

# SURVEY OF CANADIAN PARENTS ON TECHNOLOGY AND ELECTRONIC BULLYING



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A nationally representative sample of Canadian parents with children between the ages of 8 to 17 completed an online survey assessing their experiences with technology, as well as their children's online bullying and victimization experiences. The results indicated that:

- Canadian youth are “plugged in”. About 44% of youth spend between 1 and 3 hours online every day, with boys and older youth being more likely to spend more time online. On average, youth have access to 3 different types of electronic devices (e.g., cell phones, personal computers, gaming consoles), and have 2 different types of social media accounts.
- Parents are concerned about their children's technology use, particularly around the content their child is exposed to online (64% of parents) and time spent online (58% of parents). They also report concerns about who their child interacts with online (50% of parents) and what their child is doing online (46% of parents).
- Parents have conflicting attitudes towards technology use. While most parents find it beneficial for their children when used properly (96%), they agree that technology negatively affects youth (59%). Most parents believe that life was easier before technology and devices became popular (62%) and that parenting has become more difficult because of technology and social media (70%).
- Parents are confident about their ability to use electronic media (86%) and endorsed high levels of skill in a number of different areas (e.g., using mobile devices and apps, using social media, surfing the web, managing privacy settings, etc.).
- When it comes to their child's online use and safety, parents prefer to talk to their child about what they do online (53%) rather than using technical software or tools to track or block their child's online use (20%) or to going online with their child (25%).
- Cyberbullying is at the forefront of parents' minds. Seventy-six percent of parents reported they have spoken with their child about cyberbullying by the time he/she is 12 years old. Almost half of parents are concerned that their child is being cyberbullied (46%), but only 10% of parents report knowing that their child has been cyberbullied. Upon learning that their child has been cyberbullied, parents often speak directly with their child about cyberbullying to educate and give tips on how to prevent cyberbullying (65%) and how to cope (63%). Some parents choose to take unhelpful actions such as limiting their child's social media use (14%) or time online (19%). A smaller proportion of parents report that they ignore the cyberbullying (5%), threaten the person bullying their child (3%), or bully back (2%).

**Technology use and cyberbullying in youth is an area of concern for Canadian parents. We need to support parents in supporting their kids online.**

## INTRODUCTION

There is no question that youth grow up in a digitally connected world. According to a recent national survey of students in Grade 4 through 11, nearly all Canadian youth (99%) are able to connect online outside of school (Steeves, 2014). Youth often have unsupervised access to mobile and portable devices (e.g., smartphones, tablets, etc.), and use the Internet for entertainment, connecting with others, and as a source of information. As technology use and access to online content and devices become more wide-spread, parents are increasingly concerned about the potential consequences and opportunities associated with digital device use. As adolescence is a crucial time for emotional, physical, and social development, it is important to understand how parents can be involved in and manage their children's online behaviours to promote positive digital citizenship.

Parents play a critical role in youth's technology behaviours by enabling access to different types of technology (i.e., devices and accounts), providing coaching and feedback on how to behave online, and/or being gatekeepers of the content to which their child is exposed. Parents may have household rules about children's online activities, including rules about for how long or where they can use devices, who the child can chat with online, which sites they are allowed access to, and how to treat others while online – particularly for children and younger adolescents. However, we know little about how Canadian parents manage their children's technology use. We need to learn more about how parents carry out or enforce household rules about technology (e.g., time spent online, devices they are allowed access to, etc.), as well as about the attitudes or concerns that parents have regarding technology and Internet use. In doing so, we will be able to identify gaps in our current understanding of parents' needs and target key areas of concern when developing materials or training for parents.

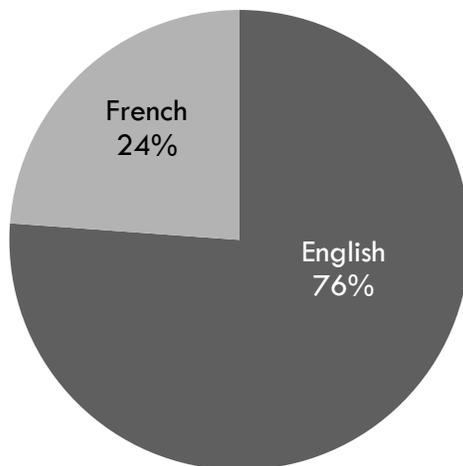
Finally, cyberbullying in youth is a great area of concern for many parents, schools, and communities. It is associated with a number of negative consequences in youth – for all youth involved (i.e., those who bully others, those who are victimized, those who witness bullying, and those who defend others). Although we know how frequently cyberbullying occurs based on youth reports, we have a more limited understanding about parents' knowledge of their children's cyberbullying experiences. There is a need to learn more about to what extent parents are aware of their child's negative online experiences, what their attitudes towards cyberbullying are, and how parents help their child cope with cyberbullying incidents in order to provide parents with the knowledge and tools to best support their child.

The goals of this report are to understand Canadian parents' understanding, attitudes, and concerns about: 1) their children's access to technology use; 2) their own technology use and how it relates to parenting practices; and 3) cyberbullying in youth. We hope the findings can be used to inform future education and intervention efforts to keep Canadians safe online.

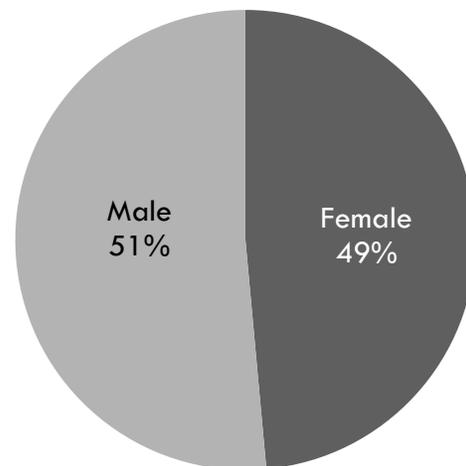
## 1. RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

998 parents participated in the survey.

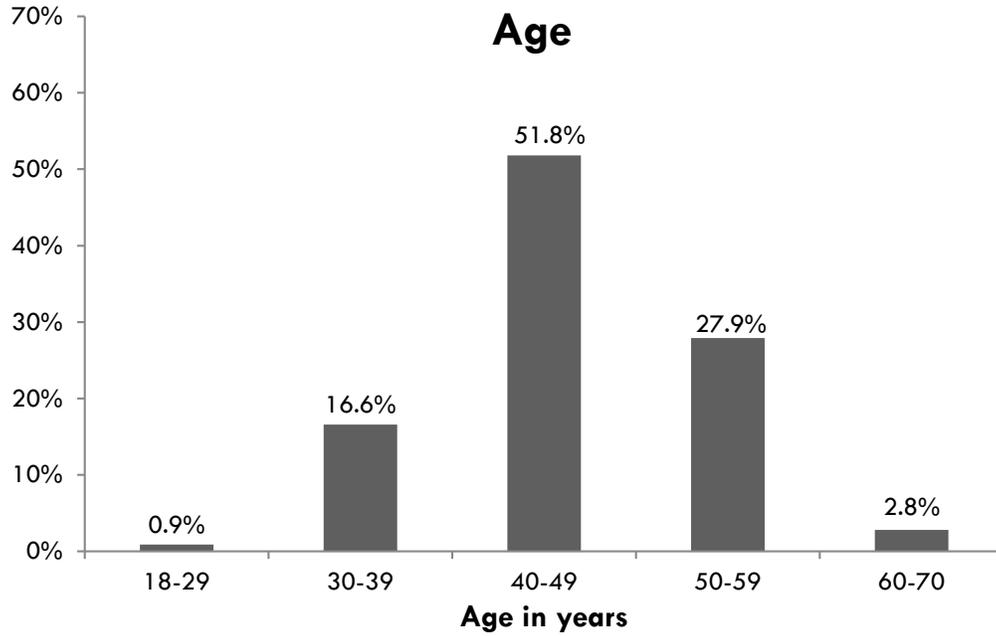
### Language



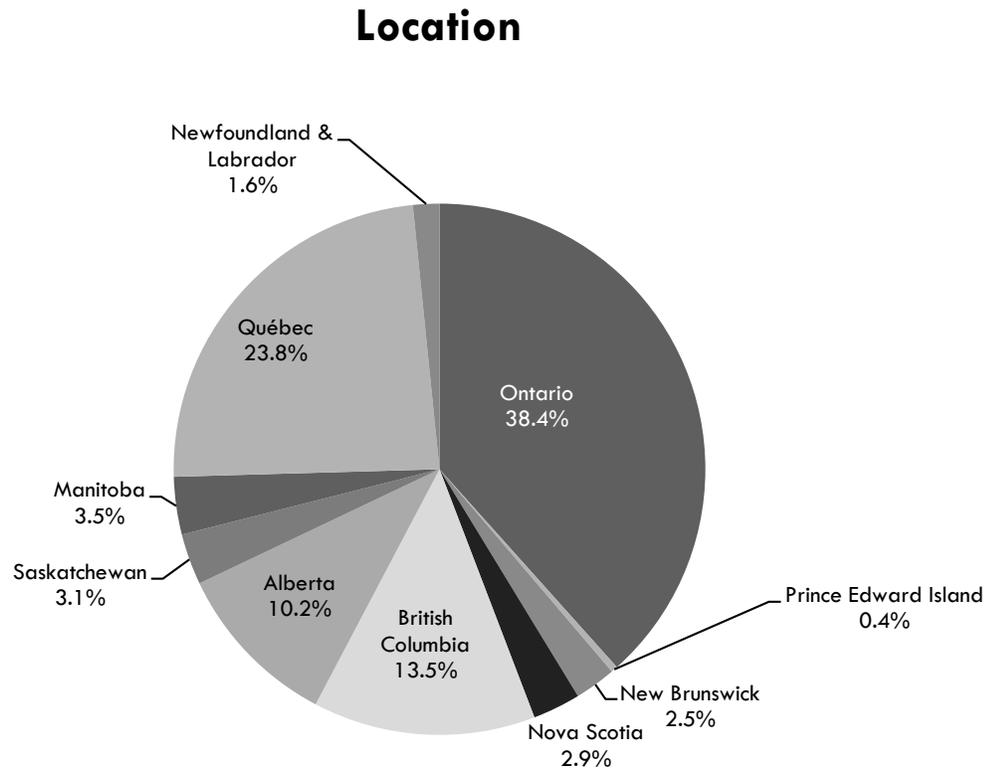
### Gender



Participants ranged in age from 18 years to 70 years. 517 (51.8%) were in the 40 to 49-year-old range.

