

Statistical bulletin

Bullying and online experiences among children in England and Wales: year ending March 2023

Estimates of the prevalence and nature of bullying and online experiences among children using data from the 10- to 15-year-olds' Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW).

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Table of contents

1. [Main points](#)
2. [Children's online activity](#)
3. [Sending or receiving sexual messages](#)
4. [Prevalence of children speaking to or meeting someone online](#)
5. [Prevalence of bullying](#)
6. [Nature of bullying](#)
7. [Bullying and online experiences among children data](#)
8. [Glossary](#)
9. [Measuring the data](#)
10. [Strengths and limitations](#)
11. [Related links](#)
12. [Cite this statistical bulletin](#)

1 . Main points

- The 10- to 15-year-olds' Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) showed that 92.6% of children went online daily or almost daily in the year ending March 2023, with 58.1% spending three or more hours a day online on an ordinary school day, an increase from 47.6% in the year ending March 2020, the last time the data were collected.
- Just over a third (35.0%) of children accepted a friend request online from someone they did not know and 8.5% had shared their location publicly, in the last year.
- An estimated 19.2% of children spoke to or exchanged messages with someone online in the last year who they had never met in person before and 4.4% met up in person with someone they had only spoken to online, with boys more likely than girls (5.7% compared with 3.1%).
- Almost 1 in 10 (9.5%) children aged 13 to 15 years received a sexual message in the last year (no significant difference compared with the year ending March 2020), with just over three-quarters of these (76.7%) receiving them more than once.
- An estimated 1,544,000 children aged 10 to 15 years (34.9%) experienced an in-person bullying behaviour and 847,000 children (19.1%) experienced an online bullying behaviour, in the last year; there was no significant difference compared with the year ending March 2020.
- Over half of children told their parent or guardian about the bullying they experienced in the last year, however, 18.1% who experienced an online bullying behaviour and 14.7% who experienced an in-person bullying behaviour did not tell anyone.

2 . Children's online activity

The latest figures from the 10- to 15-year-olds' Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) for the year ending March 2023 showed that 92.6% of children said they went online or used the internet daily or almost daily, with 30.1% using it "Almost all the time".

Children were most likely to use the internet at the weekend, but there was an increase in the time spent in the week, with 58.1% of children spending three or more hours a day online in the year ending March 2023 compared with 47.6% in the year ending March 2020.

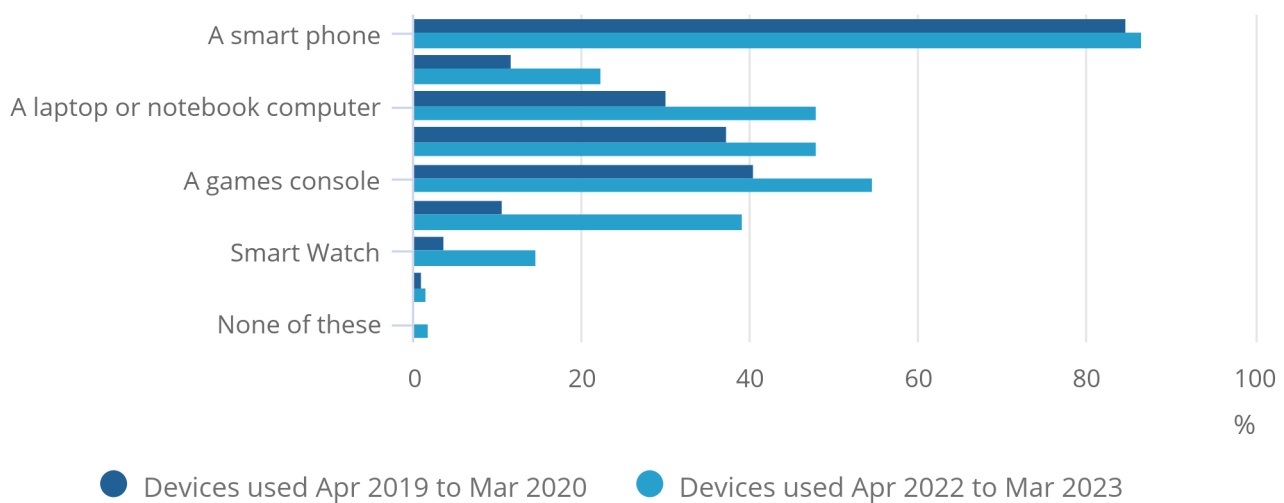
Most children (86.6%) used a smartphone to go online, a similar figure to the year ending March 2020 (Figure 1). There were significant increases in other types of devices used, with 54.7% of children using a games console in the year ending March 2023 compared with 40.6% in the year ending March 2020. There were also large increases in the percentage of children that had access to the internet via newer technologies such as a smart TV (39.2% compared with 10.8% in the year ending March 2020) or smartwatch (14.6% compared with 3.8% in the year ending March 2020).

