Online sexual predators									
Family	53%	57%	51%	26%	24%	26%	43%	45%	42%
Friends	20%	32%	17%	32%	38%	31%	25%	34%	22%
None of the these	34%	26%	36%	49%	46%	50%	39%	33%	41%

Note: Columns will not total 100 because the question was multiple select and only select response options are displayed. Rows labeled 'family' and 'friends' represent a NET group of responses which are detailed in Fig 27b and 27c, respectively.

Within families, teens report coming-of-age conversations or discussions about navigating online risks are most likely to occur with parents/caregivers, regardless of the respondents sexual orientation or gender identity. While LGBTQ+ teens showed slightly higher rates across all family members included in the survey (parent/caregiver, other family member over 18, and other family member under 18), there was an interesting (albeit small) difference in the likelihood of having these discussions with other minor family members, between LGBTQ+ and non LGBTQ+ teens. While only directional at this point, this may underscore the role of other minors, even within the same family unit, as part of a broader support network utilized by LGBTQ+ teens.

Overall, LGBTQ+ teens were more likely than were their non-LGBTQ+ peers to have discussed one of the listed coming-of-age or online risk topics with their friends. Among their friends, teenage respondents, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, were most likely to turn to friends who were also under 18 (vs. aged 18+) and whom they knew offline (vs. only online).

However, compared to non-LGBTQ+ teens, LGBTQ+ teens were more likely to turn to minor friends they only know online. For example, LGBTQ+ teens were 4 times more likely to have discussed pornography (12% vs. 3%), 4 times more likely to have discussed sexting (12% vs. 3%), and 3 times more likely to have discussed online sexual predators (11% vs. 4%) with an online friend who was under 18 than were non-LGBTQ+ teens.

Fig 27b | Family, detailed

	Ages 13-17		
	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+
Substance use (alcohol and/or drugs)			
Parent(s) or caregiver(s)	50%	54%	48%
Other family member over 18	11%	14%	10%
Other family member under 18	6%	13%	4%
Bullying			
Parent(s) or caregiver(s)	56%	62%	54%
Other family member over 18	15%	20%	14%
Other family member under 18	10%	18%	7%
Mental health			
Parent(s) or caregiver(s)	56%	68%	53%
Other family member over 18	14%	21%	12%
Other family member under 18	8%	17%	5%
Puberty			
Parent(s) or caregiver(s)	59%	65%	57%
Other family member over 18	11%	14%	10%
Other family member under 18	7%	11%	6%
Consent and healthy relationships			
Parent(s) or caregiver(s)	51%	58%	49%
Other family member over 18	11%	15%	10%
Other family member under 18	7%	13%	5%
Safe sex/STIs/STDs/Contraception			
Parent(s) or caregiver(s)	47%	53%	45%
Other family member over 18	9%	11%	9%
Other family member under 18	5%	9%	3%
Pornography			
Parent(s) or caregiver(s)	30%	32%	29%
Other family member over 18	8%	8%	8%
Other family member under 18	4%	6%	3%
Sexting/sharing of nude photos/videos of yourself			
Parent(s) or caregiver(s)	32%	29%	33%
Other family member over 18	6%	7%	6%
Other family member under 18	3%	6%	3%
Re-sharing nude photos/videos of other people in general			
Parent(s) or caregiver(s)	27%	27%	28%
Other family member over 18	6%	6%	7%
Other family member under 18	3%	3%	3%
Online sexual predators			
Parent(s) or caregiver(s)	47%	53%	45%
Other family member over 18	10%	12%	10%
Other family member under 18	4%	8%	3%

Note: Columns will not total 100 because the question was multiple select and only select response options are displayed.

Fig 27c | Friends, detailed

	Ages 13-17		
	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+
Substance use (alcohol and/or drugs)			
Friend I know in person who is under 18 years old	18%	27%	15%
Friend I know online only who is under 18 years old	8%	15%	6%
Friend I know in person who is 18 or older	6%	10%	4%
Friend I know online only who is 18 or older	3%	7%	2%
Bullying			
Friend I know in person who is under 18 years old	23%	36%	19%
Friend I know online only who is under 18 years old	9%	20%	6%
Friend I know in person who is 18 or older	8%	13%	7%
Friend I know online only who is 18 or older	5%	7%	4%
Mental health			
Friend I know in person who is under 18 years old	19%	36%	14%
Friend I know online only who is under 18 years old	7%	18%	4%
Friend I know in person who is 18 or older	7%	10%	6%
Friend I know online only who is 18 or older	6%	8%	5%
Puberty			
Friend I know in person who is under 18 years old	18%	25%	16%
Friend I know online only who is under 18 years old	6%	13%	5%
Friend I know in person who is 18 or older	5%	6%	4%
Friend I know online only who is 18 or older	4%	6%	3%
Consent and healthy relationships			
Friend I know in person who is under 18 years old	17%	27%	15%
Friend I know online only who is under 18 years old	8%	15%	6%
Friend I know in person who is 18 or older	8%	9%	7%
Friend I know online only who is 18 or older	4%	5%	3%

Fig 27c | Friends, detailed

	Ages 13-17		
	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+
Safe sex/STIs/STDs/Contraception			
Friend I know in person who is under 18 years old	14%	19%	13%
Friend I know online only who is under 18 years old	6%	12%	4%
Friend I know in person who is 18 or older	6%	6%	6%
Friend I know online only who is 18 or older	4%	4%	3%
Pornography			
Friend I know in person who is under 18 years old	14%	21%	12%
Friend I know online only who is under 18 years old	5%	12%	3%
Friend I know in person who is 18 or older	4%	7%	4%
Friend I know online only who is 18 or older	4%	7%	3%
Sexting/sharing of nude photos/videos of yourself			
Friend I know in person who is under 18 years old	13%	20%	10%
Friend I know online only who is under 18 years old	5%	12%	3%
Friend I know in person who is 18 or older	4%	7%	4%
Friend I know online only who is 18 or older	3%	6%	2%
Re-sharing nude photos/videos of other people in general			
Friend I know in person who is under 18 years old	11%	16%	9%
Friend I know online only who is under 18 years old	3%	5%	2%
Friend I know in person who is 18 or older	4%	4%	4%
Friend I know online only who is 18 or older	3%	5%	3%
Online sexual predators			
Friend I know in person who is under 18 years old	11%	18%	9%
Friend I know online only who is under 18 years old	6%	11%	4%
Friend I know in person who is 18 or older	6%	10%	5%
Friend I know online only who is 18 or older	3%	4%	2%

Note: Columns will not total 100 because the question was multiple select and only select response options are displayed.