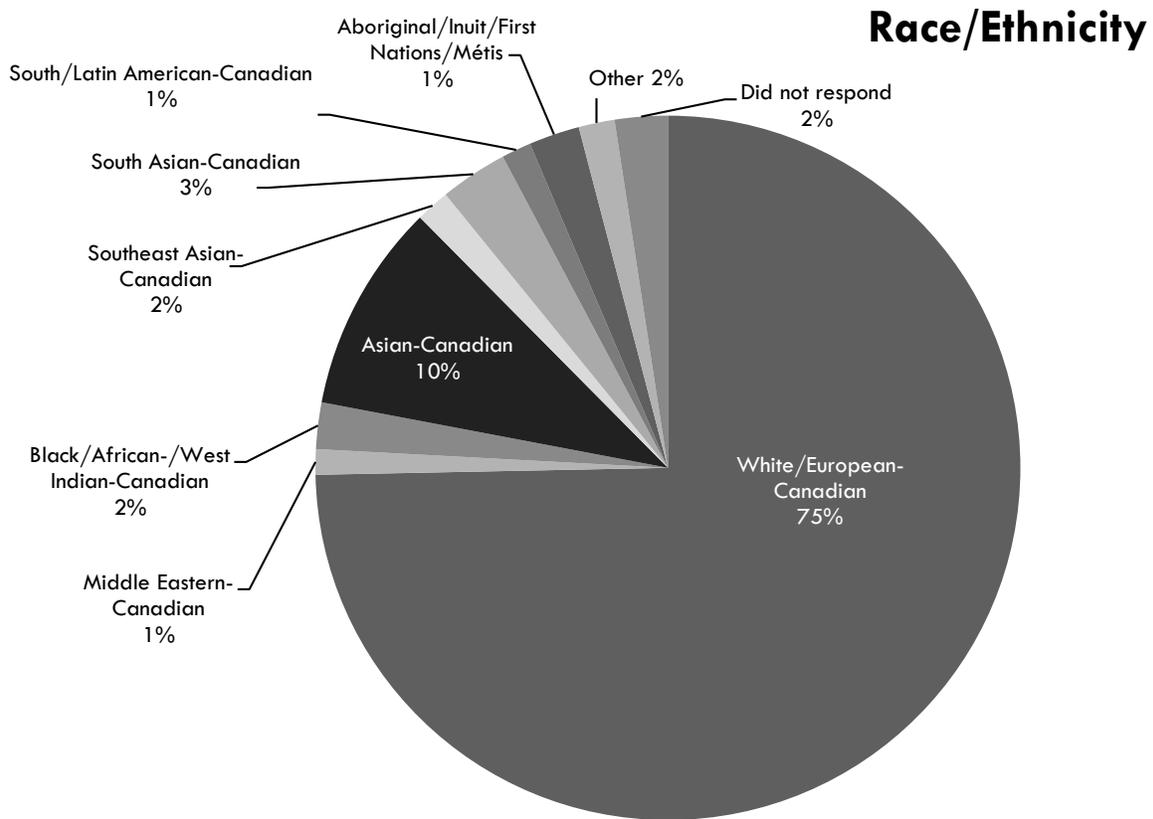


Participants were selected to be representative of the geographic distribution of Canada's population. All 10 provinces were represented.



Province	% of Canadian population <sup>1</sup>	% of current sample
British Columbia	13.1	13.5
Alberta	10.9	10.2
Saskatchewan	3.1	3.1
Manitoba	3.6	3.5
Ontario	38.4	38.4
Québec	23.6	23.8
New Brunswick	2.2	2.5
Nova Scotia	2.8	2.9
Prince Edward Island	.4	.4
Newfoundland & Labrador	1.5	1.6

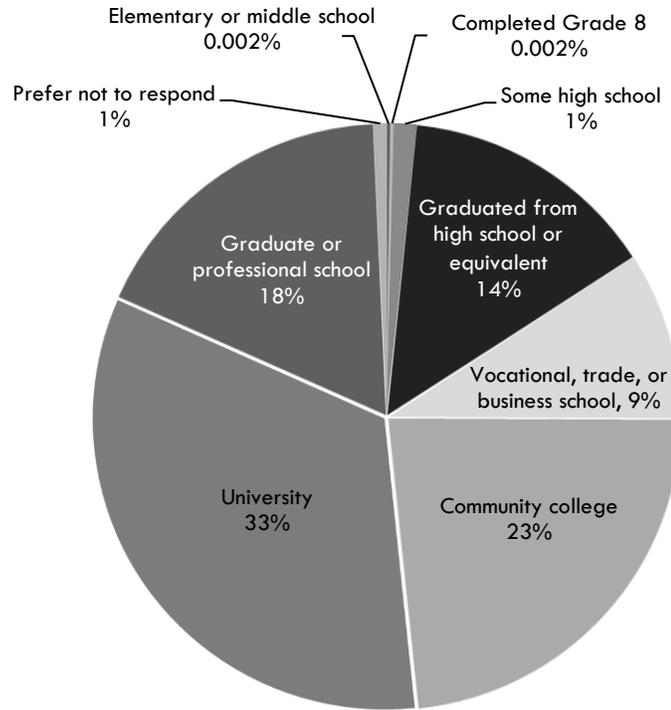
Participants were asked to self-identify their race or ethnicity. They were able to select as many identities as they desired. Three-quarters of the sample identified as White/European-Canadian.



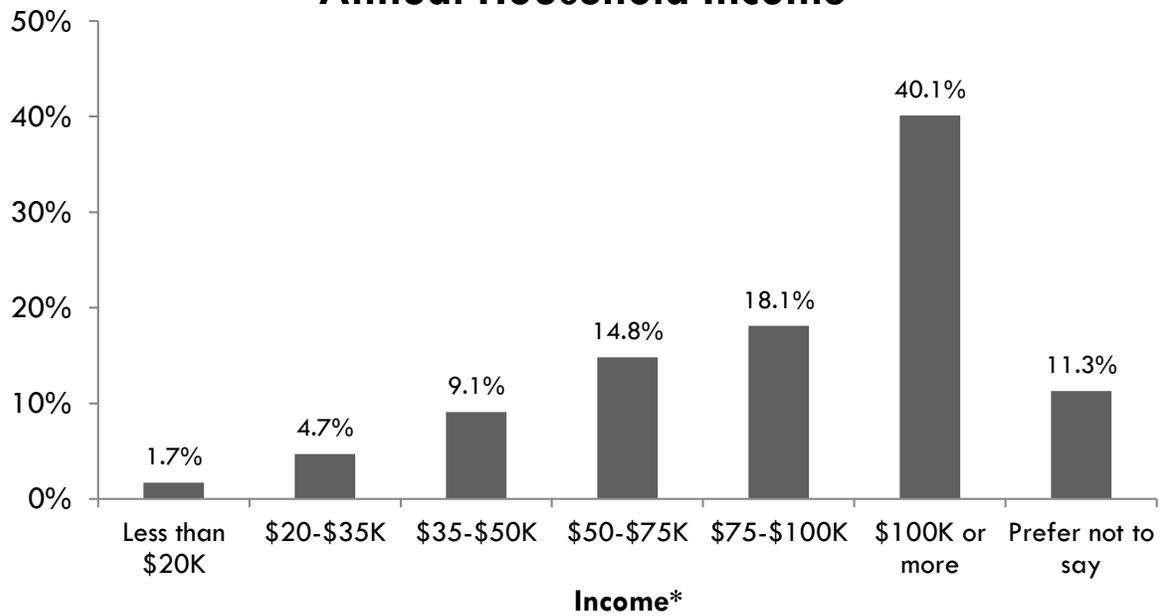
<sup>1</sup> Based on 2011 Canadian census data.

Participants were asked to answer questions about their education and household income.

