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Youth Perspectives on Online Safety in France

Findings from 2023 quantitative research among 12-16-year-olds in France

Research conducted by Thorn in partnership with iconkids & youth international research GmbH

THORN ¹

**iconkids
& YOUTH**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

4	Methodology & Research Design
7	Introduction
9	The Digital Landscape
14	Online Social Interactions & Risks
18	Uncomfortable Interactions & Online Grooming
22	Online Sexual Experiences
30	Responding to Risky Encounters
36	Discussion
39	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.

OUR THANKS

We are grateful to the individuals who took the time to participate in our research. Without their gracious participation, we would not share these key insights about the online harms and risks they encounter and attempt to navigate within their digital environments.

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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. Some of these challenges and their corresponding mitigation strategies are discussed below.

Challenges

CHALLENGE: The issues and risks associated with online child sexual abuse exist within a dynamic online environment where the technologies and platforms intersecting with this issue area are in constant flux¹, as are the habits of the kids who use them.

Action: *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 reevaluated for the needs of each survey.*

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

Action: *This is a universal issue, but how it impacts kids differs across cultures and demographics. This research aimed to identify trends among kids overall in two countries, France and Germany, and within some significant subgroups – such as age and gender groups. Given sample size limitations and, for some responses, low base sizes, some of the data points are most appropriately viewed as starting points and should be considered directional. Within the report, asterisks indicate instances where the data is derived from smaller sample sizes. The use of a single asterisk (*) represents a base size smaller than 100, and the use of a double asterisk (**) represents a base size smaller than 50. Base size information is included within all figures.*

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

Action: *Asking individuals – especially kids – 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 requires the design of survey instruments that are safe and supportive. The sequence was important in our research instruments. Each sensitive question was prefaced with a note acknowledging the potential difficulty of discussing the topic and reiterating the anonymity of the responses. Questions were also written to allow individuals to generally answer*

¹ For example, Omegle, an anonymous video chat platform that randomly connected users, was included in this research. However, the platform shut down in November 2023 prior to the publication of this report.

about “close friends” instead of exclusively asking respondents about their personal experiences. Resources for additional information and referrals for real-time support were highlighted in all survey instruments. The support resources included were identified and externally validated by local child safety non-profits within each country.

CHALLENGE: This research required and relied on the use of translation.

Action: *From the onset, it was vital Thorn identify and partner with a market research firm with local expertise in France and Germany and extensive expertise in conducting research with minors in both countries. A single survey was initially developed in English and then translated into French and German. Multiple native speakers of each respective language externally validated the translations.*

CHALLENGE: Securing parental consent for participation in the survey proved more difficult among older minors (aged 16-17).

Action: *To ensure the safety of all study participants, minors were recruited through their parents, and parental consent was required for children to participate in the survey. While a practical approach in recruiting younger minors (aged 12-15), older minors (aged 16-17) proved more challenging to recruit through this method. Consequently, this research could not recruit 17-year-olds effectively in France (n=27), and their responses were excluded from the resulting analysis and reporting.*

Research Design

The resulting research focused on French minors aged 12-16.² Research methods were designed to identify minors’ behaviors and attitudes related to online risks, especially online sexual interactions and harms, and how minors respond to such encounters.

QUANTITATIVE ONLINE SURVEY

A survey was developed in English and then translated into French. The survey translation was developed and validated by multiple native French speakers. In total, 820 minors in France participated in a 20-minute online survey from August 17, 2023, to September 18, 2023. Specifically, the sample makeup was:

- 12-13-year-olds (n=324)
- 14-15-year-olds (n=321)
- 16-year-olds (n=175)
- Boys (n=418)
- Girls (n=402)

To ensure a representative sample, sampling quotas were established for age, gender, educational level, and geography based on country-specific demographic statistics. No subsequent weighting was needed or applied to the raw sample.

Results and Reporting

Due to rounding, some of the figures included in this report may not have columns or rows that add up to exactly 100 percent. Some questions also featured multi-select response options, which have been noted.

² In the context of this report, and unless otherwise noted, the term “minors” is used to describe young people represented in the survey sample (aged 12-16).

Privacy and Safety

Ensuring the privacy and safety of those participating in this research was paramount. All participant responses were anonymized. Minor participants were recruited directly through caregivers at the time of this survey.

Caregiver consent was required for minors' participation in the surveys. In addition, help resources were provided to participants if they wanted to learn more about the topics discussed or needed professional support to discuss these issues.

Introduction

Digital life can be immensely rewarding. For many, it offers robust opportunities for exploration and interconnectedness that are not otherwise accessible in offline life. Yet, digital environments also incubate the potential for harm. Where users go to find authentic connection and acceptance, they can be met with manipulation and abuse by other users. The risks of online harms may be compounded for younger users. Unlike their offline worlds where people (caregivers, educators, or neighbors, for example) and systems are in place to defend against threats young people may not recognize, many of the online spaces they explore lack similar safeguards.

Since 2019, Thorn has conducted a series of research initiatives aimed at capturing the online experiences of young people with a particular focus on generating insight into where, how, and in what ways online sexual risks emerge, and harm occurs for them. Previous areas of focus have sought to examine youth perceptions of and experiences with online grooming, self-generated child sexual abuse material (SG-CSAM) or “nudes,” nonconsensual resharing of intimate imagery, and how kids attempt to seek help for sexual harms committed through digital technologies.

While Thorn’s prior research efforts have focused exclusively on youth in the United States, Thorn’s latest research sought to understand the online experiences of French and German youth. A primary goal of this

research was to develop a foundational understanding of the rates at which French and German youth encounter online sexual risks and how they subsequently attempt to navigate and respond to those risks; a secondary goal was to generate data to support future cross-cultural comparisons of these experiences.

This report presents the findings of the research conducted in France. A separate report covering the findings from the research conducted in Germany is available.³

In a survey of 820 French youth (aged 12–16), Thorn explored youth attitudes and behaviors related to online sexual interactions and harms and how French youth respond to such encounters. Several key findings emerged:

1. French youth have robust digital lives, connecting with a wide range of other users and often exploring beyond the confines of platforms built with them in mind. Most youth surveyed say their friends sometimes misrepresent their age online. Among those with online-only contacts, 40% say some of those contacts are other users they believe to be aged 18 or older, including 1 in 5 12–13-year-olds.

³ Thorn. 2024. Youth Perspectives on Online Safety in Germany. Available at: https://info.thorn.org/hubfs/2024_YouthPerspectivesonOnlineSafetyinGermany_EN.pdf.

2. French youth are familiar with online grooming and anticipate that they or their friends may have to navigate it at some point. Forty-three percent of minors think online grooming is a common experience for other kids online, and 1 in 6 minors reported they have been approached by another user online for manipulation.

3. French youth are much less likely to report a user if confronted with a potentially risky online encounter than they are to block or ignore the user. While 3 in 4 minors who had an online sexual experience used a blocking feature as part of their response, only 1 in 5 responded by reporting the other user, and only 1 in 7 responded by confiding to an offline support person.

4. Social and technical barriers often contribute to an underreporting of risky experiences and the increased isolation of minors in danger. Few minors who have had a potentially risky online sexual interaction report their experience – either to the platform or to a trusted adult in their offline world. In both cases, the leading reason inhibiting their disclosure is embarrassment. In other cases, they lack faith in the systems in place to protect them. Among those who did not report an online sexual interaction they experienced, 1 in 5 said they didn't report to a platform because they didn't think it would do any good.

The Digital Landscape

While recognizing the digital landscape where minors spend their time online is ever-evolving, understanding which platforms minors are aware of and their usage rates can provide foundational insight into their online experiences, the risks they may face, and where gaps in online safeguarding exist.

“It is easier to talk with people that I know online because we can talk about more things without being judged”

14, BOY, FRANCE

“[People online] don’t judge as much as people [I] know in real life. I’m more comfortable admitting certain things to them”

16, GIRL, FRANCE

Platform Awareness and Usage

French youth are aware of and use most platforms, regardless of the platform’s intended user base or a given platform’s attempts at age verification.

From a select list of platforms⁴, French minors reported the highest levels of awareness with Fortnite (76%), Minecraft (73%), Call of Duty (58%), Twitch (49%), and Roblox (45%) (Fig 1). In general, platform awareness increased

with age; an exception was Roblox, where levels of awareness were highest among younger minors (aged 12–13).

Across nearly all platforms, boys reported higher rates of platform awareness than girls; a notable exception was BeReal, where girls (23%) reported higher rates of awareness than boys (15%). The largest gaps in platform awareness between boys and girls were with gaming platforms, specifically Grand Theft Auto, Call of Duty, Fortnite, Minecraft, and Among Us.

In France, the top five platforms with the highest overall usage (e.g., ever used by a minor) and those with the highest daily usage rates were the same, although featured in a different order. Minors reported the highest overall usage of YouTube (89%), WhatsApp (73%), Snapchat (68%), TikTok (67%), and Instagram (60%), while minors reported the highest daily usage rates with YouTube (61%), TikTok (49%), Snapchat (48%), WhatsApp (45%), and Instagram (41%) (Fig 2). Platform ranking based on usage rates largely held across different age cohorts and among genders.

Across all platforms, rates for daily usage increased alongside age. The single exception to this was Roblox, where daily usage was highest among minors aged 12–13: 1 in 7 (14%) 12–13-year-olds reported using Roblox daily, compared to 1 in 10 (9%) 14–15-year-olds and 1 in 20 (5%) 16-year-olds. Boys were more likely to report daily usage of Fortnite (+17), Minecraft (+10), Discord (+9), and YouTube (+8) compared to girls. In contrast, girls

⁴ The following platforms were not included in the initial list of platforms where survey participants were asked to indicate their awareness with given platforms: Facebook, Google Meet, Instagram, Messenger (Facebook), Snapchat, TikTok, Tumblr, WhatsApp, X (f/k/a Twitter), and YouTube.

were more likely to report daily usage of Instagram (+15), Snapchat (+11), WhatsApp (+9), TikTok (+8), and BeReal (+8) compared to boys.

Fig 1 | **General platform awareness**

Q4. Which of the following platforms are you aware of, even if only by name?