Conversations and Cultures Surrounding Sexting

The culture and content of conversations between teens and their parents regarding sexting or sending nude photos or videos reveals a mixed approach to communicating risk, outcomes, and strategies. These perceptions are as reported by the participants, as opposed to parents or caregivers.

The majority of teens who have had conversations with parents/caregivers about sexting, regardless of sexual orientation or gender, report the sentiment from caregivers is most often a mix of “it is wrong” but “I will be here to support you”. Also common are warnings that the behavior is dangerous or will get the teen in trouble.

Nearly two-thirds of teenage participants (63%) said parents have told them it is never acceptable to share nudes. While not pervasive, still 1 in 5 (19%) parents of teens had articulated a belief that “if your nudes are leaked it’s your fault,” with LGBTQ+ teens’ parents slightly less likely (13%) to communicate blame towards the victim than non-LGBTQ+ teens’ parents (20%). The same number of teens (19%) reported conversations about sexting included parents naming that blame falls on the re-sharer, with little overlap between the two groups who received messaging about blaming victims as compared to re-sharers.

For the majority of teens, conversations also included discussion of the risks to the teen and the potential to be in trouble. For example, 75% of parents/caregivers included warnings about strangers online and 71% of parents/caregivers included the risk of online manipulation when discussing sexting. In addition, 43% of teens said parents told them a young person’s future will be put in jeopardy if they choose to send nudes. On average, parents/caregivers of LGBTQ+ teens were slightly more likely to include warnings of the risk of sexting (92% vs. 82%) and slightly more

likely to include warnings that sexting could get the teen in trouble (80% vs. 70%)

Conversations about sexting are not entirely about consequences and risk: for a strong majority (88%) of teens, conversations with parents/caregivers also included messages of support and encouragement to disclose. Within this majority, LGBTQ+ teens reported their parents as being slightly more likely than non-LGBTQ+ participants’ parents to articulate a space for open conversation: 80% of LGBTQ+ teens reported their caregiver encouraged them to come to them if they ever had an issue, as compared to 68% of non-LGBTQ+ teens and 80% of LGBTQ+ teens reported their parent/caregiver would be there no matter what, as compared to 72% of non-LGBTQ+ teens.

43%

Teens reported a conversation with their parent/caregiver about sexting included warnings that sharing nudes could put their future in jeopardy.

88%

Teens reported a conversation with their parent/caregiver about sexting included messages of support and encouragement to disclose.

Fig 28 | **What parents and caregivers want their children to know about sexting**
 Among participants who reported having discussed sexting with their parent(s) or caregiver(s)

QH6. When your parent(s) or caregiver(s) talked to you about sexting which of the following did they want you to know? Select all that apply.

	Total	Ages 13-17	
		LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+
NET It is Wrong	88%	91%	87%
Re-sharing someone's nude photos or videos is wrong	70%	70%	70%
It's never okay to share nudes	63%	64%	62%
You're too young to be doing this	46%	51%	45%
If your nudes leak it's your fault	19%	13%	20%
NET Supportive	88%	93%	86%
Your parent/caregiver will be here to help no matter what	74%	80%	72%
You should come to me if you ever have an issue	71%	80%	68%
This can be dangerous but I'm so glad you feel like you can talk to me about this/come to me for support	66%	68%	65%
NET Dangerous	84%	92%	82%
Beware of strangers online	75%	80%	74%
Some people online may try to manipulate you	71%	78%	69%
NET In Trouble	73%	80%	70%
Re-sharing someone's nude photos or videos is illegal	59%	70%	56%
Your future will be at risk / in jeopardy	43%	47%	42%
You will be in trouble if your parent/caregiver finds out this happened	23%	25%	22%

Note: Columns will not total to 100 because the question was multiple select.

Fig 29 | **Helpfulness of conversations with parents by topic**
 Among participants who had discussion with parent(s) or caregiver(s)

QH2IN. How helpful was what your parent had to say to you?

	HELPFUL				NOT HELPFUL			
	Ages 13-17			Ages 18-20	Ages 13-17			Ages 18-20
	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+	Total	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+	Total
Bullying	96%	94%	96%	81%	4%	6%	4%	19%
Social media/digital safety	94%	86%	97%	74%	6%	14%	3%	26%
Mental health	95%	90%	97%	73%	5%	10%	3%	27%
Consent and healthy relationships	96%	97%	96%	90%	4%	3%	4%	10%
Sexual assault	97%	99%	96%	79%	3%	1%	4%	21%
Sexting/sharing of nude photos/videos of yourself	96%	96%	96%	*71%	4%	4%	4%	*29%
Re-sharing nude photos/videos of other people in general	93%	96%	92%	*71%	7%	4%	8%	*29%
Re-sharing nude photos/videos of minors (under 18 years old)	95%	96%	95%	*70%	5%	4%	5%	*30%
Pornography	91%	88%	92%	*66%	9%	12%	8%	*34%
Online sexual predators	95%	93%	96%	79%	5%	7%	4%	21%

*Base size <100

Navigating and Responding to Online Risks

Young people are responding to unwanted and/or potentially risky online experiences with a mixture of online and offline resources and relationships; their decisions of where to turn are often informed by the quality and accessibility of those resources, the anticipated outcomes of using them, and the perceived risk of the moment.

Prior research⁵ has shown that online tools act as the first line of defense – and in some cases the only means of responding – for many young people when they encounter a risky situation online. A strong majority of participants in the current survey, ranging from 64% to 84% depending on the scenario, reported using either blocking or reporting tools in response to potentially unwanted or risky online experiences, a rate at times more than twice that of confiding in a caregiver, trusted adult, or friend.