Figure 1: Most children (86.6%) used a smartphone to go online

Devices used by children aged 10 to 15 years to go online where the device was for their use only, England and Wales, year ending March 2020 and year ending March 2023

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Devices used by children aged 10 to 15 years to go online where the device was for their use only, England and Wales, year ending March 2020 and year ending March 2023



Source: 10- to 15-year-olds' Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) from the Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Percentages may not sum to 100 as respondents may have given more than one answer.

Most parents had some involvement in their child's internet use, with 26.1% of children saying that their parent knew "a lot" and 53.4% saying they knew "a fair amount" of what they did online, in the year ending March 2023.

As some children spend time online without their parents knowing anything about what they are doing (3.3%), it is important that children have the appropriate knowledge about internet security. The majority of children (88.4%) said they had received information about internet security. This was a decrease from 94.8% in the year ending March 2020. The most frequent sources of information were school (82.9%) and parents (13.0%).

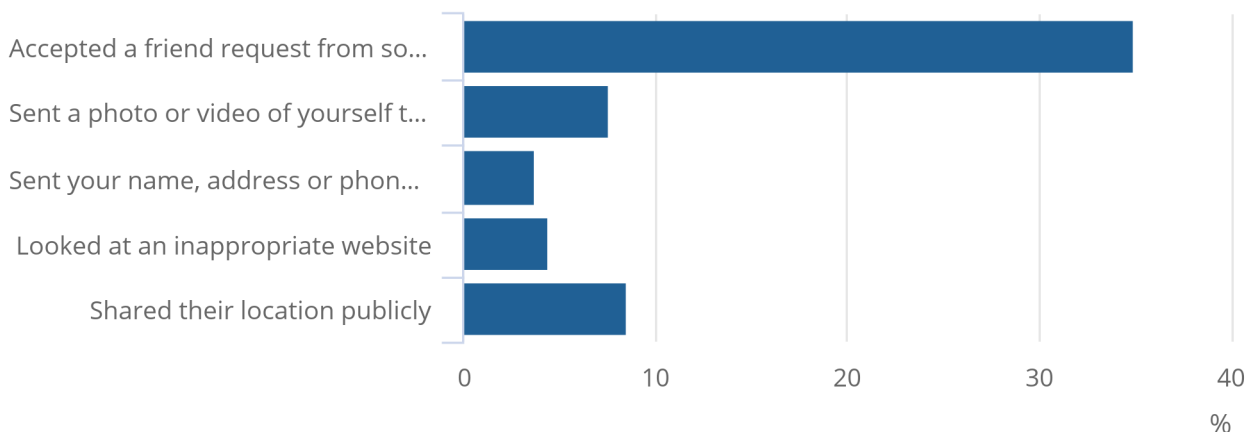
The most common activities children used the internet for were watching videos online (80.0%), messaging (77.6%) and playing online games (75.3%). Figure 2 shows the proportion of children who did certain “potentially risky” activities online in the last year. More than a third (35.0%) of children accepted a friend request from someone they did not know, 8.5% shared their location publicly and 7.6% sent a photo or video of themselves to someone they had never met.

Figure 2: Just over a third (35%) of children accepted a friend request from someone they did not know

Which “potentially risky” activities children aged 10 to 15 years did online in the last year, England and Wales, year ending March 2023

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Which “potentially risky” activities children aged 10 to 15 years did online in the last year, England and Wales, year ending March 2023



Source: 10- to 15-year-olds’ Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) from the Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Percentages may not sum to 100 as respondents may have given more than one answer.

3 . Sending or receiving sexual messages

It is a criminal offence to create or share explicit images of a child, even if the person doing it, is a child. The term “sexual messages” used in the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) covers the sending and receiving of text messages as well as images, videos and voice notes, and therefore captures activities that are not explicitly a crime.