	All Minors n=820	Ages 12-13 n=324	Ages 14-15 n=321	Age 16 n=175	Boys n=418	Girls n=402
Amino	4%	3%	5%	2%	4%	3%
Among Us	23%	23%	25%	21%	27%	19%
BeReal	19%	13%	23%	22%	15%	23%
Byte	2%	0%	3%	2%	3%	1%
Call of Duty	58%	54%	58%	64%	67%	48%
Chatroulette	4%	1%	7%	4%	5%	3%
Discord	44%	37%	47%	50%	47%	41%
Fortnite	76%	76%	76%	76%	81%	71%
Grand Theft Auto (GTA)	36%	31%	37%	42%	45%	27%
Kik	2%	1%	3%	1%	2%	1%
Live.me	2%	1%	4%	2%	3%	2%
Marco Polo	4%	2%	5%	3%	4%	3%
Minecraft	73%	74%	71%	74%	78%	68%
Monkey	9%	6%	11%	12%	11%	7%
Omegle	6%	3%	8%	6%	7%	5%
Reddit	27%	21%	31%	29%	29%	25%
Roblox	45%	53%	45%	31%	47%	43%
Signal	17%	13%	21%	20%	17%	18%
Tagged	3%	2%	4%	3%	3%	2%
Telegram	30%	19%	35%	40%	31%	29%
Tor/Onion Browser	1%	0%	2%	3%	2%	1%
Triller	3%	1%	4%	2%	3%	2%
Twitch	49%	42%	53%	57%	52%	46%
VSCO	2%	0%	4%	3%	3%	2%
Whisper	5%	2%	6%	7%	5%	4%
Wickr	4%	3%	4%	5%	5%	2%
Wink	3%	3%	4%	4%	4%	3%
Wishbone	3%	0%	4%	4%	3%	2%
Wizz	11%	7%	14%	14%	11%	11%
YouNow	4%	3%	5%	3%	5%	3%
Yubo	4%	2%	5%	6%	4%	3%

Question was multi-select. The following platforms were not included in the initial list of platforms where survey participants were asked to indicate their awareness with given platforms: Facebook, Google Meet, Instagram, Messenger (Facebook), Snapchat, TikTok, Tumblr, WhatsApp, X (f/k/a Twitter), and YouTube.

Fig 2 | General platform usage

Q5. How often do you use/check/play each of the following platforms?

	All Minors n=820		Ages 12-13 n=324		Ages 14-15 n=321		Age 16 n=175		Boys n=418		Girls n=402	
	Ever used	Daily use	Ever used	Daily use	Ever used	Daily use	Ever used	Daily use	Ever used	Daily use	Ever used	Daily use
Among Us	14%	2%	14%	1%	15%	3%	13%	2%	18%	3%	10%	1%
BeReal	13%	10%	9%	7%	15%	11%	17%	13%	9%	6%	18%	14%
Call of Duty	28%	5%	21%	4%	30%	5%	35%	5%	38%	7%	17%	2%
Discord	28%	12%	22%	8%	29%	15%	35%	13%	33%	16%	22%	7%
Facebook	41%	19%	28%	11%	47%	22%	55%	26%	41%	17%	42%	20%
Fortnite	50%	16%	50%	15%	51%	18%	50%	12%	66%	24%	34%	7%
Google Hangouts/Google Meet	22%	7%	20%	6%	22%	7%	27%	9%	26%	8%	18%	7%
Grand Theft Auto (GTA)	20%	3%	16%	2%	22%	3%	23%	2%	29%	4%	10%	1%
Instagram	60%	41%	41%	23%	69%	50%	77%	58%	55%	34%	64%	49%
Messenger (Facebook)	39%	16%	26%	10%	44%	17%	51%	24%	40%	17%	37%	15%
Minecraft	47%	9%	48%	10%	46%	10%	49%	6%	59%	14%	36%	4%
Reddit	11%	2%	8%	1%	13%	4%	11%	2%	14%	3%	7%	2%
Roblox	32%	10%	39%	14%	31%	9%	22%	5%	35%	9%	29%	11%
Signal	6%	1%	4%	1%	8%	3%	5%	1%	7%	2%	5%	1%
Snapchat	68%	48%	56%	40%	72%	51%	81%	59%	66%	43%	70%	54%
Telegram	10%	3%	6%	2%	11%	4%	15%	4%	11%	3%	9%	3%
TikTok	67%	49%	54%	38%	72%	52%	81%	65%	66%	45%	68%	53%
Tumblr	13%	3%	8%	1%	15%	4%	18%	5%	16%	4%	10%	2%
Twitch	24%	7%	17%	4%	26%	10%	31%	8%	28%	10%	19%	5%
WhatsApp	73%	45%	65%	36%	79%	53%	77%	45%	69%	40%	77%	49%
Wizz	4%	1%	3%	1%	5%	1%	5%	1%	3%	1%	5%	1%
X (f/k/a Twitter)	25%	12%	15%	4%	29%	15%	39%	21%	28%	13%	23%	11%
YouTube	89%	61%	86%	55%	91%	65%	91%	66%	91%	65%	87%	57%

Question was multi-select. Figure 2 excludes any platforms featured in Figure 1 that did not meet a minimum threshold of participant awareness (<10%). The remainder of the report focuses only on platforms with base sizes above n=99 for "ever used."

Secondary Accounts

Use of secondary accounts⁵ (i.e., accounts designed to keep content private from some groups like parents or friends) was also reported within the French sample, where 11% of minors reported having a secondary account (Fig 3). Older teen girls (aged 16) were the most likely to report having a secondary account, with 1 in 4 (25%*) reportedly having one.

1 in 4
girls aged 16 reported having a secondary account.

Circumvention of Age-Gating Policies

A majority of minors in France (58%) acknowledged their friends misrepresent their age online (Fig 4).⁶ This perception was found to increase the most between the ages of 12 and 13 (+7) and between the ages of 14 and 15 (+10).

When asked a follow-up question about why they think their friends pretend to be older online, most minors acknowledged it was to meet the minimum age requirements for using online platforms (Fig 5).

“So we can talk on Snapchat despite the age [requirement]”

12, GIRL, FRANCE

Gender seemed to have some influence on the perceived motivation; boys were more likely to perceive their friends lied about their age to get access to dating apps (+6), while girls were more likely to perceive their friends lied about their age to make friends with people older than them (+11) or to flirt with older people (+6). Age also appeared to influence the perceived motivation. Older minors were more likely to perceive their friends lied about their age to flirt with people older than them, while younger minors

⁵ Such as, but not limited to, “finstas” or “fake Instagrams.”

⁶ Given minimum age requirements associated with various platforms, the data presented in this section breaks down the age cohorts into individual ages.

Fig 3 | Prevalence of secondary accounts

Q7. Across the social media platforms or apps that you use, do you have a second private account that allows you to share content without certain people such as your parents, family, or people at school seeing it?

		Yes	Prefer not to say	No
All Minors	n=820	11%	3%	86%
Boys	n=418	9%	4%	87%
Girls	n=402	13%	2%	85%
Ages 12-13	n=324	9%	2%	89%
Boys	n=162	7%	2%	91%
Girls	n=162	10%	2%	87%
Ages 14-15	n=321	11%	4%	86%
Boys	n=162	10%	6%	84%
Girls	n=159	11%	2%	87%
Age 16	n=175	18%	2%	80%
Boys	n=94	12%	3%	85%
Girls	n=81	25%	1%	74%

Fig 4 | Frequency of friends misrepresenting their age on a platform

Q21. How common is it for your friends to pretend to be older than they actually are online?

		Happens	...very common	...somewhat common	...not very common, but happens	Never happens
All Minors	n=820	58%	4%	18%	35%	42%
Boys	n=418	56%	5%	18%	33%	44%
Girls	n=402	60%	4%	18%	38%	40%
Age 12	n=158	47%	3%	9%	34%	53%
Age 13	n=166	54%	4%	20%	30%	46%
Age 14	n=177	58%	5%	19%	34%	42%
Age 15	n=144	68%	4%	24%	40%	32%
Age 16	n=175	64%	5%	20%	39%	36%

were more likely to perceive their friends lied about their age to meet minimum age requirements for platform access.

“To watch porn”

14, BOY, FRANCE

Dating Apps and Pornography Site Usage

Some minors also reported using applications intentionally designed for adult users (aged 18 or older) to foster romantic or sexual experiences. Seven percent of French minors reported they had used an online dating app (e.g., Bumble, Grindr, Hinge, or Tinder), and 7% reported they had used a pornography site (Fig 6). Boys generally reported higher rates of usage of dating apps and pornography sites, with older teen boys (aged 16) reporting the highest use of both.

Fig 5 | **Reasons friends misrepresent their age on a platform**
Among minors with friends who misrepresent their age online

Q22. Which of the following describe why your friends pretend to be older than they actually are online?

		Social media apps require a minimum age for use	Dating apps require a minimum age for use	To make friends with people older than them	To flirt with people older than them	Other
All Minors	n=476	56%	27%	33%	19%	4%
Boys	n=234	58%	30%	27%	16%	4%
Girls	n=242	54%	24%	38%	22%	4%
Age 12	n=74	65%	27%	23%	15%	5%
Age 13	n=89	60%	29%	30%	15%	4%
Age 14	n=103	53%	28%	34%	17%	2%
Age 15	n=98	54%	30%	38%	22%	3%
Age 16	n=112	52%	22%	35%	25%	6%

Question was multi-select.

Fig 6 | **Prevalence of dating app and pornography site usage**

Q6. Do you use any of the following dating or adult apps?

		Any Dating App	OnlyFans	Pornography Site
All Minors	n=820	7%	4%	7%
Boys	n=418	8%	5%	9%
Girls	n=402	6%	3%	4%
Ages 12-13	n=324	6%	2%	5%
Boys	n=162	6%	2%	6%
Girls	n=162	5%	2%	4%
Ages 14-15	n=321	7%	6%	7%
Boys	n=162	8%	7%	9%
Girls	n=159	7%	5%	4%
Age 16	n=175	8%	3%	9%
Boys	n=94	11%	4%	13%
Girls	n=81	5%	2%	4%

Question was multi-select. Percentages reflect a net percentage of participants who selected “Yes, I currently use this” or “I do not currently use this but have in the past.” “Any dating app” includes participant selection of Bumble, Grindr, Hinge, Tinder, and/or Other.