Neither platform reporting tools, nor online-only friends, take the place of offline support systems for young people. When asked, “when you feel unsafe online, who are you more likely to turn to?” more than half (54%) of

participants, including nearly two-thirds (63%) of teens, reported they’d be more likely to turn to people they know in person than someone they only know online.

Unfortunately, many teens do not want to, or do not feel comfortable, turning to either their existing online or offline communities when in danger. For nearly one-quarter of teens, they said they were more likely to try and handle a situation by themselves than turn to someone they know on or offline. For LGBTQ+ teens, this is even more pronounced: 1 in 3 (32%) LGBTQ+ teens report if they felt unsafe online, they’d try to handle it themselves, including nearly half (45%) of cisgender non-hetero males.

1 in 3
LGBTQ+ teens report if they felt unsafe online they’d try to handle it themselves.

5 Thorn. (2023). Responding to Online Threats: Minors’ Perspectives on Disclosing, Reporting, and Blocking in 2021. https://info.thorn.org/hubfs/Research/Thorn_SG-CSAM_Monitoring_2021.pdf

Fig 30 | How young people responded to online experiences – online vs. offline support

Among participants who had the experience listed

QG3. For each of the following, when this has happened to you, how have you responded?

Fig 30a NET Totals	Ages 13-17			Ages 18-20			All Ages		
	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+
After being bullied									
...Used a platform safety tool	73%	80%	*67%	74%	69%	77%	75%	78%	74%
...Told a person you trust	46%	48%	*44%	29%	30%	28%	38%	41%	36%
...Ignored/did nothing	24%	31%	*18%	35%	33%	36%	29%	32%	28%
... Other	21%	22%	*19%	30%	31%	30%	25%	26%	25%
After witnessing potentially distressing content									
...Used a platform safety tool	64%	70%	*59%	69%	77%	66%	70%	75%	67%
...Told a person you trust	30%	26%	*32%	16%	17%	15%	23%	22%	23%
...Ignored/did nothing	39%	49%	*31%	42%	43%	42%	40%	46%	37%
... Other	29%	22%	*35%	28%	19%	32%	29%	21%	33%
After receiving requests for nudes from people I don't know									
...Used a platform safety tool	75%	*81%	**71%	77%	*74%	*79%	76%	78%	75%
...Told a person you trust	33%	*37%	**30%	16%	*16%	*17%	24%	27%	23%
...Ignored/did nothing	13%	*18%	**9%	20%	*18%	*21%	17%	18%	16%
... Other	25%	*17%	**31%	17%	*22%	*15%	21%	19%	22%
After adults trying to befriend and manipulate me									
...Used a platform safety tool	84%	*78%	**90%	73%	*57%	*80%	79%	70%	*85%
...Told a person you trust	42%	*42%	**42%	14%	*13%	*14%	29%	32%	*27%
...Ignored/did nothing	19%	*21%	**17%	27%	*30%	*25%	22%	24%	*22%
... Other	16%	*17%	**15%	19%	*26%	*16%	17%	20%	*15%
After being recontacted after blocking or reporting someone									
...Used a platform safety tool	*79%	**81%	**78%	80%	*88%	*76%	83%	86%	81%
...Told a person you trust	*32%	**32%	**20%	25%	*27%	*40%	28%	26%	29%
...Ignored/did nothing	*15%	**15%	**15%	18%	*15%	*20%	17%	15%	17%
... Other	*20%	**12%	**23%	18%	*17%	*19%	19%	15%	21%
After getting blackmailed or receiving threats									
...Used a platform safety tool	*69%	**70%	**68%	69%	*66%	**70%	71%	*70%	*72%
...Told a person you trust	*46%	**49%	**45%	31%	*25%	**34%	38%	*36%	*39%
...Ignored/did nothing	*8%	**12%	**6%	13%	*21%	**9%	11%	*17%	*7%
... Other	*32%	**28%	**34%	28%	*27%	**29%	30%	*28%	*31%

Note: Columns will not total 100 because the question was multiple select and only select response options are displayed. Base sizes are small and should be considered directional. Rows labeled 'used a platform safety tool', 'other', and 'told a person you trust' represent a NET group of responses detailed in Fig 30b, 30c and 30d, respectively. *Base size <100 **Base size <50

Responses To Harms and Threats Using Online Tools

In general, LGBTQ+ teens showed a slightly greater likelihood to use a platform safety tool such as blocking or reporting compared to non-LGBTQ+ teens. For example, LGBTQ+ teens were 13 points more likely to use a platform safety tool than non-LGBTQ+ teens if they experienced bullying (80% vs. 67%), 11 points more likely if they witnessed unwanted or potentially harmful online content (70% vs. 59%), and 10 points more likely if they received a request for nudes from someone they didn't know (81% vs. 71%).

In a few instances, this was driven by higher rates of reporting as compared to blocking. For example, while all teens generally showed similar levels of using platform safety tools if blackmailed or threatened, half of LGBTQ+ teens reported this experience to the platform compared to slightly more than one-third (38%) of non-LGBTQ+ teens. Similar gaps were seen if teen respondents were recontacted by someone they had blocked or if they witnessed harmful content online. Importantly, this data only reflects the behaviors of those who had these experiences