### Highest level of education completed



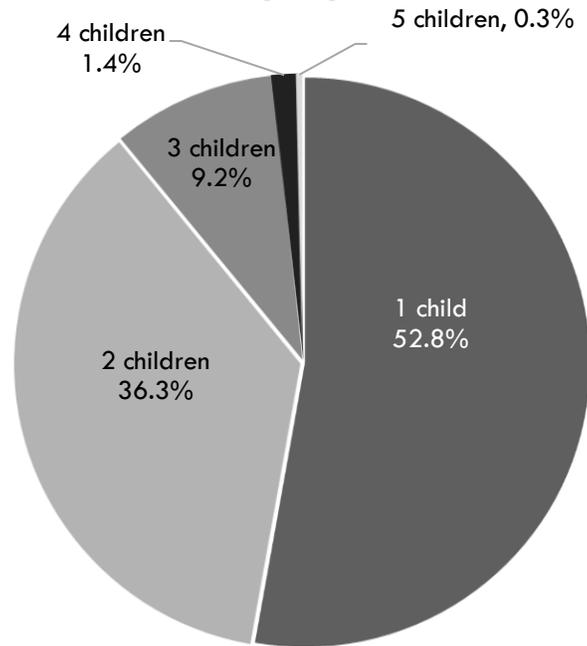
### Annual Household Income



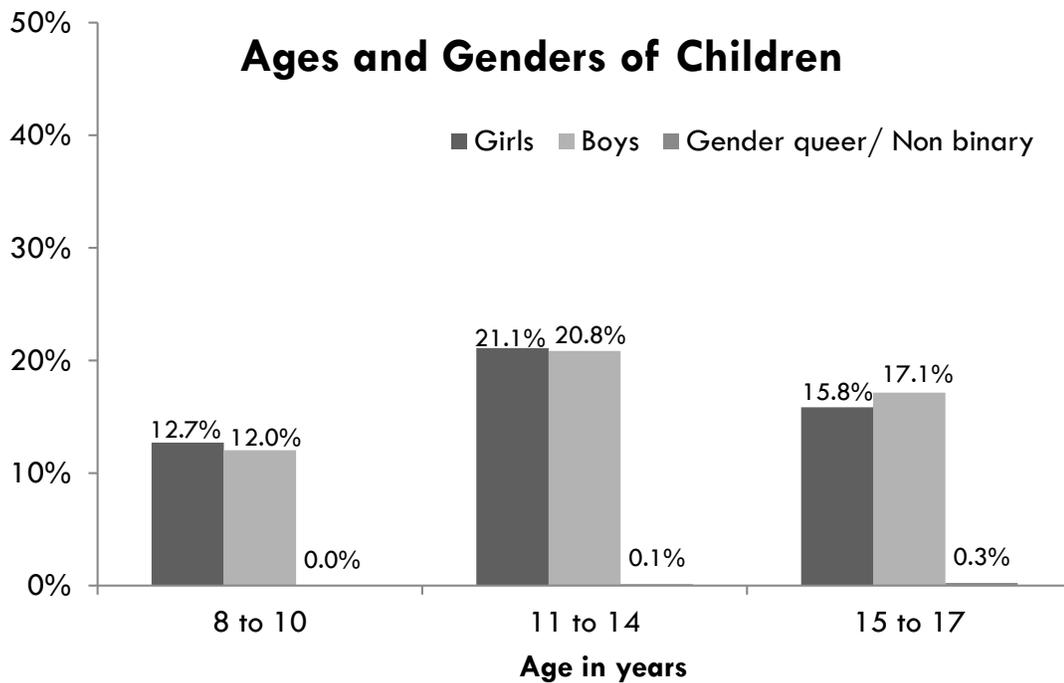
\*K=thousand

Participants were asked how many children, between ages 8-17, they were personally involved in caring for as a parent or guardian. The majority of participants reported having 1 (52.8%) or 2 (36.3%) children in their care. As well, participants were asked about the ages and genders of each of the children in their care.

### Number of Children in the Home



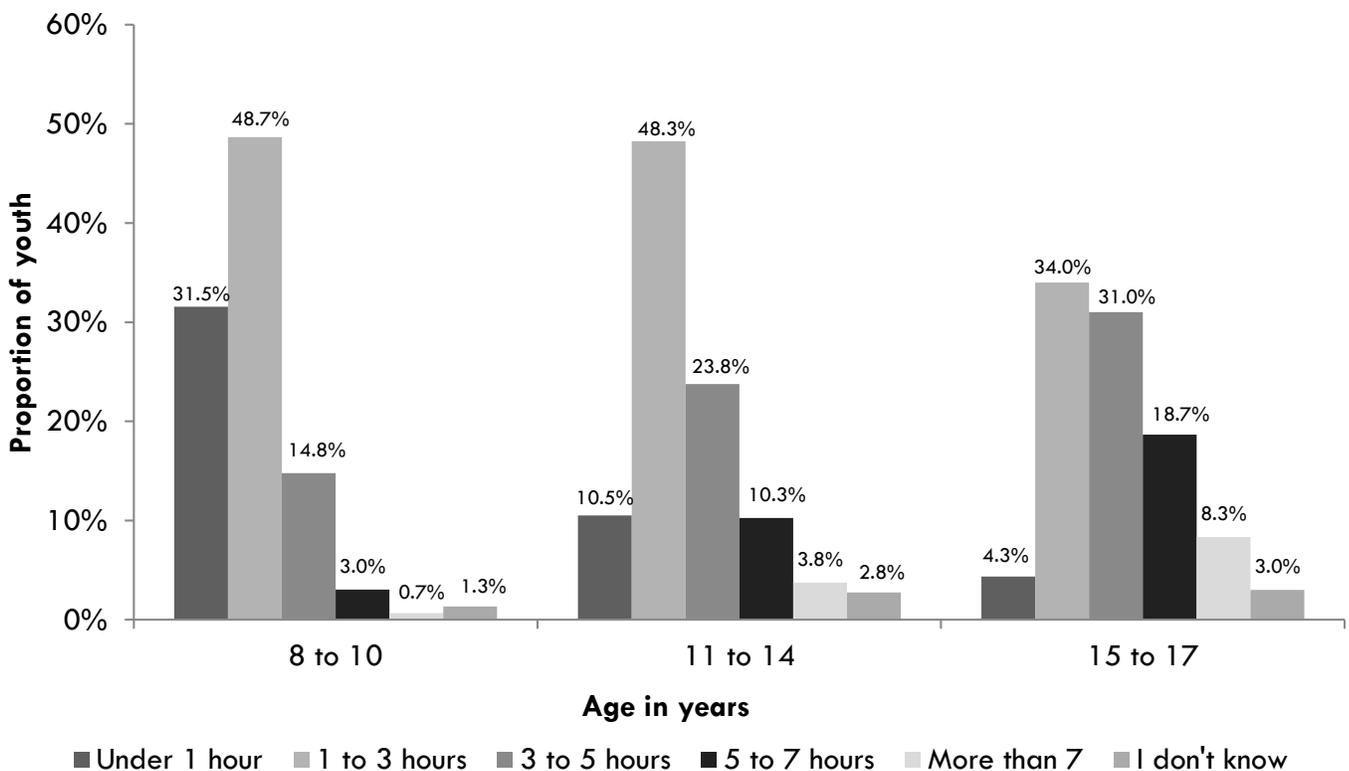
### Ages and Genders of Children



## 2. ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY

Participants were asked to report approximately how many hours their child spent online daily. Approximately 44% of parents reported that their child spends between 1 and 3 hours or 3 to 5 hours (22.8%) online every day. Boys are more likely than girls to spend more time online<sup>2</sup>. As well, older youth (aged 15-17) are more likely to spend more time online than younger youth across all age groups<sup>3</sup>.

### Time Spent Online



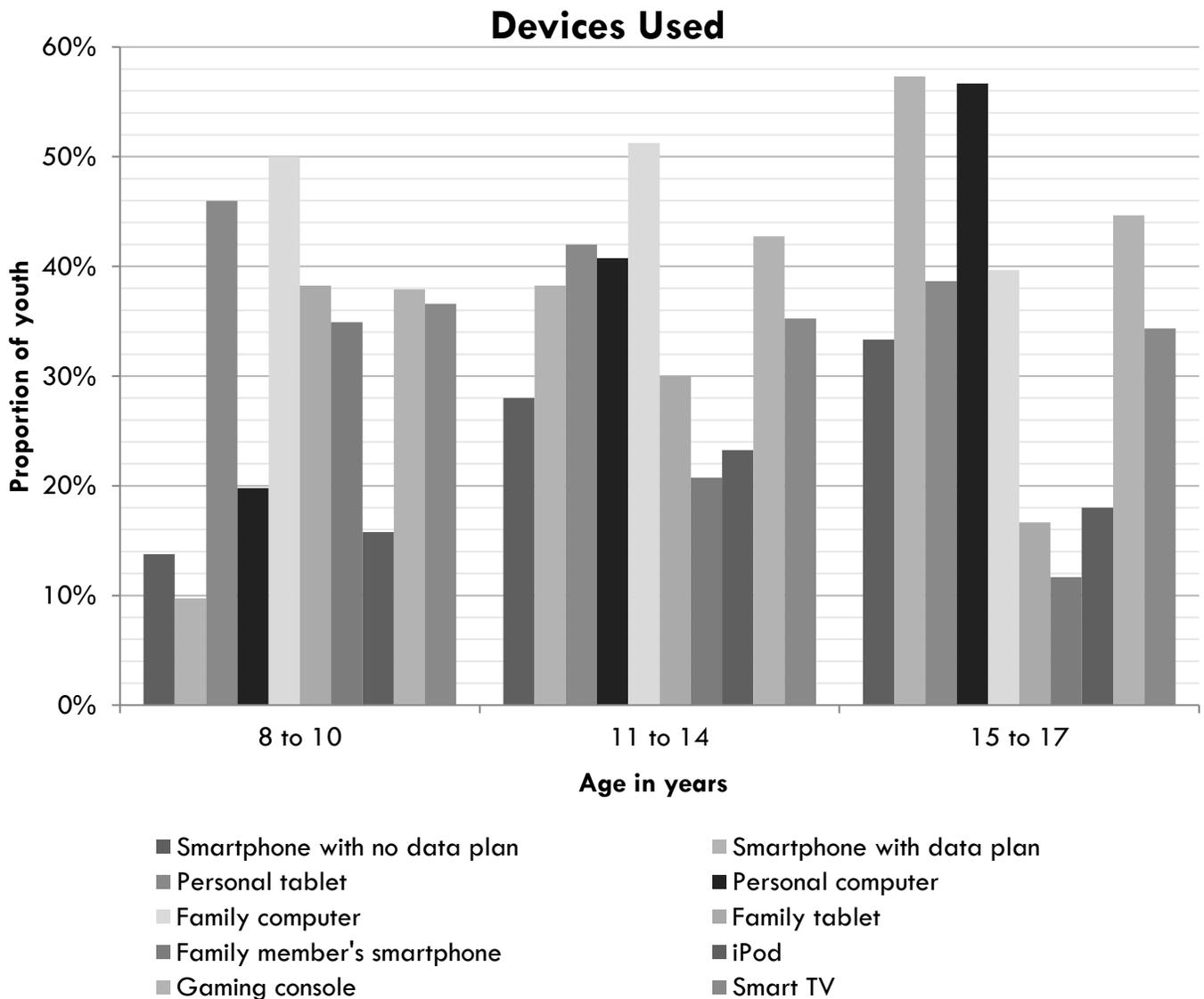
Most parents report that their children spend between 1 and 3 hours online per day, but 14.8% of youth spend more than 5 hours online every day.