In the year ending March 2023, 9.5% of children aged 13 to 15 years had received a sexual message in the last year, a similar figure to the year ending March 2020. An estimated 1.6% of children aged 13 to 15 years stated that they had sent a sexual message in the last year.

Just over three-quarters (76.7%) of children aged 13 to 15 years who received sexual messages received them more than once in the last year, with 12.7% of children receiving them more than 20 times.

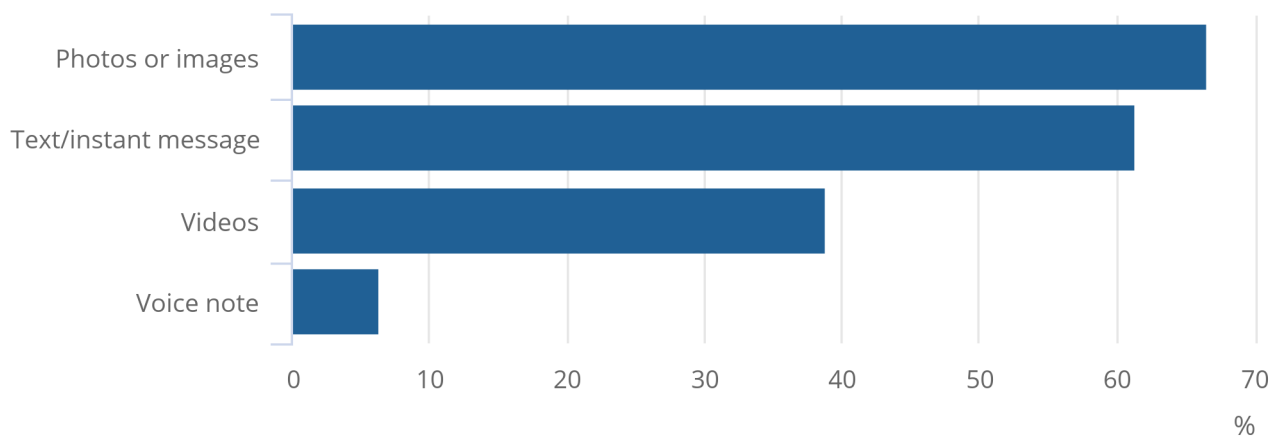
The majority of children received sexual messages through photos or images (66.6%; Figure 3) with most receiving the messages through social media (78.9%) followed by an instant message (32.1%).

Figure 3: Two-thirds of children who received sexual messages received them as photos or images

Type of sexual messages children aged 13 to 15 years received in the last year, England and Wales, year ending March 2023

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Type of sexual messages children aged 13 to 15 years received in the last year, England and Wales, year ending March 2023



Source: 10- to 15-year-olds’ Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) from the Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Because of the nature of questions about sending or receiving sexual messages, they are only asked to children aged 13 to 15 years.

The vast majority of these messages were received through private messages (96.8%) rather than group messages (21.1%). In the year ending March 2023, over half of children (56.6%) told someone about the sexual messages they received.

4 . Prevalence of children speaking to or meeting someone online

In the year ending March 2023, the most common people children spoke to online were friends (82.9%), classmates (53.2%) and their parents or guardians (51.3%). In the last year, 1.4% of children said that they spoke to or messaged someone online who they thought was their age and later found out were much older. Overall, 3.7% of children experienced this at some point in their lifetime.