Fig 30b | **Used a platform safety tool, detailed**

	Ages 13-17			Ages 18-20			All Ages		
	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+
After being bullied									
...Blocked the person	66%	76%	*57%	64%	64%	64%	65%	71%	61%
...Reported to platform	43%	51%	*35%	49%	50%	49%	46%	51%	43%
After witnessing potentially distressing content									
...Blocked the person	59%	63%	*55%	57%	64%	54%	58%	63%	55%
...Reported to platform	46%	57%	*37%	50%	60%	46%	48%	58%	42%
After receiving requests for nudes from people I don't know									
...Blocked the person	70%	*79%	**63%	72%	*70%	*74%	71%	74%	69%
...Reported to platform	46%	*52%	**41%	39%	*39%	*39%	42%	46%	40%
After adults trying to befriend and manipulate me									
...Blocked the person	82%	*76%	**87%	65%	*53%	*70%	74%	68%	*78%
...Reported to platform	42%	*41%	**44%	35%	*32%	*37%	39%	37%	*40%
After being recontacted after blocking or reporting someone									
...Blocked the person	*73%	**75%	**72%	72%	*75%	*70%	72%	75%	71%
...Reported to platform	*46%	**60%	**39%	50%	*54%	*48%	48%	57%	44%
After getting blackmailed or receiving threats									
...Blocked the person	*67%	**65%	**68%	63%	*60%	**66%	65%	*62%	*67%
...Reported to platform	*43%	**50%	**38%	33%	*36%	**31%	37%	*43%	*34%

Note: Columns will not total 100 because the question was multiple select and only select response options are displayed. Base sizes are small and should be considered directional. *Base size <100 **Base size <50

(vs. those who shared what they would hypothetically do in these situations); thus, sample sizes are smaller, and this observation should be treated as directional.

In only one case for those with lived experiences of these scenarios did non-LGBTQ+ teens show a notably greater likelihood to take action using a platform safety tool than their LGBTQ+ peers: When teens experienced an adult attempting to befriend or manipulate them online, 90% of non-LGBTQ+ teen respondents who reported having the experience stated

they blocked and/or reported the person to the platform, compared to 78% of their LGBTQ+ peers. While the majority of teens with lived experiences, both LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+, used blocking and/or reporting when confronted with an adult attempting to befriend and manipulate them, it is notable that LGBTQ+ teens were twice as likely as non-LGBTQ+ teens to have not done so: 1 in 5 LGBTQ+ teens reported they did not use either blocking or reporting when they experienced an adult attempting to befriend and manipulate them online compared to 1 in 10 non-LGBTQ+ teens who said the same.

Fig 30c | Other, detailed

	Ages 13-17			Ages 18-20			All Ages		
	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+
After being bullied									
...Looked for advice on what to do online	5%	7%	*3%	10%	11%	9%	7%	9%	6%
...Contacted a help line/text line or an anonymous help resource	3%	4%	*2%	9%	10%	8%	6%	6%	6%
...None of these things/Other	14%	12%	*16%	17%	17%	17%	15%	14%	16%
After witnessing potentially distressing content									
...Looked for advice on what to do online	9%	8%	*10%	10%	5%	12%	10%	7%	11%
...Contacted a help line/text line or an anonymous help resource	6%	6%	*7%	5%	4%	6%	6%	5%	6%
...None of these things/Other	16%	11%	*20%	16%	12%	18%	16%	11%	19%
After receiving requests for nudes from people I don't know									
...Looked for advice on what to do online	7%	*5%	**8%	4%	*2%	*4%	5%	4%	6%
...Contacted a help line/text line or an anonymous help resource	5%	*5%	**4%	4%	*1%	*5%	4%	3%	5%
...None of these things/Other	16%	*10%	**20%	12%	*20%	*8%	14%	14%	14%
After adults trying to befriend and manipulate me									
...Looked for advice on what to do online	4%	*4%	**5%	6%	*1%	*8%	5%	3%	7%
...Contacted a help line/text line or an anonymous help resource	2%	*3%	**0%	3%	*4%	*3%	2%	3%	1%
...None of these things/Other	10%	*10%	**10%	10%	*21%	*5%	10%	14%	7%
After being recontacted after blocking or reporting someone									
...Looked for advice on what to do online	*12%	**11%	**13%	10%	*10%	*11%	11%	10%	12%
...Contacted a help line/text line or an anonymous help resource	*5%	**3%	**6%	4%	*2%	*5%	5%	3%	6%
...None of these things/Other	*8%	**2%	**10%	10%	*8%	*11%	9%	5%	11%
After getting blackmailed or receiving threats									
...Looked for advice on what to do online	*14%	**15%	**13%	14%	*7%	**18%	14%	*11%	*16%
...Contacted a help line/text line or an anonymous help resource	*7%	**3%	**10%	7%	*12%	**5%	7%	*8%	*7%
...None of these things/Other	*15%	**11%	**18%	7%	*8%	**6%	11%	*9%	*11%

Note: Columns will not total 100 because the question was multiple select and only select response options are displayed. Base sizes are small and should be considered directional. *Base size <100 **Base size <50

Human Support Networks

In general, teens – with little difference across sexual orientation or gender identity – showed similar rates of turning to a parent or caregiver when navigating an unwanted or potentially harmful experience online. However, the likelihood of looking to a parent/caregiver dropped considerably with age. Teen participants who had experienced one of the surveyed scenarios were at least twice as likely as young adults to have reported looking to a parent or caregiver when experiencing the presented scenario. The most extreme examples of this were: (1) participants who experienced an adult trying to befriend and manipulate them online, in which case teen participants were approximately 5 times more likely to confide in a parent/caregiver (38% of teens vs. 7% of young adults); and (2) participants who received requests for nudes from people they did not know, in which case teens were nearly 7 times more likely to turn to a parent/caregiver than were young adults (27% vs. 4%). While increased independence is assumed as young people mature to adulthood, anticipating the size of this shift away from parent/caregiver support systems underscores the importance of having safeguarding conversations early and often as kids develop.

While parents/caregivers were the clear leader in terms of human support for non-LGBTQ+ teens, for LGBTQ+ teens with lived experiences of at least one of the surveyed scenarios, they were nearly or as likely to turn to a friend for support as a parent/caregiver. Put another way, while both LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+ teens showed similar rates of looking to parents/caregivers when facing an online risk, LGBTQ+ teens were much more likely to look to their friends for support as compared to non-LGBTQ+ teens.