<sup>2</sup>  $t(955) = 4.37, p < .001$

<sup>3</sup>  $F(2, 958) = 84.43, p < .001$

Participants were asked about the types of devices their child has access to in the home. On average, youth have access to 3 different types of devices. A very small proportion of participants (0.5%) reported that their child does not use any of the types of technology mentioned.

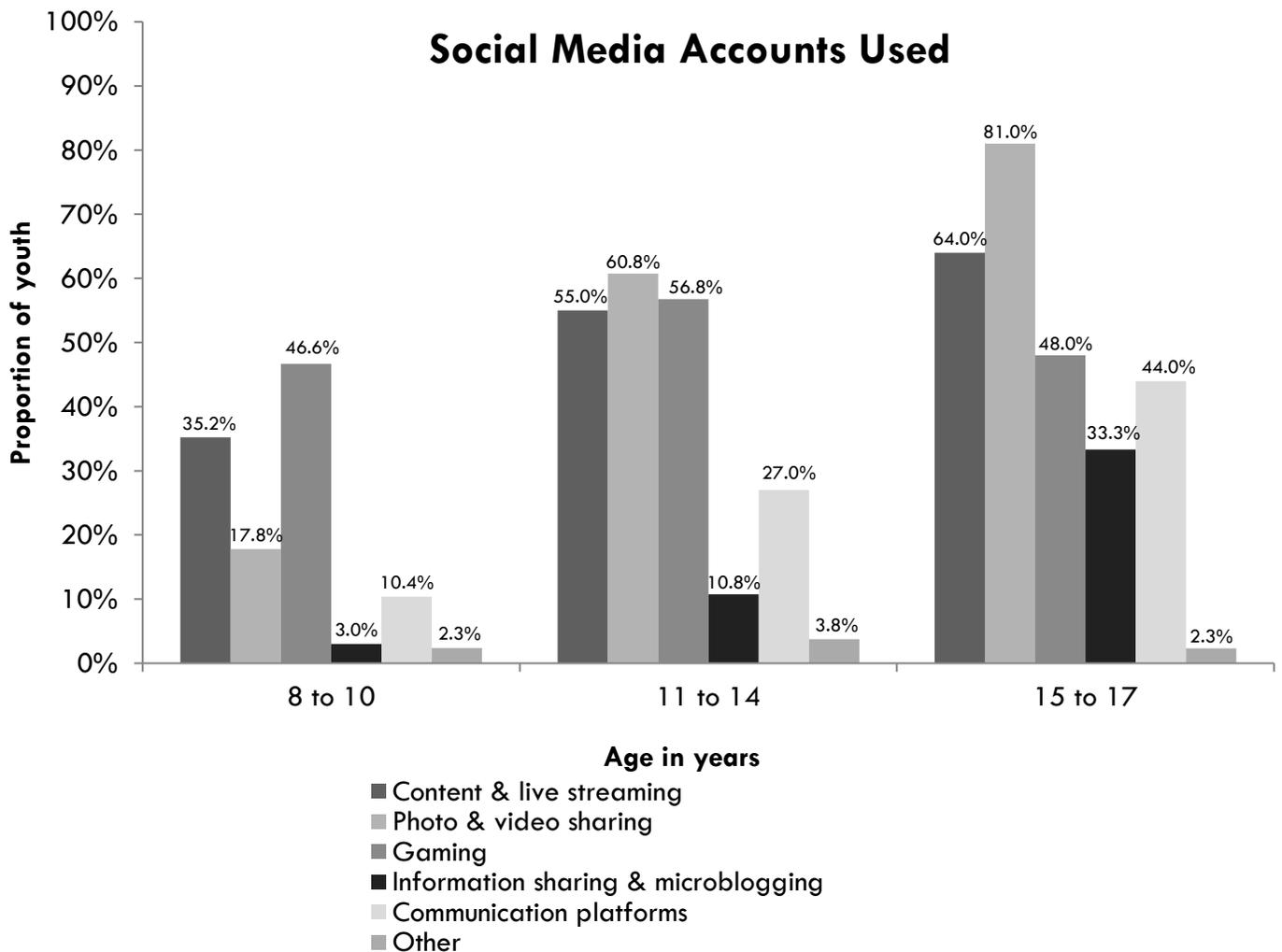
90.7% of older youth (aged 15-17) have access to a smart phone (either with or without a data plan) while 96.3% of older youth have access to a computer (either personal or family-owned). Trends indicate that use of family tablet and family member's smartphone is more common in younger children. While the proportion of youth who have access to TVs, gaming consoles, and iPods remained relatively consistent across age groups, boys were more likely than girls to have access to a gaming console<sup>4</sup>.



<sup>4</sup>  $t(992) = 12.04, p < .001$

Participants were asked about the social media accounts their child used. On average, youth have access to 2 different types of social media accounts. 14% percent of parents reported that their child does not use any of the types of social media accounts mentioned, while 2% of parents did not know what their child used.

In general, a greater proportion of older youth use each type of social media (with the exception of gaming) than younger children. Girls were more likely to use photo and video sharing accounts<sup>5</sup>, while boys were more likely to use gaming platforms to connect and interact with others<sup>6</sup>.



<sup>5</sup>  $t(992) = -3.78, p < .001$

<sup>6</sup>  $t(992) = 10.71, p < .001$

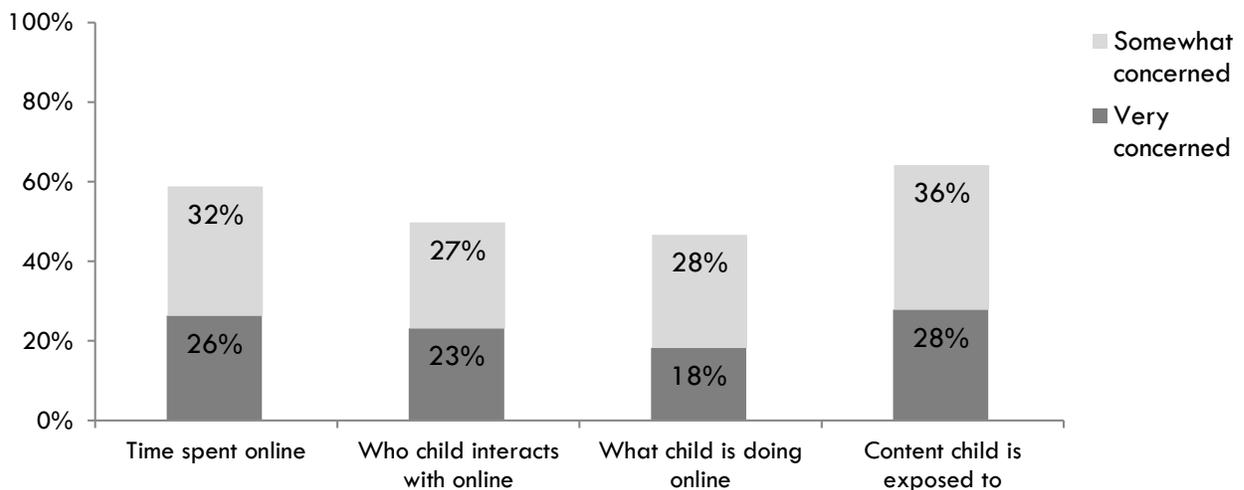
### 3. PARENTING AND TECHNOLOGY USE

Participants were asked about concerns they may have regarding their child's technology use.

