

# SAFE & SOUND



VOL . 01

Welcome to Best Foot Forward's safeguarding newsletter, bringing you the latest insights on current safeguarding topics and educational legislation. Let's take a look at what's new and unfolding in this constantly changing landscape!

## ONLINE SAFETY AND VIRTUAL REALITY HEADSETS

Whilst the risks of online safety have always been there, there are always new and emerging online activities to be aware of and it is important that as educators and parents we keep stepping up our digital game. This article highlights the latest things to be aware of.

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THE IMPACT OF ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES IS GREATER THAN YOU MAY KNOW.

## ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES (ACES)

Many young people experience anxiety and quite often their behaviour can be attributed to ACES. If you're looking to familiarise yourself with more of an understanding of ACES and the impact of this, this post is a must-read.

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# ONLINE SAFETY

As parents and teachers we have a responsibility to ensure that our children are safe when online but this is increasingly more challenging as bullying grooming and sexual exploitation of children can and does take place in increasingly disguised and subtle ways through a variety of apps – snapchat, Tik-Tok, Instagram, Facebook and via online gaming, where it is easy for abusers to disguise themselves as children. It is extremely difficult to stay on top of this, and to protect children and to keep up to date with advances in technology and ways that children can be harmed and exploited whilst online.



Below are some extracts and facts from various sources and agencies including the NCPCC, 'mums net', BBC interviews and Social Work journals, that we hope might be helpful.



'Whilst they can be a great way for friends to socialise, online games like Roblox that allow multiplayer gameplay with strangers are always fraught with a variety of dangers that can expose children to inappropriate or harmful content. Roblox enables people to play anonymously, which can often be something that attracts people to misuse the game and potentially put young people at risk of harm. In addition to interacting with random strangers across the world, other factors such as in-game purchases and potential scams can also pose a financial risk. It's important that parents and educators remain aware of the risks associated with this popular title and how it can be used safely. " **Keep your children off Roblox if you are worried**", CEO tells parents.

'The chief executive of global gaming platform Roblox has said parents who are worried about the game should not let their children use it. The site, popular among children aged 8 - 12, has recently been hit by claims of some youngsters being exposed to harmful content through its games. CEO Dave Baszucki told the BBC the company is making sure its users are protected and said millions have 'amazing experiences; on the site.

**'For those who are not aware of this website - (many of you will be) children's use of Roblox and Fortnite, as well as other popular games and the online risks of grooming via this platform and children viewing inappropriate material is a very hot topic on [www.mumsnet.com](http://www.mumsnet.com) providing the opportunity to see other parents experiences, concerns and how they are dealing with it'**



# EXTRACTS FROM CASPAR (NSPCC)

Internet Matters' annual "Children's Wellbeing in a Digital World Index" reveals there has been no reduction in children's experiences of harm online, and that children in the UK are finding it harder to navigate and recover from the challenges of the digital world.

The survey shows that two in five parents believe that excessive time online is negatively affecting their child's health, and that the impacts of harm are becoming worse, with parents reporting children feeling increasingly distressed when they encounter graphic content online.

Over a quarter of children (27%) have been contacted by strangers, around one in five have encountered violent content (22%), and more than 4 in 10 children have encountered false information.

Parents remain concerned about the impact of screen time on their children's physical and mental wellbeing. There has also been a doubling in the number of parents reporting how seeing unhealthy body image or eating habits content online has had a negative impact on their children.

However, the survey also reveals parents are stepping up their digital game and are becoming more aware of their children's online activities, including what they do online, the games they play, the websites and apps they visit, and who they are interacting with.



## CHILDREN'S WELLBEING IN A DIGITAL WORLD

The survey with parents and children of 1,054 families in the UK is the fourth annual Internet Matters Index, tracking the impact of digital technology on children's physical, social, emotional, and developmental wellbeing and family life. The Index highlights both the positive impacts of the internet and tech devices on children and families as well as areas of concern.

Today's report shows that over the past year, both the positive and negative aspects of the online world have intensified for children and families, creating increasingly divided experiences.

The survey's results reveal a growing sense of unease among children and parents, with the distress caused by online harms impacting on children's safety and wellbeing. It also highlights how parents are noticing a rise in harms affecting their children and their concerns that these harms are having a greater negative impact.



[HTTPS://WWW.INTERNETMATTERS.ORG/HUB/RESEARCH/CHILDRENS-WELLBEING-IN-A-DIGITAL-WORLD-INDEX-REPORT-2025/](https://www.internetmatters.org/hub/research/childrens-wellbeing-in-a-digital-world-index-report-2025/)

