

**FEBRUARY 2024**

# Youth Perspectives on Online Safety in Germany

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

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

**THORN** <sup>1</sup>

**iconkids  
& youth**

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# 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 be able to 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 flux<sup>1</sup>, 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*

<sup>1</sup> 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 minors 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, 16-year-olds were underrepresented within the sample and were subsequently weighted to establish representativity. This research could not recruit 17-year-olds effectively in Germany (n=36), and their responses were excluded from the resulting analysis and reporting.*

<sup>2</sup> 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).

## Research Design

The resulting research focused on German minors aged 12-16.<sup>2</sup> 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 German. The survey translation was developed and validated by multiple native German speakers. In total, 815 minors in Germany 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=316)
- 14-15-year-olds (n=322)
- 16-year-olds (n=177)
- Boys (n=417)
- Girls (n=398)

To ensure a representative sample, sampling quotas were established for age, gender, educational level, and geography based on country-specific demographic statistics. Given the recruitment challenge with older teens, the sample was weighted to age; specifically, data for 16-year-olds within the sample was weighted.

## 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. Due to the weighting of the interviews, there are individual case number bases in subgroups

that deviate slightly from the overall base. Some questions also featured multi-select response options, which have been noted.

## 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 Germany. A separate report covering the findings from the research conducted in France is available.<sup>3</sup>

In a survey of 815 German youth (aged 12–16), Thorn explored youth attitudes and behaviors related to online sexual interactions and harms and how German youth respond to such encounters. Several key findings emerged:

**1. German 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, 44% say some of those contacts are other users they believe to be aged 18 or older, including 1 in 4 12–13-year-olds.

<sup>3</sup> Thorn. 2024. Youth Perspectives on Online Safety in France. Available at: [https://info.thorn.org/hubfs/2024\\_YouthPerspectivesonOnlineSafetyinFrance\\_EN.pdf](https://info.thorn.org/hubfs/2024_YouthPerspectivesonOnlineSafetyinFrance_EN.pdf).

**2. German youth are encountering non-consensual sexual interactions online at concerning rates.**

Twelve percent of all German youth surveyed said they have been shown another child's nonconsensually reshared SG-CSAM, while among minors who've been contacted online by someone they've never previously interacted with 41% have received a cold solicitation request for nudes, including 1 in 2 12-13-year-old boys who've had such contacts.

**3. Despite awareness of online risks such as grooming and experiences with unwanted online sexual interactions, many youth choose not to cut off contact when another user makes them feel uncomfortable.**

Forty-six percent of minors think online grooming is a common experience for other kids online. Nevertheless, among minors who have felt uncomfortable while messaging with an online-only contact 1 in 5 remained in contact with the problematic user.

**4. When trying to address risky online interactions, German youth encounter social and technical challenges that shape and hinder their disclosure process.**

Minors who've had an online sexual interaction were 2 to 3.5x as likely to respond by blocking the user than they were to report the user or confide in someone they trust offline. Among those who did not report an online sexual interaction they experienced, 1 in 3 cited embarrassment as the reason they didn't report, 1 in 4 said it was because they didn't think it was important enough to report, and 1 in 6 said they didn't think the platform would do anything in response.



# 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.

“You can be as you are. You are not convicted from the outset. You can exchange secrets.”

**14, BOY, GERMANY**

“I feel freer. You are judged less harshly. It’s easier to get to know new people. I can say everything I think.”

**13, GIRL, GERMANY**

“I like that online communication enables people to deal with each other more openly and honestly. Sometimes it is easier to share feelings or thoughts if you are not face to face with someone.”

**13, BOY, GERMANY**

“...we have the same interests, I think it’s good when I get to know a lot of people who don’t just live in the surrounding area. This means that I can simply meet a lot more people online who share my interests.”

**14, BOY, GERMANY**

## Platform Awareness and Usage

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

From a select list of platforms<sup>4</sup>, German minors reported the highest levels of awareness with Minecraft (70%), Fortnite (65%), Telegram (56%), Twitch (53%), and Roblox (48%) (Fig 1). Surprisingly the variable of age did not reveal a notable trend across platforms: for some platforms awareness increased with age (e.g. Telegram, Reddit), for some it decreased with age (e.g. Among Us, Roblox), and for some it varied (e.g. Discord, Fortnite).

Across nearly all platforms, boys reported higher rates of platform awareness than girls. The largest gaps in awareness of platforms between boys and girls were generally with gaming platforms: Grand Theft Auto (+22), Call of Duty (+20), Fortnite (+12), Reddit (+10), and Twitch (+10).

In Germany, 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. Minors reported the highest overall usage of YouTube (96%), WhatsApp (96%), TikTok (76%), Instagram (71%), and Snapchat (66%); minors reported the highest daily usage rates with WhatsApp (87%), YouTube (67%), TikTok (54%), Instagram (52%), and Snapchat (42%) (Fig 2).

<sup>4</sup> 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.

Unexpectedly, platform usage rates were not generally found to increase with age. The largest increases in daily usage emerged between the 12-13 and 14-15 age cohorts and included Instagram (+23), TikTok (+12) and Snapchat (+11). Boys were more likely to report daily usage of Fortnite (+12),

Discord (+9), and Facebook (+9) compared to girls, while girls were more likely to report daily usage of Instagram (+14), Snapchat (+14) and TikTok (+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=815	Ages 12-13 n=316	Ages 14-15 n=322	Age 16 n=177	Boys n=417	Girls n=398
Amino	4%	3%	2%	8%	4%	3%
Among Us	27%	30%	26%	23%	24%	30%
BeReal	19%	19%	19%	18%	16%	22%
Byte	3%	3%	4%	3%	5%	2%
Call of Duty	41%	35%	47%	40%	51%	31%
Chatroulette	4%	3%	6%	3%	5%	3%
Discord	41%	37%	45%	40%	45%	37%
Fortnite	65%	63%	67%	64%	71%	59%
Grand Theft Auto (GTA)	34%	34%	35%	32%	44%	23%
Kik	20%	17%	22%	21%	20%	19%
Live.me	6%	8%	5%	4%	7%	5%
Marco Polo	14%	11%	16%	15%	15%	13%
Minecraft	70%	71%	71%	67%	73%	67%
Monkey	7%	6%	7%	11%	9%	6%
Omegle	8%	10%	8%	6%	10%	6%
Reddit	35%	28%	36%	47%	40%	30%
Roblox	48%	55%	49%	36%	48%	49%
Signal	35%	31%	36%	38%	37%	32%
Tagged	4%	4%	4%	2%	4%	3%
Telegram	56%	47%	56%	69%	59%	52%
Tor/Onion Browser	4%	4%	4%	6%	6%	3%
Triller	5%	5%	5%	6%	5%	5%
Twitch	53%	50%	55%	56%	58%	48%
VSCO	3%	3%	2%	3%	3%	2%
Whisper	8%	7%	8%	9%	9%	7%
Wickr	6%	6%	5%	9%	8%	4%
Wink	3%	4%	2%	4%	4%	3%
Wishbone	3%	4%	1%	5%	3%	3%
Wizz	8%	7%	8%	8%	7%	9%
YouNow	9%	8%	8%	14%	10%	9%
Yubo	6%	6%	5%	6%	7%	5%