Online Social Interactions & Risks

For many, a primary benefit of the internet is connecting with other users the individual has never met. Online environments are often seen as less judgmental and more flexible, providing opportunities for connection that may be missing within offline communities. While many of these connections are superficial and temporary, not all are. Many users find people with shared values and interests and build meaningful online relationships.

“When you feel a little alone, it’s good to talk with other people who share your joys and sorrows”

14, GIRL, FRANCE

“We can discuss many subjects and find out how people live in other countries or other regions of the world”

13, BOY, FRANCE

Yet, building new relationships in online environments carries unique risks, particularly for younger users. As adolescents explore and push boundaries, they encounter places and content designed for older audiences as well as other users who target them for abuse.

Online Connections and Online-Only Contacts

Among French minors, 63% acknowledged they had been contacted online by someone they did not know in person and have never interacted with before (i.e., a stranger); nearly 1 in 3 (31%) acknowledged this is something they regularly experience, on at least a monthly basis (Fig 7).

This experience increased considerably between the 12-13 and 14-15 age cohorts (+15), especially for girls (+22).

Further highlighting the normalcy of online interactions among users who only know each other online (i.e., between “online-only” contacts), only around 1 in 3 (36%) minors reported they know all their online contacts in person (Fig 8). Alternatively, 12% of minors reported more than half of their online contacts are contacts they exclusively know online.

The overall share of online-only contacts for minors increased with age. While 41% of minors aged 12-13 reported they know all their online contacts in person, only 30% of minors aged 16 reported the same. Boys reported having more online-only contacts than girls: 68% of boys reported having online contacts they only know online compared to 60% of girls. This difference was driven by more boys, specifically reporting that 11-25% of their online contacts are other users they do not know offline compared to girls. Notably, the largest difference between boys and girls was among 12-13-year-olds, where 12-13-year-old boys (65%) reported more online-only contacts than girls (52%).

“I feel freer to express myself. If I’m sure I’ll never meet the person, this allows me to remain authentic, I don’t need to play a role in order to please the person. I find that nowadays, you have to act the same as your offline friends in order to be accepted... On the other hand, with a person I will never see, I can chat freely.”

13, BOY, FRANCE

Fig 7 | Frequency of contact attempts by strangers online

Q23. How often does someone you do not know in person, and you have never interacted with before, contact you on an online platform or app for whatever reason?

		Happens	...daily	...weekly	...monthly	...less often, but has happened	Never
All Minors	n=820	63%	6%	13%	11%	32%	37%
Boys	n=418	59%	6%	13%	9%	32%	41%
Girls	n=402	66%	7%	13%	14%	32%	34%
Ages 12-13	n=324	53%	5%	9%	9%	30%	47%
Boys	n=162	54%	4%	7%	9%	34%	46%
Girls	n=162	52%	6%	10%	10%	27%	48%
Ages 14-15	n=321	68%	7%	16%	15%	31%	32%
Boys	n=162	62%	7%	17%	12%	27%	38%
Girls	n=159	74%	7%	15%	18%	34%	26%
Age 16	n=175	70%	8%	14%	10%	38%	30%
Boys	n=94	62%	6%	15%	5%	35%	38%
Girls	n=81	79%	10%	14%	15%	41%	21%

Although the vast majority (87%) of minors with online-only contacts report their online-only contacts include users they believe to be other teens (aged 13-17), 40% also acknowledged some of their online-only contacts are with other users they believe to be adults (aged 18 or older) (Fig 9). While the distribution of older online-only contacts increased alongside the minor's age, 1 in 5 (21%) minors aged 12-13 reported having online-only contacts they believed to be adults, including 1 in 4 (26%*) girls aged 12-13. Alarming, 7%* of 12-13-year-old girls with online-only contacts reported having some they believed to be aged 30 or older. The age-related increase was most pronounced among boys; while 18% of boys aged 12-13 reported having online-only contacts they believed to be adults, 44% of boys aged 14-15 and 79%* of boys aged 16 reported the same.

Among minors with online-only contacts, **40%** admitted some of those contacts are with other users they believe to be adults.

Fig 8 | Share of online interactions with online-only contacts

Q9. Overall, if you had to say, roughly what % of the people you interact with online are people you only know online and have never met in person?

		51% or more	26-50%	11-25%	1-10%	None
All Minors	n=820	12%	11%	18%	23%	36%
Boys	n=418	12%	10%	22%	23%	32%
Girls	n=402	11%	12%	12%	24%	40%
Ages 12-13	n=324	11%	11%	15%	21%	41%
Boys	n=162	11%	10%	19%	25%	35%
Girls	n=162	12%	12%	11%	18%	48%
Ages 14-15	n=321	12%	12%	19%	23%	34%
Boys	n=162	13%	11%	23%	20%	32%
Girls	n=159	10%	13%	15%	26%	36%
Age 16	n=175	13%	10%	19%	28%	30%
Boys	n=94	14%	6%	27%	24%	29%
Girls	n=81	12%	14%	10%	32%	32%

Recognizing that among older teens (aged 16), it may be expected they interact with users who are younger adults (aged 18-20), many of the adult contacts held by older teens are with older adults. Among the 16-year-olds surveyed who reported having online-only contacts, 1 in 4 (25%) reported some of those contacts were users they believed to be 21-29 years old. While base sizes were small, this was particularly pronounced among 16-year-old boys, where 1 in 3 (34%*) reported some of their online-only contacts were users they believed to be 21-29 years old. Notably, 16-year-old girls (9%*) were more likely than boys (1%*) to report having online-only contacts they believed to be aged 30 or older.

Among minors with online-only contacts, **1 in 5** aged 12-13 reported some of those contacts are with other users they believe to be adults.

Fig 9 | Minors' online-only contacts by perceived age of the contact
Among minors with online-only contacts

Q11. Which of the following age ranges describe any of the types of people you only know online?

		Younger than 9	9-12-years-old	13-17-years-old	Aged 18 or older	...18-20-years-old	...21-29-years-old	...30 or older
All Minors	n=524	1%	23%	87%	40%	37%	15%	5%
Boys	n=283	0%	29%	87%	42%	40%	16%	4%
Girls	n=241	2%	16%	87%	38%	34%	14%	6%
Ages 12-13	n=191	3%	48%	83%	21%	18%	10%	5%
Boys	n=106	1%	59%	86%	18%	17%	5%	3%
Girls	n=85	6%	33%	79%	26%	20%	16%	7%
Ages 14-15	n=211	0%	13%	94%	40%	39%	14%	5%
Boys	n=110	0%	15%	93%	44%	42%	16%	5%
Girls	n=101	1%	10%	95%	36%	36%	11%	4%
Age 16	n=122	0%	2%	80%	71%	64%	25%	5%
Boys	n=67	0%	3%	78%	79%	73%	34%	1%
Girls	n=55	0%	0%	84%	62%	53%	15%	9%

Question was multi-select.

Just as offline life is not restricted to school or home settings, digital life is not restricted to a single platform. Part of online life involves connecting with other users on multiple platforms, including initially meeting on one platform and then moving to communicate on other platforms. While a relatively normal online experience, many bad actors intentionally move potential victims across platforms, particularly to less public platforms, to increase isolation and reduce the likelihood of detection by other community members or platform-specific safety tools.

Among minors with online-only contacts,

61%

have had an online-only connection invite them to move from a public chat into a private conversation on a different platform.

minors aged 12-13 with online-only contacts reported it has happened to them. A notable gender difference was identified among minors aged 14-15: 63% of boys with online-only contacts reported this has happened to them compared to 71% of girls with online-only contacts.

Among minors with online-only contacts, 61% reported they had been invited by an online-only contact to move from a public chat into a private conversation on a different platform (Fig 10). Although younger minors (aged 12-13) reported the lowest rates of this experience, still 1 in 2 (53%)

Fig 10 | Frequency of invitations to move from public forums to private chats from online-only contacts

Among minors with online-only contacts

Q12. How common is it for someone you only know online to invite you to move from a public chat into a private conversation on a different platform? Is it... ?

		Happens	...very common	...somewhat common	...somewhat uncommon	...very uncommon	Never happens
All Minors	n=524	61%	1%	16%	22%	22%	39%
Boys	n=283	59%	1%	14%	22%	23%	41%
Girls	n=241	63%	1%	18%	23%	22%	37%
Ages 12-13	n=191	53%	1%	12%	18%	22%	47%
Boys	n=106	53%	1%	10%	18%	24%	47%
Girls	n=85	54%	1%	14%	19%	20%	46%
Ages 14-15	n=211	66%	0%	19%	25%	22%	34%
Boys	n=110	63%	1%	16%	24%	22%	37%
Girls	n=101	70%	0%	23%	26%	22%	30%
Age 16	n=122	65%	2%	16%	25%	23%	35%
Boys	n=67	64%	0%	16%	25%	22%	36%
Girls	n=55	65%	4%	15%	24%	24%	35%

Uncomfortable Interactions & Online Grooming

Many young people realize that risks – such as manipulation and grooming – exist in online interactions. However, the promise offered in online experiences and the perceived safety of communicating “anonymously” via the internet often override inhibitions stemming from this awareness.

Among minors with online-only contacts, 1 in 4 (24%) reported they have felt uncomfortable while messaging with an online-only contact (Fig 11). This experience was nearly two times higher among girls (32%) than boys (17%).

Minors who indicated they felt uncomfortable messaging with an online-only contact were asked follow-up questions focused on the context of their experience(s), including the types of exchanges that made them uncomfortable and the perceived demographics of the other user(s). The results revealed problematic messages almost always involved overstepping boundaries.

Minors were most likely to identify they felt uncomfortable messaging with an online-only contact when they were asked for personal information (48%), they suspected they were being lied to (34%), and/or they felt like they were being contacted too often (27%) (Fig 12). For 1 in 5 (19%) minors who felt uncomfortable messaging with an online-only contact, they felt uncomfortable after the user asked them for nudes, and for 1 in 6 (16%) minors, it was the result of the conversation becoming sexual in nature.

Among minors with online-only contacts, **1 in 4** reported they have felt uncomfortable while messaging with an online-only contact.

