



EMBARGOED UNTIL 11 FEBRUARY 2020 TO COINCIDE WITH SAFER INTERNET DAY

NZ kids exposed to concerning online material

Teens view suicide methods, violent images, hateful content and ways to be thin

Almost half of New Zealand teenagers have been exposed to potentially harmful online content – including self-harm and suicide material, according to new Netsafe research.

And a quarter of New Zealand children have been bothered or upset by something that happened online in the last year.

The study, *Ngā taiohi matihiko o Aotearoa – New Zealand Kids Online*, is being released to mark Safer Internet Day, a global event with more than 50 participating countries. Netsafe is the campaign's host in New Zealand and has enlisted a record number of supporters to join *together for a better internet*.

Of the study's teenage participants (aged 13-17), 36 percent said while online they had seen violent images and 27 percent viewed hateful content.

Netsafe's research shows teenagers are accessing self-harm material (20 percent) and some are even digesting "how-to-suicide guides" (17 percent). Fifteen percent searched information on "ways to be very thin".

Martin Cocker, Netsafe CEO, says the research demonstrates why whānau need to engage in regular, open, non-judgemental discussions about life online with their young people.

"We live in an imperfect world where risks exist and young people will often be exposed to them on their devices away from the eyes of their parents. Younger children can be monitored and protected by parental software, but older children will choose who they disclose incidents to, and who they will seek help from," Cocker says.

Participants were questioned about who they turn to for help in the wake of an upsetting online incident. An overwhelming 69 percent chose a parent, 37 percent a friend and 17 percent a sibling. Eleven percent of children elected to speak with no one.

Cocker says: "Even when they deliberately seek out content, there is still a chance they'll be upset or even harmed by what they see."

Of the teenagers who report being exposed to potentially harmful content, 28 percent said they were "fairly" or "very" upset and that number was higher for girls (38 percent) compared to boys (18 percent).

Cocker added: “It’s often a big step for young people to seek help. If a child comes to you it is important to focus on fixing the issue and providing them with the right support to help minimise the harm they may experience.

“We know from previous research that young people fear they will be punished and their caregivers will blame them for the situation they find themselves in. This is something young people believe stems from adults not taking the time to understand the online world they inhabit.”

While there might be a digital technology gap between what parents know and what their child knows, adults have life skills, maturity and experience children haven’t developed.

Netsafe’s Online Safety Parent Toolkit can better equip adults to talk with their children to have ongoing online safety conversations.

A full copy of the Ngā taiohi matihiko o Aotearoa – New Zealand Kids Online study can be found here: <https://www.netsafe.org.nz/childrens-online-risks-safety>

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About Ngā taiohi matihiko o Aotearoa – New Zealand Kids Online study

In September 2018, Netsafe, with the support of UNICEF NZ, joined Global Kids Online, an international network of academics, social researchers, and experts dedicated to the study of children’s rights, risks and opportunities in the digital age.

A total of 2,061 New Zealand children aged 9-17 years of age participated in this research. The research sample is representative of the population of New Zealand children.

Global Kids Online’s purpose is to generate rigorous cross-national research-based evidence regarding the way children access and use the internet and to understand the risks and opportunities of their interaction with digital tools.

About Netsafe

Netsafe is an independent non-profit organisation with an unrelenting focus on online safety. We keep people safe online by providing free support, advice and education. Visit [netsafe.org.nz](https://www.netsafe.org.nz) for useful resources or call 0508 638 723 seven days a week for help with an online incident.