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=815		Ages 12-13 n=316		Ages 14-15 n=322		Age 16 n=177		Boys n=417		Girls n=398	
	Ever used	Daily use	Ever used	Daily use	Ever used	Daily use	Ever used	Daily use	Ever used	Daily use	Ever used	Daily use
<b>Among Us</b>	18%	3%	22%	5%	15%	1%	16%	2%	17%	3%	19%	3%
<b>BeReal</b>	12%	8%	11%	6%	12%	9%	12%	8%	9%	6%	15%	10%
<b>Call of Duty</b>	23%	6%	17%	6%	28%	6%	24%	8%	32%	10%	13%	3%
<b>Discord</b>	27%	13%	23%	12%	31%	15%	28%	14%	32%	18%	22%	9%
<b>Facebook</b>	48%	27%	44%	27%	49%	27%	52%	29%	50%	32%	46%	23%
<b>Fortnite</b>	46%	13%	48%	16%	45%	9%	42%	13%	56%	18%	35%	6%
<b>Google Hangouts/Google Meet</b>	30%	9%	30%	11%	29%	7%	32%	10%	30%	9%	29%	9%
<b>Grand Theft Auto (GTA)</b>	23%	6%	22%	5%	24%	5%	21%	10%	31%	8%	13%	3%
<b>Instagram</b>	71%	52%	59%	39%	80%	62%	78%	57%	68%	45%	75%	59%
<b>Kik</b>	10%	2%	10%	3%	11%	1%	8%	1%	10%	2%	10%	1%
<b>Marco Polo</b>	7%	2%	7%	3%	7%	1%	9%	3%	8%	3%	7%	1%
<b>Messenger (Facebook)</b>	42%	19%	39%	21%	44%	17%	46%	18%	44%	21%	40%	17%
<b>Minecraft</b>	52%	11%	54%	13%	51%	10%	48%	9%	58%	14%	44%	7%
<b>Reddit</b>	18%	4%	15%	4%	18%	4%	21%	6%	21%	5%	14%	4%
<b>Roblox</b>	37%	11%	44%	15%	36%	9%	27%	5%	37%	9%	38%	12%
<b>Signal</b>	18%	5%	17%	6%	19%	4%	20%	5%	21%	6%	16%	4%
<b>Snapchat</b>	66%	42%	60%	37%	71%	48%	67%	39%	62%	35%	70%	49%
<b>Telegram</b>	25%	10%	23%	9%	25%	9%	29%	13%	28%	11%	22%	9%
<b>TikTok</b>	76%	54%	69%	49%	82%	61%	79%	51%	74%	50%	78%	58%
<b>Tumblr</b>	21%	6%	21%	7%	22%	5%	19%	3%	25%	7%	18%	4%
<b>Twitch</b>	32%	12%	32%	14%	32%	11%	33%	9%	39%	15%	24%	9%
<b>WhatsApp</b>	96%	87%	95%	84%	98%	90%	93%	89%	95%	85%	96%	90%
<b>X (f/k/a Twitter)</b>	36%	15%	35%	15%	35%	13%	39%	16%	39%	16%	33%	13%
<b>YouTube</b>	96%	67%	92%	67%	97%	65%	98%	72%	95%	68%	96%	66%

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 accounts<sup>5</sup> (i.e., accounts designed to keep content private from some groups like parents or friends) was also reported within the German sample, where 1 in 7 (15%) minors reported having a secondary account (Fig 3). Younger boys (aged 12-13) and older boys (aged 16) were the most likely to report having one, with 1 in 5 (19%) reporting they have a secondary account. It's notable that girls were more likely to select the "prefer not to say" option when asked if they had one.

**1 in 7**  
minors report having a secondary account.

## Circumvention of Age-Gating Policies

A majority of minors in Germany (68%) acknowledged their friends misrepresent their age online (Fig 4).<sup>6</sup> This perception was found to increase the most between the ages of 12 and 13 (+13) and between the ages of 13 and 14 (+7).

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).

"To make yourself important and to look cooler."

**12, GIRL, GERMANY**

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 (+9), while girls were more likely to perceive their friends lied about their age to make friends with people older than them (+7). The possible influence of age appeared mixed.

<sup>5</sup> Such as, but not limited to, "finstas" or "fake Instagrams."

<sup>6</sup> 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
<b>All Minors</b>	n=815	15%	5%	80%
<b>Boys</b>	n=417	16%	4%	80%
<b>Girls</b>	n=398	13%	7%	80%
<b>Ages 12-13</b>	n=316	15%	4%	81%
<b>Boys</b>	n=154	19%	2%	79%
<b>Girls</b>	n=162	12%	6%	83%
<b>Ages 14-15</b>	n=322	14%	5%	81%
<b>Boys</b>	n=162	12%	4%	83%
<b>Girls</b>	n=160	15%	7%	78%
<b>Age 16</b>	n=177	16%	6%	78%
<b>Boys</b>	n=101	19%	5%	76%
<b>Girls</b>	n=77	11%	8%	81%

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
<b>All Minors</b>	n=815	68%	5%	17%	47%	32%
<b>Boys</b>	n=417	69%	5%	20%	44%	31%
<b>Girls</b>	n=398	68%	5%	13%	50%	32%
<b>Age 12</b>	n=155	57%	5%	12%	40%	43%
<b>Age 13</b>	n=161	70%	5%	18%	47%	30%
<b>Age 14</b>	n=165	77%	7%	20%	50%	23%
<b>Age 15</b>	n=157	67%	4%	19%	44%	33%
<b>Age 16</b>	n=177	71%	4%	14%	52%	29%

“Some apps are from 13 or 14, [so] they generally make themselves older.”

13, GIRL, GERMANY

## 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. One in 5 (20%) German minors reported they had used an online dating app (e.g., Bumble, Grindr, Hinge, or Tinder), 1 in 7 (15%) reported they had used a pornography site, and 1 in 10 (11%) reported they have used OnlyFans<sup>7</sup>. (Fig 6). Concerningly, reported usage of OnlyFans was greatest among minors aged 12-13, particularly boys.

**1 in 5**  
minors have used an online dating app.

Boys reported higher rates of usage across all three site types compared to girls. While notable across all age cohorts, the differences in usage rates between boys and girls were greatest among minors aged 14-15 and the greatest gender difference was associated with the usage of pornography sites (+22). Compared to girls, boys aged 14-15 were 6.5 times more likely to have used a pornography site; among minors aged 12-13 and those aged 16 boys were twice as likely.

**6.5x**  
Boys aged 14-15 were 6.5 times more likely to have used a pornography site compared to their female counterparts.

<sup>7</sup> OnlyFans is a subscription-based platform generally known for hosting sexual and pornographic content.

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
<b>All Minors</b>	n=557	65%	26%	40%	14%	5%
<b>Boys</b>	n=288	66%	30%	36%	14%	6%
<b>Girls</b>	n=269	65%	21%	43%	13%	4%
<b>Age 12</b>	n=89	62%	22%	42%	14%	3%
<b>Age 13</b>	n=112	67%	28%	38%	10%	5%
<b>Age 14</b>	n=127	63%	19%	45%	17%	4%
<b>Age 15</b>	n=104	69%	26%	38%	15%	7%
<b>Age 16</b>	n=125	65%	33%	35%	11%	5%

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
<b>All Minors</b>	n=815	20%	11%	15%
<b>Boys</b>	n=417	25%	15%	22%
<b>Girls</b>	n=398	14%	8%	7%
<b>Ages 12-13</b>	n=316	20%	14%	12%
<b>Boys</b>	n=154	24%	18%	16%
<b>Girls</b>	n=162	16%	10%	8%
<b>Ages 14-15</b>	n=322	18%	9%	15%
<b>Boys</b>	n=162	25%	13%	26%
<b>Girls</b>	n=160	10%	5%	4%
<b>Age 16</b>	n=177	25%	11%	20%
<b>Boys</b>	n=101	28%	12%	26%
<b>Girls</b>	n=77	20%	9%	11%

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.

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.

“I find it interesting to know the thoughts of other people who I don’t know personally. And nowadays everyone does that.”

**16, BOY, GERMANY**

“It’s fun to just say what you think and write. Without anyone who knows me finding out and coming up with any stupid thoughts. I’m also happy to present myself as different from what I actually am.”

**13, GIRL, GERMANY**

“Honestly, communicating with others online helps build relationships.”

**16, GIRL, GERMANY**

“There is a certain anonymity and protective function [if something happens] and I can write more openly...”

**16, BOY, GERMANY**

## Online Connections and Online-Only Contacts

Among German minors, 73% acknowledged they have been contacted online by someone they did not know in person and have never interacted with before; 1 in 3 (33%) acknowledged this is something they experience regularly, on at least a monthly basis (Fig 7). Overall, minors’ likelihood to indicate they had this experience increased consistently with age.

Further highlighting the normalcy of online interactions among users who only know each other online (i.e., between “online-only” contacts), less than 1 in 3 (29%) German minors reported they know all their online contacts in person (Fig 8). Alternatively, 11% 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 was highest among minors aged 14-15. While 37% of minors aged 12-13 reported they know all their online contacts in person, only 23% of minors aged 14-15 reported the same. Boys generally reported having more online-only contacts than girls: 75% of boys reported having online contacts they only know online, compared to 66% of girls. The largest difference between boys and girls was identified among 16-year-olds, where 16-year-old boys reported more online-only contacts than girls (+18).