Fig 11 | Prevalence of feeling uncomfortable messaging with online-only contacts
Among minors with online-only contacts

Q13. Have you ever felt uncomfortable while sending messages with someone you only know online?

All Minors	n=524	24%
Boys	n=283	17%
Girls	n=241	32%
Ages 12-13	n=191	23%
Boys	n=106	15%
Girls	n=85	33%
Ages 14-15	n=211	26%
Boys	n=110	21%
Girls	n=101	31%
Age 16	n=122	21%
Boy	n=67	13%
Girls	n=55	31%

Percentages reflect participants who selected “yes.”

Some variation in the type of exchanges that made minors feel uncomfortable was identified within different age cohorts and in gender, although base sizes were small.

For one-quarter (26%) of minors, the gender and age of the user who made them feel uncomfortable wasn’t clear (Fig 13). Minors reported the highest rates of feeling uncomfortable messaging with another user they perceived to be a boy aged 17 or younger (40%).

Fig 12 | Types of online exchanges that made minors feel uncomfortable

Among minors who have felt uncomfortable with online-only contacts

Q15. What types of online exchanges with people you only know online have made you feel uncomfortable?

	All Minors n=124	Ages 12-13 n=44	Ages 14-15 n=54	Age 16 n=26	Boys n=48	Girls n=76
I was asked for personal information	48%	36%	61%	38%	50%	46%
I was being lied to	34%	34%	31%	38%	31%	36%
I was asked for nudes	19%	7%	22%	35%	15%	22%
I was asked to meet up in person	24%	11%	33%	27%	25%	24%
The conversation was sexual in nature	16%	9%	17%	27%	15%	17%
Someone was trying to become close too quickly	18%	7%	24%	23%	17%	18%
I was contacted too often	27%	34%	24%	19%	19%	32%
I was bullied	4%	0%	6%	8%	4%	4%
Other	7%	14%	6%	0%	10%	5%

Question was multi-select.

Fig 13 | Perceived demographics of online-only contacts who made minors feel uncomfortable

Among minors who have felt uncomfortable with online-only contacts

Q14. When that has happened which type of person(s) have you felt uncomfortable messaging with?

	All Minors n=124	Ages 12-13 n=44	Ages 14-15 n=54	Age 16 n=26	Boys n=48	Girls n=76
Boy, aged 17 or younger	40%	43%	43%	27%	35%	42%
Man, aged 18-29	23%	18%	22%	35%	21%	25%
Man, aged 30 or older	11%	14%	9%	12%	13%	11%
Girl, aged 17 or younger	20%	18%	24%	15%	17%	22%
Woman, aged 18-29	9%	9%	7%	12%	15%	5%
Woman, aged 30 or older	6%	7%	6%	4%	10%	3%
Non-binary person, ages 17 or younger	5%	7%	6%	0%	6%	4%
Non-binary person, aged 18-29	6%	7%	4%	8%	10%	3%
Non-binary person, aged 30 or older	6%	7%	4%	8%	10%	3%
Gender & age were not clear	26%	25%	30%	19%	27%	25%

Question was multi-select.

Experiences with Online Grooming

One in 6 (18%) minors indicated they had personally experienced someone approaching them online to befriend and manipulate them (Fig 14). Girls reported higher rates of this experience than boys; nearly 1 in 4 (23%) girls, compared to 1 in 7 (14%) boys, believed this had happened to them. The rate of experience for girls increased steadily with age: 1 in 6 (17%) girls aged 12-13 believe it had, 1 in 4 (23%) girls aged 14-15 believe it had, and 1 in 3 (33%*) girls aged 16 believed it had happened to them.

1 in 6
minors believe they have been approached online by someone attempting to befriend and manipulate them.

Beyond minors' lived experiences with someone approaching them online to befriend and manipulate them, more than half (58%) of minors reported they believe people commonly use the internet to intentionally befriend and manipulate minors more generally (Fig 15).

Both age and gender appeared to influence minors' perceptions. This perception increased between the 12-13 (53%) and 14-15 (61%) age cohorts, and girls (65%) were more likely to hold this belief than boys (51%). The gender difference was particularly pronounced among younger minors (aged 12-13), where 60% of girls thought it was common compared to 46% of boys.

After being shown a definition of the term online grooming⁷, 43% of minors reported they believed it is a common experience for kids their same age and gender (Fig 16). Overall, girls (49%) were more likely than boys (37%) to perceive online grooming as a common experience. The gender difference was most pronounced among minors aged 14-15 (+20). Overall, girls aged 14-15 (57%) were the most likely to believe online grooming was a common experience.

⁷ Luring a child, through manipulation and coercion, to stream or record explicit acts via the internet.

Fig 14 | Prevalence of being approached online for manipulation

Q27. Do you think someone has ever approached you online in an attempt to befriend and manipulate you?

All Minors	n=820	18%
Boys	n=418	14%
Girls	n=402	23%
Ages 12-13	n=324	14%
Boys	n=162	11%
Girls	n=162	17%
Ages 14-15	n=321	19%
Boys	n=162	16%
Girls	n=159	23%
Age 16	n=175	23%
Boy	n=94	14%
Girls	n=81	33%

Percentages reflect participants who selected "yes."

Fig 15 | Perceived frequency of minors being approached online for manipulation

Q26. Sometimes people use the internet to befriend and manipulate minors (people under 18 years old). How common do you think this is?

		Common
All Minors	n=820	58%
Boys	n=418	51%
Girls	n=402	65%
Ages 12-13	n=324	53%
Boys	n=162	46%
Girls	n=162	60%
Ages 14-15	n=321	61%
Boys	n=162	53%
Girls	n=159	69%
Age 16	n=175	62%
Boys	n=94	59%
Girls	n=81	67%

Percentages reflect a net percentage of participants who selected "very common" or "somewhat common."

Fig 16 | Perceived frequency of online grooming experiences

Q28. For our purposes today, let's define cybergrooming as luring a child, through manipulation and coercion, to stream or record explicit acts via the internet. Given this, how common do you believe it is for people of your age and gender to experience someone trying to groom them online?

		Common	...very common	...somewhat common	Not too common	Not at all common
All Minors	n=820	43%	6%	37%	40%	17%
Boys	n=418	37%	3%	34%	43%	20%
Girls	n=402	49%	9%	40%	37%	14%
Ages 12-13	n=324	38%	5%	33%	42%	20%
Boys	n=162	36%	3%	33%	44%	20%
Girls	n=162	40%	7%	33%	40%	20%
Ages 14-15	n=321	47%	6%	41%	36%	17%
Boys	n=162	37%	4%	33%	41%	22%
Girls	n=159	57%	8%	50%	30%	13%
Age 16	n=175	45%	9%	36%	45%	11%
Boys	n=94	39%	3%	36%	44%	17%
Girls	n=81	51%	15%	36%	46%	4%

Online Sexual Experiences

The internet offers ongoing connection and communication in most relationships today - regardless of whether the other person is from our online or offline communities. Unsurprisingly, digital technologies now also play a role in flirting and dating. The internet creates opportunities to find information about sexual health and identity and to search for and flirt with romantic partners. This is true for adults and minors alike.

However, not all of these experiences are safe, and some carry the risk of life-changing consequences. As young people navigate sexual development in the digital age, they are confronted with risks involving the nonconsensual resharing of intimate images, unsolicited requests for nudes, grooming, and sextortion.

1 in 7
minors have had an online sexual interaction.

Potentially Harmful Online Experiences

Nearly 1 in 4 (23%) minors reported they had had a potentially harmful online experience, and 1 in 7 (15%) minors reported they had had an online sexual interaction (Fig 17). It's notable that among French youth, the rates for experiencing online bullying or otherwise being made to feel uncomfortable online (17%) and online sexual interactions (15%) were similar.

Variations in the rates of potentially harmful online experiences surfaced among gender and age variables. Across all potentially harmful online experience types, girls (28%) were likelier than boys (18%) to indicate they had had an experience. This gender difference persisted among

Fig 17 | Prevalence of potentially harmful online experiences

Q30. Please indicate if you have ever experienced any of the following on a platform. I've experienced someone online who...

		Potentially harmful online experience	Bullied/ made me feel uncomfortable	...bullied me	...made me feel uncomfortable	Online sexual interaction	...asked me to send a nude photo or video	...asked me to go 'on cam' with a nude or sexually explicit stream	...shared a nude photo or video of themselves with me	...shared a nude photo or video of another child with me	...sent me sexual messages
All Minors	n=820	23%	17%	5%	15%	15%	10%	3%	5%	1%	8%
Boys	n=418	18%	13%	4%	11%	11%	6%	2%	3%	1%	7%
Girls	n=402	28%	22%	7%	20%	18%	14%	3%	6%	1%	10%
Ages 12-13	n=324	20%	16%	6%	14%	10%	6%	2%	4%	1%	7%
Boys	n=162	18%	14%	4%	12%	7%	3%	0%	3%	0%	6%
Girls	n=162	22%	17%	7%	15%	12%	9%	4%	5%	2%	8%
Ages 14-15	n=321	24%	17%	6%	14%	16%	12%	3%	6%	1%	9%
Boys	n=162	19%	11%	5%	9%	12%	8%	4%	4%	1%	8%
Girls	n=159	30%	22%	8%	20%	20%	16%	1%	7%	1%	9%
Age 16	n=175	27%	22%	4%	21%	20%	15%	5%	5%	1%	10%
Boys	n=94	17%	15%	3%	13%	14%	10%	2%	2%	1%	5%
Girls	n=81	40%	31%	5%	30%	27%	21%	7%	9%	1%	15%

Question was multi-select.

online sexual interactions as well: 18% of girls reported having an online sexual interaction compared to 11% of boys. While overall rates of potentially harmful online experiences and online sexual interactions increased with age, 1 in 5 (20%) minors aged 12-13 reported having had a potentially harmful online experience, and 1 in 10 (10%) reported having had an online sexual experience.

Within the array of specific online sexual interaction types, minors were most likely to indicate they had experienced someone asking them to send a nude photo (10%) and/or sending them sexual messages (8%). In particular, 16-year-old girls (27%*) were the most likely to indicate they had had an online sexual interaction, with 1 in 5 (21%*) indicating they had been asked to send nude imagery.