Parents of younger children were just as likely to be concerned about the amount of time their child spent online than parents of older youth<sup>7</sup>. However, parents of younger youth (ages 8-14) were more likely to be concerned about who their child interacts with online<sup>8</sup>, the content that the child is exposed to online<sup>9</sup>, and what their child is doing online<sup>10</sup> than parents of older youth (ages 15-17).

Parents of boys were more likely to be concerned about the amount of time their child spent online than parents of girls<sup>11</sup>. However, parents of boys and girls were just as likely to be concerned about who their child interacts with online<sup>12</sup>, what their child is doing online<sup>13</sup>, or the content that their child is exposed to while online<sup>14</sup>.

#### Parental concerns about...



**Parents of younger children are more concerned about their child's technology use than parents of older youth.**

<sup>7</sup>  $F(2, 988) = 2.09, p = 0.13$

<sup>8</sup>  $F(2, 982) = 3.20, p = 0.04$

<sup>9</sup>  $F(2, 985) = 3.54, p = 0.03$

<sup>10</sup>  $F(2, 986) = 5.36, p = .01$

<sup>11</sup>  $t(985) = -2.99, p = .003$

<sup>12</sup>  $t(979) = -.10, p = 0.92$

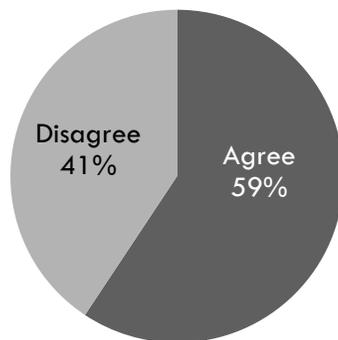
<sup>13</sup>  $t(982) = 0.65, p = 0.52$

<sup>14</sup>  $t(983) = 1.48, p = 0.14$

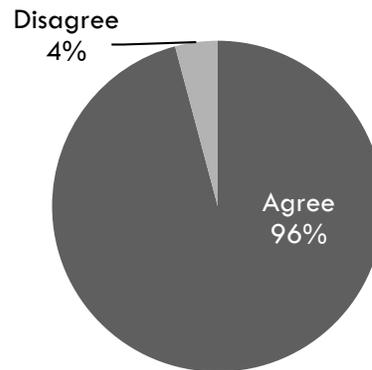
Parents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with a number of statements about their attitudes about technology. Most parents believe that technology is useful for themselves and their children, but have concerns about how to manage their children’s use and how technology is used.

**There are pros and cons to technology use in youth.** Parents who grew up with technology in the home (aged 18-39) were **more likely** to agree that “technology negatively impacts today’s youth” than parents who did not grow up with technology (aged 40+)¹⁵.

**Technology negatively impacts today's youth**

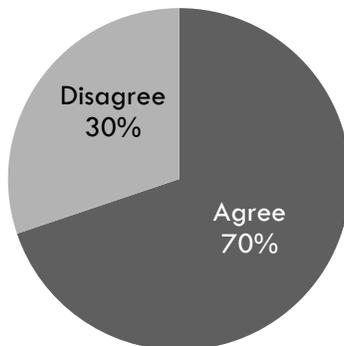


**Technology is beneficial for today's youth if used properly**

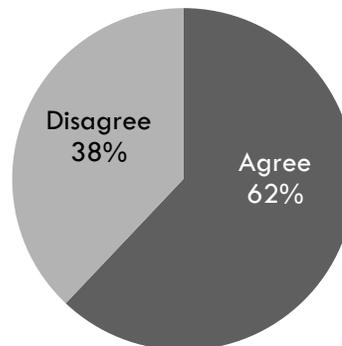


**Technology affects daily life.** Parents who grew up with technology in the home (aged 18-39) were **more likely** to agree that “life was easier before devices became popular” than parents who did not grow up with technology (aged 40+)¹⁶.

**Parenting has become more difficult because of technology and social media**



**Life was easier before these types of devices became popular**

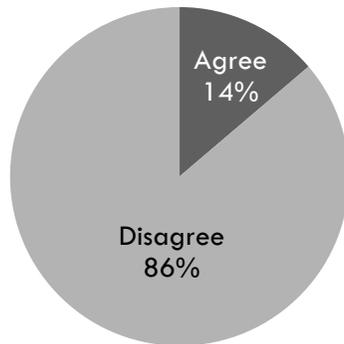


¹⁵  $t(989) = 2.35, p = .02$

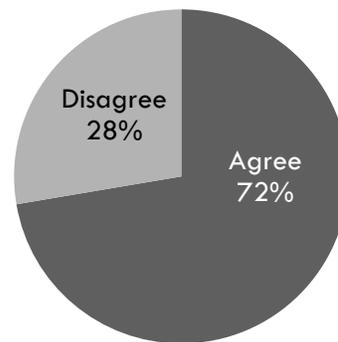
¹⁶  $t(992) = 2.38, p = .02$

**Technology use has complications.** Parents who grew up with technology in the home (aged 18-39) were **more likely** to agree that “electronic media devices are too hard to use” than parents who did not grow up with technology (aged 40+)<sup>17</sup>.

**Electronic media devices  
(computers, tablets,  
smartphones) are too difficult  
to use**

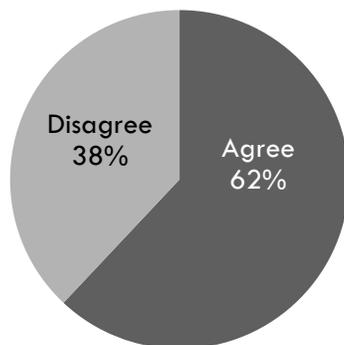


**Electronic media devices make  
people lazy**

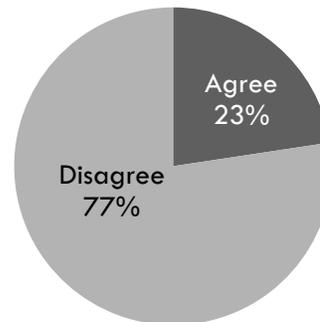


**It is difficult to manage children's technology use.** Parents who did not grow up with technology in the home (aged 40+) were **more likely** to agree that “my child knows more about devices, social media, and apps than I ever will” than parents who grew up with technology (aged 18-39)<sup>18</sup>.

**My child knows more about  
devices, social media, and  
apps than I ever will**



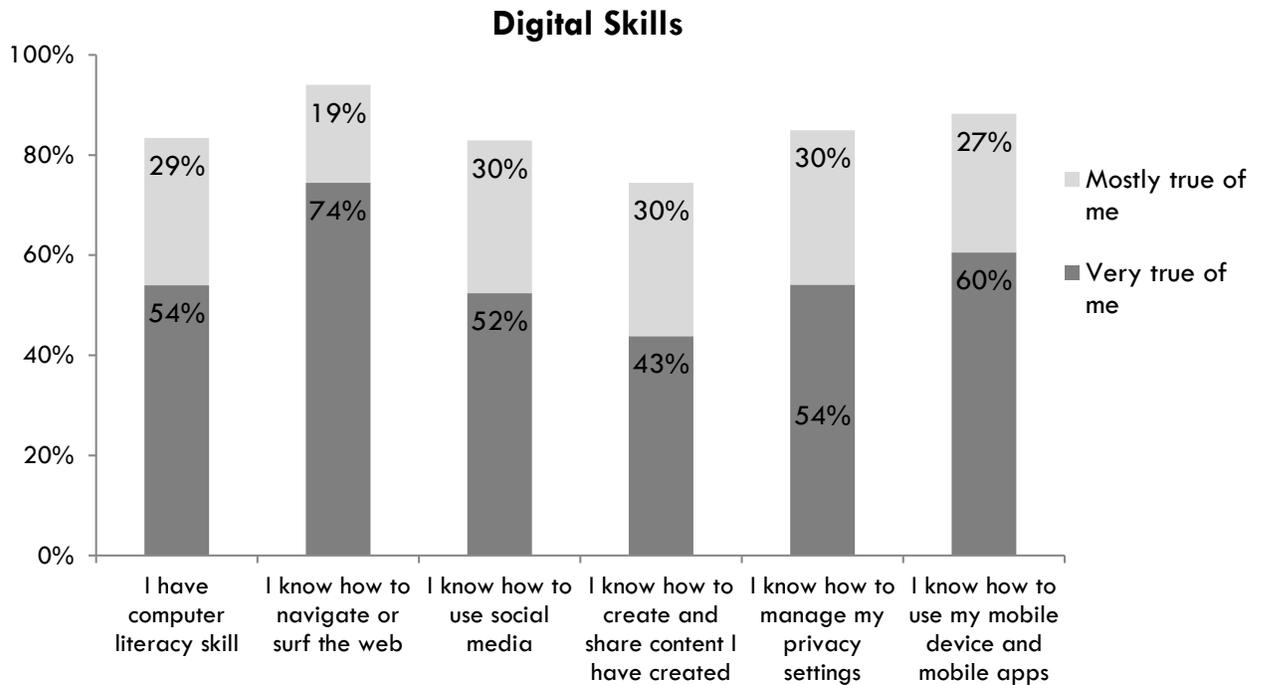
**I won't bother setting  
parental controls or  
passwords because my kids  
will "hack" around them**



<sup>17</sup>  $t(986) = 2.44, p = .02$

<sup>18</sup>  $t(991) = -2.65, p = .01$

Participants were asked to report on their ability to use digital technology and media. Most parents felt confident that they are able to perform a number of different tasks or skills while online, especially navigating the web. Parents aged 18-39 years old were more likely to endorse knowing how to use social media<sup>19</sup>, and knowing how to create content and share content they have created<sup>20</sup> than parents aged 40+ years old. On the other hand, parents 40+ were more likely to endorse knowing how to navigate or surf the web than parents aged 18-39<sup>21</sup>.