Although the vast majority (89%) of minors with online-only contacts acknowledge some of their online-only contacts are with users they believe to be other teens (aged 13-17), 44% 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 4 (28%) minors aged 12-13 reported having online-only contacts they believed to be adults. Age-related increases were most pronounced among boys between the ages of 12-13 and 14-15 (+21) and for girls between the ages of 14-15 and 16 (+29).

Among minors with online-only contacts, **44%** admitted some of those contacts are with other users they believe to be adults.

Recognizing that among older teens (aged 16), it may be expected that they form connections with other users who are younger adults (aged 18-20), it's important to note that among the 16-year-olds surveyed who reported having online-only contacts, 1 in 4 (28%) reported some of those contacts were users they believed to be 21-29-years-old and 1 in 9 (12%) reported some were users they believed to be aged 30 or older.

Among minors with online-only contacts, **1 in 4** minors aged 12-13 reported some of those contacts are with other users they believe to be adults.

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

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
<b>All Minors</b>	n=815	73%	8%	12%	13%	40%	27%
<b>Boys</b>	n=417	73%	9%	13%	13%	39%	27%
<b>Girls</b>	n=398	72%	7%	11%	13%	42%	28%
<b>Ages 12-13</b>	n=316	64%	8%	13%	11%	32%	36%
<b>Boys</b>	n=154	66%	9%	15%	9%	33%	34%
<b>Girls</b>	n=162	61%	7%	10%	13%	32%	39%
<b>Ages 14-15</b>	n=322	75%	7%	12%	14%	41%	25%
<b>Boys</b>	n=162	75%	9%	11%	16%	39%	25%
<b>Girls</b>	n=160	75%	6%	14%	12%	43%	25%
<b>Age 16</b>	n=177	84%	8%	9%	15%	52%	16%
<b>Boys</b>	n=101	80%	8%	11%	14%	46%	20%
<b>Girls</b>	n=77	89%	8%	6%	16%	59%	11%

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
<b>All Minors</b>	n=815	11%	14%	17%	28%	29%
<b>Boys</b>	n=417	11%	16%	18%	30%	25%
<b>Girls</b>	n=398	12%	12%	16%	26%	34%
<b>Ages 12-13</b>	n=316	9%	14%	16%	25%	37%
<b>Boys</b>	n=154	8%	12%	20%	27%	33%
<b>Girls</b>	n=162	9%	15%	12%	23%	40%
<b>Ages 14-15</b>	n=322	14%	15%	17%	31%	23%
<b>Boys</b>	n=162	13%	22%	15%	30%	20%
<b>Girls</b>	n=160	15%	8%	20%	32%	26%
<b>Age 16</b>	n=177	10%	13%	20%	29%	27%
<b>Boys</b>	n=101	10%	14%	21%	35%	20%
<b>Girls</b>	n=77	11%	11%	19%	21%	38%

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, 70% 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 overall perceptions of the experience were consistent across age cohorts, younger minors

(aged 12-13) were the most likely to indicate they believed it was at least a somewhat common experience, with nearly 1 in 4 (23%) believing it was. No significant gender differences were identified when looking at minors who believed the experience was at least somewhat common.

Among minors with online-only contacts, **70%** have had an online-only connection invite them to move from a public chat into a private conversation on a different platform.

**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
<b>All Minors</b>	n=576	1%	25%	89%	44%	40%	15%	7%
<b>Boys</b>	n=314	2%	25%	88%	46%	42%	19%	9%
<b>Girls</b>	n=262	1%	25%	91%	40%	37%	11%	5%
<b>Ages 12-13</b>	n=200	4%	50%	86%	28%	25%	9%	4%
<b>Boys</b>	n=103	6%	50%	83%	30%	27%	11%	3%
<b>Girls</b>	n=97	1%	50%	90%	27%	22%	7%	5%
<b>Ages 14-15</b>	n=247	0%	14%	92%	45%	43%	14%	8%
<b>Boys</b>	n=129	0%	16%	91%	51%	47%	19%	11%
<b>Girls</b>	n=118	1%	12%	93%	40%	38%	8%	4%
<b>Age 16</b>	n=128	0%	8%	89%	64%	59%	28%	12%
<b>Boys</b>	n=81	0%	8%	90%	60%	54%	28%	13%
<b>Girls</b>	n=48	0%	8%	87%	69%	67%	28%	10%

Question was multi-select.



**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
<b>All Minors</b>	n=576	70%	3%	15%	28%	24%	30%
<b>Boys</b>	n=314	71%	2%	17%	28%	24%	29%
<b>Girls</b>	n=262	69%	3%	13%	27%	25%	31%
<b>Ages 12-13</b>	n=200	69%	4%	19%	23%	23%	31%
<b>Boys</b>	n=103	65%	3%	21%	22%	18%	35%
<b>Girls</b>	n=97	72%	5%	17%	23%	28%	28%
<b>Ages 14-15</b>	n=247	70%	2%	13%	30%	24%	30%
<b>Boys</b>	n=129	77%	1%	16%	31%	28%	23%
<b>Girls</b>	n=118	63%	3%	10%	29%	20%	37%
<b>Age 16</b>	n=128	72%	1%	13%	31%	26%	28%
<b>Boys</b>	n=81	69%	1%	12%	31%	24%	31%
<b>Girls</b>	n=48	77%	0%	15%	30%	31%	23%

# 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 3 (35%) reported they have felt uncomfortable while messaging with an online-only contact (Fig 11). This experience was higher among girls (40%) than boys (31%) – a difference that was particularly pronounced among girls aged 12-13 (47%\*) compared to boys of the same age (32%). Overall, the experience of feeling uncomfortable messaging with online-only contacts decreased with age.

Among minors with online-only contacts, **1 in 3** reported they have felt uncomfortable while messaging with an online-only contact.

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 and intrusion into a young person’s sense of safety.

Minors were most likely to identify they felt uncomfortable messaging with an online-only contact when they were asked for personal information (47%), they suspected they were being lied to (32%), and/or they felt like they were being contacted too often (30%) (Fig 12). For 1 in 4 (24%) minors who felt uncomfortable messaging with an online-only contact, it was the result of the conversation becoming sexual in nature and for 1 in 7 (14%)

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?

<b>All Minors</b>	n=576	35%
<b>Boys</b>	n=314	31%
<b>Girls</b>	n=262	40%
<b>Ages 12-13</b>	n=200	39%
<b>Boys</b>	n=103	32%
<b>Girls</b>	n=97	47%
<b>Ages 14-15</b>	n=247	35%
<b>Boys</b>	n=129	34%
<b>Girls</b>	n=118	37%
<b>Age 16</b>	n=128	29%
<b>Boy</b>	n=81	25%
<b>Girls</b>	n=48	36%

Percentages reflect participants who selected “yes.”

minors it was a result of the user asking them for nudes.

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-fifth (22%) of minors who felt uncomfortable, the gender and/or 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 man aged 18-29 (42%). While base sizes are smaller, this was most likely among older teens (aged 16) and boys. In general, minors were two to three times as likely to indicate they felt uncomfortable messaging with a male user (of any age) compared to a female user (of any age).

While girls were more likely to report feeling uncomfortable messaging with other users they perceived to be girls aged 17 or younger (18%) compared to boys (12%\*), boys were more likely to report they felt uncomfortable messaging with other users they believed were older women, aged 18-29 (14%\*) and aged 30 or older (14%\*) compared to girls (9% and 8% respectively).