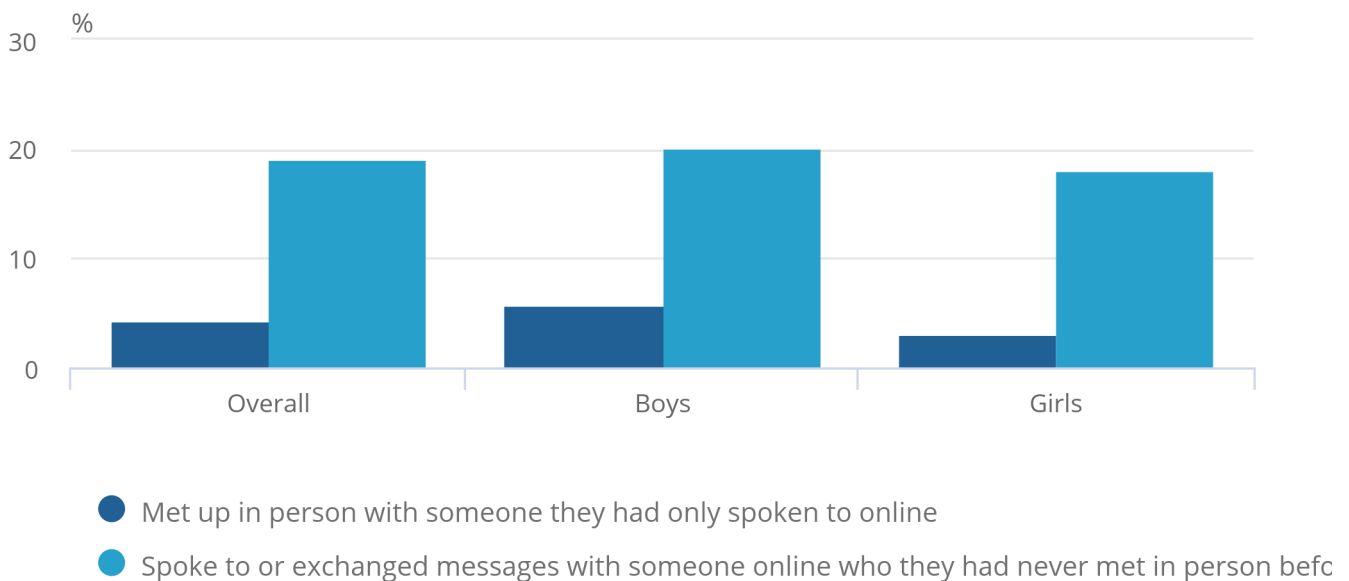
An estimated 19.2% of children spoke to or exchanged messages with someone online who they had never met in person before, in the last year. Older children aged 13, 14 or 15 years were more likely to have spoken to someone online than children aged 10 years. In addition, 4.4% of children aged 10 to 15 years met up in person with someone they had only spoken to online in the last year, with boys being more likely to meet up in person with someone than girls (5.7% compared with 3.1%; Figure 4).

Figure 4: Around one in five children spoke to someone online in the last year who they had never met in person before

Proportion of children who spoke to someone new online or met up in person with someone in the last year, by sex, England and Wales, year ending March 2023

Figure 4: Around one in five children spoke to someone online in the last year who they had never met in person before

Proportion of children who spoke to someone new online or met up in person with someone in the last year, by sex, England and Wales, year ending March 2023



Source: 10- to 15-year-olds' Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) from the Office for National Statistics

The most common person that children spoke to online who they had never met in person before was another child their age (63.3%). Another child their age was also the most common type of person that children met up in person with having only spoken to them online (76.7%).

An estimated 23.4% of children who met up in person with someone they had only spoken to online before, did not have a connection to, or a mutual friend with, that person. This was an increase from 11.8% in the year ending March 2020. There was also an increase in the proportion of children who spoke to or exchanged messages with someone online who they had not known previously and who they did not have a connection to, or a mutual friend with (from 37.3% in the year ending March 2020 to 49.6% in the year ending March 2023).

An estimated 59.4% of children who spoke to or exchanged messages with someone online who they had never met in person before said a stranger had initiated contact first. This was an increase from 52.5% in the year ending March 2020.

5 . Prevalence of bullying

The 10- to 15-year-olds' Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) also collects data on bullying. There is no legal definition of bullying, but it is often described as behaviour that hurts someone else, physically or emotionally, and can happen anywhere - at school, at home or online.

An estimated 1,544,000 children aged 10 to 15 years (34.9%) experienced an in-person bullying behaviour and 847,000 (19.1%) experienced an online bullying behaviour, in the year ending March 2023 (Figure 5). There was no significant difference compared with the year ending March 2020.