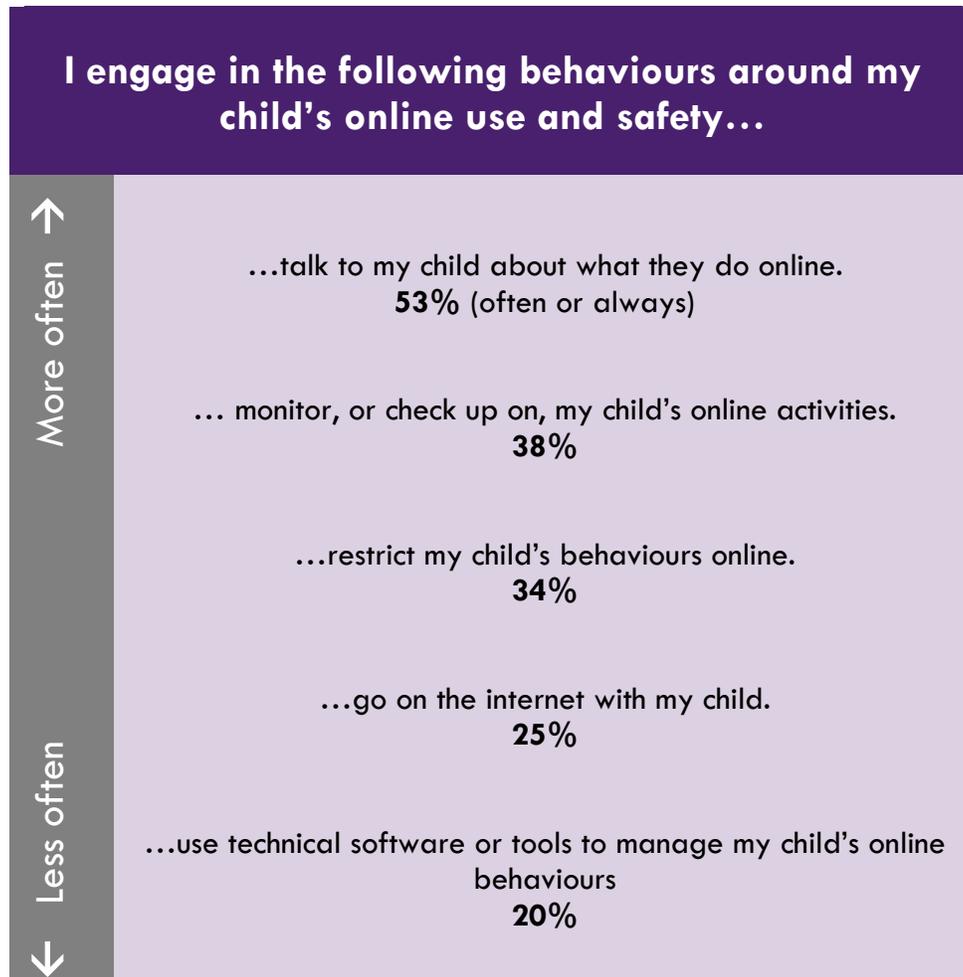
**In general, parents of children between ages 8 and 17 believe that they are skilled in using technology for themselves.**

<sup>19</sup>  $t(985) = 3.42, p = .001$

<sup>20</sup>  $t(980) = 2.26, p = .02$

<sup>21</sup>  $t(985) = -3.72, p < .001$

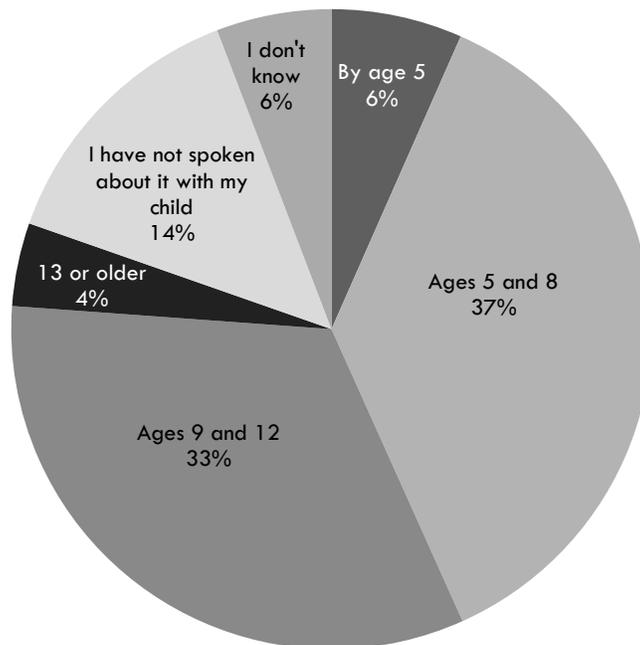
Participants were asked how often they engaged in behaviours to manage their child's online use and safety. Parents prefer to talk to their child about their online activities (53%) rather than using software or tools to manage their online behaviours (20%).



## 4. PARENTS AND CYBERBULLYING IN YOUTH

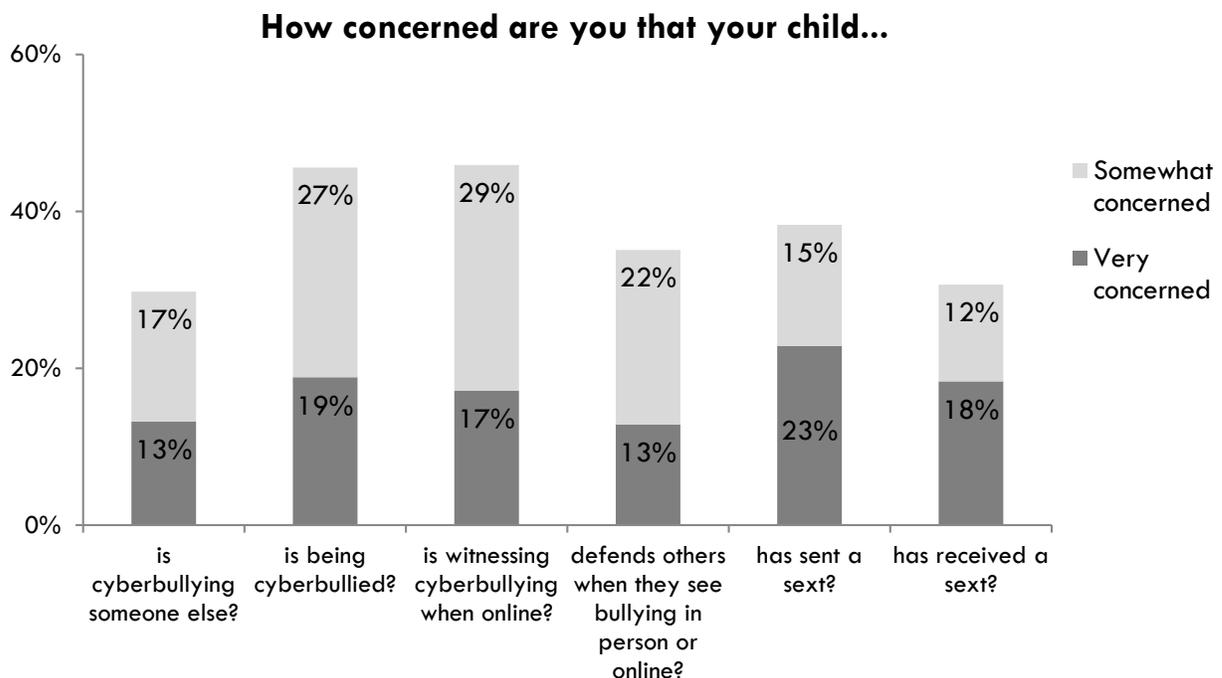
Participants were asked when they first talked to their child about cyberbullying. The majority of participants (76%) reported discussing cyberbullying with their child by the time he/she was 12 years old. 15% of parents have not talked about cyberbullying with their child.

### At what age did you first start talking to your child about cyberbullying?



**Most parents have talked to their child about cyberbullying by age 12.**

Participants were asked how concerned they were that their child was involved in cyberbullying, either directly (i.e., being victimized or perpetrating) or indirectly (e.g., witnessing, defending). Nearly half of the participants reported concerns that their child is being cyberbullied. Parents of girls were more likely to be concerned that their child is cyberbullying someone else<sup>22</sup> and being cyberbullied<sup>23</sup> than parents of boys. While parents of boys and girls were no more likely to be concerned about their child sending a sext<sup>24</sup>, parents of girls were more likely to be concerned about whether their child had received a sext than parents of boys<sup>25</sup>. As well, parents of older youth (ages 15-17) were more likely to be concerned about their child sending<sup>26</sup> and receiving<sup>27</sup> sexts than parents of younger youth (ages 8-14).