Overall, French minors reported having online sexual interactions with adults and peers at similar rates; 8% of minors reported having an online sexual interaction with another user who they believed to be an adult (aged 18 or older), and 6% reported having one with a user they believe to be another juvenile (aged 17 or younger) (Fig 18). Four percent of minors acknowledged they'd had an online sexual interaction with another user whose age they didn't know.

Minors reported experiencing online sexual interactions on every platform included in the survey. This study analyzed minor's online sexual experiences on platforms in two different ways: (1) the share of all minors who have had a given experience on a specific platform, and (2) the share of a platform's users who have had a given experience. The former helps inform where the greatest number of minors are having online sexual interactions; the latter illustrates which platforms have the highest rate of these experiences for minor users. In other words, more minors overall may have an online sexual interaction on some of the more widely used platforms; however, there may be a greater likelihood of users having an online sexual interaction on lesser-used platforms.

Fig 18 | **Prevalence of online sexual interactions, with peers and adults**

Q31. How old was the person you have experienced these issues with?

	All Minors n=820	Ages 12-13 n=324	Ages 14-15 n=321	Age 16 n=175	Boys n=418	Girls n=402
Online sexual interaction, all ages	15%	10%	16%	20%	11%	18%
With someone I believed was...	...17 or younger	6%	3%	9%	4%	9%
	...18 or older	8%	5%	7%	13%	9%
	...age unknown	4%	3%	5%	5%	5%

Question was multi-select.

The top five platforms where the most minors reported having an online sexual interaction were Snapchat (7%), Instagram (6%), TikTok (4%), Facebook (4%), and WhatsApp (3%) (Fig 19). Alternatively, the top five platforms where minor users reported the highest rates of online sexual interactions were Snapchat (11%), Tumblr (11%), Instagram (10%), Facebook (10%), and X (f/k/a Twitter) (7%).

Requests for sexual imagery online can occur in a variety of different contexts that result in kids viewing the requests differently. One related online phenomenon is the experience of a cold solicitation – a request for nudes from someone online with whom a user never had a previous interaction (i.e., the first interaction is a request for nudes). When asked about this experience, 1 in 3 (36%) minors who've been contacted online by someone they've never interacted with reported they had experienced a cold solicitation request for nude imagery online (Fig 20).

Sixteen percent of French youth who've been contacted online by someone they've never interacted with reported they receive these types

Among minors who've been contacted online by someone they've never previously interacted with,

1 in 3

have experienced a cold solicitation request for nudes.

Fig 19 | Prevalence of online sexual interactions, by platform

Q32. For each of the following platforms, please indicate if you have ever experienced any [online sexual interaction].

Key: **Above average %**

	of users who've had an online sexual interaction	of all minors who've had an online sexual interaction
Average	5%	1%
Among Us	3%	0%
BeReal	2%	0%
Call of Duty	3%	1%
Discord	4%	1%
Facebook	9%	4%
Fortnite	2%	1%
Google Hangouts/Google Meet	5%	1%
Grand Theft Auto (GTA)	2%	0%
Instagram	10%	6%
Messenger (Facebook)	6%	2%
Minecraft	2%	1%
Roblox	1%	0%
Snapchat	11%	7%
TikTok	6%	4%
Tumblr	11%	1%
Twitch	3%	1%
WhatsApp	4%	3%
X (f/k/a Twitter)	7%	2%
YouTube	2%	1%

Question was multi-select.

of nude imagery requests at least monthly. Across all age groups, girls were more likely than boys to report having had the experience.

Fig 20 | Frequency of cold solicitations

Among minors who have been contacted by someone they've never interacted with

Q24. How often does someone you do not know and have never interacted with ask you for nude photos or videos on an online platform or app?

		Happened	...daily	...weekly	...monthly	...less often, but has happened	Never
All Minors	n=513	36%	4%	7%	5%	20%	64%
Boys	n=247	31%	4%	7%	4%	17%	69%
Girls	n=266	41%	4%	7%	6%	24%	59%
Ages 12-13	n=173	31%	5%	6%	5%	15%	69%
Boys	n=88	25%	3%	6%	3%	13%	75%
Girls	n=85	36%	6%	7%	6%	18%	64%
Ages 14-15	n=218	40%	5%	8%	6%	21%	60%
Boys	n=101	34%	6%	6%	4%	18%	66%
Girls	n=117	45%	4%	9%	8%	24%	55%
Age 16	n=122	39%	2%	7%	3%	27%	61%
Boys	n=58	36%	2%	10%	3%	21%	64%
Girls	n=64	41%	2%	3%	3%	33%	59%

Self-Generated Child Sexual Abuse Material

Self-generated child sexual abuse material (SG-CSAM) – explicit imagery of a child that appears to have been taken by the child in the image with no clear offender present in the frame – can result from both consensual and coercive experiences. For example, a teen may choose to share a nude selfie with their romantic partner; similarly, a child could be groomed by an online perpetrator and manipulated into sharing a nude image.

In both instances, the resulting imagery is a form of child sexual abuse material (CSAM) that can be circulated online, harming the depicted minor, increasing the availability of CSAM, and threatening other children when used as a tool for grooming victims by child sexual offenders. As a result, understanding the rates of initial shares and the context of those

experiences is critical for developing interventions aimed at prevention.

Overall, few (6%) French minors think that the sharing of nude imagery is normal among people their age (Fig 21). Yet, when asked about the perceived prevalence of sexting behaviors among their close friends, 1 in 4 (28%) reported they believe their close friends receive nude imagery, and 1 in 6 (18%) reported they believe their close friends share their own nude imagery at least rarely (Fig 22). Perceptions of both sexting behaviors increased with age, where 1 in 3 (34%) 16-year-olds believed their close friends receive nude imagery, and nearly 1 in 4 (23%) 16-year-olds believed their close friends share their own nude imagery.

1 in 6
minors believe their close friends share their own nude imagery.

Fig 21 | Perceptions of normalcy - sharing SG-CSAM

Q40. How strongly do you agree with the following statement? It's normal for people my age to share nudes with each other.

Group	n	Percentage
All Minors	n=820	6%
Boys	n=418	6%
Girls	n=402	5%
Ages 12-13	n=324	5%
Boys	n=162	6%
Girls	n=162	4%
Ages 14-15	n=321	6%
Boys	n=162	6%
Girls	n=159	6%
Age 16	n=175	7%
Boy	n=94	7%
Girls	n=81	7%

Percentages reflect a net percentage of participants who selected "strongly agree" or "somewhat agree."

Fig 22 | Perceived frequency of friends sexting experiences

Q41. To the best of your knowledge, how often do your close friends...?

	Receive or get sent photos or videos that are nude	Send or share photos or videos of an adult who is nude to others	Send or share photos or videos of themselves that are nude to others	Have nude photos or videos of themselves shared or leaked without their permission	Send or share photos or videos of another kid that is nude to others
All Minors	n=820 28%	16%	18%	17%	11%
Boys	n=418 29%	17%	18%	17%	12%
Girls	n=402 27%	14%	18%	16%	9%
Ages 12-13	n=324 21%	13%	13%	15%	11%
Boys	n=162 23%	16%	15%	18%	14%
Girls	n=162 20%	10%	11%	12%	7%
Ages 14-15	n=321 32%	18%	21%	19%	11%
Boys	n=162 34%	19%	20%	19%	12%
Girls	n=159 30%	16%	21%	19%	9%
Age 16	n=175 34%	17%	23%	16%	10%
Boys	n=94 32%	17%	21%	13%	11%
Girls	n=81 36%	17%	26%	20%	10%

Percentages reflect a net percentage of participants who selected "often," "sometimes," or "rarely."

Fig 23 | Frequency of sexting experiences

Q42. How often do you personally...?

		Receive or get sent photos or videos that are nude	Send or share photos or videos of an adult who is nude to others	Send or share photos or videos of yourself that are nude to others	Have nude photos or videos of yourself shared or leaked without your permission	Send or share photos or videos of another kid that is nude to others
All Minors	n=820	12%	7%	6%	5%	5%
Boys	n=418	15%	9%	7%	7%	6%
Girls	n=402	9%	5%	4%	4%	4%
Ages 12-13	n=324	8%	5%	5%	4%	5%
Boys	n=162	10%	7%	7%	6%	6%
Girls	n=162	6%	3%	3%	2%	3%
Ages 14-15	n=321	16%	9%	7%	7%	6%
Boys	n=162	19%	10%	9%	9%	7%
Girls	n=159	12%	8%	5%	5%	4%
Age 16	n=175	13%	8%	5%	5%	5%
Boys	n=94	15%	10%	4%	5%	5%
Girls	n=81	11%	6%	5%	4%	4%

Percentages reflect a net percentage of participants who selected “often,” “sometimes,” or “rarely.”

Comparatively, when asked about the frequency of their own sexting behaviors, around 1 in 9 (12%) reported they receive nude imagery from others, and 6% reported they share their own nude imagery at least rarely (Fig 23). The rates of both were higher among boys compared to girls. While the rates of receiving nude imagery increased somewhat with age, the reported rates for sharing one’s own nude imagery remained relatively consistent across age cohorts.

When asked more directly about whether or not they have shared nude imagery of themselves, 3% of French minors reported they had, with

8 The discrepancy in minors’ reported rates of sharing their own nude imagery between the two question formats (6% v. 3%) should be further investigated in future research. It could be that social desirability bias was more pronounced in responses to the more directly asked question, whereas responses about the frequency of sexting experiences, including sharing their own nude imagery, allowed respondents to relate their experiences within a broader context of doing so rarely. Alternatively, the frequency-based question may have captured responses of participants who have not yet shared nude imagery, but anticipate they may do so in the future.

Fig 24 | Experiences sharing SG-CSAM

Q43. Have you ever sent or shared a nude photo or video of yourself either directly with someone else or with your social media followers?