**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=203	Ages 12-13 n=78	Ages 14-15 n=87	Age 16 n=37	Boys n=98	Girls n=105
<b>I was asked for personal information</b>	47%	46%	44%	57%	46%	48%
<b>I was being lied to</b>	32%	22%	36%	42%	28%	35%
<b>I was contacted too often</b>	30%	30%	28%	36%	27%	33%
<b>Someone was trying to become close too quickly</b>	24%	23%	20%	38%	23%	26%
<b>The conversation was sexual in nature</b>	24%	24%	24%	25%	25%	23%
<b>I was asked to meet up in person</b>	20%	18%	20%	25%	18%	34%
<b>I was bullied</b>	16%	10%	25%	9%	18%	15%
<b>I was asked for nudes</b>	14%	12%	15%	19%	9%	19%
<b>Other</b>	5%	4%	5%	7%	5%	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=203	Ages 12-13 n=78	Ages 14-15 n=87	Age 16 n=37	Boys n=98	Girls n=105
<b>Boy, aged 17 or younger</b>	35%	36%	36%	29%	33%	36%
<b>Man, aged 18-29</b>	42%	38%	42%	52%	45%	39%
<b>Man, aged 30 or older</b>	25%	19%	24%	41%	25%	25%
<b>Girl, aged 17 or younger</b>	15%	19%	12%	16%	12%	18%
<b>Woman, aged 18-29</b>	11%	16%	8%	9%	14%	9%
<b>Woman, aged 30 or older</b>	11%	7%	14%	12%	14%	8%
<b>Non-binary person, aged 17 or younger</b>	5%	4%	7%	0%	8%	2%
<b>Non-binary person, aged 18-29</b>	8%	7%	11%	6%	13%	4%
<b>Non-binary person, aged 30 or older</b>	5%	3%	6%	6%	6%	4%
<b>Gender &amp; age were not clear</b>	22%	17%	25%	23%	20%	23%

Question was multi-select.

## Experiences with Online Grooming

One in 4 (28%) minors indicated they had personally experienced someone approaching them online with the intention to befriend and manipulate them (Fig 14). Girls were slightly more likely to indicate higher rates of this experience than boys; nearly 1 in 3 (30%) girls, compared to 1 in 4 (26%) boys, believed this had happened to them. The rate of experience for girls also increased with age. A difference in experience between girls and boys was noted among minors aged 14-15 (+9), while within other age cohorts, the rates of experience were closer.

**1 in 4**  
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, a majority (62%) 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. Girls (66%) were more likely to hold this belief than boys (58%). The perception increased between the ages of 12-13 (57%) and 14-15 (65%), with the largest increase occurring among boys (+9) within those age cohorts.

After being shown a definition of the term online grooming<sup>8</sup>, nearly half (46%) of German minors reported they believed it is a common experience for kids their same age and gender (Fig 16). Overall, girls (50%) were more likely than boys (42%) to perceive online grooming as a common

**46%**  
of minors think online grooming is a common experience for kids their age.

<sup>8</sup> 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?

<b>All Minors</b>	n=815	28%
<b>Boys</b>	n=417	26%
<b>Girls</b>	n=398	30%
<b>Ages 12-13</b>	n=316	25%
<b>Boys</b>	n=154	24%
<b>Girls</b>	n=162	25%
<b>Ages 14-15</b>	n=322	28%
<b>Boys</b>	n=162	24%
<b>Girls</b>	n=160	33%
<b>Age 16</b>	n=177	32%
<b>Boy</b>	n=101	31%
<b>Girls</b>	n=77	35%

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?

		<b>Common</b>
<b>All Minors</b>	n=815	62%
<b>Boys</b>	n=417	58%
<b>Girls</b>	n=398	66%
<b>Ages 12-13</b>	n=316	57%
<b>Boys</b>	n=154	52%
<b>Girls</b>	n=162	63%
<b>Ages 14-15</b>	n=322	65%
<b>Boys</b>	n=162	61%
<b>Girls</b>	n=160	68%
<b>Age 16</b>	n=177	65%
<b>Boys</b>	n=101	61%
<b>Girls</b>	n=77	70%

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

experience. The gender difference was most pronounced among minors aged 14-15 (+20). Overall, girls aged 14-15 (60%) were the most likely to believe online grooming was a common experience.

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
<b>All Minors</b>	n=815	46%	9%	37%	40%	14%
<b>Boys</b>	n=417	42%	8%	35%	43%	15%
<b>Girls</b>	n=398	50%	10%	40%	37%	12%
<b>Ages 12-13</b>	n=316	44%	10%	34%	39%	17%
<b>Boys</b>	n=154	45%	9%	36%	35%	20%
<b>Girls</b>	n=162	43%	10%	33%	43%	14%
<b>Ages 14-15</b>	n=322	50%	11%	39%	39%	11%
<b>Boys</b>	n=162	40%	8%	32%	46%	14%
<b>Girls</b>	n=160	60%	14%	46%	32%	8%
<b>Age 16</b>	n=177	44%	4%	40%	43%	13%
<b>Boys</b>	n=101	43%	6%	37%	48%	9%
<b>Girls</b>	n=77	46%	2%	45%	36%	18%

# 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.

## Potentially Harmful Online Experiences

Forty-one percent of German minors reported they had had a potentially harmful online experience, and one quarter (24%) of minors reported they had had an online sexual interaction (Fig 17). Few variations in the rates of potentially harmful online experiences surfaced among gender and age variables. An exception to this was a gender difference identified among minors aged 16, where girls (30%\*) were more than 1.5 times as likely to indicate they had had an online sexual interaction compared to boys (18%).

**1 in 4**  
minors have had an online sexual interaction.

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
<b>All Minors</b>	n=815	41%	31%	20%	19%	24%	12%	5%	7%	4%	15%
<b>Boys</b>	n=417	40%	30%	20%	17%	22%	11%	5%	6%	5%	11%
<b>Girls</b>	n=398	41%	33%	19%	22%	25%	14%	5%	7%	3%	18%
<b>Ages 12-13</b>	n=316	40%	29%	18%	17%	24%	11%	5%	5%	4%	13%
<b>Boys</b>	n=154	39%	27%	19%	14%	25%	12%	6%	6%	5%	13%
<b>Girls</b>	n=162	41%	31%	16%	20%	23%	11%	5%	4%	2%	13%
<b>Ages 14-15</b>	n=322	43%	35%	25%	22%	23%	13%	5%	9%	5%	17%
<b>Boys</b>	n=162	42%	34%	24%	20%	22%	10%	4%	7%	7%	13%
<b>Girls</b>	n=160	43%	37%	25%	23%	25%	16%	6%	12%	3%	22%
<b>Age 16</b>	n=177	39%	27%	15%	19%	23%	14%	5%	6%	2%	12%
<b>Boys</b>	n=101	39%	28%	16%	17%	18%	11%	5%	6%	1%	7%
<b>Girls</b>	n=77	40%	27%	15%	21%	30%	17%	5%	5%	3%	19%

Question was multi-select.

Within the array of specific online sexual interaction types, minors were most likely to indicate they had experienced someone sending them sexual messages (15%) and/or asking them to send a nude photo (12%). In particular, 16-year-old girls were the most likely to indicate they had had these interactions, with 1 in 6 indicating they had been sent sexual messages (18%\*) and/or indicating they'd been asked to send nude imagery (17%\*).

Overall, German minors reported having online sexual interactions with adults and peers at somewhat similar rates; 14% of minors reported having an online sexual interaction with another user who they believed to be an adult (aged 18 or older), and 11% reported having one with a user they believe to be another juvenile (aged 17 or younger) (Fig 18). Seven 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. At the same time, 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.

The top five platforms where the most minors reported having an online sexual interaction were Instagram (11%), Snapchat (11%), WhatsApp (11%), TikTok (9%), and Facebook (8%) (Fig 19). Alternatively, the top five platforms where minor users reported the highest rates of online sexual interactions were Facebook (16%), Instagram (16%), Snapchat (16%), Telegram (15%), Messenger (13%) and Tumblr (13%).

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=815	Ages 12-13 n=316	Ages 14-15 n=322	Age 16 n=178	Boys n=417	Girls n=398
<b>Online sexual interaction, all ages</b>		24%	24%	23%	23%	22%	25%
With someone I believed was...	...17 or younger	11%	11%	11%	9%	11%	10%
	...18 or older	14%	14%	13%	13%	13%	14%
	...age unknown	7%	5%	9%	6%	5%	9%

Question was multi-select.

Requests for sexual imagery online can occur in a variety of different contexts that result in kids viewing them 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, 41% of minors who've been contacted online by someone they've never previously interacted with reported they had experienced a cold solicitation request for nude imagery online (Fig 20).