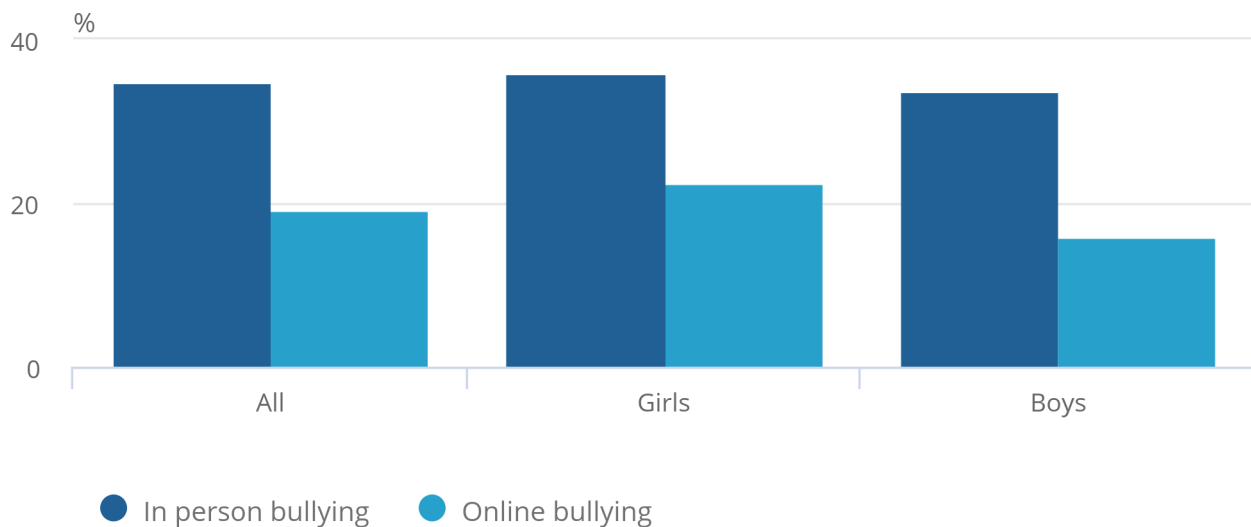
There was no significant difference in the estimated number of girls (779,000; 36.0%) and boys (765,000; 33.8%) who experienced in-person bullying behaviours in the year ending March 2023. However, the prevalence of experiencing online bullying behaviours was significantly higher for girls (486,000; 22.5%) than boys (361,000; 16.0%).

Figure 5: Just over a third of children experienced at least one type of in-person bullying behaviour

Proportion of children aged 10 to 15 years who experienced in-person and online bullying behaviours in the last year, by type of bullying behaviour, England and Wales, year ending March 2023

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Proportion of children aged 10 to 15 years who experienced in-person and online bullying behaviours in the last year, by type of bullying behaviour, England and Wales, year ending March 2023



Source: 10- to 15-year-olds' Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) from the Office for National Statistics