All Minors	n=820	3%
Boys	n=418	2%
Girls	n=402	3%
Ages 12-13	n=324	1%
Boys	n=162	1%
Girls	n=162	1%
Ages 14-15	n=321	5%
Boys	n=162	4%
Girls	n=159	6%
Age 16	n=175	2%
Boys	n=94	2%
Girls	n=81	1%

Percentages reflect a net percentage of participants who selected “yes - on purpose” or “yes - on accident.”

minors aged 14-15 reporting the greatest likelihood (5%) (Fig 24).⁸

Additional survey questions were asked to the 3% of minors who reported they had shared their own nude imagery. These questions sought to gain contextual insight into minors’ sharing experiences related to the recency of when the minor has shared nude imagery (i.e., if they had shared it in the past year), the methods they used to share the imagery (i.e., if it was shared via a text, a direct message feature, a live-stream, etc.), whether the minor had shared the nude imagery with an online-only contact, and the perceived age of the user the minor had shared the nude imagery with.

However, given that the overall rate of French minors who reported they had shared their own nude imagery was 3%, subsequent base sizes for the additional questions were too low (n=22) for meaningful analysis and reporting. Descriptively, French minors who reported they had shared their own imagery reported a mixture of sharing experiences. They shared their nude imagery with both adults and other juveniles; they shared their nude imagery with other users they only know online as well as users they also know offline, and they also reported sharing it through a variety of platform features like ephemeral messaging, live streaming, texting, and video calling.

Minors who reported they had not shared nude imagery of themselves were subsequently asked if they had ever considered doing so, and 3% of minors reported they had considered it (Fig 25). Consideration of sharing their own nude imagery increased with age, with 16-year-old boys reporting the highest percentage of consideration (8%*).

“I was afraid of what the boy would do with it if we argued”

15, GIRL, FRANCE

“The shame and fear that it could be publicly distributed”

15, BOY, FRANCE

“What becomes of the shared photo? What will the person say? The risks of being bullied in school.”

13, BOY, FRANCE

“The fear of judgment, the fear that the person I’m sharing it with saves it and uses it against me”

16, GIRL, FRANCE

Fig 25 | **Percentage of minors who considered sharing a nude, but chose not to**
Among minors who have not shared their nudes

Q44. Even though you have never shared a nude photo of yourself, have you ever considered doing so?

All Minors	n=789	3%
Boys	n=408	3%
Girls	n=381	3%
Ages 12-13	n=318	1%
Boys	n=161	1%
Girls	n=157	1%
Ages 14-15	n=301	3%
Boys	n=155	3%
Girls	n=146	3%
Age 16	n=170	6%
Boys	n=92	8%
Girls	n=78	5%

Percentages reflect participants who selected “yes.”

Nonconsensual Resharing

One of the more impactful harms that result from an initial share of SG-CSAM is when the receiver nonconsensually reshapes the imagery with others, whether by showing it to them in person or redistributing it in other digital exchanges.⁹ The resulting harms can be long-lasting for the victims: victims can experience bullying and harassment in both online and offline environments, threats and sextortion, and their images may circulate indefinitely, well beyond the original recipient. Once online, these images are also known to be used by perpetrators targeting other children for victimization.

⁹ Finkelhor, et al. (2023). Which dynamics make online child sexual abuse and cyberstalking more emotionally impactful: Perpetrator identity and images?. *Child Abuse & Neglect*. Vol. 137. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0145213423000017?via%3Dihub>.

“[I felt] discomfort and pity for the person in the photo whose body is exposed for everyone to see”

15, BOY, FRANCE

Worryingly, rates of resharing among minors are as high, and at times higher, than their self-reported rates of sharing their own nude imagery. Within the French sample, 7% of minors reported they had seen someone else’s nonconsensually reshared SG-CSAM (Fig 26). Boys (9%) were nearly twice as likely to report they had than girls (5%). Notably, younger boys (aged 12-13) reported the highest rates (12%) for seeing this type of content.

7%
of minors have seen someone else’s nonconsensually reshared nudes.

While a small overall base size (n=59), among minors who reported they had seen nonconsensually reshared SG-CSAM, they reported the highest likelihood to have responded by ignoring the imagery (34%*), blocking the person who shared the imagery (29%*), and/or telling a parent (29%*) (Fig 27). Minors indicated they were least likely to reshare the imagery themselves (2%*), delete the app on which it was shared (5%*), and/or tell a teacher or guidance counselor (7%*) in response to seeing the imagery.

Within the context of nonconsensually reshared imagery, minors were also asked if they thought the original receiver of the imagery had a right to reshare it; only 2% of French minors reported they believed the receiver of nude imagery has the right to reshare the imagery at their discretion (Fig 28). Another 3% of minors acknowledged they weren’t sure.

While the vast majority (94%) of French minors might recognize the receiver does not have the right to reshare someone’s nude imagery, nevertheless, when minors were asked who was to blame in circumstances involving non-consensually reshared nudes, 1 in 5 (22%) minors ultimately identified blame with the victim whose imagery had

Fig 26 | Experiences having seen non-consensually reshared SG-CSAM

Q52. Have you ever been shown or sent a nude photo or video of someone at your school or someone else your age in your community without that person’s knowledge?

		Yes	Prefer not to say	No
All Minors	n=820	7%	1%	91%
Boys	n=418	9%	0%	91%
Girls	n=402	5%	2%	92%
Ages 12-13	n=324	7%	1%	91%
Boys	n=162	12%	0%	88%
Girls	n=162	3%	2%	94%
Ages 14-15	n=321	7%	1%	93%
Boys	n=162	6%	1%	94%
Girls	n=159	8%	1%	92%
Age 16	n=175	8%	3%	89%
Boys	n=94	10%	0%	90%
Girls	n=81	6%	6%	88%

been reshared (Fig 29). Minors’ likelihood to associate blame with the victim was highest among younger minors (aged 12-13), where 1 in 4 (25%) ultimately associated blame with the person whose imagery was nonconsensually reshared.

1 in 5
minors ultimately blame the victim of nonconsensually reshared imagery.

Fig 27 | Responses to seeing non-consensually reshared SG-CSAM
Among minors who have seen nonconsensually reshared SG-CSAM

Q54. How did you respond when you saw this photo or video?

	All Minors n=59
Ignored the imagery	34%
Blocked the person who sent the imagery	29%
Told a parent/caregiver	29%
Told a sibling/friend	27%
Told the person in the imagery	20%
Reported it to the online platform	10%
Told a teacher/guidance counselor	7%
Deleted the app	5%
Reshared the imagery with someone else	2%
Other	8%

Question was multi-select.

Fig 28 | Perceived right to reshare

Q57. In your view, does the receiver have the right to re-share or re-send the nude photo or video with others as they wish?

		Yes	No	Don't know
All Minors	n=820	2%	94%	3%
Boys	n=418	2%	94%	4%
Girls	n=402	2%	95%	3%
Ages 12-13	n=324	2%	93%	5%
Boys	n=162	2%	93%	6%
Girls	n=162	2%	94%	4%
Ages 14-15	n=321	3%	95%	2%
Boys	n=162	2%	94%	3%
Girls	n=159	3%	96%	1%
Age 16	n=175	2%	95%	3%
Boys	n=94	2%	95%	3%
Girls	n=81	2%	95%	2%

Fig 29 | Perceptions of blame

Q58. In your opinion, if a nude photo or video of someone gets out, who is to blame?
// Q59. And if a nude photo or video of someone gets out, who is most to blame?

		Victim's fault	...victim's fault alone	...both (lean victim)	Resharer's fault	...resharer's fault alone	...both (lean resharer)
All Minors	n=820	22%	8%	15%	78%	41%	37%
Boys	n=418	22%	7%	15%	78%	42%	36%
Girls	n=402	23%	8%	15%	77%	40%	37%
Ages 12-13	n=324	25%	9%	17%	75%	41%	33%
Boys	n=162	24%	7%	17%	76%	44%	32%
Girls	n=162	27%	10%	17%	73%	39%	35%
Ages 14-15	n=321	21%	8%	12%	79%	42%	37%
Boys	n=162	20%	8%	12%	80%	41%	39%
Girls	n=159	22%	9%	13%	78%	43%	35%
Age 16	n=175	20%	5%	15%	80%	38%	42%
Boys	n=94	22%	5%	17%	78%	38%	39%
Girls	n=81	17%	4%	14%	83%	37%	46%

“I was shocked and would not have liked for it to happen to me”
13, GIRL, FRANCE

“... I was bothered. It was a boy in [my] class who shared a photo of a girl he had broken up with.”
13, GIRL, FRANCE

“I felt uncomfortable but I laughed in front of the others”
16, BOY, FRANCE

Responding to Risky Encounters

In conjunction with developing an understanding of the rates at which French minors are experiencing risky online encounters, this research also sought to gain insight into how minors attempt to respond to those encounters and the factors that influence disclosure.

Responding to Online-only Contacts

Among minors with online-only contacts, 60% reported they had cut off contact with someone they only knew online (Fig 30). Minors' likelihood of ending contact with online-only contacts increased most noticeably among minors aged 12-13 (57%) and those aged 14-15 (64%). Girls (66%) were likelier to report they had cut-off contact with an online-only contact than boys (54%).

Among minors with online-only contacts, **60%** have cut off contact with someone they only knew online.

For minors who indicated they had cut off contact with an online-only contact, a follow-up question was asked about how the minor cut off the contact. Minors reported a clear primary response; 3 in 4 (77%) indicated they severed contact by blocking the other user (Fig 31). The use of a blocking tool was followed by ignoring the user (35%).

Girls were comparatively more likely to block another user as a way of cutting off contact (+15). At the same time, boys were comparatively more likely to ignore the other user and stop responding (+7) or to mute the other user (+6). Blocking as a method for cutting off contact was the only method found to substantively increase with age.

Fig 30 | **Prevalence of breaking off contact with online-only contacts**

Among minors with online-only contacts

Q18. Have you ever cut off contact with someone you only knew online?

All Minors	n=524	60%
Boys	n=283	54%
Girls	n=241	66%
Ages 12-13	n=191	57%
Boys	n=106	51%
Girls	n=85	64%
Ages 14-15	n=211	64%
Boys	n=110	58%
Girls	n=101	71%
Age 16	n=122	57%
Boys	n=67	54%
Girls	n=55	62%

Percentages reflect participants who selected "yes."

Fig 31 | **Ways of breaking off contact with online-only contacts**

Among minors with online-only contacts who they've cut off contact with

Q19. How did you cut off contact?