Among minors who've been contacted online by someone they've never interacted with, **41%** have experienced a cold solicitation request for nudes.

Eighteen percent of German youth who've been contacted online by someone they've never previously interacted with reported they receive these types of nude imagery requests at least monthly. While the overall rate of experience was somewhat consistent across age cohorts, some gender variation emerged within them. Younger boys (aged 12-13) who've been contacted online by someone they've never previously interacted with were the most likely to report they had had the experience, with 1 in 2 (49%) indicating they had experienced a cold solicitation and 1 in 4 (27%) indicating they experienced cold solicitations at least monthly.

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
<b>Average</b>	10%	2%
<b>Among Us</b>	3%	1%
<b>Call of Duty</b>	3%	1%
<b>Discord</b>	8%	2%
<b>Facebook</b>	16%	8%
<b>Fortnite</b>	3%	1%
<b>Google Hangouts/Google Meet</b>	11%	3%
<b>Grand Theft Auto (GTA)</b>	4%	1%
<b>Instagram</b>	16%	11%
<b>Messenger (Facebook)</b>	13%	6%
<b>Minecraft</b>	3%	1%
<b>Reddit</b>	9%	2%
<b>Roblox</b>	5%	2%
<b>Signal</b>	9%	2%
<b>Snapchat</b>	16%	11%
<b>Telegram</b>	15%	4%
<b>TikTok</b>	12%	9%
<b>Tumblr</b>	13%	3%
<b>Twitch</b>	8%	2%
<b>WhatsApp</b>	11%	11%
<b>X (f/k/a Twitter)</b>	10%	3%
<b>YouTube</b>	4%	3%

Question was multi-select.

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
<b>All Minors</b>	n=592	41%	7%	6%	5%	23%	59%
<b>Boys</b>	n=304	39%	8%	7%	5%	19%	61%
<b>Girls</b>	n=288	43%	5%	5%	5%	28%	57%
<b>Ages 12-13</b>	n=202	44%	10%	9%	4%	20%	56%
<b>Boys</b>	n=102	49%	12%	9%	7%	21%	51%
<b>Girls</b>	n=99	38%	8%	9%	2%	20%	62%
<b>Ages 14-15</b>	n=242	42%	6%	6%	5%	26%	58%
<b>Boys</b>	n=122	37%	8%	8%	5%	16%	63%
<b>Girls</b>	n=120	47%	4%	3%	5%	35%	53%
<b>Age 16</b>	n=148	37%	5%	4%	5%	23%	63%
<b>Boys</b>	n=80	31%	4%	5%	1%	21%	69%
<b>Girls</b>	n=68	44%	5%	3%	9%	26%	56%



## 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, 8% of German minors think that the sharing of nude imagery is normal among people their age (Fig 21). Boys (12%) were more than twice as likely to think the behavior was normal than girls (5%). This gender gap appeared to widen as age increased.

**2x**  
Boys were more than twice as likely to think sharing SG-CSAM is normal compared to girls.

When asked about the perceived prevalence of sexting behaviors among their close friends, 40% reported they believe their close friends receive nude imagery, and 1 in 4 (24%) reported they believe their close friends share their own nude imagery at least rarely (Fig 22). Perceptions of both

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=815	8%
Boys	n=417	12%
Girls	n=398	5%
Ages 12-13	n=316	8%
Boys	n=154	10%
Girls	n=162	6%
Ages 14-15	n=322	9%
Boys	n=162	14%
Girls	n=160	5%
Age 16	n=177	8%
Boy	n=101	12%
Girls	n=77	1%

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=815 40%	31%	24%	23%	21%
Boys	n=417 44%	34%	24%	25%	25%
Girls	n=398 37%	27%	23%	21%	18%
Ages 12-13	n=316 34%	29%	18%	20%	20%
Boys	n=154 39%	32%	18%	21%	21%
Girls	n=162 30%	26%	19%	19%	19%
Ages 14-15	n=322 41%	29%	23%	22%	20%
Boys	n=162 44%	36%	26%	26%	26%
Girls	n=160 37%	22%	21%	18%	14%
Age 16	n=177 51%	37%	34%	31%	25%
Boys	n=101 51%	34%	30%	30%	28%
Girls	n=77 51%	40%	38%	31%	20%

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

sexting behaviors were found to increase with age, where 1 in 2 (51%) 16-year-olds believe their close friends receive nude imagery, and nearly 1 in 3 (34%) 16-year-olds believe their close friends share their own nude imagery. Concerningly, nearly 1 in 4 (23%) think their close friends have had their nude imagery nonconsensually reshared or “leaked” without their consent.

**1 in 4**  
minors believe their close friends share their own nude imagery.

“Sometimes when a couple is in a relationship, it is normal to share some pictures between them but within limits.”

**13, BOY, GERMANY**

“Thankfully, this has never happened to me, but my friends have reported that they received naked pictures of men in a chat without asking.”

**15, GIRL, GERMANY**

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
<b>All Minors</b>	n=815	23%	13%	11%	10%	10%
<b>Boys</b>	n=417	28%	18%	13%	13%	14%
<b>Girls</b>	n=398	19%	8%	8%	6%	6%
<b>Ages 12-13</b>	n=316	23%	14%	12%	10%	12%
<b>Boys</b>	n=154	27%	18%	14%	13%	16%
<b>Girls</b>	n=162	20%	10%	9%	7%	9%
<b>Ages 14-15</b>	n=322	23%	13%	10%	11%	11%
<b>Boys</b>	n=162	29%	22%	14%	16%	16%
<b>Girls</b>	n=160	17%	5%	6%	6%	5%
<b>Age 16</b>	n=177	25%	10%	10%	7%	6%
<b>Boys</b>	n=101	27%	10%	11%	7%	7%
<b>Girls</b>	n=77	22%	9%	8%	6%	5%

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

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?

<b>All Minors</b>	n=815	6%
<b>Boys</b>	n=417	8%
<b>Girls</b>	n=398	3%
<b>Ages 12-13</b>	n=316	6%
<b>Boys</b>	n=154	9%
<b>Girls</b>	n=162	4%
<b>Ages 14-15</b>	n=322	5%
<b>Boys</b>	n=162	7%
<b>Girls</b>	n=160	2%
<b>Age 16</b>	n=177	6%
<b>Boys</b>	n=101	7%
<b>Girls</b>	n=77	5%

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

Comparatively, when asked about the frequency of their own sexting behaviors, around 1 in 4 (23%) reported they receive nude imagery from others, and 1 in 10 (11%) reported they share their own nude imagery at least rarely (Fig 23). Overall rates for most sexting experiences were generally consistent across age cohorts. However, across all sexting experiences inventoried, boys were 1.5 to more than 2 times as likely to report participating in sexting behaviors compared to girls. Boys were more than twice as likely to report sharing nude imagery of adults with others (18%) and having their nude imagery leaked (13%) compared to the equivalent rates of girls (8% and 6%, respectively). Gender differences were most pronounced across all sexting experiences within the 14-15-year-old age cohort.

# 1.5-2x

Boys were 1.5 to 2 times more likely to report they had sexting experiences compared to girls.

When asked more directly about whether or not they have shared nude imagery of themselves, 6%<sup>9</sup> of German minors reported they had (Fig 24). While the sharing rate was consistent across age cohorts, it was greater among boys (8%) than girls (3%).

Additional survey questions were asked to the 6% 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.

<sup>9</sup> The discrepancy in minors' reported rates of sharing their own nude imagery between the two question formats (11% v. 6%) should be further investigated in future research. It could be that social desirability bias was more pronounced in response 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 experience 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.

"There have been several incidents of child pornography being shared at my school, even in 5th grade. The police were even informed and cyberbullying happens again and again. I think that's bad. The dick pick I shared was to a girl from my school, she asked me to do it and it was just a joke. Then I realized myself that it was stupid."

**16, BOY, GERMANY**

Acknowledging the limited sample size in subsequent data (n=46), German minors who admitted sharing their own imagery reported a range of sharing experiences. Among them, two-thirds (66%\*\*) had shared nude imagery within the past year (Fig 25). Descriptively, they used various platform features for sharing, such as texting in messaging apps, direct messaging within apps, and ephemeral messaging. They also reported sharing their nude imagery with both users they only know online and those they know offline as well (Fig 26) and with other juveniles and with adults (Fig 27).