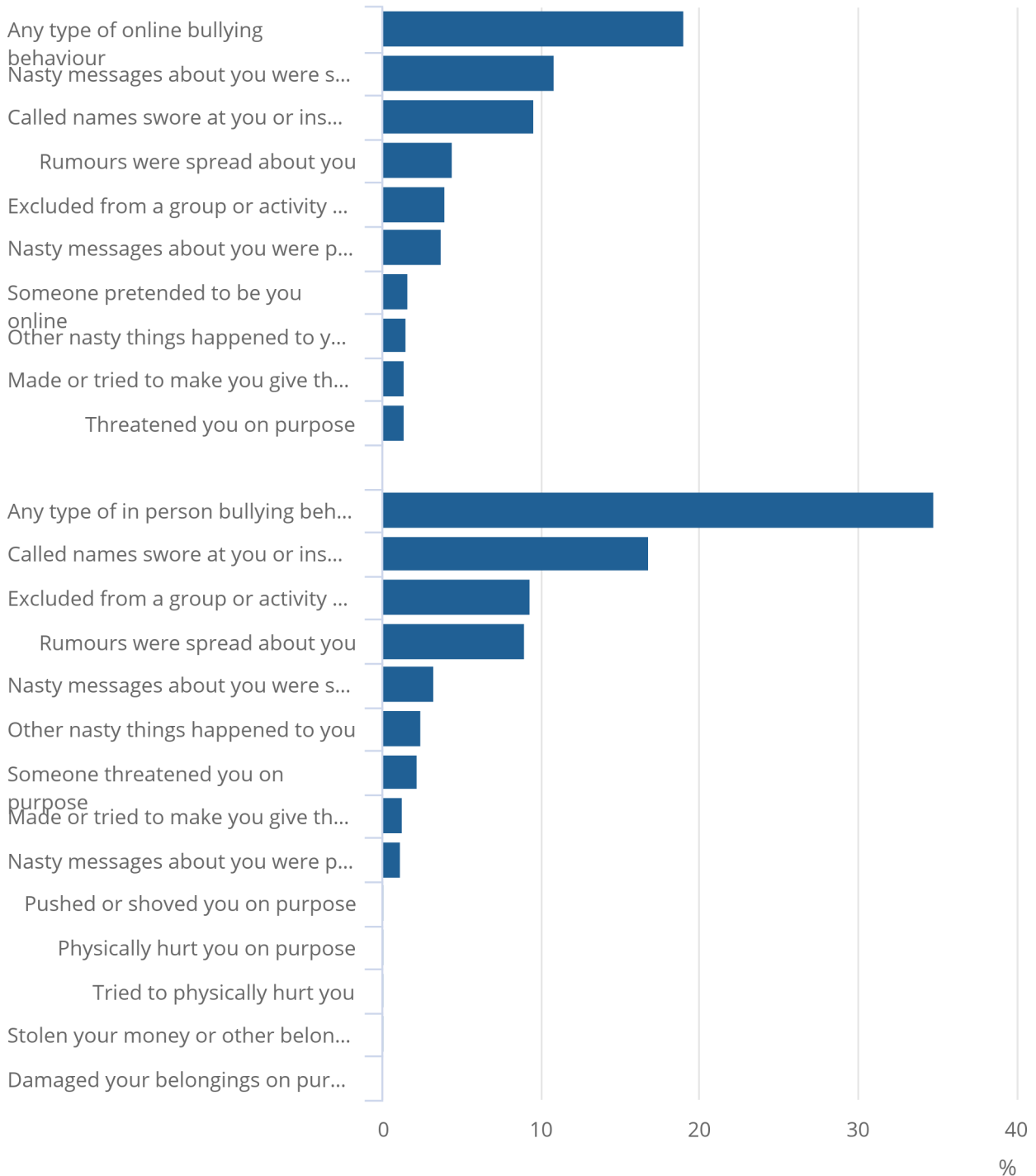
The most common type of in-person bullying behaviour experienced by children was being called names, swore at or insulted (16.8%), followed by being left out and excluded from a group or activity on purpose (9.3%). For children who experienced an online bullying behaviour, just over 1 in 10 (10.9%) had received a nasty message about themselves and 9.6% had been called names, swore at or insulted (Figure 6).

Figure 6: The most common type of in-person bullying behaviour was being called names, swore at or insulted

Proportion of children aged 10 to 15 years who experienced in-person and online bullying behaviours in the last year, by type of bullying behaviour, England and Wales, year ending March 2023

Figure 6: The most common type of in-person bullying behaviour was being called names, swore at or insulted

Proportion of children aged 10 to 15 years who experienced in-person and online bullying behaviours in the last year, by type of bullying behaviour, England and Wales, year ending March 2023



Notes:

1. Percentages may not sum to 100 as respondents may have given more than one answer.
2. For a full description of types of bullying behaviours, please see Table 1a and 1d of our [Bullying among children dataset](#).

Bullying can be perceived differently by individuals and can depend on the context in which something is taking place and who it is carried out by. A third (33.4%) of children who experienced in-person bullying behaviours in the last year said they would describe these behaviours as bullying compared with 45.0% of children who experienced online bullying behaviours.

6 . Nature of bullying

Of all children who had experienced an in-person bullying behaviour in the last year, two-thirds (66.2%) said they had experienced two or more types of bullying behaviour. This was higher than for online bullying, with half (50.2%) stating they had experienced two or more types of online bullying behaviour in the last year.

Children were asked whether the bullying behaviours they experienced were carried out by the same person or same group of people. A similar proportion of bullying experiences were carried out by the same people, with 46.2% of children saying yes for in-person bullying and 47.4% for online bullying.

In the year ending March 2023, 67.5% of children who experienced an in-person bullying behaviour and 64.7% who experienced an online bullying behaviour said this was by someone from their school.