**Parents are concerned about their child's involvement in cyberbullying, regardless of age or gender; however, concerns about sexting differ based on the child's age and gender.**

<sup>22</sup>  $F(2, 972) = 2.03, p = 0.04$

<sup>23</sup>  $F(2, 977) = 2.18, p = 0.03$

<sup>24</sup>  $F(2, 955) = 0.49, p = 0.62$

<sup>25</sup>  $F(2, 953) = 2.60, p = 0.01$

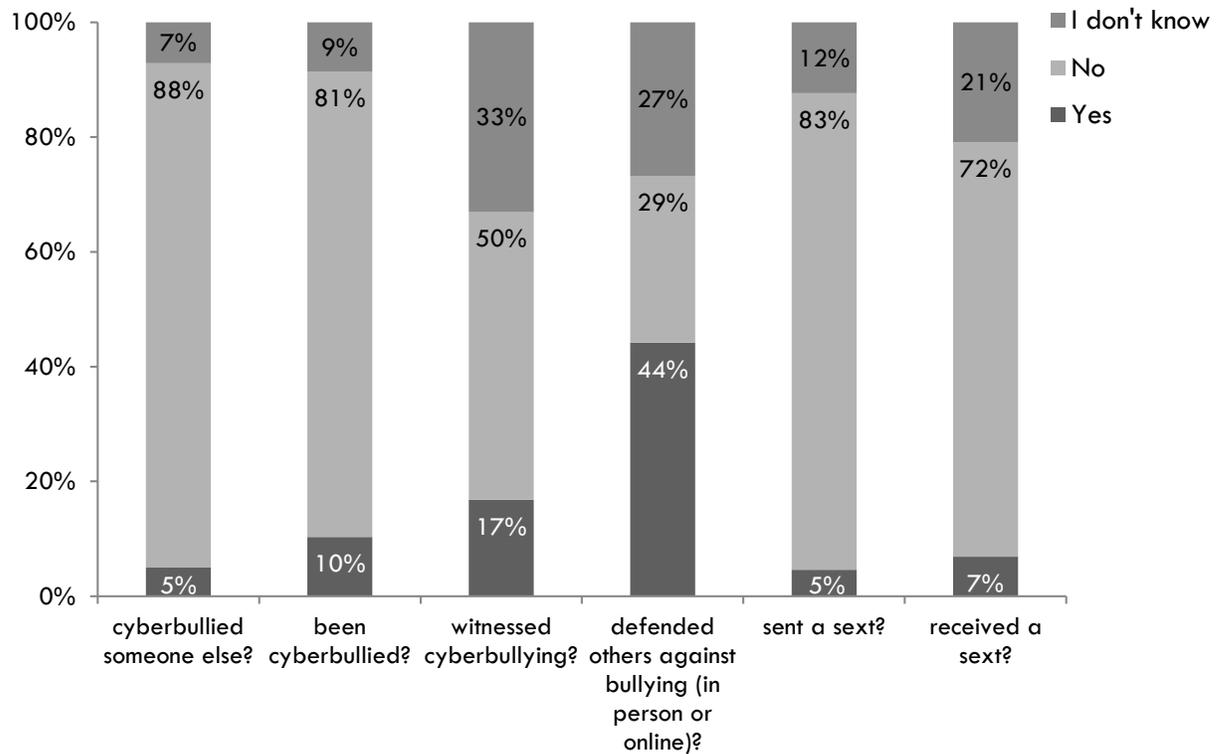
<sup>26</sup>  $F(2, 958) = 12.09, p < .001$

<sup>27</sup>  $F(2, 956) = 10.13, p < .001$

Participants were asked about their child’s involvement in cyberbullying (to the best of their knowledge). Despite close to 50% of parents reporting *being concerned* that their child has been cyberbullied, only 10% of parents reported having knowledge that their child had experienced cyberbullying.

There were no differences in cyberbullying perpetration<sup>28</sup> (as reported by parents) between early-, mid-, and late-adolescents. However, mid- and late-adolescents were more likely to experience cybervictimization<sup>29</sup>, witness cyberbullying<sup>30</sup>, and defend online<sup>31</sup> than early-adolescents. They were also more likely to send<sup>32</sup> and receive<sup>33</sup> sexts. On the other hand, no differences were reported between boys and girls for cyberbullying perpetration<sup>34</sup>, cyberbullying victimization<sup>35</sup>, defending<sup>36</sup>, and sending<sup>37</sup> or receiving sexts<sup>38</sup>. Girls, however, were more likely to witness cyberbullying than boys<sup>39</sup>.

**To the best of your knowledge, has your child...**



<sup>28</sup>  $F(2, 924) = 1.99, p = 0.14$

<sup>29</sup>  $F(2, 909) = 12.07, p < .001$

<sup>30</sup>  $F(2, 665) = 26.76, p < .001$

<sup>31</sup>  $F(2, 728) = 18.11, p < .001$

<sup>32</sup>  $F(2, 872) = 11.76, p < .001$

<sup>33</sup>  $F(2, 786) = 16.00, p < .001$

<sup>34</sup>  $t(921) = 0.41, p = 0.68$

<sup>35</sup>  $t(906) = 0.57, p = 0.57$

<sup>36</sup>  $t(663) = 2.33, p = 0.02$

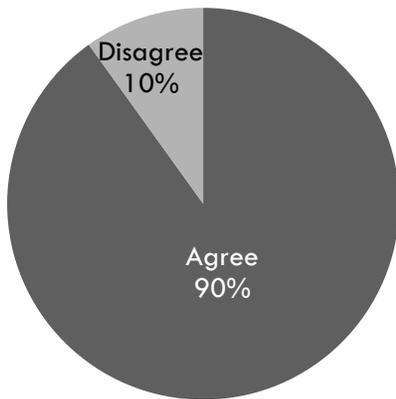
<sup>37</sup>  $t(725) = -0.24, p = 0.81$

<sup>38</sup>  $t(870) = 0.01, p = 0.99$

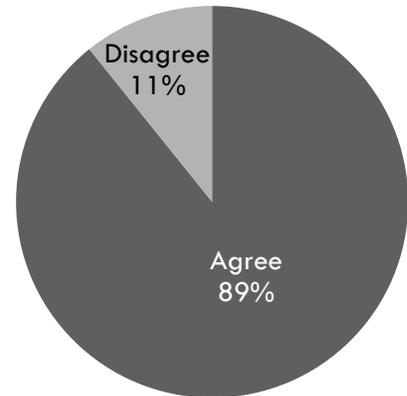
<sup>39</sup>  $t(784) = 0.38, p = 0.71$

Participants were asked how much they agreed or disagreed with a number of statements about their child and cyberbullying experiences. Most parents believe they would know if their child was being cyberbullied, and that they have the tools or resources available to help their child cope.

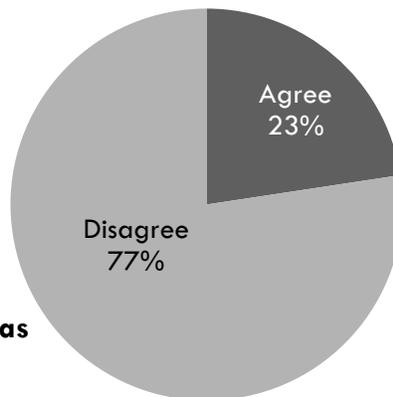
**My child would tell me if he/she was being cyberbullied**



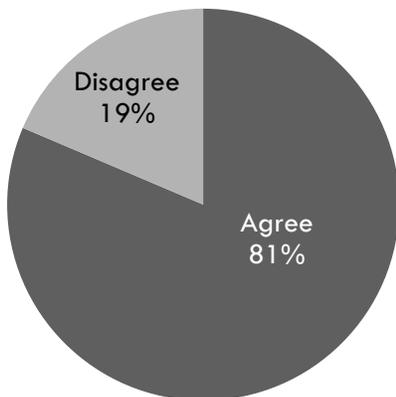
**I would recognize the signs if my child was being cyberbullied**



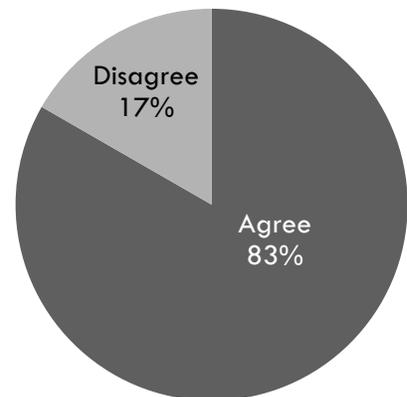
**Cyberbullying is a normal part of childhood and growing up in today's age**