Minors who reported they had not shared nude imagery of themselves were subsequently asked if they had ever considered doing so, and 5% of minors reported they had considered it (Fig 28). Consideration of sharing their own nude imagery was not found to increase with age.

"The Internet never forgets my parents said."

**13, BOY, GERMANY**

"For fear that it will be spread further."

**14, GIRL, GERMANY**

Fig 25 | Experiences sharing SG-CSAM in the past year  
Among minors who've shared their nudes

Q46. 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?

<b>All Minors</b>	n=46	66%
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Percentage reflects a net percentage of participants who selected "yes - on purpose" or "yes - on accident."

Fig 26 | Sharing SG-CSAM with offline v. online-only contacts  
Among minors who've shared their nudes

Q48. And had you met the person or people you shared this nude photo/video of yourself with in real life before you shared it?

<b>All Minors</b>	
	n=46
<b>Yes - I had met the person/people before</b>	44%
<b>Both - I had met some of the people but not all of them</b>	41%
<b>No - I had not met the person/people before</b>	15%

Fig 27 | Perceived age of the recipient  
Among minors who've shared their own nudes

Q50. Have you ever sent or shared nude photo(s)/video(s) of yourself with any of the following...?

<b>All Minors</b>	
	n=46
<b>Aged 17 or younger</b>	43%
<b>Aged 18 or older</b>	59%
<b>Age unknown</b>	20%

Question was multi-select.

10 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>.

Fig 28 | 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?

<b>All Minors</b>	n=756	5%
<b>Boys</b>	n=375	5%
<b>Girls</b>	n=381	6%
<b>Ages 12-13</b>	n=292	5%
<b>Boys</b>	n=138	5%
<b>Girls</b>	n=154	4%
<b>Ages 14-15</b>	n=301	6%
<b>Boys</b>	n=147	5%
<b>Girls</b>	n=153	7%
<b>Age 16</b>	n=163	5%
<b>Boys</b>	n=90	4%
<b>Girls</b>	n=73	7%

Percentages reflect participants who selected "yes."

"I don't know how the photo is used, that it will be distributed further, I don't know the other person personally. I am worried about who will see my pictures."

12, GIRL, GERMANY

## 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.<sup>10</sup> 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.

“Luckily nothing bad has happened to me yet, but I know of girls whose pictures have been forwarded.”

15, BOY, GERMANY

“Always include a feature in sent images so that you know who sent them.”

12, GIRL, GERMANY

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 German sample, 12% of minors reported they had seen someone else’s nonconsensually reshared SG-CSAM (Fig 29). The reported rates of this experience were generally consistent across ages and genders.

12%  
of minors  
have seen  
someone else’s  
nonconsensually  
reshared nudes.

“At first you laughed about it, only then did you start to think about it.”

14, BOY, GERMANY

“I was ashamed and I was sorry for it.”

12, GIRL, GERMANY

Among German minors who reported they had seen nonconsensually reshared SG-CSAM, they reported the highest likelihood to respond by telling a parent (38%\*), blocking the resharer of the imagery (32%\*), and/or ignoring the imagery (32%\*) (Fig 30). Minors indicated they were least likely to reshare the imagery themselves (0%\*), delete the app on which it was shared (4%\*), and/or report the incident to the platform (14%\*) in response to seeing the imagery.

Fig 29 | 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
<b>All Minors</b>	n=815	12%	3%	85%
<b>Boys</b>	n=417	12%	3%	84%
<b>Girls</b>	n=398	11%	2%	87%
<b>Ages 12-13</b>	n=316	11%	3%	86%
<b>Boys</b>	n=154	11%	3%	86%
<b>Girls</b>	n=162	11%	2%	87%
<b>Ages 14-15</b>	n=322	12%	3%	85%
<b>Boys</b>	n=162	13%	4%	83%
<b>Girls</b>	n=160	11%	2%	87%
<b>Age 16</b>	n=177	14%	1%	85%
<b>Boys</b>	n=101	14%	1%	84%
<b>Girls</b>	n=77	13%	2%	86%

Fig 30 | 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=97
<b>Told a parent/caregiver</b>	38%
<b>Blocked the person who sent the imagery</b>	32%
<b>Ignored the imagery</b>	32%
<b>Told a sibling/friend</b>	26%
<b>Told the person in the imagery</b>	23%
<b>Told a teacher/guidance counselor</b>	18%
<b>Reported it to the online platform</b>	14%
<b>Deleted the app</b>	4%
<b>Reshared the imagery with someone else</b>	0%
<b>Other</b>	9%

Question was multi-select.

“I thought it was shit, the boy fooled the girl and then tried to blackmail her. A friend and I told a teacher and he then informed the parents. There was a lot of trouble, but the guy who took the picture didn’t get expelled from school. Everyone thinks he is dishonorable and he was beaten up all the time. He had to take it all school year.”

12, BOY, GERMANY

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 German minors reported they believed the receiver of nude imagery has the right to reshare the imagery at their discretion (Fig 31). Another 4% of minors acknowledged they weren’t sure. Younger minors (aged 12-13), particularly younger boys (7%), were likelier to indicate they weren’t sure.

While the vast majority (94%) of German 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 nonconsensually reshared nudes, 1 in 4 (24%) minors ultimately identified blame with the victim whose imagery had been reshared (Fig 32). Minors’s perceptions of blame were consistent across age cohorts and genders.

**1 in 4**  
minors ultimately blame the victim of nonconsensually reshared imagery.

Fig 31 | 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
<b>All Minors</b>	n=815	2%	94%	4%
<b>Boys</b>	n=417	2%	93%	5%
<b>Girls</b>	n=398	2%	95%	3%
<b>Ages 12-13</b>	n=316	2%	92%	6%
<b>Boys</b>	n=154	2%	91%	7%
<b>Girls</b>	n=162	2%	94%	4%
<b>Ages 14-15</b>	n=322	2%	96%	3%
<b>Boys</b>	n=162	3%	94%	3%
<b>Girls</b>	n=160	1%	97%	2%
<b>Age 16</b>	n=177	1%	96%	3%
<b>Boys</b>	n=101	0%	96%	4%
<b>Girls</b>	n=77	3%	95%	1%

Fig 32 | 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)
<b>All Minors</b>	n=815	24%	13%	11%	76%	49%	26%
<b>Boys</b>	n=417	25%	13%	12%	75%	50%	25%
<b>Girls</b>	n=398	24%	13%	11%	76%	49%	27%
<b>Ages 12-13</b>	n=316	24%	14%	10%	76%	46%	30%
<b>Boys</b>	n=154	23%	14%	9%	77%	43%	34%
<b>Girls</b>	n=162	25%	14%	11%	75%	50%	25%
<b>Ages 14-15</b>	n=322	24%	12%	12%	76%	51%	25%
<b>Boys</b>	n=162	26%	15%	11%	74%	54%	20%
<b>Girls</b>	n=160	22%	10%	12%	78%	49%	29%
<b>Age 16</b>	n=177	26%	13%	14%	74%	51%	22%
<b>Boys</b>	n=101	28%	11%	17%	72%	53%	19%
<b>Girls</b>	n=77	24%	14%	10%	76%	50%	26%

# Responding to Risky Encounters

In conjunction with developing an understanding of the rates at which German 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 German minors with online-only contacts, 63% reported they had cut off contact with someone they only knew online (Fig 33). Minors' likelihood of ending contact with online-only contacts increased with age. Girls (68%) were likelier to report they had cut-off contact with an online-only contact than boys (60%). Younger boys, aged 12-13 (52%) were the least likely to indicate they had cut off contact with an online-only contact.

Among minors with online-only contacts, **63%** 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; 68% indicated they severed contact by blocking the other user (Fig 34). The use of a blocking tool was followed by ignoring the user (49%). Blocking as a method for cutting off contact was the only method found to increase with age.

Fewer than 1 in 10 (7%) German minors who have cut off contact with an online-only contact have reported the user to the platform. The likelihood of using a reporting feature was lowest among younger minors (aged 12-13) (4%). Given the different functions of blocking tools – designed to

Fig 33 | **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?