For example, if facing a situation in which an adult was trying to manipulate or groom them, LGBTQ+ teens were nearly 4 times more likely to tell a friend their age compared to non-LGBTQ+ teens (23% vs. 6%) and more than 4 times more likely to tell a friend if they received an unsolicited request for nudes from a stranger (30% vs. 7%). LGBTQ+ teens with lived experiences were also twice as likely as non-LGBTQ+ teens with lived experiences to confide in a friend if being blackmailed or receiving threats (32% vs. 15%). While sample sizes are small among the teen cohort with lived experiences, when looking more widely across all participants similar trends are evident.

Fig 30d | Told a person you trust, detailed

	Ages 13-17			Ages 18-20			All Ages		
	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+
After being bullied									
...Told a parent/caregiver	38%	40%	*35%	15%	18%	14%	27%	31%	24%
...Told another trusted adult	17%	20%	*15%	16%	10%	19%	16%	16%	17%
...Told a friend who is under 18	26%	32%	*20%	20%	23%	19%	23%	28%	20%
...Told a friend who is 18+	7%	8%	*6%	14%	18%	13%	11%	12%	10%
After witnessing potentially distressing content									
...Told a parent/caregiver	26%	24%	*27%	7%	5%	8%	17%	17%	17%
...Told another trusted adult	8%	7%	*8%	8%	5%	9%	8%	7%	9%
...Told a friend who is under 18	18%	22%	*14%	11%	13%	11%	15%	19%	12%
...Told a friend who is 18+	8%	7%	*9%	8%	12%	7%	8%	9%	8%
After receiving requests for nudes from people I don't know									
...Told a parent/caregiver	27%	*29%	**26%	4%	*7%	*2%	15%	19%	13%
...Told another trusted adult	9%	*12%	**6%	9%	*4%	*12%	9%	8%	10%
...Told a friend who is under 18	17%	*30%	**7%	8%	*16%	*4%	12%	24%	6%
...Told a friend who is 18+	4%	*9%	**0%	8%	*10%	*7%	6%	9%	4%
After adults trying to befriend and manipulate me									
...Told a parent/caregiver	38%	*38%	**37%	7%	*3%	*8%	23%	25%	*21%
...Told another trusted adult	6%	*8%	**5%	8%	*3%	*11%	7%	6%	*8%
...Told a friend who is under 18	14%	*23%	**6%	13%	*15%	*11%	13%	20%	*9%
...Told a friend who is 18+	4%	*4%	**3%	7%	*12%	*5%	5%	7%	*4%
After being recontacted after blocking or reporting someone									
...Told a parent/caregiver	*27%	**30%	**25%	11%	*9%	*12%	19%	20%	19%
...Told another trusted adult	*4%	**4%	**4%	8%	*3%	*10%	6%	3%	7%
...Told a friend who is under 18	*12%	**16%	**11%	9%	*13%	*7%	10%	15%	9%
...Told a friend who is 18+	*4%	**7%	**2%	13%	*12%	*14%	8%	9%	8%
After getting blackmailed or receiving threats									
...Told a parent/caregiver	*40%	**36%	**42%	10%	*10%	**10%	23%	*23%	*24%
...Told another trusted adult	*16%	**15%	**16%	16%	*5%	**21%	16%	*10%	*19%
...Told a friend who is under 18	*21%	**32%	**15%	16%	*21%	**14%	19%	*26%	*14%
...Told a friend who is 18+	*5%	**8%	**3%	20%	*24%	**19%	13%	*16%	*12%

Note: Columns will not total 100 because the question was multiple select and only select response options are displayed. Base sizes are small and should be considered directional.

*Base size <100 **Base size <50

The Reliance on Offline vs Online Relationships

Given the heavily digital lives young people lead, meaningful relationships now develop in both offline and online communities. In prior research, 1 in 3 youth (aged 9-17) reported some of their closest friends were only known to them online, with just under 1 in 3 (27%) LGBTQ+ youth saying the same.⁶ However, most teens still look to in-person relationships more often than online relationships when reacting to an unwanted or potentially risky online experience.

A majority of teens (63%) said they would turn to someone they know in person if they felt unsafe online, while 1 in 10 (10%) would look to find support from someone they only know online. In addition, while more than 90% of teens had confidence in advice from a parent/caregiver and 67% had confidence in advice from a friend under the age of 18 who they knew offline, less than half had confidence in a friend they only knew exclusively online.

While more than half (56%) of LGBTQ+ teens more specifically reported they would look for support from their offline community rather than their online community, this was still notably less than the trust in offline communities expressed by non-LGBTQ+ teens, for whom two-thirds stated they would turn to people they know in-person.

This discrepancy between LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+ teens' reliance on offline support was not accounted for in reliance on online relationships, as all teens showed similar likelihood (9%) to look to online relationships if they felt unsafe. Rather, the difference in reliance on offline support systems seems to become evident when observing the likelihood to try and handle risky situations by themselves. For both groups, the second most

10 pts
LGBTQ+ teens were 10 points more likely to try and handle an unsafe online experience by themselves than their non-LGBTQ+ peers.

Fig 31 | Understanding who teens turn to if exposed to unsafe online experiences or behaviors

QG7. When you feel unsafe online, who are you more likely to turn to?

	Total	Ages 13-17						
		LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+	Cis Non-Hetero Male	Cis Hetero Male	Cis Non-Hetero Female	Cis Hetero Female	Trans, Non-Bin, and other Non-Cis*
I'm more likely to turn to people I only know online	9%	9%	9%	9%	9%	10%	9%	7%
I'm more likely to turn to people I know in person	63%	56%	65%	44%	60%	63%	71%	58%
I'm more likely to try and handle it on my own	24%	32%	22%	45%	27%	22%	16%	33%
Other	4%	3%	4%	2%	4%	5%	4%	2%

*Base size <100

6 Thorn. (2022). Online Grooming: Examining risky encounters amid everyday digital socialization.

common response is to try and handle the situation on their own and LGBTQ+ teens were 10 points more likely than non-LGBTQ+ peers to have reported they'd handle an unsafe online experience themselves.