	All Minors n=314	Ages 12-13 n=108	Ages 14-15 n=136	Age 16 n=70	Boys n=154	Girls n=160
Blocked them	77%	69%	79%	86%	69%	84%
Ignored them	35%	32%	38%	33%	38%	31%
Reported them to the platform	11%	8%	11%	13%	12%	9%
Muted them	11%	8%	13%	11%	14%	8%
Told them to leave you alone	11%	11%	12%	11%	10%	13%
Deleted the app	6%	5%	6%	7%	6%	6%
Other	2%	3%	3%	0%	3%	2%

Question was multi-select.

Fig 32 | Experiences with recontacts
Among minors with online-only contacts who they've cut off contact with

Q20. Have you ever cut off contact with someone online who then tried to recontact you under a different name/identity or somewhere else/on another platform?

	All Minors n=314	Ages 12-13 n=108	Ages 14-15 n=136	Age 16 n=70	Boys n=154	Girls n=160
Yes	16%	14%	18%	16%	16%	17%
...on the same platform	12%	10%	14%	10%	9%	14%
...on a different platform	8%	6%	9%	9%	8%	7%
No	62%	66%	58%	63%	65%	59%
Not sure	22%	20%	24%	21%	19%	24%

A portion of this question was multi-select.

Only 1 in 10 (11%) French minors who have cut off contact with an online-only contact have reported the user to the platform. Given the different functions of blocking tools – designed to prevent someone from interacting with you on a given platform – and reporting tools – designed to flag the other user’s behavior for administrative review against a platform’s community guidelines and policies – the comparative rates of minors using blocking as a response compared to reporting has important implications for the development of effective online interventions, especially those aimed at the prevention of harms.

Yet attempts at cutting off contact with online-only contacts are not foolproof: 16% of French minors who have cut off contact with an online-only contact reported they had been recontacted by the problematic user, either on the same platform (12%) or on a different platform (8%) (Fig 32). While overall recontact rates were consistent across genders, girls (14%) were 1.5 times more likely to report they had experienced recontacts on the same platform compared to boys (9%).

Concerningly, among minors who have felt uncomfortable while messaging with an online-only contact, 1 in 6 (17%) reported they did not cut off contact and, instead, remained in contact with the user who

Fig 33 | Remaining in contact with online-only contacts despite feeling uncomfortable

Among minors with online-only contacts who've made them feel uncomfortable

Q16: Has someone you only knew online made you feel uncomfortable, but you remained in contact with them?

	All Minors n= 124	Ages 12-13 n=44	Ages 14-15 n=54	Age 16 n=26	Boys n=48	Girls n=76
Yes	17%	9%	15%	35%	21%	14%
Prefer not to say	3%	5%	4%	0%	4%	3%
No	80%	86%	81%	65%	75%	83%

made them feel uncomfortable (Fig 33). While base sizes were small, boys (21%***) were 1.5 times more likely to report they remained in contact than girls (14%*), and minors’ likelihood to remain in contact despite feeling uncomfortable appeared to increase with age.

1 in 6

minors who have cut off contact with an online-only contact reported the problematic user had recontacted them.

Among minors who have felt uncomfortable while messaging with an online-only contact,

1 in 6

remained in contact with the user who made them feel uncomfortable.

3.5x

Minors were 3.5 times more likely to respond to an online sexual interaction by blocking the user than they were to report the user.

5x

Minors were more than 5 times as likely to use an online safety tool in response to an online sexual interaction than they were to seek support offline.

Responding to Online Sexual Interactions

Overall, the highest rates of response types to online sexual interactions were blocking the user (75%), ignoring the situation (39%), and reporting the user (21%) (Fig 34).

Among minors who indicated they had had an online sexual interaction, minors were more than five times as likely to indicate they used an online safety tool (e.g., blocking, reporting, or muting) (81%) as part of their response compared to seeking help from their offline support networks (15%). Minors who had an online sexual interaction were also 2.5 times more likely to indicate they responded to the experience by ignoring the interaction (39%) compared to seeking offline help (15%). Notably, the likelihood for a minor who had an online sexual interaction to indicate they had sought offline support, particularly from their parents, increased among 16-year-olds (23%**). However, it's important to recognize base sizes were small (n=35).

In general, girls were more likely to respond to the online sexual interactions they experienced; particularly, girls were more likely than boys to block the other user (84%* v. 60%**), and they were more than twice as likely to tell a parent (18%* v. 7%**). Comparatively, boys were more likely than

girls to indicate ignoring the situation was their response (47%** v. 34%*). Again, comparative base sizes were small.

Minors who indicated they did not seek support from someone offline were subsequently asked why they did not. The primary concerns that inhibited minors from seeking offline support as part of their response to an online sexual interaction were embarrassment and fear of being judged (44%), fear of getting in trouble with their family (37%), feeling like the experience wasn't a big deal (34%), and fear they would be unable to continue using the platform (32%) (Fig 35). There was minor variation in these concerns by specific online sexual interaction type.

"It bothers me when people talk about sex online. I can't see myself talking to an adult about it because I'm afraid of being judged."

15, GIRL, FRANCE

Minors who indicated they did not report their online sexual interaction to the platform were subsequently asked why they did not report the interaction(s). The leading reasons minors chose not to report their experience to a platform were consistent across different interaction types: they felt embarrassed (47%), they were worried they would get in trouble with their family (28%), and they were concerned the other user would nonconsensually reshare their nude imagery (24%) (Fig 36). One in 6 (18%) minors who chose not to report an online sexual interaction to the platform decided not to report it because they didn't think the platform would do anything.

1 in 6

minors who chose not to report an online sexual interaction to the platform chose not to report it because they didn't think the platform would do anything.

Fig 34 | **Minors responses to online sexual interactions**

Among minors who've had an online sexual interaction

Q33. For each, when this happened to you, which of the following, did you do in response? // Q34. For the scenarios you experienced, which of the following, if any, did you turn to for support?

	All Minors n=119	Ages 12-13 n=32	Ages 14-15 n=52	Age 16 n=35	Boys n=45	Girls n=74
Online action	81%	78%	81%	83%	71%	86%
...blocked the user	75%	72%	73%	80%	60%	84%
...reported the user to the platform	21%	16%	21%	26%	20%	22%
...muted the user	13%	16%	13%	11%	13%	14%
Offline action	15%	13%	12%	23%	9%	19%
...parent or guardian	13%	9%	10%	23%	7%	18%
...other trusted adult (e.g. uncle, aunt, family friend)	3%	6%	0%	3%	0%	4%
...teacher, guidance counselor, or someone at school	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
...friend	3%	3%	0%	6%	2%	3%
...sibling	2%	0%	2%	3%	2%	1%
...police officer	3%	3%	2%	6%	4%	3%
...hotline	1%	0%	0%	3%	0%	1%
...someone else	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Ignored it	39%	34%	42%	37%	47%	34%
Deleted the app	7%	6%	10%	3%	7%	7%
Other	3%	6%	2%	3%	2%	4%
Prefer not to say	4%	3%	4%	6%	2%	5%

Question was multi-select.

Fig 35 | **Minors' reasons for not disclosing their online sexual interaction to someone offline**

Among minors who did not disclose an online sexual interaction to someone offline

Q35. Which of the following describe why you did not look for additional support...?

	Online sexual interaction n=119	...asked me to send a nude photo or video n=73	...sent me sexual messages n=60	...shared a nude photo or video of themselves with me n=34
Felt embarrassed and worried of being judged	44%	49%	42%	38%
Worried about getting in trouble with your family	37%	38%	30%	35%
Felt it wasn't a big deal	34%	34%	33%	24%
Worried you wouldn't be allowed to use a platform	32%	30%	33%	32%
Worried your report would not be anonymous	21%	19%	20%	18%
Felt like you were to blame	18%	15%	17%	12%
Worried you'd get bullied at school	15%	12%	17%	21%
Worried you'd lose friends	15%	14%	7%	18%
Worried about police involvement	12%	11%	12%	9%
Worried about getting in trouble with your school	9%	8%	5%	9%
Other	6%	4%	7%	3%

Question was multi-select. Data for response options "asked me to go 'on cam' with a nude or sexually explicit stream" and "shared a nude photo or video of another child with me" are not included in the table due to low base sizes (n=<25).

Opportunity exists to increase disclosure and reporting rates via online tools and offline communities. In fact, a majority of French minors indicated they believed they would turn to these resources if confronted with an online sexual interaction: among minors who have not had an online sexual interaction, roughly two-thirds (68%) anticipated they would use a platform reporting tool (Fig 37) and slightly more than half (55%) believed they would turn to an offline support system (Fig 38). However, in reality, the actual rates of minors using such disclosure methods were significantly lower. Among minors who had an online sexual interaction, only 21% reported the user to the platform, and only 15% disclosed to a peer, caregiver, or other trusted adult.

Minors’ overestimation of taking offline action as part of their response to an online sexual interaction was especially pronounced among minors who ultimately sought support from parents or other trusted adults in their lives. While base sizes were small, younger minors (aged 12–13) were more likely to overestimate their use of offline support than older minors (aged 14–16), particularly as it related to seeking support from their parents. Compared to girls, boys were much more likely to overestimate their likelihood of telling their parents about an online sexual interaction. While 50% of boys who did not have an online sexual experience anticipated they would tell a parent, only 7%** of boys who had an online sexual experience did.

Fig 36 | **Minors’ reasons for not reporting their online sexual interaction to the platform**
Among minors who did not report an online sexual interaction to the platform

Q38. Which of the following describe why you did not report the following experiences you have had on a platform?

	Online sexual interaction n=119	...asked me to send a nude photo or video n=65	...sent me sexual messages n=58	...shared a nude photo or video of themselves with me n=33
Felt embarrassed	47%	49%	50%	33%
Worried about getting in trouble with your family	28%	31%	28%	21%
Worried the person would reshare nudes they had of you	24%	31%	17%	24%
Worried the person would find you in real life	21%	23%	14%	18%
Felt it wasn't important enough to report	18%	17%	16%	9%
Didn't think the platform would do anything	18%	17%	22%	0%
Worried your report would not be anonymous	17%	14%	16%	15%
Worried the person would harm you	14%	20%	5%	12%
Worried about restrictions being placed on your account	14%	15%	17%	9%
Felt like you were to blame	13%	18%	10%	9%
Worried the person would find you on another platform	13%	14%	10%	12%
Worried about police involvement	10%	8%	3%	15%
Worried the person would retaliate against your friends/family	9%	9%	5%	12%
Worried about being banned from the platform	8%	8%	7%	9%
Worried about getting in trouble with your school	8%	6%	3%	9%
Other	7%	6%	5%	3%

Question was multi-select. Data for response options “asked me to go ‘on cam’ with a nude or sexually explicit stream” and “shared a nude photo or video of another child with me” are not included in the table due to low base sizes (n=<25).