<b>All Minors</b>	n=576	63%
<b>Boys</b>	n=314	60%
<b>Girls</b>	n=262	68%
<b>Ages 12-13</b>	n=200	59%
<b>Boys</b>	n=103	52%
<b>Girls</b>	n=97	67%
<b>Ages 14-15</b>	n=247	63%
<b>Boys</b>	n=129	61%
<b>Girls</b>	n=118	66%
<b>Age 16</b>	n=128	70%
<b>Boys</b>	n=81	68%
<b>Girls</b>	n=48	72%

Percentages reflect participants who selected "yes."

Fig 34 | **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?

	<b>All Minors</b> n=364	<b>Ages 12-13</b> n=118	<b>Ages 14-15</b> n=157	<b>Age 16</b> n=89	<b>Boys</b> n=187	<b>Girls</b> n=177
<b>Blocked them</b>	68%	62%	68%	74%	65%	70%
<b>Ignored them</b>	49%	41%	55%	48%	50%	47%
<b>Told them to leave you alone</b>	25%	28%	26%	21%	23%	28%
<b>Muted them</b>	20%	19%	23%	16%	19%	21%
<b>Deleted the App</b>	8%	8%	11%	3%	11%	5%
<b>Reported them to the platform</b>	7%	4%	10%	7%	7%	8%
<b>Other</b>	2%	6%	1%	0%	2%	2%

Question was multi-select.



**Fig 35 | 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=364	Ages 12-13 n=118	Ages 14-15 n=157	Age 16 n=89	Boys n=187	Girls n=177
<b>Yes</b>	25%	32%	25%	16%	24%	26%
...on the same platform	15%	21%	15%	8%	16%	15%
...on a different platform	13%	14%	14%	9%	11%	15%
<b>No</b>	58%	55%	56%	66%	60%	56%
<b>Not sure</b>	17%	13%	19%	18%	16%	17%

A portion of this question was multi-select.

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: 1 in 4 (25%) German 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 (15%) or on a different platform (13%) (Fig 35). Notably, the experience of recontacts appeared to decrease with age: minors aged 12-13 (32%) were the most likely to indicate they had had a recontact experience.

**1 in 4**

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 5**

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

**Fig 36 | 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=203	Ages 12-13 n=78	Ages 14-15 n=87	Age 16 n=37	Boys n=98	Girls n=105
<b>Yes</b>	22%	25%	17%	25%	26%	18%
<b>Prefer not to say</b>	4%	4%	4%	3%	5%	3%
<b>No</b>	74%	70%	79%	71%	69%	79%

Concerningly, among minors who have felt uncomfortable while messaging with an online-only contact, 1 in 5 (22%) reported they did not cut off contact and, instead, remained in contact with the user who made them feel uncomfortable (Fig 36). Boys (26%\*) were more likely than girls (18%) to indicate they remained in contact with the problematic user.



## Responding to Online Sexual Interactions

Overall, the highest rates of response types to online sexual interactions were blocking the user (72%), ignoring the situation (46%), and reporting the user (32%) (Fig 37).

“Sometimes guys write to me and want to get to know me, but it’s often about sexual things. Then I delete it and don’t answer anymore.”

**15, GIRL, GERMANY**

Among minors who indicated they had had an online sexual interaction, minors were four 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 (20%). Minors who had an online sexual interaction were also twice as likely to indicate they responded to the experience by ignoring the interaction (46%) compared to seeking offline help (20%). Notably, the likelihood for a minor who had an online sexual interaction to indicate they had sought offline support from their parents increased substantially between the ages of 12-13 (9%\*) and 14-15 (17%\*). However, it’s important to recognize base sizes were small (n=76).

In general, girls were more likely to respond to the online sexual interactions they experienced; girls were more likely than boys to block the other user (77% v. 66%\*) and report the other user (38% v. 26%\*). They were also more than twice as likely to tell a parent (20% v. 8%\*). Comparatively, boys were more likely than girls to indicate they responded

2x

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

4x

Minors were 4 times more likely to use an online safety tool in response to an online sexual interaction than they were to seek support offline.

by ignoring the interaction (51%\* v. 42%) or by muting the other user (28%\* v. 20%).

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 (30%), feeling like the experience wasn’t a big deal (28%), and fear of getting in trouble with their family (26%) (Fig 38). There was minor variation in these concerns by specific online sexual interaction type.

Minors who indicated they did not report their online sexual interaction to the platform were subsequently asked why they did not report the interaction. The leading reasons minors chose not to report their experience to a platform were consistent across different interaction types: they felt embarrassed (30%), they felt it wasn’t important enough (23%), and they were worried they would get in trouble with their family (19%) (Fig 39). Eighteen percent of minors who did not report their online sexual interaction indicated it was because they were worried the other user would harm them. Another 17% indicated it was because they didn’t think the platform would do anything.

Opportunity exists to increase disclosure and reporting rates via online tools and offline communities. In fact, a majority of German 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 (69%) anticipated they would use a platform reporting tool (Fig 40) and slightly more than half (56%) believed they would turn to an offline support system (Fig 41). However, in reality, the actual rates of minors using such disclosure methods were significantly lower. Among minors who had an online sexual interaction, only 32% reported the user to the platform, and only 20% disclosed to a peer, caregiver, or other trusted adult.

Fig 37 | **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=192	Ages 12-13 n=76	Ages 14-15 n=76	Age 16 n=41	Boys n=91	Girls n=101
<b>Online action</b>	81%	75%	86%	83%	76%	85%
...blocked the user	72%	62%	77%	80%	66%	77%
...reported the user to the platform	32%	32%	37%	24%	26%	38%
...muted the user	24%	23%	26%	20%	28%	20%
<b>Offline action</b>	20%	18%	19%	24%	16%	23%
...parent or guardian	14%	9%	17%	18%	8%	20%
...other trusted adult (e.g. uncle, aunt, family friend)	8%	6%	8%	12%	7%	9%
...teacher, guidance counselor, or someone at school	4%	3%	2%	7%	4%	3%
...friend	8%	7%	10%	6%	6%	9%
...sibling	4%	3%	5%	6%	4%	5%
...police officer	3%	3%	1%	6%	3%	3%
...hotline	3%	5%	2%	0%	5%	1%
...someone else	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
<b>Ignored it</b>	46%	46%	45%	50%	51%	42%
<b>Deleted the app</b>	12%	14%	11%	9%	13%	10%
<b>Other</b>	8%	6%	8%	11%	8%	7%
<b>Prefer not to say</b>	1%	2%	1%	0%	2%	1%

Question was multi-select.

Fig 38 | **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=192	...sent me sexual messages n=99	...asked me to send a nude photo or video n=82	...shared a nude photo or video of themselves with me n=43	...asked me to go 'on cam' with a nude or sexually explicit stream n=30	...shared a nude photo or video of another child with me n=26
<b>Felt embarrassed and worried of being judged</b>	30%	26%	36%	18%	25%	33%
<b>Felt it wasn't a big deal</b>	28%	34%	22%	48%	29%	12%
<b>Worried about getting in trouble with your family</b>	26%	23%	26%	25%	44%	28%
<b>Worried your report would not be anonymous</b>	23%	16%	21%	14%	35%	25%
<b>Worried you wouldn't be allowed to use a platform</b>	22%	20%	22%	17%	23%	15%
<b>Felt like you were to blame</b>	19%	18%	12%	17%	20%	25%
<b>Worried you'd get bullied at school</b>	15%	13%	9%	12%	23%	15%
<b>Worried about getting in trouble with your school</b>	13%	10%	12%	4%	28%	13%
<b>Worried about police involvement</b>	12%	9%	7%	6%	28%	12%
<b>Worried you'd lose friends</b>	8%	7%	9%	4%	3%	16%
<b>Other</b>	10%	10%	12%	17%	0%	4%

Question was multi-select.

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 more likely to overestimate their likelihood of telling their parents about an online sexual interaction. While 48% of boys who did not have an online sexual experience anticipated they would tell a parent, only 8%\* of boys who had an online sexual experience did.