1 in 2
Cis male non-hetero teens say they'd try to handle an unsafe situation alone.

said they would try to handle a situation in which they feel unsafe online by themselves. This group reported they would handle unsafe online experiences themselves between 12 and 29 points more compared to other groups. In addition, a majority (57%) of cisgender non-hetero male teens said they believe a friend they know online only who is their age is a good source of advice. Teen cisgender non-hetero males' trust in these online-only friendships distinguishes them from both other LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+ participants.

As observed in many of the responses, cisgender non-hetero male teens are a notable exception. Nearly half of cisgender non-hetero male teens

Fig 32 | **Percentage of young people confident in the advice they receive from each contact type**

QH8. How confident are you that each of the following people would have good advice on what to do about these situations?

Fig 32a

	Ages 13-17		
	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+
Offline Contact From			
...Parent(s) or caregiver(s)	93%	88%	94%
...Trusted adult I know in person	89%	86%	90%
...Friend I know in person who is 18 or older	73%	71%	74%
...Friend I know in person who is my age (under 18 years old)	67%	69%	66%
Online Contact Only From			
...Friend I know online only who is my age (under 18 years old)	44%	46%	44%
...Friend I know online only who is 18 or older	45%	48%	44%

Fig 32b | **Ages 13-17**

	Total	Cis Non-Hetero Male	Cis Hetero Male	Cis Non-Hetero Female	Cis Hetero Female	Trans, Non-Bin, and other Non-Cis*
Offline Contact From						
...Parent(s) or caregiver(s)	93%	87%	94%	87%	95%	87%
...Trusted adult I know in person	89%	84%	88%	85%	93%	87%
...Friend I know in person who is 18 or older	73%	76%	73%	67%	74%	70%
...Friend I know in person who is my age (under 18 years old)	67%	72%	66%	70%	67%	66%
Online Contact Only From						
...Friend I know online only who is my age (under 18 years old)	44%	57%	45%	40%	42%	43%
...Friend I know online only who is 18 or older	45%	54%	43%	47%	45%	42%

Note: *Base size <100

Factors Impeding Disclosure to Caregivers or Other Trusted Adults

While there are many reasons participants said they chose not to report harmful or threatening experiences to adults, they largely fell into one of two categories: social attitudes and discipline.

The leading obstacles to reporting to parents/caregivers or other trusted adults, as cited by teens who'd experienced an unwanted or potentially harmful online encounter, were concerns related to discipline. Slightly more than half (54%) of teens feared caregiver-delivered consequences such as being more closely monitored, having new rules established, or taking away their privileges to use certain platforms or devices. In general, LGBTQ+ teens were roughly 10-20 points more likely to report fear of a consequence or loss of privilege than their non-LGBTQ+ peers.

Following disciplinary fears, social attitudes were often named as a reason for which teens did not disclose risky or harmful experiences to a caregiver or other trusted adult. Nearly 4 in 10 (38%) teens with lived experiences did not tell an adult because they felt "it wasn't a big deal to me." One quarter of teens did not tell an adult because they feared reporting would lead them to be labeled a "tattle tale" or "snitch."

Many views related to disclosure barriers were shared by all participants, teens included. However, in addition to greater concern regarding consequences, LGBTQ+ participants (aged 13-20) reported greater concern than their non-LGBTQ+ peers for being cut off from their online communities. Transgender, non-binary, or other non-cisgender participants held uniquely high concerns regarding loss of community. For 1 in 3 (33%*) transgender, non-binary, or other non-cisgender participants with lived experiences, concern that reporting would lead to them being cut off from their online community prevented them from confiding in a caregiver or other trusted adult. While sample sizes are smaller, similar rates were apparent among teen respondents within this group more specifically. This concern rated approximately 2 to 3 times higher among this group than any other based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

1 in 3

Transgender, non-binary, or other non-cisgender participants reported concerns about being cut off from their online communities influenced their decision not to disclose a risky online experience to a caregiver or other trusted adult.

Fig 33 | **Reasons for not reporting risky online experiences to a caregiver or trusted adult**
 Among those who did NOT report experiences of risky behavior online to a parent, caregiver, or trusted adult

QG5. For the instances where you did not tell a parent/caregiver or trusted adult, were any of the following reasons why you decided not to tell/report?

Fig 33a	Ages 13-17			Ages 18-20			All Ages		
	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+*	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+*	Total	LGBTQ+	Non-LGBTQ+*
Outness	-	17%	-	-	33%	-	-	24%	-
Caregiver consequences	54%	63%	49%	45%	52%	43%	50%	58%	45%
It wasn't a big deal to me	38%	40%	37%	46%	52%	44%	42%	46%	41%
I don't want to be a tattler or snitch	25%	27%	24%	21%	20%	22%	23%	24%	23%
It would be embarrassing because I did something sexual (like sent the person a nude photo or video)	15%	15%	14%	15%	20%	13%	15%	17%	14%
I'd face consequences in general	13%	27%	4%	22%	25%	20%	17%	26%	13%
I'd be cut off from my online community	13%	20%	8%	14%	20%	12%	14%	20%	10%
My friends would judge me	9%	13%	7%	12%	10%	12%	10%	11%	10%
I was threatened/blackmailed	5%	5%	4%	11%	9%	13%	8%	7%	9%
Other/None of the above	17%	16%	18%	17%	13%	18%	17%	17%	18%

Fig 33b Ages 13-17	Total	Cis Non-Hetero Male**	Cis Hetero Male**	Cis Non-Hetero Female**	Cis Hetero Female*	Trans, Non-Binary, and other Non-Cis**
Outness concerns	-	34%	-	11%	-	9%
Caregiver consequences	54%	71%	44%	58%	50%	65%
It wasn't a big deal to me	38%	43%	47%	40%	32%	35%
I don't want to be a tattler or snitch	25%	35%	30%	23%	21%	23%
It would be embarrassing because I did something sexual (like sent the person a nude photo or video)	15%	37%	0%	17%	4%	34%
I'd face consequences in general	13%	23%	23%	5%	9%	19%
I'd be cut off from my online community	13%	19%	9%	16%	5%	33%
My friends would judge me	9%	19%	10%	5%	5%	16%
I was threatened/blackmailed	5%	2%	9%	0%	2%	13%
Other/None of the above	17%	3%	18%	19%	19%	20%

Note: Outness concerns refers to participants who selected responses about their friends, parent(s)/caregiver(s), or other people finding out they are LGBTQ+. Caregiver consequences refer to participants who selected responses indicating concerns about parent(s)/caregiver(s) imposing stricter rules, monitoring, or other consequences. *Base sizes <100 **Base sizes <50

While data was limited in exploring the role of outness as a barrier for where LGBTQ+ participants would look for support if confronted with an unwanted or potentially harmful online experience, many LGBTQ+ participants identified this as a factor in their decision not to confide in a parent/caregiver or other trusted adult in response to one of the surveyed scenarios.