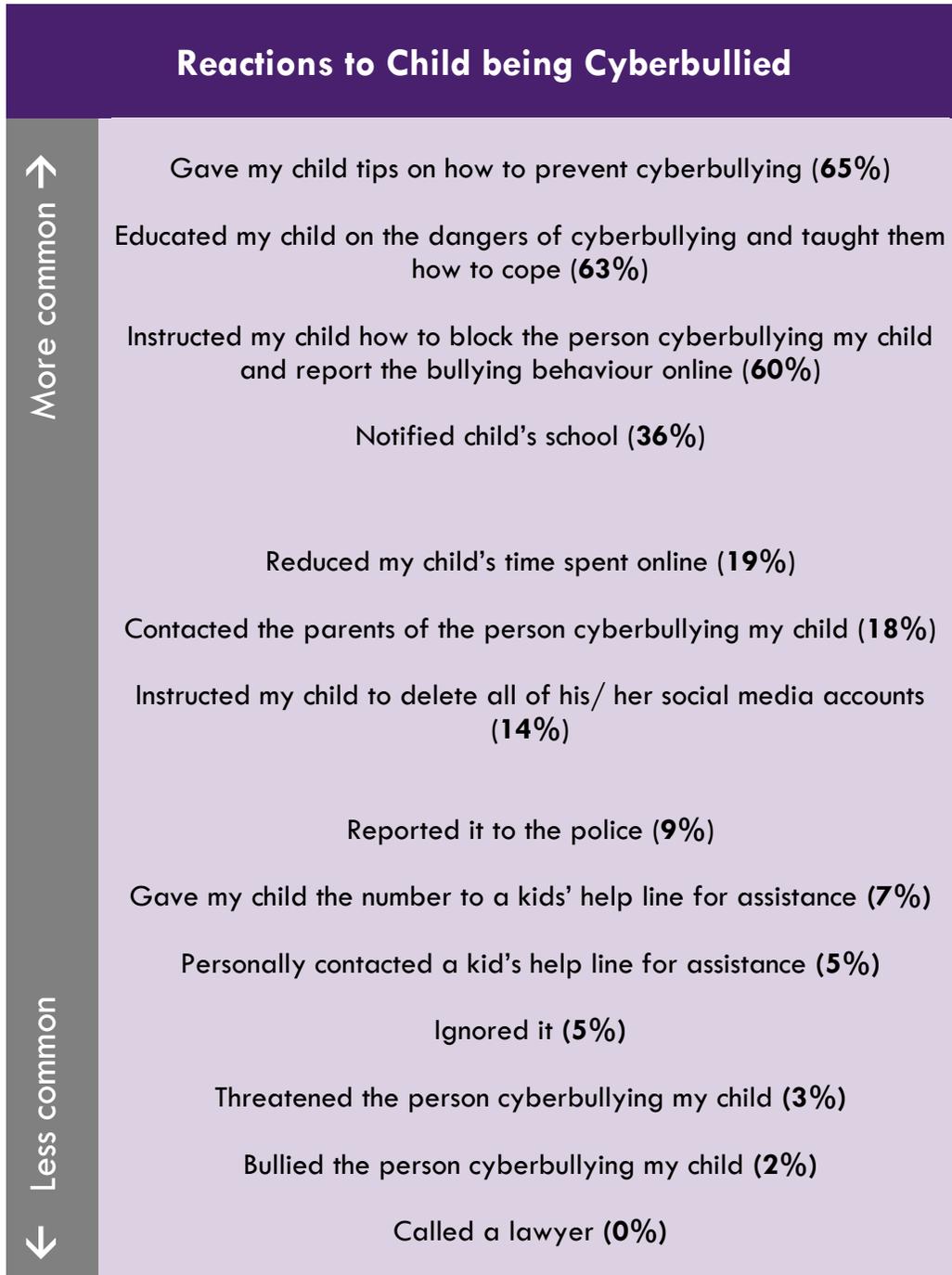
**I know what to do if my child was being cyberbullied**



**I may not know what to do, but I know I have access to resources to protect my child from cyberbullying**



Participants were asked what action(s) they took when they learned their child had been cyberbullied. The most common strategies used involved speaking with their child directly about cyberbullying, rather than strategies that involved other stakeholders or parties (e.g., the school, other parents, police, kids help lines, etc.).



## KEY FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS:

- Canadian youth have easy access to technology and spend a significant portion of their day online. While most youth spend between 1 and 3 hours (44%) or 3 and 5 hours (22.8%) online, 14.8% of parents report that their child spends more than 5 hours online every day. Boys and older youth are more likely to spend more time online than girls and younger youth. As well, over 90% of youth between the ages of 15-17 have their own smartphone (either with or without a data plan), and over 96% have access to a computer (either personal or family-owned). In comparison, 66.3% youth between the ages of 11-14 and 23.5% of youth aged 8-10 have their own smartphone (either with or without a data plan).

Results suggest that parents scaffold their children's technology use: in general, they allow older youth more access (both time and types of devices) than younger youth. We need to ensure that youth develop healthy digital habits early on, so that they may continue to be good digital citizens as they become older. As well, given the associations between time spent online with physical (e.g., sleep disruption), emotional (e.g., depression), and social difficulties (e.g., cyberbullying perpetration and victimization), it is important to provide youth with support to navigate the challenges that come with being "plugged in".

- Parents are concerned about their children's technology use, particularly around the content their child is exposed to online (64%) and time spent online (58%). They also report concern about who their child interacts with online (50%) and what their child is doing online (46%).

In general, parents of younger children are more likely to be concerned about their child's online use (i.e., who their child interacts with online, the content their child is exposed to, and what they are doing online). For parents of boys, the time their child spends online is an area of concern. These concerns and populations (e.g., parents of younger children and boys) are important to target in education and intervention efforts around these specific issues.

- Parents have conflicting attitudes towards technology use. While most parents find it beneficial for their children when used properly (96%), they agree that technology negatively affects youth (59%). The majority of parents believe that life was easier before technology and devices became popular (62%) and that parenting has become more difficult because of technology and social media (70%). Interestingly, parents who themselves had technology in the home while growing up (i.e., parents aged 18-39) were *more likely* to agree that 1) technology negatively impacts today's youth; 2) life was easier before devices became popular; and 3) that electronic media devices are too hard to use, compared to parents over 40 years old.

It is concerning that so many Canadian parents believe that technology has negatively affected everyday life for both themselves and their children. Parents in this population report being confident in their abilities to use electronic media (86%) and endorse high levels of skill in a number of different areas (e.g., using mobile devices and apps, surfing the web, managing privacy settings, using social media, etc.), and yet feel that life has become more difficult with the rise in technology use. These results suggest that there is a need for parent training that is geared towards younger parents (who may already have a high level of digital literacy skills) that integrates education about general parenting skills with practical skills about online safety and technology use.

- When it comes to their child's online use and safety, parents prefer to talk to their child about what they do online (53%) rather than using technical software or tools to track or block their child's online use (20%) or going online with their child (25%). Parents also report monitoring their child's online use (38%) or restricting their child's online activities (34%).

The literature suggests that approaches such as having discussions about online activities and setting limits together are associated with less online risk in youth (e.g., cyberbullying perpetration and victimization, digital addiction). On the other hand, blocking or limiting youth's access to online content is associated with decreased online opportunities for learning and higher levels of cyberbullying victimization in youth. We need to continue to move parents towards a model of parenting around technology that is collaborative and less restrictive.

- Cyberbullying is an area of concern for Canadian parents. Seventy-six percent of parents reported they have spoken with their child about cyberbullying by the time he/she is 12 years old. Close to 50% of parents reported being concerned that their child has been cyberbullied or that their child has witnessed cyberbullying while online, while approximately 30% of parents reported being concerned that their child is cyberbullying someone else, defending others, or sending and/or receiving sexts.

Despite high levels of parental concerns in this area, results suggest a large gap in parents' knowledge when it comes to youth's cyberbullying and online experiences. There is a notable difference between the level of parents' concerns about cyberbullying perpetration (30%) or victimization (46%), and parents' reported knowledge about their child's cyberbullying perpetration (5%) or cybervictimization (10%) experiences. As well, approximately 30% of parents reported not knowing whether their child had witnessed cyberbullying, or if their child had defended others in bullying incidents.

- Parents may be underestimating just how difficult it can be for youth to disclose about their cyberbullying experiences. Most parents (90%) feel confident that their child would tell them if he/she was being cyberbullied, and that they would recognize the signs if their child was being cyberbullied (89%).

Research suggests that youth are often reluctant to tell adults about cyberbullying because they are worried that their concerns will not be taken seriously or because they believe adults will be unhelpful. Results from this study also point to a gap between parents' knowledge of their child's cyberbullying experiences and youth-reported rates of cyberbullying perpetration and victimization. According to a recent nationally representative survey of Canadian youth (Li & Craig, 2015), 15% of youth reported bullying others online, while 42% of youth reported being targets of cyberbullying. In comparison, 5% of parents in the current survey reported that their child had cyberbullied someone else and 10% of parents reported that their child had been cyberbullied. Parents may not be well-informed about their child's cyberbullying perpetration and victimization experiences as they believe.

- The majority of parents (81%) reported knowing what to do if their child has been cyberbullied. Upon learning that their child has been cyberbullied, parents often speak directly with their child about cyberbullying to educate and give tips on how to prevent cyberbullying (65%) and how to cope (63%). Parents may also involve the child's school (36%) when the incidents involve their child's schoolmates. Some parents choose to take unhelpful actions such as deleting their child's social media accounts (14%) or limiting time spent online (19%). A smaller proportion of parents report that they ignore the cyberbullying (5%), threaten the person bullying their child (3%), or bully back (2%).

Most parents know how to support their child when they experience cyberbullying and use strategies that can help their child cope with the bullying (e.g., blocking and reporting the person doing the bullying, educating their child about how to prevent incidents in the future). They may also involve other parties, such as the school or the parents of the child who is cyberbullying their child to ensure that the bullying stops. However, a significant proportion of parents report restricting their child's time spent online and instructing their child to delete their social media accounts following cyberbullying victimization. While these strategies appear to be helpful because they reduce the likelihood or opportunities for the youth to be cyberbullied, they may do more harm than good. Limiting youth's social media use and time spent online removes the child from their social supports and ability to interact with their friends outside of school. As well, these strategies may make it less likely for the youth to seek support following cyberbullying victimization in the future, as they may be concerned that their online privileges will be taken away. While most parents' responses to learning that

their child has been victimized online is appropriate, further work is needed to ensure that Canadian parents are well informed about how to best support their child.