Fig 39 | **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=192	...asked me to send a nude photo or video n=88	...sent me sexual messages n=67	...shared a nude photo or video of themselves with me n=36
<b>Felt embarrassed</b>	30%	40%	32%	26%
<b>Felt it wasn't important enough to report</b>	23%	29%	19%	24%
<b>Worried about getting in trouble with your family</b>	19%	20%	25%	20%
<b>Worried the person would harm you</b>	18%	19%	19%	7%
<b>Didn't think the platform would do anything</b>	17%	19%	15%	3%
<b>Worried your report would not be anonymous</b>	16%	15%	12%	15%
<b>Worried the person would find you in real life</b>	14%	10%	17%	7%
<b>Felt like you were to blame</b>	14%	11%	12%	18%
<b>Worried the person would find you on another platform</b>	13%	14%	13%	12%
<b>Worried about restrictions being placed on your account</b>	12%	10%	17%	12%
<b>Worried the person would retaliate against your friends/family</b>	10%	9%	5%	5%
<b>Worried about being banned from the platform</b>	10%	12%	11%	7%
<b>Worried about police involvement</b>	9%	10%	6%	7%
<b>Worried about getting in trouble with your school</b>	7%	3%	4%	7%
<b>Worried the person would reshared nudes they had of you</b>	7%	5%	6%	8%
<b>Other</b>	6%	7%	8%	20%

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 40 | **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=810	Actually did n=192	Say they would n=316	Actually did n=76	Say they would n=317	Actually did n=76	Say they would n=177	Actually did n=41	Say they would n=415	Actually did n=90	Say they would n=395	Actually did n=101
<b>Online action</b>	92%	81%	88%	75%	95%	86%	96%	83%	93%	76%	91%	85%
...block the user	86%	72%	80%	62%	91%	77%	90%	80%	86%	66%	87%	77%
...report the user to the platform	69%	32%	64%	32%	73%	37%	72%	24%	69%	26%	70%	38%
...mute the user	39%	24%	38%	23%	39%	26%	40%	20%	41%	28%	36%	20%
<b>Ignored it</b>	46%	46%	47%	46%	45%	45%	45%	50%	49%	51%	43%	42%
<b>Deleted the app</b>	20%	12%	21%	14%	20%	11%	20%	9%	25%	13%	16%	10%

Question was multi-select.

Fig 41 | **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 had it

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=810	Actually did n=192	Say they would n=316	Actually did n=76	Say they would n=317	Actually did n=76	Say they would n=177	Actually did n=41	Say they would n=415	Actually did n=91	Say they would n=395	Actually did n=101
<b>Offline action</b>	56%	20%	62%	18%	54%	19%	51%	24%	54%	16%	59%	23%
...parent or guardian	51%	14%	56%	9%	48%	17%	47%	18%	48%	8%	54%	20%
...other trusted adult (e.g. uncle, aunt, family friend)	22%	8%	24%	6%	21%	8%	18%	12%	20%	7%	24%	9%
...teacher, guidance counselor, or someone at school	15%	4%	17%	3%	14%	2%	12%	7%	12%	4%	17%	3%
...friend	19%	8%	18%	7%	19%	10%	21%	6%	17%	6%	22%	9%
...sibling	10%	4%	12%	3%	10%	5%	7%	6%	7%	4%	13%	5%
...police officer	21%	3%	17%	3%	23%	1%	26%	6%	20%	3%	23%	3%
...hotline	7%	3%	6%	5%	9%	2%	7%	0%	7%	5%	7%	1%

Question was multi-select.

# Discussion

German 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 German 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 Germany on the risks they're navigating online and highlights opportunities to support them better.

**German 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, 44% say some of those contacts are other users they believe to be aged 18 or older, including 1 in 4 12-13-year-olds.

German 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.

“I found content on social networks and platforms that should not be allowed as it is an online service that many teenagers and children use.”

**14, BOY, GERMANY**

“My mother always locked or unlocked apps on my phone by age. This often upset me because my friends were always allowed to do more. When I was online on sites like this for the first few times, I was contacted often and quickly.”

15, GIRL, GERMANY

**German youth are encountering non-consensual sexual interactions online at concerning rates.** Twelve percent of all German youth surveyed said they have been shown another child’s nonconsensually reshared SG-CSAM, while among minors who’ve been contacted online by someone they’ve never previously interacted with 41% have received a cold solicitation request for nudes, including 1 in 2 12-13-year-old boys who’ve had such contacts.

Evolving use of technology and the rise of online socialization and sexual exploration have introduced new types of risk into young people’s lives. Bad actors leverage all areas of the internet to target, harass, and exploit minors. For too many, receiving unsolicited requests for nudes has simply become an expected part of being online.

Sadly, the potential to have a harmful online sexual interaction is not isolated to strangers. While technology has opened new avenues for sexual exploration, such as sharing flirty text messages or intimate images, it has also created new forms of abusive behaviors among young people, including by other youth who were previously friends or romantic partners. Today, the non-consensual resharing of nudes is used to embarrass, bully, and sextort young people, even by other minors themselves.

Acknowledging that technology now plays a role in the development of young people is a first step towards empowering kids to recognize the risks and potential outcomes they may face, and how to navigate those experiences safely. Sexual health education conversations must evolve to acknowledge the novel risks presented by digital spaces and communications, equipping young people with an understanding of the risks associated with new types of exploration and flirtation. Critically, these conversations must also educate young people about the impacts of engaging in nonconsensual resharing behavior, emphasizing how the behavior is not the victim’s fault, is a violation of the victim’s privacy, and carries real life harm.

“I looked at it with friends. I think it’s pretty stupid if you make such videos of yourself. I wouldn’t do that, it would be too stupid for me. You have to expect something like that.”

16, BOY, GERMANY

**Despite awareness of online risks such as grooming and experiences with unwanted online sexual interactions, many youth choose not to cut off contact when another user makes them feel uncomfortable.** Forty-six percent of minors think online grooming is a common experience for other kids online. Nevertheless, among minors who have felt uncomfortable while messaging with an online-only contact 1 in 5 remained in contact with the problematic user.

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, nor is it enough to ensure they break off contact if they begin feeling uncomfortable in a conversation with an online contact. 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 and exit strategies 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.

"There should be social media for my age group, where it is checked that they are really children."

**13, BOY, GERMANY**

"The Internet can be very dangerous. There should be a lot more information about it."

**14, BOY, GERMANY**

**When trying to address risky online interactions, German youth encounter social and technical challenges that shape and hinder their disclosure process.** Minors who've had an online sexual interaction were 2 to 3.5x as likely to respond by blocking the user than they were to report the user or confide in someone they trust offline. Among those who did not report an online sexual interaction they experienced, 1 in 3 cited embarrassment as the reason they didn't report, 1 in 4 said it was because they didn't think it was important enough to report, and 1 in 6 said they didn't think the platform would do anything in response.

The decision to disclose is a challenging one for those who have experienced a risky or dangerous situation. Feelings of shame and a fear of consequences not only delay many disclosures, but, for some, prevent them from happening at all. Often, those seeking support face judgmental questions rather than

receiving initial reassurance that they are victims deserving of help and support. Societal attitudes contribute to barriers for both girls and boys, resulting in the underreporting of experiences and a tendency for victims to try to handle risky situations on their own.

Data shows strong use of online blocking tools by minors experiencing potentially harmful online interactions. However, while blocking provides some defense against online abuse, it does not trigger the same trust and safety workflows tied to higher levels of protection such as human review to assess the nature of the complaint, removal of bad actors from a platform, or referrals to child protection hotlines or law enforcement. Young people view reporting as more punitive, have concerns about the privacy of the process, and aren't confident that their use of the tool will effectively stop the harassment and abuse they're experiencing. 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. While blocking is a valuable layer of defense, more work is needed to increase the adoption of reporting tools among young users to ensure they have the strongest defenses available to them. Platforms can enhance the visibility of reporting features, especially during user onboarding and in higher-risk areas like private messaging windows.

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, effective online safety tools that meet young people where they are, and cutting edge technologies that prevent harm and abuse.

“There are too many sick people in this world. Such people should be banned immediately. Every message should be checked.”

**16, GIRL, GERMANY**

“Major social media should do a better job of protecting minors.”

**12, GIRL, GERMANY**



# 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. This includes applying 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 them 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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