Fig 37 | Online resources for online sexual interactions: What minors say they would do vs. what they actually do
Among minors who have not had an online sexual interaction and minors who have

Q33. For each, when this happened to you, which of the following, did you do in response? // Q36. For each, if this did happen to you, which of the following would you be likely to do in response?

	All Minors		Ages 12-13		Ages 14-15		Age 16		Boys		Girls	
	Say they would n=818	Actually did n=119	Say they would n=323	Actually did n=32	Say they would n=321	Actually did n=52	Say they would n=174	Actually did n=35	Say they would n=418	Actually did n=45	Say they would n=400	Actually did n=74
Online action	92%	81%	89%	78%	94%	81%	94%	83%	91%	71%	94%	86%
...block the user	87%	75%	86%	72%	86%	73%	90%	80%	86%	60%	88%	84%
...report the user to the platform	68%	21%	61%	16%	69%	21%	78%	26%	69%	20%	66%	22%
...mute the user	20%	13%	19%	16%	20%	13%	21%	11%	22%	13%	17%	14%
Ignored it	40%	39%	41%	34%	36%	42%	45%	37%	43%	47%	36%	34%
Deleted the app	28%	7%	32%	6%	26%	10%	25%	3%	26%	7%	30%	7%

Question was multi-select.

Fig 38 | Offline resources for online sexual interactions: What minors say they would do vs. what they actually do
Among minors who have not had an online sexual interaction and minors who have

Q34. For the scenarios you experienced, which of the following, if any, did you turn to for support? // Q37. For each, if this did happen to you, who would you turn to for support?

	All Minors		Ages 12-13		Ages 14-15		Age 16		Boys		Girls	
	Say they would n=818	Actually did n=119	Say they would n=323	Actually did n=32	Say they would n=321	Actually did n=52	Say they would n=174	Actually did n=35	Say they would n=418	Actually did n=45	Say they would n=400	Actually did n=74
Offline action	55%	15%	60%	13%	54%	12%	49%	23%	52%	9%	58%	19%
...parent or guardian	51%	13%	57%	9%	49%	10%	45%	23%	50%	7%	54%	18%
...other trusted adult (e.g. uncle, aunt, family friend)	21%	3%	20%	6%	22%	0%	19%	3%	20%	0%	22%	4%
...teacher, guidance counselor, or someone at school	9%	0%	11%	0%	9%	0%	6%	0%	8%	0%	10%	0%
...friend	13%	3%	14%	3%	12%	0%	13%	6%	11%	2%	16%	3%
...sibling	16%	2%	16%	0%	15%	2%	18%	3%	14%	2%	18%	1%
...police officer	14%	3%	11%	3%	15%	2%	16%	6%	14%	4%	13%	3%
...hotline	4%	1%	4%	0%	4%	0%	2%	3%	3%	0%	4%	1%

Question was multi-select.

Discussion

French youth, like their peers around the world, actively engage with the internet and digital platforms. Results from this research show that navigating risky situations online is inevitable for French youth, and many young people view those experiences – including potential threats – as normal experiences for kids like them.

To create effective and nuanced safeguards for all children, we must examine the digital landscape as young people are experiencing it. This research provides initial insights from young people in France on the risks they're navigating online and highlights opportunities to support them better.

French youth have robust digital lives, connecting with a wide range of other users and often exploring beyond the confines of platforms built with them in mind. Most youth surveyed say their friends sometimes misrepresent their age online. Among those with online-only contacts, 40% say some of those contacts are other users they believe to be aged 18 or older, including 1 in 5 (21%) 12-13-year-olds.

French youth spend their time across a wide range of platforms, often evading age-gating practices to participate in communities intended for older users. All platforms are vulnerable to this – both those designed exclusively for adults and those intended for teens. In addition, the anonymity afforded by the internet creates opportunities to socialize with new connections, often outside of existing peer groups. For young people, this can include seeking out and exploring conversations with older teens and, at times, adults.

As we continue to develop tactics that reduce the opportunity for young people to encounter material they are not developmentally prepared to navigate, we must also acknowledge the high likelihood of young people exploring platforms intended for older users or chatting with users who are, sometimes, much older than them. This reality requires proactive conversations that equip young people with awareness of the risk involved in such experiences and provide them with concrete tools to safely navigate an experience when it becomes risky or uncomfortable.

From a youth-safeguarding perspective, the value of robust sexual health education inclusive of online sexual interactions cannot be understated. The framing of online sexual risks must be inclusive of all the pathways through which online sexual harm can occur – whether through exploration or targeted exploitation. The experiences of kids reveal that some risky and potentially harmful sexual interactions occurring online are a result of exploration and

romantic relationships. Acknowledging technology now plays a role in that normal developmental phase for young people is the first step in empowering them to recognize the risks and potential outcomes, and navigate those experiences safely.

“We need to talk about it more at school – more prevention to prevent us from being victims of this”

12, BOY, FRANCE

French youth are familiar with online grooming and anticipate they or their friends may have to navigate it at some point. Forty-three percent of minors think online grooming is a common experience for other kids online, and 1 in 6 (18%) minors reported they have been approached by another user online for the purpose of manipulation.

Young people are not blind to the risks of online grooming; however, the potential to encounter this risk is not sufficient to stop young people from connecting with new people online. The draw of expanding one’s community and creating new friendships often outweighs the potential to have a negative experience in the process, and many do not view a stranger online as the threat described in traditional “stranger danger” warnings.

Further efforts are required to enhance safeguarding conversations tailored to the communication style of young people, addressing topics such as recognizing grooming threats, establishing boundaries, and exploring possible responses when something feels uncomfortable. It’s crucial to acknowledge that, by biological design, young people are inclined to take risks. Relying solely on the expectation that they won’t engage in risky behaviors leaves young people ill-equipped to defend against the threats many already anticipate encountering.

French youth are much less likely to report a user if confronted with a potentially risky online encounter than they are to block or ignore the user. While 3 in 4 (75%) minors who had an online sexual experience used a blocking feature as part of their response, only 1 in 5 (21%) responded by reporting the other user, and only 1 in 7 (15%) responded by confiding to an offline support person.

Examining how minors respond to online sexual interactions and how different response options are used provides user-based guidance for those developing the available trust and safety features of a platform. Given the different functions blocking tools and reporting tools serve, kids’ preferences for using blocking features as a primary response to uncomfortable exchanges or online sexual interactions leave the platform vulnerable to continued misuse by bad actors.

Building with this in mind can help to improve user reporting and anticipate when reporting is less likely to happen as a reliable safety mechanism. Platforms can enhance the visibility of reporting features, especially during user onboarding and in higher-risk areas like private messaging windows. Additionally, using language that emphasizes the role of reporting in protecting the broader community from potential threats can appeal to young people's empathy and their inclination to protect others, even when they may downplay the risk to their own experience.

Social and technical barriers often contribute to an underreporting of risky experiences and the increased isolation of minors in danger.

Few minors who have had a potentially risky online sexual interaction report their experience – either to the platform or to a trusted adult in their offline world. In both cases, the leading reason inhibiting their disclosure is embarrassment. In other cases, they lack faith in the systems in place to protect them. Among those who did not report an online sexual interaction they experienced, 1 in 6 said they didn't report to a platform because they didn't think it would do any good.

The persistence of victim shaming and blaming significantly hinders individuals from seeking help. Unfortunately, those reaching out for support often face judgmental questions about their actions rather than receiving initial reassurance that they are victims deserving of help and support. Societal attitudes towards gender norms may contribute to barriers for both girls and boys, with girls frequently facing criticism for any sexual behavior and boys confronting stigma that implies they shouldn't be victims. These attitudes contribute to the underreporting of experiences and a tendency for victims to try to handle risky situations on their own, in isolation. Moreover, online safety tools can be imperfect, often leaving users open to recontacts or without closure, as a report may go unanswered or deemed unfounded.

In all of these instances, victims are left unprotected and isolated. Acknowledging the varying needs and preferences of a victim seeking support, we must continue to develop a layered approach to safeguarding young people online. That safeguarding must be inclusive of early and supportive conversations that equip young people with awareness and normalize discussions on sensitive topics, online safety tools that meet young people where they are and deliver on their promise to safeguard users and their online communities, and enhanced technologies that remove the burden placed on young people to recognize manipulation and that prevents harm and abuse before they happen.

“Protection of minors is non-existent on the internet”

14, BOY, FRANCE

Final Thoughts

The internet is not all bad – far from it. Digital experiences are often enriching, validating, and constructive for users, including kids. Yet, digital environments introduce new risks. Online safeguarding work must focus on fostering and protecting beneficial digital exploration while preventing and mitigating harmful online abuse and exploitation. Online spaces should be made safer, not taken away or continuously built without adequate protections for all users in place.

Listening to the lived experiences of kids online today across the globe provides critical input into the ongoing development of safe and supportive online environments. Research into their experiences highlights opportunities to meet young people where they are and provides insight into where they need additional protection and support.

We must strengthen young people’s resilience and provide support as they form meaningful online connections while helping them recognize and terminate harmful relationships. Ongoing education about online sexual risks – at home, in schools, and within platforms – is essential. Effective education will use harm reduction framing, speak openly about the diversity of threats and pathways to harm, and outline inclusive support options when something goes wrong.

This work must go hand in hand with improved platform- and ecosystem-based strategies aimed at proactive harm prevention, leveraging safety-by-design principles, and adopting a collaborative whole-of-society approach. While young people play an active role in their communities and strive to keep them safe, relying solely on youth to recognize and report dangers neglects our responsibility to minimize these experiences from happening in the first place. As young people increasingly engage in digital spaces, we must ensure we’ve built safe environments where they can thrive.

THANK YOU

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