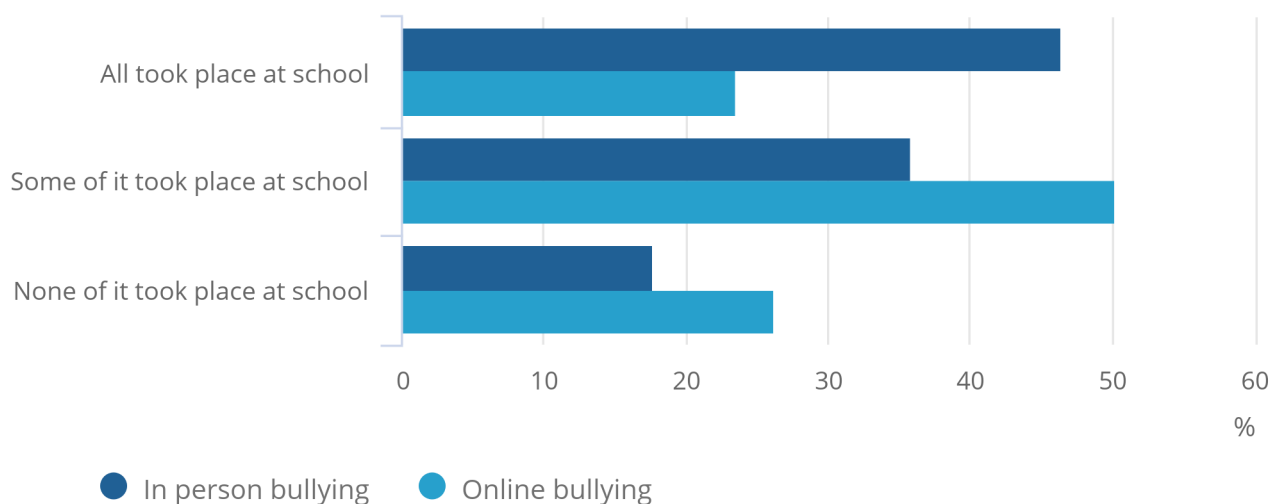
Children who had experienced an in-person bullying behaviour by someone at their school were more likely to say that all the bullying took place at school or during school time (46.4%) compared with children that had experienced an online bullying behaviour during school time (23.6%; Figure 7).

Figure 7: Most children who experienced an online or in-person bullying behaviour in the last year experienced at least some or all of it at school or during school time

Proportion of children experiencing online and in-person bullying behaviours at school or during school time, England and Wales, year ending March 2023

Figure 7: Most children who experienced an online or in-person bullying behaviour in the last year experienced at least some or all of it at school or during school time

Proportion of children experiencing online and in-person bullying behaviours at school or during school time, England and Wales, year ending March 2023



Source: 10- to 15-year-olds' Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) from the Office for National Statistics

Bullying can have an impact on a child's emotional well-being. For the year ending March 2023, 18.3% of children aged 10 to 15 years who had experienced an in-person bullying behaviour and 22.7% of children who had experienced an online bullying behaviour said they were emotionally affected "a lot" by these incidents. More data on children's general well-being can be found in our [Children's well-being datasets](#).

Another important finding concerning schools is children's perception of how well their school deals with bullying. Most children believed that their school deals with bullying "very well" or "quite well". These figures varied depending on whether children experienced at least one bullying behaviour in the last year.

For children who had experienced an in-person bullying behaviour, the percentage saying that their school deals with bullying "not very well" or "not well at all" was more than double (46.9%) than for children who had not (20.4%). This was similar for online bullying, with 52.9% of children who had experienced an online bullying behaviour saying that their school deals with bullying "not very well" or "not well at all" compared with 24.3% for children who had not experienced an online bullying behaviour.

Over half of children told their parent or guardian about the bullying they experienced in the last year (58.8% for children who experienced an in-person bullying behaviour and 56.3% for children who experienced an online bullying behaviour), however, 18.1% who experienced an online bullying behaviour and 14.7% who experienced an in-person bullying behaviour did not tell anyone.

7 . Bullying and online experiences among children data

[Children's online behaviour](#)

Dataset | Released 7 March 2024

Data from the 10- to 15-year-olds' Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) on the prevalence and nature of speaking to or meeting someone online and sending or receiving sexual messages.

[Bullying among children](#)

Dataset | Released 7 March 2024

Data from the 10- to 15-year-olds' Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) on the prevalence and nature of bullying.

[Children's well-being](#)

Dataset | Released 7 March 2024

Data from the 10- to 15-year-olds' Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) on children's well-being.

8 . Glossary

Bullying

There is no legal definition of bullying. According to the [National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children \(NSPCC\)](#):

"Bullying is behaviour that hurts someone else. It includes name calling, hitting, pushing, spreading rumours, threatening or undermining someone.