For example, LGBTQ+ participants who said they were not out to their parents reported a lower likelihood to disclose the experience to a parent/caregiver if it occurred: 16%* of LGBTQ+ teens who reported they were not out to their parents said they would tell their parents if they were threatened online compared to 45% of those who said they are out to their parents. Similarly, 8%* of LGBTQ+ teens not out to their parents would tell a parent or caregiver about being solicited for nudes compared to 38% of those out to their parents. Finally, 17%* of LGBTQ+ teens not out to their parents said they would tell parents about adults attempting to befriend and manipulate them, compared to 44% of those out to their parents.

While sample sizes are smaller for those with lived experiences of these scenarios, similar trends were present.

In addition, for 1 in 4 (24%) LGBTQ+ participants who'd had a potentially harmful online experience that was not disclosed to an adult, concern over being outed was cited as a disclosure barrier. This concern ranked higher among young adults, for whom 1 in 3 reported it as a consideration in disclosure, with the greatest worry tied to being outed to parents/caregivers. While a more prominent factor for young adults, still 1 in 6 LGBTQ+ teens who'd had a potentially risky online interaction reported concern that sharing what they'd experienced with a parent/caregiver or other trusted adult would lead to them being outed, preventing them from disclosure.

1 in 6
LGBTQ+ teens reported concerns about being outed played a role in deciding not to tell a parent/caregiver about a potentially harmful online encounter.

Fig 34 | Rates at which LGBTQ+ teens think they will tell parent(s)/caregiver(s) about their online experiences vs. how often they actually did

QG4. If each of the following were to happen to you, how do you think you would respond? QG3. For each of the following, when this has happened to you, how have you responded?

	WHAT LGBTQ+ TEENS THOUGHT THEY WOULD DO...		WHAT THEY ACTUALLY DID....	
	out to parents	not out to parents*	out to parents	not out to parents*
Receiving requests for nudes from people I don't know	38%	8%	32%	7%
Adults trying to befriend and manipulate me	44%	17%	43%	0%
Being bullied or seeing people get bullied for other reasons	29%	7%	36%	11%
Getting blackmailed or receiving threats	45%	16%	46%	0%

Note: Columns will not total 100 because the question was multiple select, and only select response options are displayed. For "what they actually did," responses were recorded only among participants who indicated they had had the experience listed. *Base size <100

Fig 35 | **Reasons for not reporting risky online experiences – outness concerns**

Among those who did NOT report experiences of risky behavior online to a parent, caregiver, or trusted adult

QG5. For the instances where you did not tell a parent/caregiver or trusted adult, were any of the following reasons why you decided not to tell/report?

	LGBTQ+		
	Ages 13-17	Ages 18-20	All Ages
NET Outness Concerns	17%	33%	24%
My friends would find out I'm LGBTQ+	6%	9%	8%
My parent/caregiver would find out I'm LGBTQ+	9%	25%	16%
Other people would find out I'm LGBTQ+	9%	18%	13%

Note: Columns will not total 100 because the question was multiple select, and only select response options are displayed.

Looking Ahead

Following earlier research pointing to increased rates of exposure to potentially risky online sexual interactions among LGBTQ+ youth,⁷ this research sought to explore how the experiences and perspectives of LGBTQ+ teens might be distinct from that of their non-LGBTQ+ peers. While the survey reaffirms many of the overall risks all young people are navigating in their online lives, the data also underscored several key findings that may help to strengthen tools and safeguarding approaches to ensure they are inclusive of, and responsive to, the experiences of LGBTQ+ youth.

1. LGBTQ+ teens reported a greater reliance on online communities and spaces. While the internet plays a critical role in socialization and exploration for all minors, LGBTQ+ youth were nearly 20 points more likely to say they felt their online communities were essential to them.

The internet is integral in the lives of many young people, yet this survey underscored this is particularly the case for LGBTQ+ youth. LGBTQ+ teens uniquely rely on the perceived anonymity and privacy from offline communities as they mature through adolescence and the internet may provide greater access to others in the LGBTQ+ community, creating an inclusive social network potentially lacking in their offline worlds.

This group demonstrates the critical importance of approaching issues of online safety from a safeguarding lens, not a pursuit for digital isolation. Outright prohibitions of digital experiences are ineffective as a singular tool to combat online harms. Instead, safeguarding approaches should start from a place of awareness, should begin, in an age appropriate fashion, when kids are first getting online, and should be co-designed with youth of different backgrounds and identities to ensure they are relevant and accessible to the young people they seek to support.

7 Thorn. (2022). Self-Generated Child Sexual Abuse Material: Youth Attitudes and Experiences in 2021. https://info.thorn.org/hubfs/Research/Thorn_SG-CSAM_Monitoring_2021.pdf

2. LGBTQ+ teens reported higher rates of experiences involving nudes and online sexual interactions. The rate at which all teens are engaging in sexual interactions using technology is notable. However, LGBTQ+ teens were more than twice as likely to report sharing their own nude photos or videos compared to non-LGBTQ+ teens.

Online sexual exploration is not unique to LGBTQ+ youth – far from it; however, LGBTQ+ teens report distinctly higher rates of these experiences. LGBTQ+ teens may have less opportunity to meet and engage with other LGBTQ+ youth in their offline communities or may not feel their sexual orientation or gender identity would be supported.