# KEY FINDINGS FROM 2025 INDEX

- The impact of the internet on wellbeing has become more extreme. Both the positive and negative impacts of time online have increased over the last year.
- Experiences of harm remain stubbornly high, and children's emotional resilience seems to be weakening. There has been a rise in children choosing to avoid certain platforms because of negative interactions (26% cf. 21% in 2023) and upsetting experiences. This suggests they may be feeling less resilient to the challenges of online spaces.
- Fewer children feel safe online. While three quarters (77%) of children still feel safe online, this has dropped over the last year (81%). Fewer children say they feel consistently safe and more report only feeling safe occasionally.
- Parents remain concerned about the impact of screen time on their children's physical wellbeing. Nearly two-fifths (38%) now believe the internet negatively affects their child's health, a concern that has grown for the second year in a row.
- The positive impacts of being online still outweigh the negatives across all four dimensions of children's wellbeing. Children feel that the internet is far more important for various aspects of their social lives than last year, with more children seeing the internet and technology as important for finding supportive communities (50% this year cf. 44% in 2023), meeting good friends (56% cf. 50%) and participating in events (69% cf. 63%).
- Online harms are more upsetting for children. Two-thirds (67%) of children say they experience harm online. Whilst this remains in line with children's experiences in previous years, children report finding many of these experiences more upsetting or frightening this year.
- Parents feel the impacts of harm are getting worse. Parents think encountering graphic violent content has a more negative impact compared to last year (31% cf. 18%). Similarly, they feel that content promoting unhealthy body image or eating habits is more distressing to their children (27% cf. 13%).
- The most prevalent harm this year is exposure to false information, encountered by 41% of children. Additionally, over a quarter (27%) have been contacted by strangers, around one in five have encountered violent content (22%) and a similar number have experienced receiving bullying, abusive, or upsetting messages and comments from people they don't know (19%).
- Vulnerable\* children face growing social and emotional strain online. The negative indexes for this group have now risen to their highest ever level since our first Index was published four years ago. Vulnerable children are having more upsetting experiences, such as bullying online.
- Parents are stepping up their digital game: Over the last three years, parents have become more aware of their children's online activities, including what they do online, the games they play, apps they visit, and who they are interacting with.
- A growing number of parents now consider themselves stricter about their children's technology use and online time and are using tools and controls to manage time spent online. Parents in the highest socio-economic group are far more likely to manage their children's online behaviour (23%) compared to those in the lowest socio-economic group (11%).

[HTTPS://WWW.INTERNETMATTERS.ORG/HUB/RESEARCH/CHILDRENS-WELLBEING-IN-A-DIGITAL-WORLD-INDEX-REPORT-2025/](https://www.internetmatters.org/hub/research/childrens-wellbeing-in-a-digital-world-index-report-2025/)





# VIRTUAL REALITY HEADSETS

[HTTPS://WWW.DIGITALPARENTINGCOACH.COM/BLOG/VR-SAFETY-GUIDE](https://www.digitalparentingcoach.com/blog/vr-safety-guide)



VR headsets are becoming increasingly accessible and popular but also present an ideal medium for sexual predators and adults intent on grooming children. Below are some of the findings of a BBC researcher who posed online as a 13 year old girl who entered a virtual strip club where she saw adult men chase a child while telling them to remove their clothes. In many of the rooms Sherwood visited, she frequently saw condoms and sex toys on display, and on one occasion even saw a group of adult men and minors simulating group sex. She also saw instances of grooming:

**"It's very uncomfortable, and your options are to stay and watch, move on to another room where you might see something similar, or join in — which, on many occasions, I was instructed to do"** she said. A player who was interviewed said as part of this research **"The amount of 'people' around the age of 30 attempting to do stuff like flirting, all the way to trying to have e-sex with clearly underage users is alarming!"**.

This is a subject we will regularly return to in our newsletter and will share any new research, advice or alerts that come to our attention.

As a general rule we would advise that where possible it is better when gaming or on the internet for children to be in an open setting such as a living room rather than behind a closed door in a bedroom, that age appropriate controls are activated and that devices are either disabled or moved to a different room at night as during the hours when parents are asleep is a prime time for online predators to be active.

## VR AGE LIMITS

**"Is Your Child Safe in Social VR?"**



Generally speaking, VR headsets aren't suitable for children under the age of about 12-13. This is for several reasons, including physical, emotional, and developmental. Amongst other concerns, VR devices have the potential to cause eye and neck strain as well as motion sickness in users. There is also limited research into the long-term effects of VR use for young children, which is another contributing factor to age restrictions. Age limits can differ depending on the device, so it's worth checking the packaging and the manufacturer's information before allowing your child to use a VR product.

# ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES (ACES)

## Abuse



Physical Abuse



Sexual Abuse



Verbal Abuse

## Neglect



Emotional Neglect



Physical Neglect

## Growing up in a household where:



There are adults with alcohol and drug use problems



There are adults with mental health problems



There is domestic violence



There are adults who have spent time in prison



Parents have separated

**Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)** are "highly stressful, and potentially traumatic, events or situations that occur during childhood and/or adolescence. They can be a single event, or prolonged threats to, and breaches of, the young person's safety, security, trust or bodily integrity." (*Young Minds, 2018*)

## Some of the effects of ACEs on our physical and mental health are:

- An increase in the risk of certain health problems in adulthood, such as cancer and heart disease, as well as increasing the risk of mental health difficulties, violence and becoming a victim of violence.
- An increase in the risk of mental health problems, such as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress. 1 in 3 diagnosed mental health conditions in adulthood directly relate to ACEs.

- The longer an individual experiences an ACEs and the more ACEs someone experiences, the bigger the impact it will have on their development and their health.

## Some of the other things exposure to ACEs can impact, are:

- The ability to recognise and manage different emotions.
- The capacity to make and keep healthy friendships and other relationships.
- The ability to manage behaviour in school settings.
- Difficulties coping with emotions safely without causing harm to self or others.

It is important for our tutors and mentors at **Best Foot Forward** that we have some knowledge of our Young Peoples past experiences even if not all the detail so that we can be aware of potential trigger subjects or settings and understand some of the context.