"It can happen anywhere - at school, at home or online. It's usually repeated over a long period of time and can hurt a child both physically and emotionally."

Meeting up in person with someone they had only spoken to online

This includes children who met up in person with someone they had only spoken to online through social networking sites, instant messaging, online gaming, chatrooms or any other way online.

Online bullying

The NSPCC defines cyberbullying as:

"Bullying that takes place online. Unlike bullying in the real world, online bullying can follow the child wherever they go, via social networks, gaming and mobile phone."

Sexual messages

Sexual messages can be photos, images, videos, text or voice notes that can be sent or received by a child through messages in online games, chatrooms, social media or any other online way.

Speaking to or exchanging messages with someone online who they had never met in person before

This includes children who contacted or were contacted by someone online who they had never met up with in person. This includes contact through social networking sites, instant messaging, online gaming, chatrooms or any other way online.

9 . Measuring the data

The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) is a face-to-face victimisation survey, which asks people resident in households in England and Wales about their experiences of a selected range of offences in the 12 months before the interview. From January 2009, in households with children aged 10 to 15 years, a child is also selected at random to be interviewed using a separate shorter 10- to 15-year-olds' questionnaire. For the year ending March 2023, 1,309 children aged 10 to 15 years took part in the children's survey and 1,181 answered the self-completion section of the [10- to 15-year-olds' questionnaire](#).

The face-to-face CSEW was suspended on 17 March 2020 because of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Although an interim telephone survey (TCSEW) was put in place to capture crime during the pandemic, the TCSEW did not collect data from children aged 10 to 15 years.

Data collection for the face-to-face 10- to 15-year-olds' CSEW resumed in April 2022. When fieldwork resumed, the response rate achieved was significantly lower than that achieved before the suspension of fieldwork. Data for the year ending March 2023 is the first year of data we have collected for the 10- to 15-year-olds' CSEW since the year ending March 2020. [Please see our User guide to crime statistics for England and Wales: March 2023](#) for more information.

Data used in this bulletin come from modules of the self-completion CSEW, which are asked to 10- to 15-year-olds. The "sending and receiving of sexual messages" module is only asked to children aged 13 to 15 years because of the sensitive nature of the questions.

All differences reported in this bulletin are [statistically significant](#) at the 5% level unless stated otherwise.

10 . Strengths and limitations

Data used in this bulletin come from the self-completion section of the 10- to 15-year-olds' Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW). Because of the sensitive nature of the questions and the young age of the respondents, we took care to address a series of ethical considerations before introducing these questions into the survey. For more information, please see the Measuring the data section in [Children's online behaviour in England and Wales: year ending March 2020](#).

Since the return to face-to-face interviewing following the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the CSEW estimates have been temporarily suspended of their [National Statistics](#) status while we assess data quality. Data presented in this release for the year ending March 2023 are not badged as National Statistics. For more information, see the [Office for Statistics Regulation's temporary suspension of National Statistics status for estimates from the Crime Survey for England and Wales note](#). Data presented for the year ending March 2020, the first year these data were collected, are classified as [official statistics in development](#).

Caution should be taken when using these data because of the impact of lower response rates on the quality of the estimates since the return to face-to-face interviewing.

11 . Related links

[Children's online behaviour in England and Wales: year ending March 2020](#)

Bulletin | Released 16 November 2020

Estimates of the prevalence and nature of online bullying among children using data from the 10- to 15-year-olds' Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW).

[Online bullying in England and Wales: year ending March 2020](#)

Bulletin | Released 16 November 2020

Estimates of the prevalence and nature of online bullying among children using data from the 10- to 15-year-olds' Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW).

[Child abuse in England and Wales: March 2020](#)

Bulletin | Released 5 March 2020

Statistics and research on child abuse in England and Wales, bringing together a range of different data sources from across government and the voluntary sector.

[Transforming children's crime statistics for England and Wales: March 2023](#)

Article | Released 1 March 2023

Progress update on our transformation of the Children's Crime Survey for England and Wales.

[Exploring the feasibility of a survey measuring child abuse in the UK: April 2022](#)

Article | Released on 6 April 2022

Update on the first phase of research to understand whether a new survey to measure the current extent and nature of child abuse in the UK is viable.

12 . Cite this statistical bulletin

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