While online sexual exploration may feel at times safer than offline exploration, particularly for LGBTQ+ youth, risks exist all the same. The historical risks communicated in sex education talks are no longer confined to physical consequences like pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, but now include navigating a host of new concerns, such as the influence of adult pornography, sexting with strangers, grooming, and the non-consensual distribution of nude content. In addition to the personal wellbeing and safety of minors using the internet to explore their sexuality, some of these experiences can also carry legal consequences.

Safeguarding young people as they navigate sexual development in a digital age means equipping them with the understanding and awareness of the risks associated with online sexual encounters – as well as the tools to respond effectively. Conversations should not just focus on “just don’t do it”. They must occur early, must be clear in the risks and how to navigate them, and must include an open and judgment-free door for support should risk turn to danger.

3. Cisgender non-hetero male teens reported higher rates of risky encounters and attempt to handle unsafe situations alone more than other teens. While LGBTQ+ participants reported many similar experiences, cisgender non-hetero males stand out as uniquely experiencing and navigating potentially risky events. More than half of cisgender non-hetero male teens reported they have been sent nudes they did not ask for and were roughly 10 points more likely than other members of the LGBTQ+ community to report sharing their own nudes. In addition, nearly half of cisgender non-hetero male teens stated they would try to handle feeling unsafe online by themselves.

This survey points to a concerning gap between the level of risky experiences among cisgender non-hetero male teens and the likelihood to seek help when in danger. These teens report greater rates of online exploration and sexual interactions and are the most likely to try and handle feeling unsafe online by themselves. As we continue to improve the onset, frequency, and quality of conversations relating to online risks, we need to ensure we’re meeting these young people, in particular, in a way that resonates with their attitudes and needs.

This reality also underscores the critical need to increase investment in research among under-represented populations, including, but not limited to LGBTQ+ youth. Research serving this group, along with youth of color, and neurodiverse youth, are just a few of the areas needing further attention. General surveys, while valuable to understand the “big picture”, often fail to offer sufficient data to explore the experiences of smaller populations. Indeed, even in this research, which was designed specifically to develop a deeper understanding of the experiences and needs of LGBTQ+ youth, sample sizes remained small for many communities – particularly trans, non-binary, or other non-cisgender youth. New research should intentionally seek to explore the experiences and perspectives of underrepresented groups to ensure interventions and responses are inclusive, relevant, and effective for all youth.

4. Offline relationships - such as with caregivers and friends - are the preferred people to turn to when young people feel unsafe, including for LGBTQ+ youth. Despite an increased reliance on online communities and spaces, LGBTQ+ teens still overwhelmingly prefer their offline relationships if they feel unsafe. However, for 1 in 3 LGBTQ+ teens, they would rather handle a dangerous situation alone than turn to either their online or offline communities.

Online spaces and relationships are increasingly a part of young people’s lives, a place where they feel they can be themselves. This was a sentiment particularly strong for LGBTQ+ youth. And yet, regardless of sexual orientation or gender, there is greater trust in the advice and support from offline relationships than those made online. It is important to remember that the potential for online connection for those who don’t currently feel seen or connected in their offline worlds, while valuable, does not abdicate the communities around young people from rising to meet the needs of all in an open and supportive way.

Importantly, conversations about the online risks young people face are not the sole responsibility of parents/caregivers. In fact, for some not ready or able to talk to a caregiver about sensitive coming-of-age topics, a friend can be an important source of support. Indeed, LGBTQ+ teens - more often than their non-LGBTQ+ peers - already turn to friends for support as they navigate unwanted or potentially harmful sexual interactions online.

Conversations on challenging subjects such as sexual exploration and risky behavior can be harder to initiate, less open, and less direct than those that occur between young people and their peers. As the quality and timing of conversations with caregivers continue to improve, we should recognize the inherent value of friend groups as non-parental influences in young people’s lives.

Programming and resources that seek to inform and encourage conversations on subjects such as sexting, grooming, and non-consensual re-sharing should include bystander audiences. Not only will this increase the chances of a young person having someone in their lives ready and willing to discuss these topics, it offers an indirect means of empowering young people. Messaging focused on the support of friends or other bystanders can inform personal safety practices, and may be better received when viewed through the lens of protecting a friend, as opposed to only oneself.

Final Thoughts

As with all parts of our lives, technology now plays a role in romantic relationships and sexual exploration for many, including young people, and particularly for LGBTQ+ youth. Whereas in their offline communities they may fear judgment or physical harm, or simply may not see the non-hetero or non-cisgender people and relationships they are seeking, the internet opens new communities and experiences in a way that can feel more representative and inclusive than their offline worlds. As many young people told us in this research, the internet lets them be their true selves.

Given this, the need to develop platforms, tools, and programming that ensures online spaces are safe for all young people is vital. LGBTQ+ youth are using technology to explore their sexuality and connect with new people in a way that is not exclusive to them; however, it is happening for them at higher rates. Platform safety tools are a popular first line

of defense in risky situations, but they are not a substitute for human support. Sadly, the availability and quality of human support is far from uniform, leaving too many isolated and trying to process harm alone. Diversifying the sources and types of support available may make an important dent in the number of young people who currently feel without a safe place to turn when navigating a risky online encounter.

The internet offers the ability to curate our experiences and communities – both to increase the good and decrease the bad - in a way we cannot as easily offline. This is uniquely relevant for LGBTQ+ youth. In the face of this, we must speak directly to the risks they are sure to be navigating and ensure they have access to open and non-judgmental spaces to turn for support.

Understanding the complex intersection of technology and child sexual abuse empowers us to safeguard kids from the ever-evolving threats they face online. Without direct insights from caregivers who are the first line of support for kids as they navigate their online experiences, we risk missing the mark in the development of valuable resources that can effectively protect them and foster their resilience.

THANK YOU

We are grateful to the parents and caregivers who took the time to participate in our research. Without their gracious participation, we would not be able to share these key insights about the role of caregivers in safeguarding kids online.

THORN 

thorn.org | info@thorn.org